Writing-Between: Australian and Canadian Ficto-criticism

Helen Flavell BA (Hons)

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as
its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at
any tertiary education institution.

Helen Louise Flavell
Abstract

The current cultural climate, theoretical developments, the changing state of the tertiary institution, and the increasing presence of voices from the margin have contributed to the critical re-evaluation of academic writing as a way of knowing and representing the world. At the same time, hybrid forms of writing, those that exist in the interstices of established generic codes, are experiencing increased critical attention. Yet, despite the fact that genre has become an inadequate notion to describe boundary-crossing writing, little appears to have shifted in the way these forms are understood. Dominant methodologies tend to render what is between less visible or valid, and they define this space only in terms of its relation to set borders. Located at the boundaries of what is familiar and unfamiliar, “writing-between” is a contentious space where elements are combined without clear rules to aid identification. In this thesis the term “ficto-criticism” is used broadly to describe generically transgressive writing that blurs the defining lines between creative and critical texts. The thesis explores the political and theoretical implications of writing-between through a discussion of Australian and Canadian work in English (or English translation), which display the characteristics of the ficto-critical form. This thesis argues for a critical understanding of ficto-criticism that conceptualises it as a highly political strategy of literary intervention, rather than as a mere trend toward cross-genre writing. Indeed, rather than understanding it as surface play, the thesis argues that ficto-critical practice is deeply troubled by the oppressive role of academic writing and that, significantly, its emergence was highly influenced by postcolonial and feminist theory. Thus, ficto-critical practice interrogates the violence of representation and explores what is left out and or misrepresented through that process. The thesis applies Deleuze and Guattari’s concept-tools to articulate a methodology by virtue of which desire and ficto-criticism are understood as productive forms that are liberated from an equation of lack. The tension between ficto-criticism as an open practice and the tradition of scholarly writing, which requires a clear fixed proposition and outcomes, mirrors the project of ficto-criticism, which seeks to unlearn one’s authority and privilege as the beginning of a process towards developing an ethical relationship with the other.
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1 For a critique of the conventions of the “Acknowledgements” in academic texts, see Terry Caesar’s book Conspiring with Forms: Life in Academic Texts. In his hands the acknowledgements become a text to deconstruct. Caesar dedicates a whole chapter to exploring the conventions of the form noting that the acknowledgements have been increasing in length over the years. Caesar also notes that it was relatively recently that the acknowledgements were split off from the preface and introduction (1991: 28-49).
This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Joy George and Tom. Joy for knowing, understanding, believing, and especially for being interested, and Tom for being the best study buddy one could hope for.
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When I run the spell check over my thesis I am repeatedly asked whether I want to change the “ficto” of ficto-criticism to “fix.” Initially it was merely an annoyance, like many of the other pre-programmed rule-bound commands of the computer that are arbitrarily applied, and which are not appropriate in every situation. However, the notion of “fix-criticism” and the computer’s insistence on it became useful since it highlighted a common theme throughout this research project: the tensions between the transgressive character of ficto-criticism and the conventional nature of established knowledge. Ficto-criticism was a word that had been made up to represent a generically hybrid writing practice, which was unrecognised by the computer’s dictionary due to its recent and localised history. In the light of this, “fix-criticism” became a reminder of my project, and a way to think through the questions raised by ficto-criticism as an identified and identifiable practice.

As my thesis attests, hybrid forms of writing—those that exist in the interstices of established generic codes of taxonomy—are experiencing increased critical attention, and this is not limited to literary studies. If we believe what is being said and written about hybridity, it indeed seems that there has been a dramatic growth in such forms, and more generally a popular engagement with the concept of heterogeneity. For example, much has been written on boundary and border crossing, hybridity and the emergence of new (trans)disciplines, and over the past few years transgression or rule breaking has been a common conference theme. Even as early as 1983 Clifford Geertz was declaring that a trend toward genre blurring was already well established. In “Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought,” he announced: “there has been an enormous amount of genre mixing in intellectual life in recent years, and it is, such blurring of kinds, continuing apace” (19). According to Geertz, the scope of this transdisciplinary and generic blurring is substantial:
This genre blurring is more than just a matter of Harry Houdini or Richard Nixon turning up as characters in novels or of midwestern murder sprees described as though a gothic romancer had imagined them. It is philosophical inquiries looking like literary criticism (think of Stanley Cavell or Thoreau, Sartre on Flaubert), scientific discussions looking like belles lettres *morceaux* (Lewis Thomas, Loren Eiseley), baroque fantasies presented as deadpan empirical observations (Borges, Barthelme), histories that consist of equations and tables or law court testimony (Fogel and Engerman, *Le Roi Ladurie*), documentaries that read like true confessions (Mailer), parables posing as ethnographies (Castenada [sic]), theoretical treatises set out as travelogues (Lévi Strauss), ideological arguments cast as historiographical inquiries (Edward Said), epistemological studies constructed like political tracts (Paul Feyerabend), methodological polemics got up as personal memoirs (James Watson). Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*, that impossible object made of poetry and fiction, footnotes and images from the clinic, seems very much of the time; one waits only for quantum theory in verse or biography in algebra.

(19-20)

Geertz goes on to state that this “distinctive phenomenon” demonstrates that “[s]omething is happening to the way we think about the way we think” (20). However, twenty years after his paper, conceptualisations of genre and disciplines as coherent discreet categories remain dominant to our way of knowing. The paradigm of knowledge he seems to imagine arriving in 1983—a paradigm comfortable with narratives of discontinuity and transgressed boundaries—appears to remain elusive. In literature we still rely on old categories to define and describe texts that lie generically “between.” In other words, despite announcements by many postmodern theorists that genre is anachronistic and inappropriate to describe the new forms of writing that cross boundaries, little appears to have shifted in terms of how we really think and demonstrate our understanding. According to Ralph Cohen, for example, the belief that genre is an anachronistic concept in the postmodern literary world relies on the assumption that “a genre theory of the novel is committed to backgrounding literary artifice, to demanding coherence, unity and linear
continuity” (11). Put another way, despite the fact that there are theories of genre that are compatible with discontinuity and multiple discourses, the dominant theory of genre as taxonomic remains most familiar to us, justifying the statements made by many postmodern literary critics (Cohen). The phrases we use in relation to postmodern texts, such as generic hybridity, generically challenging and generically transformative, all still rely on the word genre and its fixed taxonomy for definition and existence. Similarly, the notion of transdiscipline still relies on discipline for meaning. This is what it means to exist at the interstices, in the space between what is familiar and unfamiliar: dominant methodologies of conceptualisation tend toward rendering what is between less visible or valid, and defining this space only in terms of its relation to set borders. Ficto-criticism as “writing-between” is, therefore, a contentious space where a mixture of elements are combined without clear rules of organisation, hierarchy, or set characteristics to aid identification. In this context, the ironies inherent in the computer’s rule-bound insistence on “fix-criticism” are reiterated. It does not and cannot recognise the hybridity suggested by this new term ficto-criticism.

In an effort to remain consistent with the hybridity engendered in ficto-criticism (both the concept and the term), I am using ficto-criticism in this thesis very broadly to describe generically transgressive writing, which blurs the defining lines between fiction/creative writing and critical/theoretical texts. My thesis explores this writing-between and the social, political, critical, and theoretical implications of the increasing body of texts that defy standard generic conventions. This is achieved through a focused study of Australian and Canadian work in English (or English translation) that display the characteristics of the emerging genre of ficto-criticism. Significantly, the thesis explores not just the texts that identify as “ficto-criticism” but also those that take a ficto-critical approach. The implications of the apparent growing popularity of this generic space between fiction and non-fiction are also explored through tracing the genesis of the term. The decision to carry out a comparative study of Australian and Canadian ficto-critical writing developed out of the realisation that the term—taken up in Australia to describe creative-critical texts—
came from Canada. I was interested in finding out why two postcolonial nations, with
much in common, both appeared to have writers that identified with this term, and
presumably the practice. As this study will show, whilst there are many differences, there
is a strong link between Australia, Canada and “ficto-criticism.” The term, in fact,
originated in Canada. The events surrounding the term’s deployment and arrival in
Australia illustrate the revolutionary power of transgressive forms and what controls are
brought to bear on them. Ficto-criticism (the word) thus represents the experimental
generic space between fiction and non-fictional forms. It also functions as a link between
Australia, Canada and the creative-critical writing practices of the authors found in these
countries.

However, despite the apparent similarities and linkages between Australia and Canada in
relation to ficto-criticism, in Australia the discourse on creative-critical texts is unique.
This is due to the fact that Australia is the only English speaking country in which one
term (ficto-criticism) has risen to dominance—over many—to describe this hybrid form.
More specifically, in Australia, the dominance of ficto-criticism tends to be within literary,
cultural studies and the arts. Notably, although the term developed in Canada through the
work of a little-known art critic, it is only employed by a handful of writers, the most
prominent being Aritha van Herk.¹ In Canada, often no term is used to describe the
blurring of criticism and fiction and it is simply enacted, or, alternatively, another term is
employed to describe ficto-critical writing. An excellent example is Québécoise feminist
fiction-theory (une fiction théorique), the term coined by Nicole Brossard to describe her
questions authority and binary codes, destabilises generic hierarchies and through this
process challenges the fictions that bind women’s lives (Godard, “Theorizing Fiction
Theory”). Not surprisingly, in Australia there is also a tradition of women writing
creative-critical texts, although here, particularly early on, there was frequently no term or
label applied. As will be revealed in Chapter Five, where I trace the use of the term ficto-
criticism in Australia, most early practitioners, mainly women, resisted the temptation to
fix the form by applying a name to their approach. Significantly, the rise of term’s popularity in Australia, I argue, undermines the transgressive intent of the (non)genre and exposes some of the myths around this kind of writing.

What this thesis is concerned with, therefore, is how ficto-criticism emerged in Australia as a hip, fashionable and sexy new genre, and the differences between Australian and Canadian examples of ficto-criticism. In the process of examining the above this thesis reveals the problematics of being “between” as well as the reaction of the academy toward fluid knowledges. Interestingly, the between-ness of ficto-criticism may be understood in another way in the sense that it has begun to be accepted as a legitimate form or established genre in some contexts, yet at the same time it remains in the broader literary world a marginal and marginalised practice. For that reason, this thesis is particularly timely as ficto-criticism becomes less a general trend toward cross-genre writing and more a specific and identified form of literary intervention. In Australia, for example, the term is recognised in literary and academic circles, yet it will not be found in the latest of literary dictionaries (nor the *Oxford English Dictionary* or *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words*). You can in Australia also study ficto-criticism at university. At the University of Tasmania, for example, a unit on ficto-criticism is part of the honours program in English. In Canada, in some university literature departments—such as the University of Calgary—you may experiment with normative academic modes and a (controlled) ficto-critical approach. However, the practice and term remains marginalised as a legitimate mode of academic writing. Even though texts that display the characteristics of ficto-criticism may be studied, there is little support for students and academics wishing to write in this way and still be taken seriously. Ficto-critical studies of specific topics may be tolerated in creative writing schools, but they are often seen as the soft option by the serious intellectual disciplines and lacking intellectual rigour. Frequently, in the process of researching ficto-criticism, I have come across anecdotal evidence that illustrates people’s frustration with, and dismissal of, generically mutant texts like ficto-criticism. I have often heard statements like this arise: “This isn’t an essay/thesis/report, this is creative
writing/fiction!” Alternatively, creative writers will often attack ficto-criticism for what they perceive as the heavy-handed inclusion of theoretical or intellectual concerns in fiction.

What began to emerge as I researched writing-between, therefore, were three parallel lines of investigation that complicated the research project. Firstly, the very interesting and elusive trail of the term ficto-criticism, its use, meaning and genesis which—certainly in Australia—appears to suggest the visible birth of a new kind of writing. Secondly, the examination of alternative terms used to describe writing that displays the characteristics of ficto-criticism, and, thirdly, the discovery and exploration of those texts that display ficto-critical tendencies but go unmarked or unlabelled. The necessity of this approach due to the ambiguity of the form has made for a challenging research project, as has theorising the writing-between within the tradition of a doctoral thesis. Since my thesis is not written ficto-critically the inconsistency suggested in writing about such a practice whilst remaining within normative academic writing convention is highlighted. Most theses in Australia that address ficto-criticism do so ficto-critically, usually only examining the form critically in the introduction or an early chapter as a justification for the chosen writing style. That is, the focus is on practising ficto-criticism rather than analysing it; the whole thesis is not devoted to its historical, material and theoretical analysis.5 My dissertation is the first in Australia to do so in specific relation to both the term and the concept. The methodology adopted by other studies of ficto-criticism is probably more consistent with ficto-critical discourse since the use of fictional techniques tends to keep the meaning of a text much more open. In other words, my thesis is in danger of being dismissed by advocates of ficto-criticism for—potentially—failing to realise the same transgression.6 Nevertheless, there is a need for the kind of critical intervention into ficto-critical practice found here due to the dominance of certain discourses around the form. These statements, often about the radical and revolutionary nature of ficto-criticism, tend to be naïve and inadequately theorised. They also tend to lock into a binary structure thereby failing to recognise the critique of binary systems implicit in ficto-criticism as writing-between. In
their terms, ficto-criticism is billed as either good (radical other and revolutionary) or bad (narcissistic and lacking intellectual rigour). Yet the story of ficto-criticism is quite different and much more consistent with its between character. Similarly, the complexity of ficto-criticism would be difficult to explore in a ficto-critical mode within the confines of a PhD thesis. The scope of my project—both Australian and Canadian ficto-critical writing—and the term’s genesis from Canada to Australia, would also be difficult to address adequately in a creative mode whilst at the same time maintaining the necessary word count. Writing on ficto-criticism straight, as it were, may also prove more likely to encourage the interest of some critics of ficto-critical practice, allowing them to engage with it on their own (generic) terms. Therefore, despite my initial concerns, the contradiction inherent in analysing an open form from within a scholarly tradition that tends toward closure has not detracted from the main storylines of my thesis. Rather, tracing these tensions and contradictions has made more apparent the processes of negotiation between practices such as ficto-criticism and dominant ways of knowing. In other words, the tension between ficto-criticism as an open practice and the tradition of scholarly writing, which wants a clear fixed proposition and outcomes, mirrors the project of ficto-criticism.

Importantly, this thesis will prove a number of hypotheses that, whilst not unconnected, have contradictory elements. This contradictory characteristic is immutable, since it cannot be separated from what ficto-criticism is. Thus, the focus of this dissertation is not to discover a new form of writing, but to think through the historical context from which there has developed a need to question the tradition of normative academic writing. In other words, in this study ficto-criticism is read as a critique of the generic neutrality of normative (or current dominant) modes of academic and critical writing. It questions the reality of the knowledges produced by such discourses. The focus here is not, however, the history of critical writing and criticism. My project is to investigate the value of ficto-criticism as a transgressive practice that works to explore the nexus between language, power and the economy of knowledge.
Thus, despite tracing the emergence of the term and ficto-critical texts, this dissertation does not, however, attempt to suggest that border crossing texts are new—that ficto-criticism is new—but, rather, explores the historical conditions that have contributed to allowing these texts an increasing degree of recognition and reception. Why are more writers—particularly those within the academy—interested in experimenting with transgressive forms such as creative criticism? Put another way, what conditions have resulted in this seeming identification with between-ness and its characteristics, resulting in a plethora of texts that are not only generically between, but also often explore the condition of life between? Texts have always displayed contradictory moments that defy codification. Certainly, generic mutation is not something inherent only to the post-industrial period in which we find ourselves. To be sure, technological metaphors lend themselves to describing hybridity, yet hybridity is not in itself a new thing specific to this period in time, especially literary generic hybridity. Well-known texts are now being revisited and reassessed in terms of their tendencies to be contradictory and challenge prescribed generic conventions. This shift in interest toward genre blurring is significant for what it tells us about the political and theoretical mood in which we find ourselves, and the epistemological questions facing the human sciences.

I begin this thesis in Chapter One with a discussion of a generically hybrid book by a high profile Australian creative writer, Helen Garner’s *The First Stone* (1995). The decision to begin with *The First Stone*, which may or may not be considered a ficto-critical text, is a deliberate strategy designed to maintain the openness inherent in ficto-criticism as a transgressive (non)genre. As we shall discover, many of the debates surrounding Garner’s book resonate with the debates that circle ficto-criticism. This discussion provides a context in which to begin a dialogue on ficto-criticism as writing-between.
Chapter Two critically introduces the theories of Deleuze and Guattari to open a theoretical space in which ficto-criticism can remain conceptualised in a way that is consistent with its between-ness. The application of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept-tools is a logical move in a thesis on writing-between since the critique of binary structures and interpretive codes are a major focus of their work. Their concept-tools of de-and re-territorialisation, for example, help extrapolate the tensions inherent in being both between and outside classification (of being a (non)genre). The Deleuzian reading of desire as productive, liberates experimental hybrid forms like ficto-criticism from an equation of lack, allowing them to be conceptualised broadly—as constituting a vast mix of between forms. In this theoretical context, the focus does not need to remain on what ficto-critical texts are or are not, but rather what they have the potential to achieve through their experimentation. Here I demonstrate that the multiple and transformative philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari not only resembles ficto-critical practice, it can be productively applied to analyse the politics of ficto-critical texts. This chapter thus lays the theoretical groundwork to enable the analysis of writing-between that follows; an approach that I argue is consistent with the ethos of ficto-critical practice. By engaging with aspects of what is often now referred to as “Deleuzian thought,” I establish the key stylistic features of ficto-criticism. Through this process I reiterate why their concept-tools are so useful and relevant to conceptualise not only ficto-criticism itself, but also the literature, debates and themes surrounding it. The revolutionary potential of ficto-criticism is therefore developed through an engagement with Deleuze and Guattari. The main texts of theirs, which I draw on, are *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1986), *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1983) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). This chapter also includes close readings of some Australian and Canadian examples of ficto-criticism to extrapolate my use of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept-tools, including Guattari’s autopoetic subjectivity developed in *Chaosmosis* (1995).

Chapter Three, following on from the theoretical tenor established in Two, functions transitionally by establishing the way in which—internationally—ficto-critical texts in
English have overwhelmingly been labelled postmodern. Through a survey of the literature, primarily from England and the United States, it shows how a particular kind of popular “postmodernism” has become the framework for ficto-critical texts, how this process relies on a binary structure, and how it crushes any other possible influences on this phenomenon. In other words, before going on in future chapters to investigate and demonstrate the more complex or between influences on, and of, ficto-criticism, I first show how it has been heavily and easily aligned with a particular kind of nihilistic postmodernism. This literature survey includes a discussion of a range of terms used in place of ficto-criticism, outside Australian and Canadian examples. Most importantly, however, this chapter establishes the basis on which to imagine many other much more politically interesting influences on the emergence of ficto-criticism, such as postcolonialism and feminism. Rather than mere textual or surface play—free from any ethical or political motivation—I argue that ficto-critical texts are deeply troubled by the colonising role of critical or academic writing. Ficto-critical practice is concerned with interrogating the violence of representation, to legitimately explore what is inevitably left out and or misrepresented through that process.

In the Fourth Chapter I give a history of Australian ficto-criticism, including the history of the term (its application and non-application). This history works to undo the overcoding (in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense) of ficto-criticism within postmodern discourse. I achieve this through giving evidence of alternative influences on the development of ficto-critical practices in Australia, and through critically exploring the Deleuzian concept-tool of becoming-woman. By revealing texts that have been left out of the published discourse on ficto-criticism, I illustrate the dangers inherent in this practice ending up as a recognisable form of writing with key advocates and set codes. Not surprisingly, the texts that more closely reproduce the process of becoming-woman have been left out of the official ficto-critical story, since they radically contradict dominant conventions. Becoming-woman, central to Deleuzian thought, is materialist, vitalist, and celebrates difference as a productive force. Becoming-woman is a constant process of transformation, with plateaus
of intensity. Although related to the position of the feminine in society rather than an essential or biological notion of women, with an almost poetic sensibility we discover that many of the ficto-critical works left out are by female writers; their foray into the ficto-critical inspired by their location on the margin and the exclusion of their experience from academic writing. Most importantly, this chapter argues that if ficto-criticism is to maintain its revolutionary potential it must imitate the deterritorialising movement of becoming. In this chapter, several Australian examples undergo a close reading, including Terri-ann White’s *Finding Theodore and Brina* (2001) and Kim Scott’s *Benang: From the Heart* (1999). Textual analysis is incorporated throughout the thesis, which reflects, again, not only a Deleuzian pragmatic approach to the use of theory, but also the generically mixed-up character of ficto-criticism. That is, in keeping with the theoretical approach and writing-between, the theory and practical readings are incorporated into a working praxis. I have not wholly separated the theory neatly into its own chapter. Instead, the theory informs the thesis on all levels, including the decision to engage with a multiplicity of examples. Through the exploration of an alternative Australian ficto-critical tradition, therefore, the Fourth Chapter illustrates that the ficto-critical turn has not merely been influenced by (an aesthetic) postmodernism, but by a range of highly political discourses that bring into sharp relief the construction of stereotypes around race, class, gender and sexuality. These discourses have also acted on ficto-criticism, bringing to the foreground the power differential between subjects and objects of study and criticism, and revealing the colonising powers of discourse. Ficto-critical texts at their best self-reflexively explore the effect of the critic’s race, class, gender, sexuality and personal history on their material.

Chapter Five looks at Canadian ficto-critical work in English (or English translation), again confirming that the primary focus of ficto-criticism is on the processes of colonisation in writing (and the links between certain neutral genres and the oppression of difference). This chapter continues the history of the term, giving evidence to prove that it originated in Canada, and was then exported to Australia. The story of how this occurred and how the term was taken up in Australia—and not in the same way in Canada—
confirms the thesis storylines by offering an alternative reading of ficto-criticism and its influences from dominant (published) sources. In this chapter I continue the argument that ficto-criticism is informed by a minoritarian politics, which has inspired ficto-critics to write through convention as a political act.

The final chapter (Six) draws together the thesis arguments or storylines by further illustrating how readings informed by binary structures, or any definitive methodology, are dangerous when dealing with writing-between. Despite the rhetoric that aligns ficto-criticism with popularised notions of postmodernism, as radical, open and revolutionary, ficto-critical texts must be carefully examined on a case-by-case basis. Chapter Six examines the micro-politics of individual ficto-critical texts, exploring their success in countering the colonising forces of discourse. The texts examined include Smaro Kamboureli’s *Scandalous Bodies* (2000), Robert Kroetsch’s essay titled ‘The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues,” and Dany Laferrière’s *Why Must a Black Writer Write About Sex?* (1994). The final chapter questions the implications of some ficto-critical texts. In particular, it problematises ficto-critical discourse, questioning its suggested revolutionary power through an investigation of the kind of authorial self imagined in a number of examples, reaffirming the need for constant self-reflexive attention to one’s micro-politics and the impossibility of imposing prescriptive rules of interpretation or analysis on writing-between. Whilst it may be tempting to launch into broad generalities about ficto-criticism, a detailed engagement with some examples (representative of its multiplicity) reveals what historical change has already established. That is, inflexible truths imposed from above repress difference and a multitude of other knowledges. This ficto-critical study thus functions as a model for an expansive range of border-crossing knowledges, exploring the impact of transgressive writing on normative intellectual work as these hybrid forms seemingly become more prevalent.

Since my conceptualisation of ficto-criticism as a writing practice between genres is very open, I have chosen to read and analyse ficto-criticism across a wide range of texts. This is
not to elide difference, but to establish that ficto-critical practice—which self-consciously critiques the colonising power of writing as representation—is now more prolific. As this thesis demonstrates, more critics and writers are not only writing ficto-critically but also reading ficto-critically. The current cultural climate, theoretical developments, the changing state of the tertiary institution, and increasing voices from the margin have all contributed to the re-evaluation and self-conscious questioning of critical writing as a way of knowing and representing the world. My conceptualisation of ficto-criticism is thus consistent with my reading of ficto-critical forms. I am simultaneously working to keep the definition and meaning of ficto-criticism open, whilst at the same time remaining critically attentive to the discourse of ficto-criticism and its own immersion in processes of domination and colonisation. Much like the arbitrary insistence on “fix-criticism” by the computer’s spell check program, the historical materiality of my thesis thus reveals its inevitable contingency and the partiality of its analysis.
1 By little-known I mean that the writer who helped develop the term is not well-known within the official discourse of Australian ficto-criticism, and the literary circles of both Australia and Canada. The writer is Jeanne Randolph and her influence on the development of the term is outlined in the fifth chapter, Becoming-Minoritarian: Canadian Ficto-criticism.

2 Published in English as These Our Mothers (1983).

3 This is largely due to the influence of Aritha van Herk at the University of Calgary. See Chapter Five on Canadian ficto-criticism for more.

4 To give an indication that ficto-criticism continues to be judged unfavourably, postgraduate students often approach me seeking references to justify and explain their decision to write ficto-critically, or incorporate a ficto-critical section in their dissertation.

5 See, for example, Simon Robb’s 2001 PhD thesis titled “Fictocritical Sentences.” He examines ficto-criticism within the introduction as a justification for the rest of his thesis, written ficto-critically. Whilst he does engage with the concept critically, the entire thesis is not devoted to exploring the practice.

6 Significantly, one of the things ficto-criticism works toward is collapsing the distinction between primary and secondary texts, another binary division on which academic discourse relies.

7 I deliberately do not spend a lot of time detailing Deleuze and Guattari’s theories in this thesis. Rather, and in-keeping with their theoretical approach, I use their concepts as pragmatic tools. The reasons behind this decision is more fully explained in Chapter Two, which outlines my reading of the Deleuzian theories that I employ to theorise writing-between.

8 For an early application of Deleuzian theory to the postcolonial literatures of Canada and Australia see Kateryna Olijnyk Arthur’s “Between Literatures: Canada and Australia” (1988: 3-12) Arthur argues that Deleuzian thought releases the literature of Canada and Australia from always lacking the tradition of the centre. It allows the experimental literatures of each country to be liberated from both nationalistic and internationalistic goals. The multiple and often contradictory nature of each country’s identity no longer need be seen negatively. Instead of being viewed as a source of insecurity, it can be seen as a source of creative power.
CHAPTER ONE
Casting *The First Stone*:
Ficto-criticism as writing-between

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to hold central the uncertainty and contingency of writing-between I have deliberately chosen to begin my thesis with a brief discussion of a book that may or may not be considered ficto-criticism on first inspection. The book is *The First Stone* written by the high profile Australian creative writer Helen Garner and published in 1995. Whilst *The First Stone* is generically ambiguous (between fiction and non-fiction) it is not obviously ficto-critical. It is a text that has neither been linked to the concept of creative-critical writing, nor the term ficto-criticism. The decision to begin with this book signals my intention to broaden the field of ficto-criticism, not limiting the discussion to those texts obviously and easily identifiable as such. It is also characteristic of my intention to keep both the thesis and the definition of ficto-criticism open to negotiation in an effort to interrogate categorisation and its political implications. In other words, I begin with an example that explores why ficto-criticism should be cast as writing-between. Garner’s contentious book, written in response to a very high profile incident of sexual harassment at one of Australia’s oldest universities, was attacked by some academic feminists for blatantly mixing fiction with fact, whilst at the same time being positioned as a serious critical analysis of sex and power. *The First Stone* is written from a subjective and personal perspective, and employs fictional and narrative techniques. At the same time it makes use of authentic factual texts such as interviews, newspaper articles and letters. The generically ambiguous style of *The First Stone* presented as non-fiction—and the media’s sensationalism of reactions to the text—makes Garner’s book a heightened example to explore many of the themes central to ficto-criticism. In particular, it provides fruitful ground on which to think through what constitutes ficto-criticism, the reactions from the academy to the destabilisation of truth through mixing fact and fiction, and the
effectiveness of binary systems in relation to writing-between. The following discussion on Garner’s book furnishes us with a context in which to begin a dialogue on ficto-criticism, arguing for my reading of it as writing-between. As I demonstrate, much of the commentary made in response to Helen Garner’s book runs parallel with the commentary made in relation to ficto-criticism.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Journalists are never meant to allow themselves to be part of the story, but then one of the things [Helen] Garner and I talked about was how much a story—fiction or non-fiction—must always be about the teller. (Simons 27)

In recent years well-known Australian novelist Helen Garner has stated publicly on a number of occasions that she has increasingly been drawn away from fiction writing towards non-fiction (“You’ve Come A Long Way Baby”). In Australia few people would have been able to miss the furore over the Ormond College sexual harassment case at the University of Melbourne, and the ensuing debates that developed in the media around freedom of speech, (Australian) feminism, sexual harassment and political correctness. Garner, a feminist of the older generation, found herself in trouble with the new wave of feminists when she began research for her non-fiction book on the events. Having written a letter of sympathy to the accused male academic (whom she did not know), she then set about researching and writing her book. Surprisingly, after writing her letter of sympathy, a letter that quickly became common knowledge at the university, Garner was offended that the women involved refused to be interviewed by her and made much of what she perceived as their deliberate obscuration of the truth. Central to this story is the criticism Garner attracted for using fictional devices in her book of non-fiction, most notably the division of Dr Jenna Mead, the senior woman academic at the University of Melbourne who supported the young women complainants, into
six or seven different characters. The (implied) argument developed in *The First Stone*, of the feminist conspiracy against the College Master was therefore aided by her fictional characterisation of Mead. Subsequently Garner argued that her splitting of Mead into a number of people was undertaken to defend herself against defamation litigation. *The First Stone*, then, was seen to blur fact and fiction, yet represent itself as a well researched non-fictional account. All aided, it has been argued by Mead, through Garner’s reputation as an author of repute and her contacts in the media.

In one of the oldest and most prestigious colleges at one of the most established Australian universities, the ruination of the career of the Ormond College Master at the hands of a feminist conspiracy fuelled a backlash against bureaucratic feminazis and political correctness. The words from the back cover of *The First Stone*, in a style suggestive of the journalistic reportage of a not-to-be-overlooked highly newsworthy incident, set the scene for these events:

> In the autumn of 1992, two young women students at Melbourne University went to the police claiming that they had been indecently assaulted at a party. The man they accused was the head of their co-ed residential college. The shock of these charges split the community and painfully focused the debate about sex and power. (*The First Stone* back cover)

This back cover “blurb” in its (menacing) opening sentence (“In the autumn of 1992 . . .”) implies that there is a mystery. A mystery that Garner, eminent novelist and Walkley-Award winning journalist, will resolve for readers.¹ The language is also very much in keeping with the divisive methods of the popular media, for example, “shock” and “split the community.” Similarly, the phrases and debates that developed in relation to this incident through media usage and repetition, as Mead has pointed out, press buttons: “These buttons are labelled ‘feminist conspiracy,’ ‘a man’s career,’ and ‘wounded victim’” (Mead, “The First Stone” 9).
The ensuing developments after the initial allegations of sexual harassment were, therefore, carried out very publicly in the media. On first examination they seem to be very distant from a discussion on Australian and Canadian ficto-criticism and the growing (questionable) popularity of alternative and creatively critical forms of writing. However, there are a number of related themes and debates that link these two phenomena. For example, both raise similar questions around the distinctions between: reality/fiction; right/wrong; objectivity/subjectivity; criticism/fiction; old/new. Most importantly, both give rise to very similar reactionary and polarised debates around the ethics of self-location, authority, voice, and truth. Both are also generically between, defying the conventions of a number of genres, and, as a result, both frustrate the reader’s generic expectations. Surprisingly, however, and despite these similarities, different patterns of allegiance emerge in the debates around ficto-criticism and Garner’s highly personal reportage. For example, one might expect a hybrid form like Garner’s, which breaks with journalistic convention by employing a very personal and private voice, to fall on the left side of the binary pairs listed above. This is not the case with *The First Stone*. Despite identifying her work with New Journalism—a marginal and potentially radical form of journalistic writing in its subjective style—Garner has been heavily critiqued for being on the ideological right in her support of the Ormond College Master as a victim of feminism gone too far. New Journalism with its highly subjective, creative and candid style of commentary, in contrast to the refutably objective presentation of “just the facts” by traditional journalism, is generally considered marginal by the serious established press. In the words of Tom Wolfe in *The New Journalism*: “They [journalists and the literati] needed to believe, in short, that the new form [New Journalism] was illegitimate . . . a ‘bastard form’” (39).

Significantly, the varying and diverse forms of creative-critical writing that I will address in this thesis as ficto-criticism have also been represented in the published literature as radical, marginal, and challenging to conservative (literary) traditions. Thus, what these emerging and conflicting patterns of allegiance signal (between two hybrid forms—Garner’s text and ficto-criticism)—are the dangers inherent in binary systems of thought (particularly in relation to
writing-between). Not all hybrid generically challenging texts are automatically or simply left of centre, that is, marginal and radical. To put it another way, a change to the aesthetics and stylistics of a literary genre that potentially poses a threat to established generic conventions, might—on the surface—suggest a radical or alternative ideological position. However, these aesthetic and formal changes to a text do not guarantee a commitment to an alternative political agenda. A binary system of thought therefore has the potential—as I will demonstrate with *The First Stone* and this thesis—to reduce highly complex arguments and events to simple oppositions, which are wholly inappropriate when dealing with writing-between. In the instance of Garner’s generic oxymoron—her non-fiction novel—this process was aided by the adversarial style of the popular media. As such, the distortions caused by a binary system are magnified. However, before going on to engage with the reactions to *The First Stone* and their relation to ficto-criticism, I will first briefly introduce Garner’s “ficto-critical” style, a style well illustrated by her own introduction, the first chapter.

Reaffirming its sense of mystery, seriousness and factual nature, *The First Stone* begins with the following sentences: “Around lunchtime on Thursday 9 April 1992, a man called Dr Colin Shepherd went to the police station in the inner Melbourne suburb of Carlton. In the CIB office there, he had this conversation with two CIB detectives” (1). What follows is what appears to be a transcription of the police interview. Although the names are changed in *The First Stone* to avoid defamation charges and there is no reference to the source of this interview, this text retains a certain legitimacy. For example, Colin Shepherd—the man being interviewed—is mistakenly called Dr Colin, instead of Dr Shepherd: “Dr Colin (sic), do you agree that the time is now approximately twelve-o-six?” (1). The inclusion of “(sic)” reinforces the legitimacy of the source by indicating that it has been faithfully reproduced, including any errors. This is how Garner’s text begins. However, most of *The First Stone* is written in a subjective first person voice, which describes scenes as if part of an autobiographical account of actual events, her voice being interspersed with reproductions of
authentic texts, such as letters, newspaper articles and interview notes. The text, written from a subjective and personal perspective, which employs fictional and narrative techniques, none-the-less carries a substantial authority through the discourse of authentic voice. Throughout *The First Stone* Garner struggles with the questions surrounding sex and power, and, whilst not presented as an essay, her non-fictional novel argues a certain perspective, very persuasively. This is achieved, in part, through the revelation of her own doubts, which function almost as if part of a concession argument. In other words, Garner deals with the possible objections to her perspective by acknowledging and addressing them. Ultimately, however, she argues beyond these doubts and concerns to a position from which she views the reaction of the women students as self-righteous, reactive, inflexible and unforgiving.

In one chapter, for example, Garner discusses varying experiences of sexual assault recounted by women of her generation, whom she had met at a dinner party. One story, in particular, by a woman who was raped by a doctor at age eighteen, touches Garner. The woman does not, at the time, report the assault, nor does she tell anyone. In fact, she even pays for the consultation directly after the rape. This story leads Garner to not only think through what dynamics restrict women from speaking out in circumstances like these, but what also prompts them to act in such immediate and grotesque gestures of compliance after being violated. Later in the same chapter Garner recounts a similar, although less serious, incident she experienced in which she paid a masseur who had “come onto her” during the massage. She too wonders why she behaves so properly. In this chapter Garner is clearly struggling with the question asked of one of the Ormond college students during the trial. Why didn’t she just slap the Master after he groped her? Why does she react so passively and then report him later? The morning after the dinner party, Garner feels an immediate identification with the young women who brought the charges against Dr Shepherd:

> I woke up . . . sad and anxious, aware of the immense *weight* of men on women, the ubiquity of their attentions, the exhaustion of our resistance. In such a mood it seemed
to me an illusion that women could learn to deal with this pressure briskly, forcefully, with humour and grace. I thought about the complainants, Elizabeth and Nicole, and I felt deeply sorry for them. (171)

Interestingly, rather than undermining her final position, passages such as this function—as does her chapter—to shore up her argument by evoking an alliance, through direct reference to similar experiences. If Garner has had the same kind of experience and she still feels Nicole and Elizabeth have over reacted—here referred to by their first names, confirming a sense of intimacy—then her argument is reinforced. Garner is, after all, speaking from the authority of experience, and it is her gendered profile as a feminist of an older generation that generates such interest in her book. There is disagreement in the feminist ranks. The meanings of Garner’s ficto-criticism are, then, very complex, the text slipping between an overtly fictionalised account of a series of actual events, and a serious critical investigation into the much larger questions of sex, gender, power, feminism and patriarchy.

The Ormond sexual harassment incident, and the ensuing events, is thus clearly an intricate story, one that signals the complexities involved when researching something generically between such as ficto-criticism. For example, the hybridity of ficto-criticism—and its ambiguous non(generic) status—meant that it was difficult to immediately locate and identify examples with certainty. In other words, at the start of my project the delineating markers of ficto-criticism had not been determined, and, so, were amorphous. I had to answer the question of what exactly constituted a ficto-critical text before I could proceed. The research therefore began with the examination of a wide range of texts, which like Garner’s demonstrated similar investments in the boundaries between factuality/creativity, objectivity/subjectivity, confession (also often found in ficto-critical texts) and criticism. I had to carry out this extensive reading, as anything generically between fiction and criticism/theory was potentially a kind of ficto-criticism. This was a time-consuming yet worthwhile exercise as it helped isolate research problems associated with what is often seen
as a generically challenged form, and at the same time illustrated the issues that emerge when boundaries are crossed. The events that occurred with *The First Stone*, for example, whilst certainly caught up with other influencing discourses such as a patriarchal reaction to feminism and Australian anti-intellectualism, are interesting and relevant to ficto-criticism because they demonstrate the anger and defensiveness that erupt when people’s world views are challenged. The narratives that emerged in relation to the debate over *The First Stone* also illustrate some of the issues and difficulties associated with researching ficto-criticism. There are, therefore, a number of useful connections between ficto-critical writing and *The First Stone* that I will now explore as a means to demonstrate some of the central themes of the emerging discourse of ficto-criticism.

The academic setting and connections to the story of *The First Stone*, for example, are highly relevant to ficto-criticism. As this thesis will reveal, much ficto-critical writing in both Australia and Canada is associated with the academy either directly by being produced by academics, or indirectly as a response to normative academic writing and criticism. Similarly, the alleged sexual harassment of the two students that prompted Garner to write *The First Stone* took place at a university college party. Into this prestigious setting at Ormond College enters Garner whose book seems directed as a challenge to academic and institutionalised knowledge, something which Garner seems to perceive herself as being excluded from. On several occasions in *The First Stone* Garner implies her dislike of theory when placed above, and to the exclusion of, life experience. In fact, this is central to her critique of the women who take their allegations to the police. Repeatedly she asks why they went to these lengths, and implies they have gone too far with their abstract theories. Garner’s frustration with theory and her belief in experience can be seen in her discussion of the character “Janet F-,” the director of Melbourne University’s counselling service who was involved in the attempted conciliation between the Master and the complainants. Garner clearly identifies with this woman, whom she sees as speaking from life experience: “She struck me as someone who had
been around, perhaps suffered in her private life, who knew something of the world and spoke from that knowledge rather than from theory or dogma” (Garner 42). Taken in the context of her book this quote seems to suggest that Garner believed the (privileged) academic feminists at Melbourne University had moved beyond life or lived reality into dogmatic theories on sex and power. Instead of overlooking a man’s moment of weakness, his human-ness, Garner perceives the women as taking this opportunity to ruin his career. Significantly, the underlying assumptions of Garner’s position highlight similar concerns expressed by some ficto-critical writers: namely a critique of the exclusion of the body and what is human (that is, moments of weakness, failure and doubt) from the objective and pseudo-scientific language of academic discourse. This is a discourse that places the mind and intellectual pursuits above the body, memory and experience. In subsequent chapters I will demonstrate that, like Garner, many ficto-critics also feel excluded from, and perhaps objectified by, the discourses of academic knowledge. It is worth remembering that Garner’s foray, as a novelist into this academic scene, is a challenge to academic generic rules about objects and subjects of knowledge. Garner would more likely be found in an academic setting as the object of academic research and attention. In The First Stone, however, she turns the table on her potential critics by directing her own investigation into—and critique of—the academy. Similarly, some Canadian and Australian ficto-critics are creative writers and poets who turn the table on their critics.3 By enacting their own self-reflexive commentary on their own texts and through mixing criticism and fiction, ficto-critics do away with the critic and demonstrate their agency: they are no longer merely the object of criticism.

In other moments Garner gives clues as to why else she may dislike academics and the academy. For example, she admits her feelings of inferiority in the face of their authorised knowledge. Speaking of the panic she felt prior to an interview with a Melbourne University Law lecturer, Garner admits: “I recognised this panic. It was the same old fear of professors and people with Ph.Ds, a leftover from my own undistinguished and almost totally silent
university career, thirty years ago” (145). Interestingly, a similar fear of intellectualism or dislike of over-theorisation such as Garner’s emerges on occasion around ficto-critical texts. Whilst some ficto-critics seem to be mobilised by a desire to demystify academic language and reach a wider audience, many ficto-critical texts are highly theoretically informed and require a reader well versed in contemporary theories. The image of the popular academic who writes in a personal language more accessible to the average reader, or the highly theoretically self-referential text, however, both seem to have in their sights the omnipotent academic voice from on high which presents itself as objective and masterful, and which excludes—in the process—life and experience. Garner’s The First Stone can also be read as a critique of academic mastery and established knowledge, a masterful knowledge from which she appears to feel excluded. Of course, whether Garner’s critique of the events and the academic feminists’ actions are well-founded remains questionable. Yet, what all this demonstrates is the complexity around virtually any phenomenon, and the importance of not approaching such events and issues without attention to the contradictions, exclusions and complexities (that is, what ficto-criticism attempts to address). Ironically, despite Garner’s hybrid form that in many ways challenges authorised discourses (in particular those from the academy), her text does not trace its own immersion in equally authorised discourses, such as her connections with the media and her reliance on the discourse of free speech to validate her approach. Although Garner reflects on her possible motivations for her perspective, she fails to really interrogate them in any meaningful way.

Another interesting connection between ficto-criticism and The First Stone is that both are often critiqued for failing to meet the expectations of clever or competent writing and research. This critique comes from a traditional academic or intellectual position and must be recognised as having a reliance on truth and real facts. For example, Janet Malcolm. Matthew Ricketson, in his article titled “Helen Garner’s The First Stone: Hitchhiking on the Credibility of Other Writers,” critiques Garner for trading on the reputation of the well-researched work
of renowned New Journalists like John McPhee, Ian Jack, Tracy Kidder and others. Ricketson argues that what is important is “the quality of the reporting and research work. Without that, all the fine prose in the world has little meaning” (85). In effect, Ricketson implies that whilst Garner’s prose might be up to scratch, her research, reporting and intellectual work in *The First Stone* falls below the standard of the New Journalists whose work she identifies with. He implies that she fails to get to the truth. Ricketson says: “Garner’s keen antennae picked up the resonances of the Ormond case, but she lacks [Janet] Malcolm’s intellectual rigour” (99). Similarly, ficto-criticism finds itself being critiqued in the academy for its lack of intellectual rigour and for failing to demonstrate a clear understanding and analysis of its subject. Mead has also critiqued Garner for her failure to understand the issues that encompass sexual harassment and for failing to do adequate research. Also, like many examples of ficto-criticism, Garner’s text makes the story of the research virtually as important, if not more so, than the actual analysis. As a result, Garner was criticised for focusing her story on the process of research and writing, and for writing in a manner that was subjective and personal. In particular, she was attacked for making too central to her narrative the story of the young women’s refusal to speak to her. According to Ricketson, Garner—struggling to gather raw material—“made the story of not getting the story into a running refrain in *The First Stone*” (96-7). He states:

That many readers found this story engaging may testify to Garner’s skill as a writer, but more importantly, to her fame as a novelist. If the average journalist tried this on, most readers would say, ‘spare me your angst; tell me what happened at Ormond.’ Garner’s is a dubious strategy because she has shifted the heart of the inquiry away from Ormond College and located it inside herself. (97)

Again, these critiques may well be founded when applied to *The First Stone*. However, what is interesting is that—as hybrid forms—both ficto-criticism and Garner’s text are critiqued for similar failings. Ficto-criticism is also often critiqued for being too subjective: for locating the story in relation to individual and personal experience and memory. These failings, such as a
subjective approach, are only failings if measured against a standard they were not wishing to emulate. Both *First Stone*, ficto-criticism and other border-crossing texts become dubious strategies because they break the rules of convention. Yet, neither *The First Stone* nor ficto-criticism are attempting to be objective in the sense of academic writing, nor are they saying that their perspective is completely fictionalised. In Garner’s text, for example, the truth of the events is mediated by her use of an intrusive embodied voice. As *The First Stone* demonstrates, whether or not this author is taken as objective by a general readership on the basis of her reputation—overlooking the literary/theoretical (subjective) implications of her use of personal voice—is quite another question. To put it another way, a reader versed in literary theory may read the inclusion of the personal voice into a book of non-fiction like Garner’s as a signal for a degree of self-reflection and an acknowledgment of the author’s role in framing the events (the partiality of their perspective). But what does it signal to a non-academic audience? Also, what kind of subjectivity is being constructed in hybrid texts? Should it be taken that all texts that break generic conventions—mixing fiction and non-fiction—dislodge authority and truth? Garner also includes other voices—the voices of the people involved in the incident—that she interviews. But does this mean the text is automatically polyvocal and open? The negative reaction to *The First Stone* by some Australian academics suggests that it does not. More importantly, however, it signals the importance of taking into account the historical and material context of individual texts when reading ficto-criticism. One cannot separate ficto-critical texts from the conditions of their production because no two are ever the same.

The events surrounding Garner’s *The First Stone* are thus highly useful to consider in relation to ficto-criticism, as they signal the complexity of the problems and issues raised when truth is seen to be toyed with. That is, when someone (Garner) breaks down the distinction between the fictive and the real and then (in this case) represents it as fact. What is at risk are differing accounts of reality, and this is exactly what ficto-criticism is concerned with: the
accommodation or acknowledgment of differing truths and perspectives. As I will show, ficto-criticism is informed by a growing realisation that knowledge is partial and contested, and that the dominant academic generic form is inadequate to incorporate the tensions arising from the anxiety of speaking for and about the other. Perhaps it is the challenge to established viewpoints that makes the reaction to both ficto-criticism and *The First Stone* so divisive.⁴

Whilst I do not necessarily support Garner’s perspective on the events at Ormond College, nor her representation of her account as non-fiction, her book, like ficto-criticism, by mixing fact and fiction, posed a very real threat to some discourses. Discourses, which at that particular historical point in time were in some ways becoming entrenched in certain contexts: institutionalised feminism and political correctness. What made *The First Stone* so dangerous, and the reaction to it so strong, was its destabilisation of truth via its generic hybridity. This destabilisation of (recently) established ways of knowing worked to disrupt the truth behind the events (distorted by both her book and the media). As the book *bodyjamming* (1997) edited by Jenna Mead—and published in response to *The First Stone*—confirms, what was occurring was a contestation over truth and representation. Mead’s title to the introduction of *bodyjamming* says it all: “Tell It Like It Is.” Like ficto-criticism, therefore, Garner’s book challenged established genres and their conventions: in other words, she didn’t play by the rules, and was accused of misleading her readers.

Garner’s failure to play by the (generic) rules is, significantly, a major source of material for her critics and for the critics of ficto-criticism. In the instance of *The First Stone*, however, there is a very different outcome. It is important to remember that there is a significant difference between the two examples: that is, Garner’s account was represented as factual and therefore truthful. Ficto-criticism—on the other hand—questions the construction of facts and their proof through contaminating the generic purity of academic (non-fictional) modes of writing. Garner’s text, through destabilising categories, like ficto-criticism, presents a threat to authorised discourses. This was her intention to question some of the discourses that she
held close, which in her eyes were becoming institutionalised and rigid. In the case of *The First Stone*, the discourses she was questioning—political correctness and feminism—were arguably at their height. Garner appeared to be reacting against what she perceived was the dogmatic application of liberatory discourses. The ease with which her hybrid form was taken up by dominant right wing discourses to back their world view, however, attests not only to Garner’s failure to calculate the full implications of her chosen critical hybrid style, but also the power of discourse to shape our reality. In particular, the media’s take on her book radically changed the perception of the events, and this was something Garner did not anticipate. Significantly, by drawing attention to generic conventions through breaking their rules, ficto-criticism in its commitment to self-reflexivity attends to exposing the effects of discourse. *The First Stone* whilst displaying a degree of self-reflection fails to achieve this self-reflexivity: a self-reflexivity that I will demonstrate in this thesis is an important aspect of ficto-critical texts if they are to be successful in countering the colonising powers of discourse.

Garner’s text thus presents another key issue related to ficto-criticism. That is, the question of definition. How do you define ficto-criticism? On first inspection *The First Stone* displays some key features, but is it ficto-criticism? How do you determine where ficto-criticism begins and ends without contradicting yourself when the basis for traditional generic taxonomy is a target of ficto-criticism, as a space between such categories? We get a sense through Garner’s comments about the academy that she writes a personalised account of events as a way to counter the official version of knowledges, such as feminism, emanating from the academy. What she appears to have begun the book with (at least), was a desire to open the discussion on sex and power, a discussion she felt had become closed. To be theoretically consistent with ficto-criticism’s presentation of alternative between knowledges and its generic hybridity, it is thus necessary to keep the definition open. However, as the critiques of ficto-criticism and Garner’s text (discussed thus far) illustrate, there are risks both intellectual and political in doing so. Misunderstandings are very probable, since the rules of reading are not clear. Whilst
The First Stone was picked up and promoted by the media, the risks of being overlooked and dismissed are also very real for writing-between. Garner’s text too easily served the discourses that powerfully oppose political correctness and feminism. As a result, it was taken up to reaffirm these perspectives. Ironically, these points of view are just as inflexible or closed as Garner understood (institutionalised) feminism to have become. So whilst The First Stone took to the centre stage, this is not the usual state of affairs for most ficto-critical forms, which are most definitely at the margin of official discourses. If we turn to look at another generically hybrid form that both The First Stone and ficto-criticism have been aligned with—New Journalism—more of the risks inherent in the between become apparent.

In his article on Garner’s book, for example, Rickertson says: “This kind of writing was labelled New Journalism in the sixties, but there were so many arguments about it—this isn’t new! this isn’t journalism!—that the term fell into disuse” (82). Given that it is the generic hybridity of New Journalism that very probably caused the demise of the term, the same scenario could be anticipated for ficto-criticism. Certainly, what Rickertson says of New Journalism has also been said of ficto-criticism. In effect, the indeterminacy of hybrid forms makes them vulnerable to being ignored or subsumed by dominant discourses. This explains the disputes over terminology around Garner’s text, New Journalism and ficto-criticism. For example, before making the statement quoted above, Ricketson discusses the nomenclature of the style of writing Garner employs in The First Stone:

Garner used the term reportage in her author’s note, and it is one of several that grope toward a definition of this kind of writing. None is completely satisfactory. Literary journalism and literary non-fiction sound pompous; creative non-fiction sounds like a contradiction in terms; faction has been discredited; narrative journalism seems a bit narrow; the literature of fact is ponderous . . .. (82)

Generically challenging forms like ficto-criticism and New Journalism—forms of writing situated between—are difficult to name and pin down precisely because they exist between
established categories. Ficto-criticism also comes with an array of possible terms, for example (to name a few): paracriticism, fiction-theory, critifiction, post-criticism and performative writing. The recent debate in Australia (discussed in Chapter Four) over whether one should use ficto-criticism or creative non-fiction to describe this kind of writing, suggests that ficto-criticism (the term) may well be falling into disuse. The plethora of terms used to describe the blurring of criticism and fiction makes the project of researching ficto-criticism challenging. This will be addressed in the thesis since it says much about writing-between.

There is one final significant point that *The First Stone* raises in relation to ficto-criticism, in particular, regarding terminology and definition. That is, in an effort to “grop toward a definition of this kind of writing,” there is often a conflation, or slippage, of terms used to describe the boundary crossing ficto-criticism enacts (Ricketson 82). In numerous discussions on varying ficto-critical texts, terms with different meanings are collapsed together. The slippage between words like criticism/theory/fact/non-fiction, in the literature that addresses ficto-criticism, at first seemed merely another complication to exploring ficto-criticism and its implications, until I realised this occurred through the application of, yet again, a binary structure. This system of bifurcation repeats the following pattern:

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30
The words fact/fiction/non-fiction/theory and criticism, serious journalism/reportage, or fiction/creative writing/speculation, only come to mean the same (that is, become interchangeable) when placed in opposition to the other. This conflation of terms, especially words like theory and criticism that do not have the same meaning, can perhaps be explained as an attempt to contain an unruly, difficult, between or emerging genre. It also points to the challenges involved in researching writing-between, where terminology and definitions are in constant contestation.

Significantly, texts that attempt to grapple with the elision of the boundary between reality and fiction are symptomatic of the times we live in, as, it appears, is the tendency toward reading for indeterminate and differing realities. Many of these developments have been attributed to postmodernism and postmodernity, and the collapse of the grand narratives. Across a range of media we can see a shift in perception, critical judgement is continually being undermined as new technological developments and the discovery of new knowledges distort the perception of reality. How, for example, do you interpret and judge a photograph when images are so easily manipulated by computers, when seeing is no longer believing? Similarly, the increasing trend towards docu-drama in film and television, made possible by small, light video cameras, poses questions about art and artifice. As fiction, history, auto/biography and reality experience reciprocal contamination, new possibilities and new relationships between the subject and object of interpretation must be envisioned. This is the point at which ficto-criticism emerges—as one of the possible ways critical practice attempts to deal with these changes and developments, and the resultant shifts in perspective. In other words, when so many alternative perspectives are available, one is forced to become self-conscious about one’s own position and viewpoint.

Will events like *The First Stone*, including the media reaction, become more prolific as boundaries are elided under the cultural logic of what has been labelled postmodernism, and as
fiction and its generic conventions become exhausted? Or will we learn to live with an increasing ambiguity around truth and reality? Perhaps the exhaustion of fictional conventions (to the point of cliché) explains why Garner finds reportage so enthralling and herself drawn more and more to writing non-fiction. Does it also explain, in part, why there seem to be more television programs and films being made that are so much about the telling—the creative process—rather than the tale? Fact is stranger than fiction. Whatever Garner’s reasons for her interest in non-fiction, these new forms of writing seem to be, like *The First Stone*, signalling an important shift. A shift, which if continued to be viewed from a binary platform, may result in many of the more interesting social and political implications and influences of writing-between being overlooked. For example, is this phenomenon merely the result of postmodernism, and a reaction against modernism? Postmodernism is certainly lauded most often in the literature on border crossing texts as the defining influence. Yet, as I will demonstrate, whilst postmodernism has been instrumental in helping establish a climate more receptive to generically between texts, it is not the only influence on the varying writing forms that are developing and which challenge objectivity and the detached authoritative expert voice from above. To read these texts simply in terms of a reaction to modernism (as postmodern) results in overlooking a number of more interesting discourses and their influence on these texts.

**CONCLUSION**

*The First Stone*, therefore, makes apparent the issues and debates that circulate in relation to ficto-criticism since both betray the assumptions of fact and fiction. The book’s divisive profile made possible through media sensationalism is productive in this context since it reveals the way in which binaries function to detract from the more slippery meanings and power relations emanating from writing-between. Subtler and less reactionary readings of Garner’s book—not reliant on an either/or model—may reveal the ambiguities in her position and, most importantly, that her self-reflective speaking position does little to really counter or
expose her own position of power and ability to construct reality. The next chapter further develops the notion of ficto-criticism cast as writing-between by conceiving a conceptual framework, using the theories of Deleuze and Guattari that allows for being between.
A Walkley is one of Australia’s highest awards for journalism.

In fact, the women only take their complaint to the police when the University fails to address their allegations properly.

See Louky Bersianik’s “Aristotle’s Lantern: an essay on criticism,” published in _A Mazing Space_ (1986: 39-48). Here Bersianik—a poet—writes back to traditional critics that she argues close and limit the text by enforcing one inflexible reading or interpretation. Such critics approach the text with certain expectations and ideas. Her reading is feminist and she identifies this kind of closed criticism as masculine (although performed by both men and women). The essay is interesting as she links the power structures that enable the critic (which can be reconfigured to spell citric) a supposed objective position to “demolish” certain writings that do not fit established models. Bersianik’s essay is written in response to a review of a collection of her work, which is dismissed as feminine and frivolous. Significantly, Bersianik’s essay is not written within the genre of criticism. It is quite playful and ends creatively with an extension of the metaphor of the spider’s web.

In his introduction to the journal _Event’s_ ninth Creative Non-Fiction Contest, George Galt discusses the boundary between fact and fiction. Galt describes the “deep unease” generated when one crosses to the other: “In our highly rational, legalistic, byte-bound culture, we understand fiction to inhabit a different realm. Some of us need to be given a clear signal when we are entering it” (1996/7: 7-11). This is exactly what Garner is critiqued for not doing.

The discourse of Australian ficto-criticism has several connections with New Journalism. For example, at the University of Tasmania, Joan Dideon’s writing (that has been identified as New Journalism) is on the reading list for the unit on ficto-criticism. Similarly, Australian ficto-critic Stephen Muecke teaches ficto-criticism at the University of Technology, Sydney. Dideon’s book _After Henry_ has been listed on his suggested reading list. The unpublished introduction to Muecke’s anthology of ficto-criticism similarly makes reference to New Journalism and the work of Dideon.

Amanda Nettlebeck in the introduction to _The Space Between: Australian Women Writing Fictocriticism_ has said that the term has a short term function (1998: 13).

The extraordinary popularity of reality T.V., of series like _Big Brother_, featuring real people not actors also testifies to how changes in technology are influencing our perspective (both literally and intellectually). Entertainment is changing. Previously it was more closely tied to obviously fictionalised narratives. Now whole cable channels and internet sites are devoted to docu-dramas. There seem to be even more and more programs about placing people in confined spaces and observing their every action and interaction. This is reality T.V. but it is also unambiguously being manipulated or fictionalised (something which there is no attempt to hide). The very successful movie _The Truman Show_, starring Jim Carey, where a man’s whole life becomes a long running television program, encapsulates much of this blurring of reality and fiction, and illustrates the experience of living in an interstitial space (the struggle over truth).
CHAPTER TWO

HOW CAN WE ENTER?

FICTO-CRITICISM AS A MINOR LITERATURE

For reading a text is never a scholarly exercise in search of what is signified, still less a highly textual exercise in search of a signifier. Rather it is a productive use of the literary machine, a montage of desiring machines, a schizoid exercise that extracts from the text its revolutionary force. (Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus 106)

INTRODUCTION

In Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, Deleuze and Guattari ask the question: “How can we enter into Kafka’s work? This is a rhizome, a burrow. The castle has multiple entrances whose rules of usage and whose locations aren’t very well known” (3). In this chapter, through Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “minor literature,” I answer the question of how we can enter into ficto-criticism. From this entry point I then explore in detail several of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts found in Anti-Oedipus, Chaosmosis and A Thousand Plateaus to develop a theoretical context in which to engage with ficto-criticism as writing-between. As a burrow with multiple entrances, ficto-criticism invites a Deleuzian mapping.1 This chapter is, therefore, methodological. Here I argue that the theories of Deleuze and Guattari not only resemble ficto-critical writing, but can also be applied productively to its analysis. By looking directly at specific examples of Canadian and Australian ficto-critical writing I play out the details of my engagement with the theories of Deleuze and Guattari as a means to realise the political implications of ficto-criticism. In the process, I develop a materialist assemblage of ficto-critical characteristics, outlining the three main forms of ficto-critical expression: collage/montage, autobiography, and metafictive. I argue that each expression encourages a more fluid processual subjectivity, different from what I see as the individuated, masterful or Oedipalised subject of normative critical writing.
The individuated subject is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, a product of the blind enforcement of the Oedipal complex, which represses the subject, knowledge, thought, and desire through its role as the overarching interpretative system. In this system desire can only ever equal lack since any connections outside established rules and conventions imply a shortcoming or dysfunction. In Deleuze and Guattari’s theories desire is reclaimed as a productive, connective, creative and positive process that enables the subject to be imagined as vital, constantly changing through its engagement with the other. Envisioned in a Deleuzian system, ficto-criticism and the subject it generates can be seen positively. Here ficto-criticism need not be apologetic and defensive for its creative transgression, nor must it explain its failure to adhere to the rigorous objectivity of conventional academic writing. It becomes an alternate critical paradigm where new connections between the self and other are actively sought. Instead of interpreting and repressing difference—through an inflexible code regardless of the context—ficto-critical writing engages with what it sets out to explore in an experimental ethical creative process. The self of ficto-critical writing does not wish mastery over its subject, and self-reflexively acknowledges the impact of that subject (the other) on the self. In other words, ficto-critical writing fundamentally recognises—at the level of generic style—the contingent and partial nature of all critical writing and by extension, knowledge.

Deleuze and Guattari’s theories thus emerge as relevant tools to explore ficto-criticism since they open a space in which writing-between can be considered in a manner that allows for its creativity, multiplicity and complexity. It need not be automatically dismissed for failing to play by the rules, nor need it be interpreted singularly. Significantly, however, my use of Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptual system—including the notion of minor literature—is materialist and determined by my understanding of their work and its relevance to ficto-criticism. This approach is, in fact, consistent with their oeuvre since Deleuze and Guattari’s theories encourage and allow for such appropriation. For example, as Brian Massumi has stated “Delueze’s own image for a concept is not a
brick but a ‘tool box’” (xv). Similarly, in *Dialogues* with Clare Parnet, Deleuze says of concepts; ‘There’s no question of difficulty or understanding: concepts are exactly like sounds, colours or images, they are intensities which suit you or not, which are acceptable or aren’t acceptable” (10). Therefore, rather than referring to their theories as ideas or merely concepts, I have chosen to use “concept-tools” as an alternative. As this term suggests I do not spend a great deal of time interpreting their theories, instead I use their concept-tools in a productive and pragmatic way by employing them to map the varying characteristics of ficto-criticism, and the challenges such a practice raises to more traditional ways of knowing. In this thesis I am concerned with the practical application of Deleuze and Guattari’s theories within the context of the historical emergence of ficto-criticism rather than exploring and explaining the philosophical and intellectual traditions that inform their work.

However, despite the flexibility of approach allowed for by Deleuzian thought, it is still necessary to provide some explanation as to my reading and application of their theories. I begin this chapter, therefore, by examining a passage from the introduction to *Kafka* by Réda Bensmaïa in order to introduce my reading of Deleuze and Guattari. From there I discuss the three main reasons why Deleuzian thought is so relevant to ficto-criticism through introducing some of their key concept-tools. These include the notion of minoritarian and majoritarian, de- and reterritorialisation, and the subject developed by Guattari in *Chaosmosis*. An initial discussion on these concept-tools is necessary as background to argue that ficto-criticism is a minor literature that operates to critique of normative academic writing. Similarly, to establish the status of ficto-criticism as a minor literature I then work through the three characteristics outlined in *Kafka*, relating them to writing-between. Finally, I argue for the three characteristics or expressions of writing-between—collage/montage, autobiographical and metafictive—by examining Australian and Canadian texts. These include Erin Mouré’s *Pillage Laud*, a short piece by Anne Brewster, Fred Wah’s *Diamond Grill*, Gail Jones’ “Skulls, Fontanelles and the Spaces Between,” and finishing with Yasmin Ladha’s *The Lion’s Granddaughter*. 
Modelling Deleuze and Guattari?

Bensmaïa, in the translated version of her foreword, clarifies the potential of minor literature for reading other literatures at the margin of literary tradition:

By proposing the concept of “minor literature”. . . Deleuze and Guattari give the modern reader a means by which to enter into Kafka’s work without being weighted down by the old categories of genres, types, modes, and style (in the “linguistic” sense of the term, as Barthes would say). These categories would imply that the reader’s task is at bottom to interpret Kafka’s writing, whether the interpretation take the form of parabolism, negative theology, allegory, symbolism, “correspondences,” and so on. The concept of minor literature permits a reversal: instead of Kafka’s work being related to some preexistent category or literary genre, it will henceforth serve as a rallying point or model for certain texts and “bilingual” writing practices that, until now, had to pass through a long purgatory before even being read, much less recognized. (xiv)

In mapping Kafka’s work as minor literature Deleuze and Guattari have thus developed a concept-tool that encourages an approach to literature not based on the search for what is signified. Instead of focusing on interpretation, minor literature enables one to engage creatively and experimentally with texts. Ficto-criticism, which mixes the generic markers of fiction and non-fiction, is a creative experimental style of critical writing that has—as a result of its hybridity—little or no rules. Put another way, ficto-critical writing imitates the philosophical approach of minor literature. The term ficto-criticism is, in fact, indeterminate, and the practice encourages indeterminacy. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari: “Only the principle of multiple entrances prevents the introduction of the enemy, the Signifier and those attempts to interpret a work that is actually only open to experimentation” (Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka 3). Similarly, as suggested by the small amount of published material that directly addresses such practices, ficto-criticism is a form that has not been researched much at all. It is, as a consequence, not well known like other minor literatures. Part of the failure of ficto-criticism to attract serious critical
academic attention is very probably its diverse and slippery multiple character. The concept of a minor literature, as Bensmäïä states in the quotation above, thus recuperates writing practices that were previously banished to the margins and left unexamined due to their unruly, difficult style. Deleuze and Guattari’s question of how to enter into Kafka’s work—that opens his oeuvre to the possibility of a minor literature—thus resonates loudly with such a practice as ficto-criticism. A closer examination of the full quotation from Bensmäïä gives me an opportunity to introduce my approach to the work of Deleuze and Guattari, an approach that will build and develop in this thesis along the same continuum.

Generally speaking the words of Bensmäïä quoted above serve well as an introduction to the concept-tool of a minor literature and its relevance as a dynamic theoretical entry point for the generically hybrid ficto-criticism, a (non)form generally dismissed by the literary disciplines. However, her use of “model” to describe Kafka’s work and minor literature is contradictory. It is contradictory both in the context of her passage and that of Deleuzian theory. Whilst the use of “model” might be explained as a symptom of translation, the word is antithetical to Deleuzian theory because it conveys the traditional notion of genre. This is a subtle yet important detail, and its identification here demonstrates how I am choosing to read Deleuze and Guattari’s work to engage with ficto-criticism. “Model” commonly means an exemplar, and implies something fixed, which is then imitated. As Bensmäïä herself argues, minor literature desires escape from such models or categories. The notion of model in this passage thus becomes a contradiction in terms and highlights the challenges Deleuzian theory presents to dominant ways of knowing. Instead of fixing and reducing concepts and knowledge into manageable pieces, Deleuzian theory prefers the experimental productive flow of ideas without hierarchy. This is suggested by the concept-tool of the rhizome, which is set in play to reveal the arboreal structure of bifurcation that they argue underpins dominant Western thought. The rhizome represents a multiplicity of heterogeneous connections; the rhizome is always both/and and never either/or. Subsequently, I prefer the expression “rallying point,” given in Bensmäïä’s passage as an alternative to “model,” as this phrasing implies much more motility and is
thus more consistent with Deleuzian thought. This is because “rallying point” is less prescriptive and does not propose to determine where one will end up; from a rallying point there is the potential for movement in any direction. The contradiction implied by the use of the term model in the translated passage of Bensmäïä is thus enabling in the context of this chapter, as it foregrounds my intention to think through ficto-criticism as a politically motivated writing practice that shuns the traditional modelisation of genre.4

Deleuze and Guattari critique the tradition of hermeneutics in Western philosophy, which attempts to revise and totalise the material, actual, social and subjective through an interpretative key. Ficto-criticism—a performative practice—thus runs parallel with Deleuzian thought and the characteristics of minor literatures:

But a minor, or revolutionary, literature begins by expressing itself and doesn’t conceptualize until afterward (“I do not see the word at all, I invent it”). Expression must break forms, encourage ruptures and new sproutings. When a form is broken, one must reconstruct the content that will necessarily be part of a rupture in the order of things. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 28)

The “sprouting” of the term from an experimental and unnamed practice, combined with the form’s contravention of the rules of criticism, signals why ficto-criticism can be envisioned as a minor literature. Ficto-criticism ruptures the order of things with its multiple creative experimentation between fiction and non-fiction, encouraging a rhizomatic theorisation. It is for these practical and conceptual reasons that I have chosen to use the concept-tools of Deleuze and Guattari, as a way to imagine the space-between that is ficto-criticism. Through my application of Deleuzian theory I encourage a productive use of the literary machine, extracting from the ficto-critical text its revolutionary force. This means in Deleuzian terms, not just the unravelling of meaning and the unified subject but, the positive dynamic production and connection of new meanings and subjectivities. Having established the general theoretical approach of my ficto-critical exegesis, I now introduce in more detail the concept-tools of Deleuze and Guattari that I engage with in this chapter, and I discuss their relevance. Given the
complexity of Deleuzian thought—and its desire to imagine a way to think differently—there is a need to introduce some of the key themes and ideas present in their work. After doing so, I then delve more substantially into the Deleuzian notion of minor literature to begin to visualize the theoretical terrain that, I argue, best realises ficto-criticism as a practice of writing-between.

Firstly, ficto-criticism, particularly within the context of the academy, is minoritarian. That is, it reproduces a deterritorialising movement since it eschews dominant forms and celebrates connections between elements. Deterritorialisation is a key term of Deleuze and Guattari that refers to the escape or release of desire from stable, blocking states such as the Oedipal complex. As a result, ficto-criticism is minoritarian since it sits in relation to majoritarian or normative critical writing, which functions as the standard. Similarly, ficto-criticism enacts a minoritarian movement by refusing the majoritarian voice or position of the dominant critic. The mixing of genres that seeks to critique the codes and conventions of criticism is a risky business for many as it is the process of risking one’s own authority and legitimacy in the writing of criticism. In ficto-criticism there is no will to power by conquering a text through its objectification and sublimation as the object of study. Ficto-criticism is the process of doing something with rather than to the text: rather than an act of mastery it desires to break the boundaries between subject and object enacted by traditional (interpretative) criticism. The play with genres works to question literary hierarchies and the inclusion of the personal and creative threaten the notion of objective truth proven by the orderly and controlling essay. Ficto-criticism includes the excesses ghosting the margins of the dominant academic essay and in its extreme form can be nonsensical or, in Deleuzian terms, a form of schizoanalysis. Similarly, creative writing that includes non-fictional concerns illuminates the arbitrary nature of the distinctions that inform generic hierarchies.

In contrast, academic texts reduce their subject of analysis to fixed meanings and readings. This is achieved by the reductive and dialectic style of scholarly writing as it discards any
elements that distract from the, more often than not, linear argument. If the detractors are not discarded, then they are swiftly dealt with, proven to be aberrant, incorrect, or just irrelevant. The student learning the academic essay style is required to order and control their material to enact closure in a convincing fashion that proves their mastery over their topic and material. If the student is being asked to strictly follow the traditional academic essay form, they are also required to evacuate the text of any traces of personal interest. Anything personal—according to the conventions of academic writing—should be confined to the preface or acknowledgments. The serious academic is expected to do the same. Despite the developments and shifts in intellectual beliefs, which acknowledge the partiality of knowledge, there remains an institutional reliance on old systems of belief that wish to fix knowledge through the notion of objectivity. Ficto-criticism’s defiance of the conventions of traditional critical writing, such as objectivity, marks it as minoritarian.

Secondly, Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the constant and connected relationship between de- and re-territorialisation inherent in the world of capitalism is extremely useful in conceptualising the tenuous and tense space of ficto-criticism. Whilst it unravels genre through sitting between existing generic borders, ficto-criticism still relies on such generic borders to come into non-being (as it were). If, as already suggested, deterritorialisation refers to a process where flows of interconnectedness replace monolithic ideologies, reterritorialisation then refers to the flows of desire being blocked, that is it refers to their capture by territories or codes such as the school, family, nation, or, in this case, genre and literary tradition. Illustrating this constant pull between the two states, Deleuze and Guattari say that “[t]he movement of deterritorialisation can never be grasped in itself, one can only grasp its indices in relation to the territorial representations” (Anti-Oedipus 316). De- and re-territorialisation thus help explain the way in which ficto-criticism utilises the territoriality of genre to deterritorialise literature. At the same time, this formula explains the way in which ficto-criticism is in constant danger of being reterritorialised through that identification, and the institutional academic traditions that pressure the text to make sense and demonstrate its mastery. Unlike the traditional critic, the ficto-critic or “schizoanalyst
is not an interpreter, even less a theatre director; [s]he is a mechanic, a micromechanic. There are no excavations to be undertaken, no archaeology . . .” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 338). Although here I’m speaking mainly of ficto-criticism within academic institutions, similar concerns about the sense and nonsense of the text abound in dominant theories of writing. Elements such as clarity, understanding, syntax, and grammar are the yardsticks with which to measure the success and worth of a piece of writing. Ficto-criticism must always on some level remain a writing-between, always between escape and capture: “[s]chizophrenia or desiring production is the boundary between the molar organisation and the molecular multiplicity of desire . . .” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 102). Within ficto-criticism there is always, therefore, an internal limit on which it can be caught, the challenge is to take ficto-criticism into the desert, the space where Deleuze and Guattari imagine the realisation of many “lines of flight” or deterritorialised flows of desire. The ever-present potential threat of reterritorialisation explains the need for individual and contextual readings of each example of ficto-criticism, for even within a deterritorialised text, moments of micro-fascism can (and do) indeed exist.6 Deleuze and Guattari signal this themselves, warning that the dangers are always ever present and that escape is never guaranteed (*A Thousand Plateaus* 250).

The third major reason for using Deleuze and Guattari in this discussion on ficto-criticism is their theorisation of subjectivity (that Guattari extrapolates in *Chaosmosis*). This notion of subjectivity is useful in conceptualising the practice of ficto-criticism. According to Guattari the self is in a constant process of subjectification. The self is produced and becomes a co-creator of itself and that which it interacts with because it is always in a state of becoming. He describes this subjectivity as autopoetic and machinic, arguing that this notion of subjectivity has the potential to encourage a new ethico-political paradigm, that is imagined, in their terms, at a molecular level. Molecular is posited in relation to molar institutionalised structures, such as the family, church, school and the state. In this relation, molecular thus comes to suggest localised, multiple and micro-level meanings, writings, incidents and objects which are then inscribed with an order and significance by dominant
structures of organization. This molecular and creative subjectivity, composed of a multitude of modalities of alterity grasped only at its point of emergence, Guattari hopes cannot help but encourage a new way of being in the world that is:

non-xenophobic, non-racist, non-phallocratic—intensive and processual . . . a new love of the unknown . . . In the end, a politics and ethics of singularity, breaking the consensus, the infantile ‘reassurance’ distilled by dominant subjectivity. (117)

Maintaining the trope of the machine, as a productive system of interruptions, the subjectivity Guattari proposes is neither based on mastery nor on a closing off between the self and other. Instead of an individuated subjectivity linked to origins and location, he desires an understanding of the subject by evaluating displacement and constant change. In Guattari’s words: “Autopoetic machines undertake an incessant process of the replacement of their components as they must continually compensate for the external perturbations to which they are exposed” (39). Through reading a book, using the internet, familial and institutional relations, and media events, the subject is constantly being produced. As outlined in Anti-Oedipus this subjectivity is also in danger of being individualised as capitalist axioms work to recode the heterogeneity of this processual creative production.

How is this autopoetic subjectivity useful to ficto-criticism? It is useful as it mirrors the way in which ficto-criticism breaks down the distinction between the self and the other constructed by traditional criticism, which relies on an arbitrary distinction between object/subject, criticism/literature and non-fiction/fiction. As Guattari reminds us: “One gets to know them [the other] not through representation but through active contamination” (14). Ficto-criticism demonstrates the subject-in-process through a critique of the division between the self and the other. By mixing fictional techniques with non-fictional styles or forms, ficto-criticism dares to become the other of academic discourse: it takes the voice of the native informant of ethnographic texts. In this autopoetic (aesthetic-creative) moment, ficto-criticism has the potential to break free and become something other than what is predetermined by the molar: “The time has come for hypertexts in every genre, and even for a new cognitive and sensory writing that Pierre Levy describes as
‘dynamic ideography’” (Guattari 96-7). As a molecular desiring practice this kind of writing thus requires a different approach from traditional reading models. The application of Deleuzian theory thus not only helps explain the need for a different approach to reading ficto-criticism, it enables a reading that is more sympathetic to the multiplicity of a practice of writing-between. Having established the broad grounds for applying the work of Deleuze and Guattari, I now turn to more wholly explore the notion of a minor literature and its relevance to ficto-criticism.

FICTO-CRITICISM AS (A) MINOR LITERATURE

As one of the many possible points of entry into the virtually unmapped ficto-critical burrow, I now fully embrace Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of a minor literature and their desire for a deterritorialised encounter with Kafka’s texts, as an opening into ficto-criticism. Both in the context of the academy and outside the academy, in the literary world of publishing and readership, ficto-criticism is a minor literature. To establish clearly its minoritarian status, I begin by employing the tropes of the bent head (portrait-photo) and the straightened head (musical sound) that Deleuze and Guattari use (among others) to conceptualise Kafka’s work. According to them, these elements are consistent throughout Kafka’s texts. For example, in *The Castle* there is the portrait of a porter with his head bent, his chin sunk into his chest. Whilst in *The Metamorphosis* and *Amerika* sound is present as desire, expressed through the vibration of pure sonorous material. The musical sounds they identify in Kafka are not organised into composition; they are unstructured sounds, “a sonority that ruptures” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 6). Deleuze and Guattari begin by linking these two “relatively independent forms” to illustrate the presence of alternative productive connections in his texts, beyond Oedipal triangulation. The equation or concepts they develop here, of the bent and straightened head, are very useful in understanding ficto-criticism, as they demonstrate the complexity around the process and tension between its de- and re-territorialisation. However, it is important to consider that in *Kafka* this equation is not fixed and is not intended to function as a formal opposition. The element that plays the role of heterogeneity is not always the same, as it is
affected by its material location within Kafka’s oeuvre. The significance of this is that, through his constant experimentation, Kafka’s work challenges the tradition of hermeneutics, imagining a line of escape from the exaggerated Oedipus.

This “lifting” of Deleuze and Guattari’s tropes developed specifically in relation to Kafka (the bent and desiring straightened head) may appear to be an arbitrary gesture. However, as argued earlier, Deleuze and Guattari’s theories actually encourage and allow for such appropriation since they understand concepts to be like tools, which are either useful or not useful in a given context. In this instance, I find in Deleuze and Guattari’s “tool box,” the concepts of the bent and straightened head interesting and playful images with which to explore ficto-criticism. I experience my own lifting, as I take from Deleuze and Guattari’s tool box of concepts and move towards these image-concepts, a literal (light fingered) lifting and a lifting and straightening of my head in a gesture of desire towards new connections and new possibilities. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, therefore, I find these images or tropes acceptable colours and sounds to “pick up” and proceed with at this point.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the bent head of the portrait photo in their equation is a form of content: “a blocked, oppressed or oppressing, neutralised desire, with a minimum of connection, childhood memory, territoriality or reterritorialisation.” In contrast, the straightened head (suggested by musical sound in Kafka) is a form of expression, as “music always seems caught up in an indivisible becoming-child or becoming-animal, a sonorous block that opposes the visual memory.” The straightened head of expression, is “a desire that straightens up or moves forward, and opens us to new connections, childhood block or animal block, deterritorialisation” (Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka 5). In this equation, I have taken the bent head of content to express the reterritorialisation or territoriality of ficto-criticism. By this I mean the placement of ficto-criticism both inside and outside the academy, its geographic and discursive location as a product in the literary machine. The straightened head, however, the image of expression, is here suggestive of
ficto-criticism as a line of flight, a creative deterritorialisation or flow of desire. Ficto-criticism embodies desire—it is a creative gesturing towards new connections, new forms—a potentiality and an act of deterritorialisation achieved theoretically and stylistically through its challenge to the taxonomic hierarchy of genre. As already stated, Deleuze and Guattari’s reclamation of desire from lack challenges its association with acquisition (the lack of a real object)—to make it a productive force. They argue that from Plato through to contemporary (psychoanalytic) theories, desire has been (dis)credited as lack: “everywhere we encounter the analytic process that consists in extrapolating a transcendent and common something . . . for the sole purpose of introducing lack into desire” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 72). In this way, ficto-criticism is better understood as a productive and revolutionary force. Instead of interpreting it as (non)generic and lacking an assumed unity, it is now a source of creative power and, as such, a form of minor literature.

For ficto-criticism, therefore, both the bent and the straightened head are tropes of minor literatures. The bent head for ficto-criticism within the academy is suggestive of the moments of deterritorialisation enacted through the performance of ficto-criticism, as it challenges the codes and conventions of scholarly writing but which the institution blocks. The bent head might be the literal bent or blocked head (intellect) of the student or academic attempting to write ficto-criticism, who is either given poor marks, prevented from writing in this way at all, or, in the case of the academic, refused tenure or promotion. In “Ficto-criticism: Pedagogy and Practice,” Anne Brewster signals this dynamic when she discusses the institutional pressures that endorse “the more conventional forms of scholarship and knowledge while deprivileging other genres of writing such as fiction” (89). To fiction we might also add ficto-criticism, a form of writing Brewster says a number of her students are drawn towards, but which is marginal within the academy: my students often express frustration with the discursive limits of the essay which has long enjoyed the status of the prime genre of written assessment in literary and cultural studies courses. They find the conventions of the so-called impersonal,
disinterested voice of academic scholarship and the narrative closure of the [academic] essay limiting. They often question the hierarchisation and compartmentalisation of genres in the academy which generally disallow forms of written assessment other than the essay such as the importation of discursive strategies of fiction or poetry (or other genres) into the essay. (“Ficto-criticism Pedagogy and Practice” 90)

According to Brewster, therefore, one might imagine that the marginal status of alternative (non)genres like ficto-criticism could induce the frustrated student or academic attempting to write ficto-critically to bend their heads in a gesture of “blocked, oppressed or oppressing neutralised desire” (Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka 5). For example, in “Against Subjectivity,” Michael Bérubé talks of the way in which humanities scholars have been taken to task for failing to keep their interests out of their work. Quoting John Searle discussing grant applications to the American National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), Bérubé signals the detrimental effect that such an approach may have on one’s career. According to Bérubé, Searle states:

[F]unding agencies such as the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) receive an increasing number of applications in which it is obvious that the scholar wants to write a book about his or her politically motivated subjective reactions to, feelings about, and general “take on” the Renaissance, the plight of women in the Middle Ages, minority novelists of the Pacific North-west, transvestites in the eighteenth century. (qtd. in Bérubé 1064)

As Searle’s comments (and their tone) clearly intimate, writing ficto-critically by incorporating autobiographical subjective concerns—concerns not cloaked by a feigned objectivity—has the potential to block or repress your grant application.10

From the perspective of creative writing ficto-criticism is also minoritarian and might cause a similar “bending of the head;” both for the creative writer who wishes to write ficto-critically and for the creative writer who rejects the advances of non-fiction into fiction. Ficto-criticism—positioned between fiction and non-fiction—will often illicit
negative responses from either side of the generic border. From a traditional academic perspective ficto-criticism is judged as not intellectually rigorous, lacking discipline, narcissistic and the soft option in contrast to more conservative modes of academic writing and research. Similarly, from the perspective of creative writing the self-reflexivity inherent in ficto-criticism informed by contemporary theory is often viewed as an inappropriate incursion of non-fictional and academic or intellectual concerns into a “purely” creative mode of writing. Creative writers who challenge existing genres by mixing fiction with traditional non-fictional concerns and approaches are thus often criticised for betraying the conventions of fiction/creative writing. Contemporary theories of literature and epistemology have for some time acknowledged the arbitrary nature of such distinctions. Yet, despite the partial nature of such constructions having been generally acknowledged and accepted intellectually, it seems that—stylistically—one is expected to remain loyal to forms of writing that are underwritten by theories of knowledge that have been “overturned.” For those who strongly invest in established generic borders to define their work and place, ficto-criticism is understandably viewed negatively and has produced strong, often emotive, responses. Simon Robb discusses the reception of ficto-criticism in “Academic Divination is Not a Mysticism.” According to him, “There are limits to this writing [ficto-criticism] and they can be found in the logic of the discourse in which one is located.” From the perspective of academic discourse, for example, it thus becomes: “a kind of contamination or pollution of rational academic writing: ‘matter out of place.’” (98). I would argue that, from the traditional discourse of creative writing, ficto-criticism would similarly be seen as a kind of pollution. Ficto-criticism is consequently seen as a weed, which “exists only to fill waste spaces left by cultivated areas. It grows between, among other things” (Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus 31). Ficto-critical practices are viewed as marginal to established discursive practices; from either side of the generic fence, ficto-criticism is a “contaminated” form.
The bent head could also come to invoke the territoriality of ficto-criticism, as it becomes “blocked and oppressed” in the sense that it begins to be codified: in other words, the location of ficto-criticism within the university and its appearance in certain published forms. These connections—with established centres of power in the literary machine—show the forces of reterritorialisation at work. Ficto-criticism in Canada and Australia has many connections with universities, even sometimes with the more conservative, older universities. The revolutionary project of ficto-criticism would not immediately be thought of as being associated with the institutionalised power of the academy, nor would one expect it to be published (by well established publishing houses), and yet it is. How does a form of writing-between that critiques normative academic writing and challenges the generic boundaries of fiction and non-fiction find itself with such legitimate associations?

One can, for example, (as already mentioned) study ficto-criticism at the University of Tasmania as part of an honours degree, and publishing houses like Routledge and Duke University Press have released anthologies of ficto-critical writing. These are instances of ficto-criticism being reappropriated into centres of legitimate knowledge production. Here the academy and publishers incorporate some milder forms of ficto-criticism into their canon, reducing its revolutionary potential as it becomes a known style theorised, analysed and interpreted by introductory chapters that explain its meaning and the origin of the form. Significantly, it is often the more conservative and accessible forms of ficto-criticism that have attracted critical attention, such as autobiographical literary criticism. However, despite its affiliations with institutions such as the academy and publishing—in both Canada and Australia—ficto-criticism remains largely marginal. It might be seen as a new sexy postmodern form, but few universities teach it and recognise it as a legitimate mode of assessment, and more often than not ficto-criticism tends to be published by small, independent publishers (where they remain). The association of ficto-criticism with institutions of the literary machine signals the many contradictions of ficto-criticism: positioned quite literally between, in the sense of being marginal, yet at the same time located in such powerful institutions.
To further establish the relevance of minor literatures as a methodological framework for ficto-criticism, I will now discuss the three characteristics of minor literature that Deleuze and Guattari outline:

1. “A minor literature doesn’t come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization.”

2. “The second characteristic of minor literatures is that everything in them is political. . . . The individual concern . . . becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it.”

3. “The third characteristic of minor literature is that in it everything takes on a collective value . . . literature finds itself positively charged with the role and function of the collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation.”

\[(Kafka\text{ 16-7)}\]

Ficto-criticism meets these criteria. Firstly, by breaking the conventions of normative generic forms, ficto-criticism is a practice with a high coefficient of deterritorialisation. For example, it deterritorialises scholarly writing by incorporating the less serious and objective (from the standpoint of critical discourse) characteristics of poetics, autobiography, description and narrative. All of these characteristics are considered by the discourse of scholarship to be suggestive of fiction (in the sense of not being objective and factual) and, as a result, have no place in serious academic writing. Take, for example, autobiography. Whilst autobiography is categorised as non-fiction—and believed to be based on fact—when incorporated into academic writing it is seen to weaken the research. General readers might believe a work of autobiography to be wholly true, but academic audiences are likely to be suspicious of the narrative being told as a personal story and thus tainted by the subjective and the fictional. Autobiography, despite being categorised as non-fiction, is therefore viewed as having a much higher level of fictional content than objective scholarly writing. From a traditional academic perspective the inclusion of autobiographical detail suggests a subjective response that cannot be true. The blurring of
the lines between such genres, therefore, functions to deterritorialise the major languages that determine what is fact and what is fiction.

Ficto-criticism similarly deterritorialises fiction, as it becomes self-referential through taking on a critical or theoretical role normally associated with non-fictional genres. In examining its own mode of production, and by extension the generic rules of fiction (thus actively undermining them), metafictive ficto-critical forms defy not only the formal role of fiction as entertainment but also the role of criticism as a separate and specialised discipline. By constructing a minority language from within existing major languages—fiction and non-fiction—the ficto-critic imagines an alternative or revolutionary minor literature. Here, the student, academic, or creative writer becomes “like a foreigner in one’s own language. Constructing a line of flight” (Deleuze and Parnet 4). As Deleuze and Parnet write: “We must become bilingual in a single language, we must create a minor use of our own language” (4). This “bilingualisation” is what the ficto-critic moves towards with their hybridised form.

Through this deterritorialisation ficto-criticism thus achieves the second characteristic of minor literatures. That is, the connection of the individual to the political domain. When one is operating in the “cramped space” of a minor literature the norms of the major literature that determine its minoritarian status immediately fall into sharp relief (“because a whole other story is vibrating within it” (17)). Ficto-criticism is a political act as it presents alternatives to dominant generic modes. Through its minoritarian placement in relation to normative modes of writing it cannot fail, therefore, to make apparent the modalities of certain writing styles and their connections to wider structures of knowledge, which determine hierarchies of value. Consequently, within a minor literature the focus shifts from a majoritarian perspective to a minoritarian perspective, in which connections between dominant structures loom large:

What in great literature goes on down below, constituting a not indispensable cellar of the structure, here takes place in the full light of day, what is there a matter of
passing interest for a few, here absorbs everyone no less than as a matter of life and
death. (Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka 17)
The situation becomes grave, “a matter of life and death,” because the dominant structural
conditions—that the minor literature flies in the face of—threaten to extinguish it.

The third and final characteristic of minor literatures that Deleuze and Guattari establish is
that of the collective assemblage of enunciation. Ficto-criticism invokes collective value in
that it is simultaneously imbued with multiplicity while undermining mastery. One voice
does not speak above in a minor literature. For example, how can you have “talent”—how
can you be a master—in a literature in constant (experimental) flux? As a deterritorialising
practice ficto-criticism is always in the process of breakdown. Significantly, according to
Deleuze and Guattari, literature is always a deterritorialising practice that is then captured
and reterritorialised: “For literature is like schizophrenia: a process and not a goal . . .”
(Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus 133). The trick is to not allow oneself to be coded
into a hard segment by maintaining: “a violence against syntax, a concerted destruction of
the signifier, non-sense erected as a flow, polyvocity that returns to haunt all relations”
(Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus 133). In ficto-critical writing, as expressed in
Deleuzian terms, collective assemblages of enunciation function directly within the
multiplicity of machinic assemblages and take on a rhizomatic formulation that only ever
begins in the middle:

The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up
speed. Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one
thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal
movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end
that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle. (Deleuze and Guattari,
A Thousand Plateaus 25)

This is how ficto-criticism operates, as a contaminated form between and within fiction
and non-fiction. When mapped by Deleuzian methodology ficto-criticism is a collective
enunciation in so much as it maintains those machinic assemblages, which are always “between” in their multiplicity.

THREE EXPRESSIONS OF FICTION-CRITICISM

In the same way that Deleuze and Guattari identify three characteristics of minor literatures, three characteristics or stylistic tendencies are apparent in ficto-critical discourse. The three expressions of ficto-criticism are collage/montage or pick-up, autobiographical, and metafictive. Whilst I wish to observe these stylistics, I am in no way suggesting that they are mutually exclusive categories, either conceptually or in practice. For example, many ficto-critical texts demonstrate all three expressions with varying intensities. In keeping with the perpendicular direction of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the between, these stylistic trends do “not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again,” but a conjunction of “and, and, and” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 25). Similarly, in the process of examining these stylistic characteristics, I bring into play some other interconnected concepts of Deleuze and Guattari that help imagine ficto-criticism both as a space-between, and as writing-between. What, however, needs to be kept in mind is that there are levels or degrees of intensity in the use of these stylistics, as there are in the processes of capture and escape for ficto-criticism from generic taxonomy. I now outline these stylistic tendencies and give an explanation of their character.

The first ficto-critical stylistic is constituted by a tendency to use the devices of collage and montage in ficto-critical texts. The generic conventions of established forms such as non-fiction, the academic essay, poetry, prose, and realism are split open by bringing together text from many sources and genres in unexpected ways. *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* defines collage as an: “Internationally current French term for the sticking together of disparate elements to make a picture. The modern use of this technique, now an artistic and educational commonplace . . .” Montage, in general terms, has a similar definition: “. . .for almost any type of compilation made up of disparate
elements, particularly where there is a mechanical quality about the work.” In this thesis, I am using these terms very loosely to mean the splicing together of disparate elements. These elements are deemed disparate from the perspective of major (official) languages, such as, grammar or genre. Whilst I have chosen to identify this stylistic expression in ficto-critical practice as collage/montage—since I am using these terms generally to suggest a practice of compiling disparate elements—I wish to point out that within Deleuzian theory the notion of “pick-up” is more appropriate. Collage and montage are terms easily recognisable, which is why I have employed them here to suggest a range of “cut-up” effects. However, as Deleuze points out in his dialogue with Claire Parnet, “cut-up” in fact introduces the notion of lack back into the equation. Instead he proposes pick-up, a stammering, in which “there is no cutting, folding or turning down, but multiplications according to the growing dimensions” (18). If ficto-critical texts are to be taken into the Deleuzian desert—to imagine a line of flight—they must become as if a stammering.

The second characteristic could be termed autobiographical criticism or what has been identified as the personal turn in criticism. This is where the academic or non-fictional writer allows very openly the subjective nature of their discourse to flourish by incorporating autobiographical detail. As discussed earlier, despite being categorised as non-fiction autobiography is still deemed, through its subjective focus, to be less truthful or factual than discourses, which emphasise an objective stance. The tendency towards autobiography in scholarly and other non-fictional writing is the dominant form ficto-criticism takes in America, and is often aligned with the personal essay and creative non-fiction. This is the most conservative expression of ficto-criticism, particularly when made very superficially and without any other self-referential gestures or textual experimentation. In many ways, autobiographical criticism in its simplest form reflects an increasing unease around speaking for and about the other.
The third and final characteristic is what I have called metafictive ficto-criticism. The metafictive ficto-critical text is ostensively fictional—on first inspection—but undermines the generic taxonomy of fiction by enacting a self-referential commentary on its own mode of production. Texts such as these incorporate a critical commentary about the process of writing and meaning production. This characteristic is demonstrated by creative texts that integrate metafictive moments, which then break with mimesis by undermining the generic contract agreed to under the authority of realism. This stylistic characteristic of the between-text reflects the tendency in critical discourse (particularly literary criticism) increasingly to read contemporary creative texts as acts of theoretical commentary.

The three expressions of ficto-criticism, thus, all generically “mix it up” in varying ways, and whilst not mutually exclusive they demonstrate quite distinct traits common to ficto-critical texts. It is crucial to remember, however, that in a Deleuzian landscape these expressions can be present as only subtle traces, as explosive intensities that transgress the rules of knowing, or as something between. Through a close examination of several Australian and Canadian ficto-critical texts I illustrate these tendencies. These texts have been selected as they reflect each expression, yet in a manner that demonstrates the productive connections between the three stylistic expressions.

In discussing the tendency towards collage techniques in ficto-critical texts I begin by examining Canadian poet Erin Mouré’s *Pillage Laud*. From here I move to discuss a short ficto-critical piece by Australian academic/ficto-critic Anne Brewster, finishing with Canadian Fred Wah’s *Diamond Grill*. I then look at several more texts, this time those that demonstrate the autobiographical and metafictive tendency in ficto-criticism. Here, things become less easily distinguishable as each text demonstrates more than one stylistic element, making cross-references back to Mouré, Brewster and Wah’s works.

*Pillage Laud*, published in 1999, is poetry written using computer software. Mouré’s work demonstrates one of the characteristics of minor literature identified by Deleuze and
Guattari by maintaining a language style with a high coefficient of deterritorialisation. She states: “People who are making sense are just making me laugh, is all” (Furious 92).

Mouré enacts a highly productive use of the literary machine by employing MacProse as a tool for her poetry. In the introductory pages she states:

Pillage Laud selects from pages of computer-generated sentences to produce lesbian sex poems, by pulling through certain found vocabularies, relying on context: boy plug vagina library fate tool doctrine bath discipline belt beds pioneer book ambition finger fist flow. (no page number given)

Her poetry, in the tradition of language poetry, defamiliarises words by plundering language and destabilising referentiality. Collaging words together in a flow that breaks with grammar and syntax her work celebrates lesbian desire, producing, as it were, a minor language from within a major literary tradition. Identifying as a lesbian, Mouré has written about the effect this sense of being marginal has had on her work. To her: “Language never seems transparent” (“Acknowledging the Red Spades” 28). As the title of her collection suggests, this is a book in praise of plundering language. The following passage, from a poem titled “High Prairie,” illustrates Mouré’s irrefutable challenge to language through its break with syntax:

Who had the adults of opportunity listened. Have they pleased Performances? Relax won’t display us.

This chapter is the idiom of curiosity, the note:

So competent a heroism.

Criticism was so veterinary a master.

The ventricle of marble, did an aloof fiction prepare?

We repeat laws, but you must circle me.

Our idiom—grace—came to flow; every hole had scattered Every vote, we were parades.

So thick a restriction is speaking.
To pause expands, who couldn’t the urge establish?
My shock is exercise.
A dictionary especially rules.

The skirt between another life and the writer charms you;
When am I entering?
The risk tugs between a sentence and my pioneer.

Vertiginous. (16)
This excerpt from *Pillage Laud* does indeed unravel and challenge the conventions of grammar and syntax, but is it ficto-criticism? The self-referential quality produced through actively undermining the tradition of poetry and language works as a critique of traditional modes of writing and speaking (and more specifically of (not) writing and speaking lesbian desire). I selected this passage as it demonstrates a moment when Mouré’s work also enacts a higher level of commentary on traditional critical roles (at more than just a formal level by breaking with conventional and conventionally valued modes of writing). In my reading of ficto-criticism as a between or minor literature, which is indicative of a productive desire for new connections between fiction and non-fiction, her work thus becomes a ficto-critical act in so much as it is creative yet critical. If Mouré’s meta-critical project (critiquing critical tradition) is in doubt, one need only look to one of the rare moments she speaks directly about her writing. In “The Acts,” an epilogue to her book *Furious*, Mouré discusses the issues she explores in her writing, and the problem of judging work that defies the tradition of language and genre (sense). Here, she also enunciates a methodology that is suggestive of Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of collective assemblage and desire for a lines of flight:

There’s no way you can logically or symptomatically break down & explain the connection between these parts. But, yet, when you take two parallel things & place them in the same reading, you enunciate a kind of alteration: your perception
of one part is affected by your perception of the others, whether you like it or not. 
& I believe anyhow, that there are connections between seemingly parallel things 
that haven’t been enunciated yet because of flaws or “closed sets” (flaws is a value 
judgement) in our ways of speech. So, then, do we give up? Or do we try to break 
open the connections in another way?

And Mouré goes on to explain that:

What I am trying to do in my work these days is two things: 1) break down the 
logical connections/structure of “meaning” (referentiality), and 2) break down the 
noun/verb opposition wherein the present so-called ‘power’ of the language 
resides, both of these while still using the surface of ordinary speaking as a reflex 
for emotional power . . . (Mouré, Furious 93)

Mouré’s challenge to referentiality and by extension knowledge is what determines her 
fiotto-critical stance, which is achieved in part through the way she collages words and 
images together in non-standard ways. Moreover, there are several lines from “High 
Prairie” that confirm her play with language is much more than just an aesthetic adventure. 
For example, the line: “Criticism was so veterinary a master.” In this line or equation, the 
poet/poem becomes a dog in relation to their master and of lesser value than the highly 
trained master, the critic. As the veterinary, the critic might literally operate on or treat the 
poem. This line is also suggestive, I argue, of vivisection, that is, the way traditional 
criticism pulls apart and dissects the text in their quest for unified meaning.17 Mouré’s use 
of “was” in this line denotes past tense (“Criticism was so veterinary a master”). Does this 
suggest that she has escaped traditional criticism by collapsing poetry and criticism 
together in her own text?

Significantly, the use of the word master in relation to the critic brings into play notions of 
mastery, implying a range of hierarchies, starting with the relationship between the highly 
trained master/critic and subservient dog/poet, to the whole question of the great masters 
of literature (determined by whom?). In this way, Mouré can be seen to be invoking a 
commentary on critical judgement, her work simultaneously becoming a political
statement (“The second characteristic of minor literatures is that everything in them is political . . .” (17)). Mouré has, in fact, stated that she sees no distinction between politics and language (“Acknowledging the Red Spades” 27). Other lines from this passage that similarly suggest a higher order of commentary about the role of criticism, the search of a signifier, and more generally about systems of knowledge, are: “So thick a restriction is speaking,” “A dictionary especially rules,” and “We repeat laws, but you must circle me.”

Ironically, my identification and interpretation of Mouré’s work as ficto-critical functions to demonstrate how easily texts—even those that challenge convention and order—can be captured and coded. Speaking of the deterritorialised nature of desire under capitalism, Deleuze and Guattari discuss how artificial reterritorialisations work to capture desire:

> Everything in the system is insane: this is because the capitalist machine thrives on decoded and deterritorialized flows; it decodes and deterritorializes them still more but while causing them to pass into an axiomatic apparatus that combines them, and at the points of combination produces pseudo and artificial reterritorializations. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 374)

In this sense, ficto-criticism (the category) is itself a pseudo or artificial reterritorialisation in the same way that the genres of fiction and non-fiction are artificial categories.

Mouré’s work is thus not necessarily lacking sense, meaning, or poetic style; instead, it is quite literally a productive use of desiring machines that I have, through the conventions of academic writing, recoded. However, by using a computer program to generate the material for her poems, and through breaking with syntax and thus traditional literary sense through collage-like techniques, one can imagine some readers—still searching for unity—asking where does her skill lie? Yet her work is an assemblage: “Assemblages are composed, and decomposed, and recomposed without a molar unity informing them” (Genesko 12). The application of the notion of talent is not relevant to minor literatures.

In contrast to Mouré, Anne Brewster is a writer who is located within the academy. She employs what she describes as “collage-like arrangements” in her ficto-critical writing,
and has an interest in language poetry (an emerging category, like ficto-criticism, that could easily be applied to Pillage Laud) (Brewster, “Ficto-criticism: Pedagogy and Practice” 92). Brewster is one of a handful of academics in Australia, along with Heather Kerr, that advocate ficto-critical writing. Brewster is also a creative writer: her ficto-critical piece published in The Space Between: Australian Women Writing Fictocriticism, demonstrates the use of collage and montage techniques in ficto-criticism. In “Sucking on Remembrance: Encounters with the Vampire and Other Histories of the Body,” Brewster places creative passages alongside quotes from contemporary critical writers. For instance, at the end of her text you find a collection of endnotes referencing writers such as Walter Benjamin, Judith Butler, Sidonie Smith, Hélène Cixous and Iain Chambers. This style leaves the reader wondering whether this is creative writing or academic criticism. While on the one hand it is short in length like an academic essay and not arranged typographically on the page like a poem, as is Mouré’s text, on the other it is very creative and resembles prose-poetry.

Unlike Mouré’s writing, which defies syntax, Brewster’s text more overtly defies generic convention. Mouré deterritorialises words through defamiliarising their referentiality, achieved by collaging them together in ways that break syntactical expectation. Brewster, on the other hand, deterritorialises through defamiliarising genre, similarly employing collage-like techniques to achieve this. The context in which Brewster writes and works—within an Australian university—makes her discourse more easily identifiable as ficto-criticism. This is due to her primary role as an academic and, of course, her identification with the term. If she were like Mouré—only a creative writer—it would be much easier to see her work as experimental writing. The context of the academy, however, makes it much more apparent that Brewster is offering an alternative to normative academic writing and that her hybridised style challenges the object and subject of traditional literary criticism. This is aided, of course, by her presentation of papers at academic conferences on the subject of ficto-criticism. Her ficto-criticism is thus a practice that opens the space of traditional academic discourse to experimentation. As Brewster has stated:
In defamiliarising genre, ficto-criticism interrogates the way in which academic knowledges are constructed. It can be seen as a space clearing strategy which enables the dialogisation, the hybridisation and the relativisation of knowledges. (“Ficto-criticism: Pedagogy and Practice” 90)

Her ficto-critical practice is therefore imbued with a critique of normative academic modes of writing: “I’m fascinated by the epistemic violence of the will to know, to name and to possess, particularly in the fields of colonisation and gender and also the contestatory and agonistic nature of knowledge production . . .” (“Ficto-criticism: Pedagogy and Practice” 92). In its will to know, name and possess traditional academic convention would render Mouré’s work outside the realms of ficto-criticism since it fits the form of poetry. From the established academic perspective ficto-criticism would also seem much to an elastic category. However, by viewing Pillage Laud as ficto-criticism the divide between the traditional object of literary study (poem) and the subject (critic) is crossed, as she becomes the critic herself. Both Mouré and Brewster, for example, also make reference to contemporary writers and theorists, much in the same way as an academic text would. In fact, in the introductory pages of Pillage Laud Mouré quotes Derrida, Deleuze and Beckett.

Another contemporary text that can be seen as an instance of ficto-criticism—which also employs collage-like techniques—is Fred Wah’s Diamond Grill. In the acknowledgements, Wah describes his text as “biotext.”23 The material of this book explores his experience growing up in the Canada of the fifties with a hyphenated identity; his father was a Canadian-born Chinese-Scots-Irishman raised in China, whilst his mother was a Swedish-born Canadian. The chapters of this non-traditional autobiographic novel resemble paragraphs, and usually occupy only one page.24 Each of these chapters begins with the first part of the first sentence as the title. The title of the book comes from his father’s Chinese-Canadian restaurant:

MIXED GRILL IS AN ENTRÉE
AT THE DIAMOND
and, as in most Chinese-Canadian restaurants in western Canada, is your typical improvised imitation of Empire cuisine. No kippers or kidney for the Chinese café cooks, though. They know the authentic mixed grill is alright. It is part of the colonial cook’s training, learning to serve the superior race in Hong Kong and Victoria properly, mostly as chefs in private elite clubs and homes. But, as the original lamb chop, split lamb kidney, and pork sausage edges its way onto every small town café menu, its ruddy countenance has mutated into something quick and dirty, not grilled at all, but fried. (Wah 2)

While the collage technique in Diamond Grill is less apparent than in Brewster’s work, it is nevertheless still present. As the creative autobiographical passages are interspersed with cuttings from non-fictional sources, other sections incorporate disjunctive flows of language. In “Chinese Head Tax Paid Out Land Grants to,” for example, Wah splices together in a stream-of-consciousness several different texts as a commentary on the racism inherent in the head tax applied to Chinese immigrants to Canada. The section specifically dealing with the Chinese Immigration Act takes text from the original “Head Tax Certificate,” and fills the gaps left for an individual’s details with racialised stereotypes and vilification:

This certifies that under the provisions of the Chinese Immigration Act Charley Chim Chong Say Wong Liu Chung a native of The Peach Garden in the Kingdom of Laundry of the age ancient years and whose title official rank profession or occupation is that of a rented muscle who arrived or landed at Gold Mountain on the auspicious day of the Yellow Pages 190_ 1858, 1885, 1903, 1923, 1947 Vide statement and declaration form No. one son has (never will be) paid the fee or duty imposed upon Chinese Immigrants on their arrival in Canada NOT, no Chinky way being exempt from such payment under the terms of the said Act . . . (Diamond Grill 130)

Wah enacts a critique of racism and colonialism through reappropriating official language for his own (minor) use and interspersing it with clichés of Chinese culture from a white Canadian perspective. It is the incorporation of non-fictional texts into his biotext that
gives it a ficto-critical edge, as it works to disturb the reader’s generic and grammatical expectations. Wah also makes several references throughout the text to history, fiction and truth. This is carried out by direct reference or through the way he continuously plays with and draws on the tension between fact and fiction. In some passages, for example, the same sequence of events is recalled, but with a different outcome or recollection of what happened. Wah’s choice in employing such techniques in his text is a reminder of Mouré’s statement about her minoritarian experience, and of how this informed her suspicion of language and meaning (“language never seems transparent”). Wah’s hyphenated identity has perhaps also made him sensitive to the arbitrary nature of language and, by extension, history, fiction and truth. His reliance on the localised minor narratives of family stories is the only way he can imagine a place for himself in Canada where his identity is not figured. As Wah has stated on *Diamond Grill*: “Certainly some people of mixed race enjoy a considerable identification with the book because, I imagine, the betweenness is not a position that often escapes being hijacked by the angst of purity on either side of it” (*Faking It* 99). The official or major languages, which rely on binaries and clear boundaries, do not recognise him and his hyphenated identity and if they do it is only to coopt him. Wah dislikes the way in which those who do not live the reality of ambiguous and marginalised narratives and identities appropriate the sign of the hyphen under the auspice of the immigrant. Within this context there is no room for the specificities of his experience and his family histories:

**ANOTHER CHIP ON MY SHOULDER**

**IS THE APPROPRIATION**

of the immigrant identity. I see it all over the place. Even one of the country’s best-known writers has said We are all immigrants to this place even if we were born here. Can’t these people from central leave anything to itself? Why deny the immigrant his or her real world? Why be in such a rush to dilute? Those of us who have already been genetically diluted need our own space to figure it out. I don’t want to be inducted into someone else’s story, or project. Particularly one that would reduce or usurp my family’s residue of ghost values to another status quo.
Sorry, but I’m just not interested in this collective enterprise erected from the sacrosanct great railway imagination dedicated to harvesting a dominant white cultural landscape. There’s a whole forest of us out here who don’t like clear-cut, suspect the mechanical purity of righteous, clear, shining, Homelite Americas, chainsaws whining, just across the valley.

No way I’ll let these chips fall where they may. (Wah, *Diamond Grill* 125)

Wah’s uses of collage-like techniques in his book are suggestive of letting the “chips fall where they may.” Those chips represent his own (unapologetically) personal interests, which are seen as shortcomings (chips on his shoulder) by those from the centre who do not understand why he does not wish to align himself with the great white Canadian immigrant identity. Wah is neither pretending to, nor interested in, writing a grand narrative with feigned objectivity. Instead, Wah presents a broken minor language, rather than reproducing a linear narrative such as those that exclude both his family stories and identity. The reference in the passage to the “sacrosanct great railway imagination” is significant since it refers to the official linear narrative of the settlement of Canada, based on the national mythology of the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). In fact, the collage-style of his text undermines such narratives both at the level of content and form. Everything in his text, therefore, becomes political:

ink pious pages partial pronouns translated letters shore-to-shore Pacific jetsam pretending love forgotten history braided gender half-breed loneliness naïve voices degraded discourse racist myths talking gods fact and fiction remembered faces different brothers sisters misery tucked margins whisper zero crisscross noisy mothers. . .bilingual I’s their unheard sighs, their yet still-floating lives. (Wah, *Diamond Grill* 7)

Wah’s use of footnotes give his text a polyvocal sensibility, as they include references to contemporary theory and non-fiction. They add to the collage-like style at both the level of syntax and genre. The suggestive polyvocality is reinforced by his constant play on truth, fiction and history. “Who is speaking and for whom,” seem to be common questions
throughout this book. More generally, though, Wah’s text also interrogates the violence of representation.

Significantly, Wah’s book demonstrates not just the collage/montage tendency in ficto-critical texts, but also the way autobiographical references are called upon to situate the minor stories of ficto-criticism, as these refuse the position of a grand narrative. Not coincidentally, concerns about truth, knowledge production, language, naming and (critical) judgement resurface in all of the texts discussed above. As consistent themes throughout ficto-critical discourse these concerns foreground the latter’s autobiographical character as yet another stylistic feature of ficto-criticism. What is important, in any case, is to determine how autobiography is used to signal the partiality of knowledge and question definitive interpretive acts. However, before looking at the autobiographical tendency in ficto-critical texts in detail, I will first reiterate the critical intention of ficto-criticism, as it presents itself as an alternative to the colonising process of normative critical writing. Indeed, ficto-criticism and normative critical writing have very different projects. In acknowledging this, an examination of the differing subjectivities intimated by these writing practices should also elucidate their very different approaches. While one is constituted by/as productive writing between, it thus becomes minor literature; the other is rule bound and derivative of a major literature.

Wah’s critique of unifying major linear narratives signals dissatisfaction with those traditional modes of writing that are complicit with colonisation. In this context, colonisation is taken to mean the literal colonisation of lands and people, and also the colonisation of language and literature. As already discussed, in Deleuzian theory—writing is considered a deterritorialising practice—which is then recoded or reterritorialised by unified categories such as genre, type, style, etcetera. In contrast to hybrid ficto-critical practice traditional academic writing that examines, interprets and limits a text functions to capture and code the deterritorialised flows of desire. Discussing his use of the words “biotext” and “biofiction” to describe Diamond Grill, Wah states:
I’m using the term “biotext” as a hedge against the kind of writing I do in *Diamond Grill* being hijacked by readymade generic expectations, the cachet exuded, at least for me, by those other two terms, autobiography and life writing. As I neared finishing with the text, however, I felt I needed to call the hedge a hedge and so I tinted it as “biofiction.” For this book, that feels like a happier term, compositionally, since it indicates the possible brush with certain narrative tropes. How to depoeticize the anecdote by claiming its artificiality, and thereby gaining some levitation for the “biotext,” feels comfortably aligned with a poetic of drunken tai chi (negative capability and so forth) and my interest in keeping the hyphen hyphenated; *Diamond Grill* settles nothing (I hope). (*Faking It* 97)

With his ficto-critical text Wah, it seems, is attempting to avoid doing exactly what academic writing is designed to do, that is, to close the text and narrow its revolutionary potential. One of the ways in which Wah opens his text is through the introduction of the notion of fiction. By identifying his book as “biofiction,” *Diamond Grill* becomes a mix of autobiography and fiction, broadening the ambiguity already created through its collage-like play. Wah’s use of the words “biotext” and “biofiction” are attempts to escape “readymade generic expectations,” to keep a space open for his text to become something other—something hyphenated—and more relevant to his own between experience and identity.

In contrast to Wah’s approach in *Diamond Grill*, which hopes to settle nothing, academic writing is designed to demonstrate the author’s mastery and intellectual ability through producing a rigorous and persuasive argument, which banishes any contradictory elements to the edge of its linear narrative. Nor does the academic essay—the superior genre of non-fiction—allow for personal detail. Any personal and embodied references are to be confined to the preface and acknowledgements. In his ficto-critical text *Conspiring with Forms: Life in Academic Texts*, Terry Caesar explores the conventions of academic writing as he discusses his wholly mediocre career as an academic, implying that it may well have been better had he followed the conventions of academic writing more closely. Quoting
James Bennett, Ceasar observes that little has changed in academic discourse, despite substantial shifts in recent theories:

James Bennett has a consideration on how little the technique of the analytical essay has changed despite how much recent theory has celebrated the ‘fissure’ of boundaries between literature and literary criticism: ‘the argumentative, analytic order seems to cling firmly to nonfiction prose.’ (viii)

Almost ten years after Geertz’s 1983 essay “Blurring Genres,” in which he identified a significant shift in intellectual life and academic writing styles toward what could be described as ficto-criticism, Guattari argues that in the university objectivity continues to be paramount. In 1992 he said: “A systematic rejection of subjectivity in the name of mythical scientific objectivity continues to reign in the university” (117). In 2003 I would argue that little has changed, and that ficto-critical gestures still represent a challenge to this “mythical scientific objectivity.” Despite some early proclamations and excitement around genre blurring—such as Geertz’s—as a new kind of academic disciplinary practice, ficto-criticism remains as a minor literature. Ficto-critical texts in both Australia and Canada thus maintain their position on the margin of the academy as they incorporate elements of the writer’s subjectivity by including personal detail, memory, moments of uncertainty, reflection and corporeal reality. The revolutionary power of ficto-criticism is informed by its minoritarian position, its role in challenging normative academic writing. In the final chapter I explore what might happen if ficto-critical styles were to be taken up in a more mainstream fashion in the academy.

In “Reflections on Academic Discourse,” Peter Elbow discusses the nature of academic writing. He says: “Indeed, there is what I would call a certain rubber-gloved quality to the voice and register typical of most academic discourses—not just author-evacuated but also showing a kind of reluctance to touch one’s meanings with one’s naked fingers” (145). Similarly, Susan Koppelman says of the academic essay:

Essays are like prepackaged diet foods—no schmaltz, no seasoning, no garnish, no taste. Essays are like what I imagine sex with a sex therapist to be—no love,
nothing personal, no joking asides, no memories, no plans for the future, no relationship between participants. (76)

Both of these quotes are suggestive of the artificial distance that normative academic writing sets up between itself and its object of analysis. Elbow argues that by teaching this academic style in universities academics are tacitly teaching a version of reality, including the student’s place and mode of operation within such a world. That is, it is producing a particular kind of subject. According to Elbow, academic writing implicitly carries with it the following meanings:

1. “A version of reality.” A view of the world as manageable, including an ability to control language.
2. “Academic discourse teaches a set of social authority relations: how to talk to each other in a way that excludes ordinary people.”
3. Behind academic discourse (textual conventions) there is a note of anxiety and insecurity.
4. Academic writing contains an element of display. That is, showing off as a means to impress. (146-8)

Academic writing is thus the opposite of minor literature: “A rhizome, a burrow, yes—but not an ivory tower” (Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka 41). As such, normative academic writing implies a unified individuated subjectivity based on what Deleuze and Guattari would call an Oedipalised subject. Ficto-criticism, on the other hand, with its focus on the situated partial nature of knowledge, suggests quite a different notion of the subject.

In Anti-Oedipus, Deleuze and Guattari make a connection between the role of Oedipus in psychoanalysis as an interpretive myth par excellence and the way in which capitalism functions. The enforcement of Oedipus through psychiatry and its subsequent triangulisation (Mommy, Daddy, Me) ensures that desire equals lack:

When we relate desire to Oedipus, we are condemned to ignore the productive nature of desire: we condemn desire to vague dreams or imaginations that are merely conscious expression of it; we relate it to independent existences—the
father, the mother, the begetters—that do not yet comprise their elements as internal elements of desire. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 107)

In opposition to psychoanalysis Deleuze and Guattari suggest schizoanalysis. They argue that psychoanalysis neurotices the subject, who in this Oedipal system is always doomed to be lacking something. The attraction of the “schizo” character for Deleuze and Guattari is that it resists Oedipalisation. It is a productive force that refuses to be tied to some latent content or past: “Freud doesn’t like schizophrenics. He doesn’t like their resistance to being oedipalized . . .” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 23). They argue that capitalism produces “an awesome schizophrenic accumulation of energy or charge, against which it brings all its vast powers of repression to bear” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 34). Oedipus is the means to crush and repress these productive desiring-machines. In the process of enforcing the Oedipal dogma, the psychoanalyst becomes a fascist as they recreate themselves as God or father and interpreter of the patient’s neurosis. As it becomes the despotic signifier Oedipus kills the “endless connections, nonexclusive disjunctions, nonspecific conjunctions, partial objects and flows” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 54). The patient’s productive unconscious therefore becomes an unconscious that can only express itself as myth, tragedy and dream.

The connections between the theories developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* and *Kafka*, are suggested by the way they imagine an an-Oedipal space for literary works: “As Kafka says, the problem isn’t that of liberty but of escape. The question of the father isn’t how to become free in relation to him (an Oedipal question) but how to find a path there where he didn’t find any” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 10). The implications of Deleuzian theory are thus substantial for not only literature but also for literary criticism (and criticism more generally) as desire is released from lack. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari: “The three errors concerning desire are called lack, law, and signifier” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 111). What is the role of criticism and non-fictional writing if it is not to interpret and judge texts, events, and ideas in relation to categories, rules and signification? In this context, ficto-criticism presents itself as a creative alternative to
normative critical writing, the “path where he [the father/Oedipus] didn’t find any” (Kafka 10). The alternative creative path that ficto-criticism takes is quite literally the production of something from the imagination, as it does not follow a predetermined route it becomes a line of flight rather than an escape (from major literatures). I am employing creative here to mean both an acknowledgment of the creative nature of all acts of criticism and non-fiction, and also the creative production of both the self and the text through this process.

The subject suggested by normative academic writing, described by Elbow, is therefore very much the Oedipalised subject described by Deleuze and Guattari in Anti-Oedipus. A neurotic subject who reproduces fascist authority structures by: controlling language, writing in a way that excludes ordinary people, and displaying insecurity by working hard to impress, referring to higher powers of knowledge and authority through citation. In other words, the Oedipalised subject of academic writing that lacks, in turn, Oedipalises the text or object of analysis much in the same way that the psychiatrist Oedipalises their patient. Instead of viewing the text as a productive force of the literary machine—something to “plug into”—the text is reduced to triangulation, interpreted through so many old categories:

It is as if the so-called signifying chain, made up of elements that are themselves nonsignifying—of polyvocal writing and detachable fragments—were the object of a special treatment, a crushing operation that extracted a detached object from the chain, a despotic signifier from whose law the entire chain seems consequently to be suspended, each link triangulated. (Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus 73)

I am suggesting, therefore, that ficto-criticism has the potential to imagine a different kind of subject from that implied by the tone and distant stance of normative academic critical writing. Instead of an Oedipalised subject, ficto-critical writing encourages a deterritorialised subject that crosses the boundary between itself and object of criticism. In Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm Guattari discusses his preferred conceptualisation of the subject. He desires to replace the common understanding of the subject with “subjectification,” a notion of the subject that is understood as autopoietic and
seen to actively engage with the other through creative and productive connections. His concept of subjectification is relevant to ficto-critical writing since it helps conceive of a subject that is not distanced, closed off and controlling of the other. The subject of *Chaosmosis* both desires contact with the other and acknowledges the impact of its surroundings and experiences on itself.

In *Chaosmosis* Guattari develops more fully the notion of the subjectification evident in the books that he jointly wrote with Deleuze: *Anti-Oedipus, Kafka and A Thousand Plateaus*. According to Guattari, contemporary upheavals resulting from capitalism and technological developments have meant that the notion of the subject and its meaning is not only becoming a more pressing question, but that we also require a new way to understand the “subjective cocktail” that is emerging. Subjectivity or subjectification has in these times of global media and consumerism become the driving force, not ideology. In other words, the notion of the subject as a pre-existing entity—set in opposition to society—is no longer adequate to explain our experience. Nor is it useful, according to Guattari, in effectively negotiating the complex forces that come to bear on us in this milieu. Guattari critiques dualities, asking how can we understand the complex and dramatic changes to the subject effected by events like Tiananmen Square that are globally diffused by the mass media. He suggests that these vast processes of subjectification require more sophisticated understandings of the subject as they surpass “simple ideological demands:”

The immense movement unleashed by the Chinese students at Tiananmen Square obviously had as its goal the slogans of political democratisation. But it is equally certain that the contagious affective charges it bore far surpassed simple ideological demands. A whole lifestyle, collective ethic and conception of social relations (derived from Western images) were set into motion. (2)

In *Chaosmosis*, therefore, the subject is conceived of as a process and not a product: subjectification instead of a subject. Subjectification, in his terms, is constantly in a process of becoming—it is in a nascent state— influenced and produced by individuals,
groups, events and institutions. Guattari says: “Subjectivity is in fact plural and polyphonic—to use Mikhaïl Bakhtin’s expression. It recognises no dominant or determinant instance guiding all other forms according to a univocal causality” (5). Guattari argues that this conception of the subject more easily explains mass movements of subjectification, warning that they do not necessarily develop in the direction of emancipation. Such large movements of subjectification can, in fact, be fascist or nationalistic like fundamentalism: “The machinic production of subjectivity can work for the better or for the worse” (Guattari 79). Again, Guattari, as he does in his jointly authored books with Deleuze, argues for a pragmatic approach to such questions refusing to rely on absolutes.

If the subject is replaced by the notion of subjectification—a processual and productive force—then the self cannot be closed off from the world outside: it becomes its other in becoming itself. It is always other than itself, and the other is thus always part of the self. According to Guattari, we require this new model because old models (for example, Freudian) are based on dividing the self from its environment, aiding the blockage of desire by compartmentalising and individualising. This process closes off any notion of collective subjectification and encourages othering as it reduces the subject to a pre-given entity with latent content. In the autopoetic subjectification proposed in *Chaosmosis*, however, “I is an other, a multiplicity of others, embodied at the intersection of partial components of enunciation, breaching on all sides individuated identity and the organised body” (83). In this subjectification, the self is produced through pre-personal singularities. A singularity is an event-centred rupture that can be both human and non-human and which is either both linguistic and or bodily. Subjectification is viewed as creative and aesthetic; it is autopoietic thus helping to “contribute to an authentic relation with the other” (Guattari 7). This is achieved because the self is always becoming part of the other: “Not only is I an other, but it is a multitude of modalities of alterity. Here we are no longer floating in the signifier, the subject and the big Other in general” (Guattari 96). In this
process of subjectification the self is constantly produced through these pre-personal singularities.

In contrast to the Oedipalised subject of traditional academic writing that divides the body-self from the text for analysis with the distance of objectivity, the ficto-critic acknowledges the process of subjectification, in the autopoetic sense explained by Guattari, through their creative engagement with their text or object of investigation. The creativity to be found in all acts of writing is acknowledged as genres are blurred and fiction becomes part of non-fiction. The continual creative production of the self is also implicated in this self-referential practice that does not aspire to an artificial objectivity:

Analysis is no longer the transferential interpretation of symptoms as a function of a preexisting, latent content, but the invention of a new catalytic nuclei capable of bifurcating existence. A singularity, a rupture of sense, a cut, a fragmentation, the detachment of a semiotic content—in a dadaist or surrealist manner—can originate mutant nuclei of subjectification. (Guattari 19)

Through what Guattari would call autopoetic machinic self-production, subjectification in ficto-critical discourse is more able to maintain diverse relations of alterity, something which traditional academic writing and criticism seems unable to do with its reliance on rules, categories, expert knowledge, mastery and objectivity. According to Guattari: “It is from a failure to see that machinic segments are autopoetic and ontogenetic that one endlessly makes universalist reductions to the Signifier and to scientific rationality” (30).

The following piece of ficto-criticism examined is particularly telling since it reveals critique embedded in ficto-criticism of academic, rational writing and its role in colonisation and the construct of knowledge.

One example of Australian ficto-criticism that demonstrates the different subjectivities implied by the two forms of writing is “Skulls, Fontanelles and the Spaces Between,” by Gail Jones. This essay by Jones is particularly pertinent as it is not only ficto-critical, but also enacts quite directly a critique of colonisation, linking together the discourses
underlying both the colonising process of scientific writing and other colonising practices. Importantly, Jones’ creative-academic text employs subjective and autobiographical detail, establishing a softer and more relational dialogue between the texts she discusses and her critical voice, which is not magisterial, authoritarian and distant. In contrast to this ficto-critical work, normative academic discourse, using the rationalist project of objectivity, forces the subject of analysis and interpretation to become the object of study. As Jones reveals, the subject of rationalist discourse becomes a reified, objectified thing that can then be commodified, traded and manipulated. Through the generic conventions of academic or rationalist writing the subject becomes separated from the author thus requiring less consideration and respect.

In contrast Jones’ essay is personal, subjective and, at points, emotive as she discusses the various ways skulls have been imagined in colonial discourse. She examines a range of colonial texts, looking at the discursive construction of the skull (usually belonging to a native). The skull becomes a trope in Jones’ ficto-criticism for the objectification of something that is irrevocably linked to a living body, culture, life, relationships, memories, places:

In the mid to late nineteenth-century the ‘authorities’ of scientific racism used mercury, sand, white mustard seed, pearl barley, shot, water and even rubber bags to gauge and to hierarchise degrees of humanity in a system which arbitrarily ranked the ‘Caucasian’ at one hundred percent. I imagine these men, mock Hamlets with their Yoricks, bent in a pose of concentrated and diligent contemplation, filling carefully, oh so carefully, those hollows where minds had once rested. More Hollywoodishly, they recall generic scientists-in-white-coats, weighing in dim and B-graded light clammy fragments of humans on archaic scales. Melodrama contests theory almost irresistibly: the consideration of skulls summons any number of cinematic hallucinations, images-done-to-death, parodic phantasms.

(Yet our theorising suppresses the resources of melodrama. Why, I wonder?

It is after all a mode which recognises and theatricalises aspects of horror,
and its currencies are uncanny return—which may be read as misrecognised resistance—and the monstrous and cruel appetites of white mythologies. It has a quality of exaggeration that, pertaining above all to the symbolic, well equips it as a heuristic device to discuss the projection mechanism of the imperial.) (“Skulls, Fontanelles and the Space Between” 174)³⁰

The empty skull becomes the evacuated vessel, an object of analysis, scientific investigation, speculation, and kitsch curiosity. For example, in one of Jones’ tales, the skull of a native is translated into a souvenir, a cigarette box. In contrast the fontanelle represents a potential and productive space between, connected to life:

the body is just another tasty piece of meat and the skull just another disarticulated sphere of bone. This inverts the exquisiteness of the fontanelle, where inter-space is paradoxically the figure of plenitude and presence. Here the head is a field of negative values, the nightmare of unBeing, one might say, that is the final solution of imperialist alterity. (178)

As Jones signals implicitly and explicitly: imperialist alterity equals unBeing; the same unBeing that the colonising practice of traditional academic discourse constructs for alterity. Jones connects the skull as a sign—evacuated of its human potential—to a real person. The subtitle of “Skulls, Fontanelles” is “In memoriam: Fanny Balbuk.” By remembering Fanny Balbuk, a Bibbulmum³¹ woman who was the object of a study by Western Australian ethnographer Daisy Bates, Jones reconnects the skull to a person and humanness. She allows a space for Fanny Balbuk to speak. Bates’ ethnographic study, however, does not. According to Jones, when Fanny Balbuk died in 1907, Bates requested possession of her skull. Bates is denied, but in her ethnographic discourse Balbuk’s skull is still reduced to a valuable object, one to be possessed and snatched:

Property is therefore linked to the displacement of subjectivity and to the enforcement of sanctions by which this displacement is ensured; and one might add that body-snatching is in a sense a rational extension of this already sinister reification. Fanny Balbuk’s skull is ‘invaluable’ because, in its deathliness, it
certifies the expulsion of the colonised subject, certifies, that is to say, the

amortisation of the Imperial. (173)

Linking rationalist discourses with colonial reification and objectification of the colonised, Jones implicitly—through her ficto-critical style—critiques normative academic writing: “To put it more simply, there is a need to supplement rationalist and mimeticist explication, to veer and seek out the new surfaces of difficult subjects. To veer, perhaps wildly, into realms of melodrama, rhapsody, the intolerable elegiac” (179). Ficto-criticism makes room for melodrama and for the stories from the margin to resurface.

In the context of the dualism between fiction and non-fiction, ficto-criticism can thus be imagined as the fontanelle: as a productive space between full of potentialities, which can be linked to an embodied political, historical and social materiality. At the level of genre, therefore, Jones’ ficto-criticism is the other of academic criticism. It is not rationalist and objective; it is everything Fanny Balbuk is to Bates. As the native is to scientific discourses, so ficto-criticism is to traditional academic writing. “Skulls, Fontanelles and the Spaces Between” is not masterful and rational; it is emotional, non-linear, personal, embodied and invites melodrama. In this way Jones breaks down the artificial distance between the subject and object sustained in normative criticism, as her text takes on the position of the native informant. Jones makes strong reference to Bates’ (and other ethnographic studies’) construction of the native as irrational, childish, and wilful. In opposing the conventions of traditional objective writing, Jones productively opens herself to becoming the other in a way consistent with autopoesis:

(We tend to discount not only melodrama but the broad resources of the rhapsodic. In high-theorising we aim for tonal equanimity, for a tone hieratic, magisterial, and remotely impersonal. So academic prose is marked, for the most part, by a repressive absence of the lyrical. By wide-awake realisms. By studious passionlessness. By loss of affirmation.) (175)

The use of autobiographical elements in ficto-criticism that include the body and personal details pertaining to memory, imagination, insecurities, relationships, the experience (and
melodrama) of living, thus realises a subjectivity that is quite different from the controlling academic critical subject with their voice from on high. According to Guattari, the autopoietic subjectification that allows diverse relations of alterity can be found precisely in the creative passionate ficto-critical discourse that Jones calls for: “Aspects of this kind of polysemic, animistic, transindividual subjectivity can . . . be found in the worlds of infancy, madness, amorous passion and artistic creation” (101). The embodied autobiographical critic is also historically, politically and socially placed in a personal relationship with their (fellow) subject of attention. In Guattari’s *Chaosmosis*, the point of subject-object fusion is the point of subjectification. Significantly, Brian Attebery says of critique that doubles as fiction that “‘the study of’ becomes indistinguishable from ‘the thing studied’” (185). In this way, ficto-criticism enacts the fusion of subject and object and demonstrates the ethico-aesthetic paradigm Guattari calls for, in which:

\[
\text{generalised ecology—or ecosophy—will work as a science of ecosystems, as a bid for political regeneration, and as ethical, aesthetic and analytic engagement. It will tend to create new systems of valorisation, a new taste for life, a new gentleness between the sexes, generations, ethnic groups, races . . .. (92)}
\]

Supporters of ficto-criticism have lauded its capacity—contained in its radical, perverse nature—to redefine relations of power, and Jones’ text goes some way towards an ethico-aesthetic engagement with her subject. To say that all texts that display ficto-critical characteristics do so is, however, a risky announcement. It is the kind of announcement that resonates with bold declarations emanating from normative academic work. In Deleuze and Guattari’s terms reterritorialisation is always ever present, and I would warn—as they do—of the danger implicit in making such unified statements. The question of whether ficto-criticism achieves what it sets out to do is something that will be explored in later chapters, as it is a complex question. For now, I will return to the stylistic tendencies of ficto-critical discourse, and look at the final characteristic: metafictive fictocriticism.
Metafictive ficto-criticism is made up of largely creative works that self-referentially foreground their potential as critical acts, and as a commentary on the processes of writing. Opening ficto-criticism to include fictional texts that enact critical self-reflexivity plugs into the deterritorialising potential of ficto-criticism as it broadens the what constitutes ficto-criticism, making it even less stable a category and thus able to be contained. Nevertheless, many ficto-critical texts employ metafictive devices. Jones’ text for example—although published in an academic journal—is creative and critically self-referential: challenging the normative rules of genre. It demonstrates a metadiscursive consciousness through exploring its own mode of production, examining the discourses it emerges from. Significantly, the critical self-reflexivity or metadiscursive tendency in ficto-criticism can be enacted in a number of ways, and at different levels of subtlety. Often there are references to the arbitrary taxonomy of generic forms either implicitly or explicitly, and like Jones’ “Skulls, Fontanelles,” these texts break down the distinction between the subject and object of criticism. Enacting an an-Oedipal subjectivity ficto-criticism is subtly self-referential as it suggests a critique of the generic standards that call it into existence. By enacting a self-referential examination of their own processes of production, (largely creative) ficto-critical texts do away with the need for the critic and critical interpretation. They pre-empt the critical act and, as a result, are representative of the writer’s revenge on critical judgment. In literary studies the creative text is the objectified other, the emotional, melodramatic native who requires interpretation. In ficto-criticism the other speaks back. Diamond Grill, for example, anticipates how the text will be co-opted into standard generic forms. Wah works hard to keep the text open and true to his hyphenated identity by describing it as biofiction and maintaining a disjunctive position in relation to generic rules and expectation. His text, by contemplating the processes of writing demonstrates the metafictive tendency in ficto-criticism. It also shows how autobiography is called into play, as are collage-like techniques. Metafictive ficto-criticism thus unravels academic writing—but also creative writing forms—as it “mixes it up.”
This metafictive tendency in ficto-criticism incorporates a vast selection of texts in Australia and Canada that can be novel length, in the form of poetry (as Mouré’s is) or essay length. I have, however, chosen one example by a Canadian creative writer that appears in a collection of short writings: Yasmin Ladha’s “Beena” from The Lion’s Granddaughter to illustrate one formulation it may take. It must also be noted that all of the texts I have addressed demonstrate at some level all three of the stylistic tendencies: collage/montage, autobiography, and metafiction. Later chapters will more fully display the multiple expressions ficto-criticism can take.

The Lion’s Granddaughter appears to be fiction but like the texts already discussed it incorporates the role of non-fiction by self-referentially anticipating the critic’s judgment. Creative and playful, this text is as much a work of fiction as it is a meditation on critical judgment, generic expectation, the canon and colonisation. Ladha addresses the reader directly in a conversational style. In “Beena” the reader is “Readerji.” Early in the piece she asks that the reader “banish the critic from their eye.” Throughout “Beena” Ladha makes numerous references to role of the critic as coloniser:

Readerji, I ask you, will the critic’s privilege, his Brahmin privilege, will it never cease? You are content to drink the incantations from his soma drink? He works on formulas while I, my precious reader, create . . . And the critic/Brahmin/camel/colonizer is out, out of text! Readerji, Beena soma-wine, your and mine, salut! . . . Only the critic’s nostrils put me off. (“Beena” 1-2)

This direct addressing of the reader has several effects. It sets a frame for reading and establishes a rapport, or relationship between the reader and narrator/author. At one stage she asks: “You correcting me?” This statement directed at the reader brings into focus the politics of judgment enacted in the process of reading. As the reader you might not be judging her, but this direct statement encourages you to challenge your assumptions about the text (its generic formulation and its value). As Ladha states: “He [the critic] works on formulas while I, my precious reader, create . . .” This line is reminiscent of Deleuzian theory: the critic limits and reduces the text to an Oedipal drama. In contrast, Ladha—the
ficto-critic—creates something in an act of aesthetic autopoesis: “There is no hidden hyphenated meaning in Be-eena, though I am sure the critic will suck the book dry and author-interpret Beena. Yes, yes, I have my reasons for choosing the name. Have patience” (8). Ladha wishes to avoid being author-interpreted, or, in other words, being reduced to a limited individuated subject through which her texts could then be interpreted (very likely in relation to ethnic stereotypes). As she states: “There is never only a story. That’s why a story’s collar bones are chubby (always) because she carries layers and layers of stories” (3). Reminiscent of the ficto-critical space between that her writing takes, Ladha constantly challenges the system of reification upon which colonising practices rely. According to bell hooks: “By calling on the reader to enter realms of the unknown with no will to colonize or possess, critical fictions offer alternatives to an imperialist paradigm which constructs the text as territory to be conquered, taken over, irrevocably altered” (“Narratives of Struggle” 58). Ladha opens her text to all kinds of rule-breaking, then prods and questions the reader, asking them to think about their assumptions:

Readerji, don’t shout. All these stories knotted together are also giving me a headache. What? No Readerji, no one can be at our door. Listen, Beena is yours-mine. This is our zenana. Textbook stories of this equals that are a critic’s formula. Yaar-Readerji, life isn’t organised linearly because it is constantly piling. When I go to heat the milk or clean the fridge, other small things happen along the way: I pick up my mother’s sock from the couch (which really needs to be cleaned), close the bathroom door, slam down the receiver when I realize it is a salesman, and finally, finally, I come to the milk. God, I hope the saucepan is clean. Similarly, a story is never linear. A story’s collarbones are full of meat—by her very nature, she is massing constantly. (17)

Ladha’s text thus brings into play the embodied extratextual moments present in all acts of writing. In metafiction the process of writing is brought into the text. As a result, so too is the reality of the text creator—the author—breaking mimesis. Metafictive ficto-criticism such as Ladha’s also breaks the omnipotent register of critical writing (its own mimesis): as the author in all their bodily subjective reality becomes evident. One well-known
American piece of autobiographical ficto-criticism caused a considerable stir when published, as the academic author dared to include the need to visit the toilet whilst in the process of writing. It is difficult to remain the expert, your voice from on high, when discussing such personal subjectified bodily matters. The re-positioning of the critic at an embodied minor level, tantamount to the object of interpretation, means that ficto-critical gestures have the potential to reduce the coloniser’s privilege:

Critical fictions effectively intervene and challenge dominant reading practices when they compel the uncritical reader to put aside set notions of what literature should be or do and enthusiastically grasp new and different approaches . . . This may indeed require them to relinquish privilege and their acceptance of dominant ways of knowing as preparation for hearing different voices. (hooks, “Narratives of Struggle” 57)

Ladha’s “Beena” is just one example of metafictive ficto-criticism. It is also a fairly obvious one, in that it contains such overt references to the critic’s traditional role. Other metafictional texts constitute ficto-criticism, yet their ficto-critical character is subtler, since they more closely resemble novels and their metadiscursive commentary is on a lesser scale. As Wenche Ommundsen has written, metafiction exists at the intersection between theory and fiction (viii). Metafiction and historical metafictions thus also constitute ficto-critical acts:

In the case of metafiction the paradox of self-referentiality eventually turns not only on literary self-representation, but also on metafictional writing outside fictional texts. Literary criticism, which like its object of study functions through the medium of language, thus becomes implicated in its critique. What conventions, linguistic and narrative, govern the discourses of literary commentary? Can criticism ever hope to escape fictionality, to stand outside the literary processes it takes for its object of analysis? One of the important lessons of metafiction may well be that all writing about literature . . . is forced, reflexively, to examine its own practices, to question the stories it tells about literature and the critical categories it constructs to accommodate them. (Ommundsen 13)
The final stylistic characteristic of ficto-critical texts, metafiction, is therefore a broad category. In applying Deleuzian methodology to ficto-criticism it is possible to envision that ficto-critical texts do not intend to resolve the problem of academic writing as a mode of colonisation, but to dissolve it by undermining the structures on which it relies to imagine a line of escape.

**Conclusion**

The revolutionary potential of ficto-criticism thus comes from its between character and its work toward deterrioralising monolithic ideologies and the binaries on which they depend. The concept-tool of a minor literature has allowed us an entry point into the ficto-critical burrow, by providing an approach to literature not reliant on the old categories, models, types and genres. Without such an approach, ficto-criticism as a (non)form is virtually invisible, or else meaningless. With a more traditional system it can also only be perceived as lacking, or be redefined as a new genre with set characteristics and rules of reading therefore becoming what it is attempting to escape from. This, of course, would be a limited and prescriptive model. While the three expressions of ficto-criticism that I have outlined in this chapter—collage/montage, autobiographical and metafictive—present a potential problematic relation to ficto-criticism as a minor literature, they are not distinct categories and do not attempt to disguise or limit the excesses of ficto-critical experimentation. On the contrary, I argue that they illustrate an attempt to develop a critical practice that has an ethical relationship to the other—a way to accommodate difference—imagining a new role for the critic. Unlike normative critical writing the subject of ficto-criticism refuses the magisterial voice that establishes a clear boundary between itself as expert judge and the subject of interpretation. Instead, the author function in ficto-criticism is performative, vitalist, breaking down the binary distinction between self/other, criticism/fiction, truth/fallacy and subject/object. It challenges the categories and models dominant academic writing and research wishes to prove through its authoritatively objective approach. The theoretical context of this dissertation—employing a Deleuzian methodology—is thus convincing since it reproduces and productively
interconnects with a practice that conceptually is always in defiance of binary structures. The danger of seeing ficto-criticism as a rhizome, however, is that ficto-criticism becomes too broad and unwieldy; it becomes for many critics nonsensical. Yet it is essential to keep ficto-criticism open to the other in order for it to reach its revolutionary force—and, most importantly, to expose some of the more interesting and political aspects of this practice.

1 Other writers have identified the relevance of Deleuzian theory to conceptualising ficto-criticism. Australian Sabrina Achilles, in her paper titled “Ficto-criticism: Casting the Self” published in the postgraduate journal *W/EDGE* employs Deleuzian theory to help explain ficto-criticism (1995: 54-9).
2 Deleuzian theory is, in many ways, difficult to apply in the context of traditional critical writing since it works against closure. The words usually employed in critical academic writing in relation to theoretical models become problematic. For example, as already suggested, “model” is inappropriate in a Deleuzian context. Similarly, “concept” (in its standard use in critical writing) also implies a fixity that is inconsistent with Deleuzian theory. This is why I prefer “concept-tool” as an alternative.
3 Their concept-tool of the rhizome is discussed in detail in their introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987: 3-23).

4 Although I do not directly refer to Derrida’s “Law of Genre,” the concept of genre he outlines in this paper resonates with ficto-criticism. For Derrida, “every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging . . .” (1980: 212). Ficto-criticism, slipping in-between totalising taxonomic theories of genre, actually *acts-out* Derrida’s law of genre as a law of impurity or a principle of contamination (1980: 204).

5 The term schizoanalysis comes from Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987). A complex term, it is suggestive of their critique of the overarching power of the Oedipal complex as an interpretative system. They link the Oedipalisation of the subject with other interpretative codes that block productive flows of desire in the same way that Oedipus does (read as the manifestation of lack by Freud’s psychoanalysis). Schizoanalysis is thus presented by Deleuze and Guattari as an alternative to psychoanalysis.

6 Fascism is taken here to mean the will to power present in all of us. According to Deleuze and Guattari, we have a responsibility to address our own fascism, even on a micro-political level. My reference to micro-fascism here is a reference to the violence carried out on the other through any process of representation that closes down difference—the flows of desire released through the movement of deterritorialisation.

7 In the work of Deleuze and Guattari there are a number of linked terms such as molar and molecular, which seem to reinforce a binary structure. However, these paired terms do not function in the same way as a binary since they do not remain static as each term maintains a certain multiplicity through its interchangeable quality. See below, later in the chapter, for a more substantial discussion of this moveable Deleuzian assemblage in relation to their reading of Kafka’s texts.

8 See Deleuze and Parnet in *Dialogues* where they say: “This is better than the ‘cut-up.’ It is rather a ‘pick-me-up’ or ‘pick-up’—in the dictionary = collecting up, chance restarting of the motor, getting on to the wavelength; and then the sexual connotation of the word” (1987: 10).


10 As Bérubé goes on to discuss, John Searle’s essay in which he criticises others for being subjective is itself his own “‘take on’ the applications he has reviewed for the National Humanities Council.” In other words, his politics and subjective response inform his own position (1064).

11 In “Theory: Beauty or Monster? Resistance to Theory in the Feminine,” Smaro Kamboureli examines the response contemporary theory has received from some Canadian women writers of fiction. Constructed as elitist, masculine and monolithic, Kamboureli argues that contemporary theory is portrayed as the “beast” by these women writers—who then see themselves as “beauties”—the mute objects of theoretical enquiry. Whilst Kamboureli is discussing women writers, her paper illustrates the kind of reaction theory can and does receive from some creative writers. Kamboureli argues that this reaction is based on a binary system (a system in which we have been trained to view the world). Regardless of the gender of the creative writer, in this binary fiction becomes feminised and thus requires protection from the aggressive masculinised advances of theory. For those relying on these binaries and generic distinctions, theory and non-fictional concerns will always be problematic when combined with fiction. As Kamboureli points out, however, theory can provide useful insights for writing acts.

12 As already signalled earlier, this thesis is also part of that process of codification as ficto-criticism becomes a topic worthy of postgraduate research.


14 Although not a Canadian or Australian publication, Steven Shaviro’s book *Doom Patrols: A Theoretical Fiction on Postmodernism* is published by High Risk Books. This text is discussed in the following chapter and is ficto-critical. In Canada the small press NeWest is often the publisher of ficto-criticism, whilst in Australia the similarly regional small publisher the Fremantle Arts Centre Press is responsible for releasing what has since been described as key Australian ficto-critical texts, such as *No Substitute, No Road* and *Reading the Country*. This is discussed in detail in Chapter Four on Australian ficto-criticism.

15 Significantly, Deleuze and Guattari employ the word intensity to signal—rather than separate and close off categories—an interconnected multiplicity that varies only in terms of degree or vibration (on a molecular level).

16 Queer Latin American scholar Sylvia Molloy, in “Mock Heroics and Personal Markings,” observes that she employs the personal in strategic terms for political ends. She makes the important point that the kind of subject evoked is designed to challenge the unified and masterful objective critic of normative academic writing:
In other words, by the personal here, I mean not a presentation or construction of a coherent persona or he systematic recourse to exemplary or nostalgic anecdote as the sustaining design of a critical text but the necessary, intrusive, and discontinuous uses of a first-person narrative as a way of steering reading, redirecting reflection, defamiliarizing a too familiar scene of so-called impersonal critical reading. (1996: 1073)

17 According to the Oxford English Dictionary, vivisection can also mean more generally: “Excessively minute examination or criticism.”
19 Heather Kerr, in “Perverse Writing: Maternity and Monarchy: Fictocriticism and Exorbitant, Plural Bodies,” also identifies textual collage as a dominant tendency in ficto-critical writing (1997).
20 In “Processing Fictocriticism,” a review of The Space Between, Rosslyn Prosser observes that Anna Gibbs’ piece in the collection employs the technique of cut-up (1999: 1).
21 Mouré’s text, which is less obviously an act of criticism, requires one to have a less traditionally academic approach if one is going to be open to read it as ficto-criticism and not merely poetry. That is, be adventurous and accept ficto-criticism as a multiple space-between.
22 Quoting Roland Barthes Amanda Nettelbeck describes ficto-criticism as both undermining the masterful critic and employing montage techniques (1998: 5).
24 In an interview with Fred Wah, Ashok Mathur describes Diamond Grill as being “comprised of over one hundred prose segments, ranging in length from perhaps half a page to, at most, about three pages. Each prose segment functions in what I’d call a distinct and independent yet enmeshed, interdependent fashion” (2000: 98).
25 In Diamond Grill, for example, there is an overt reference to the relative nature of history and truth: “Betty Goodman ordered stewed oysters for lunch and you got me to wait on her while you went to the can and puked, all those puzzled moments in the new world when your brown brow squinched up while you translated vectors or politesse or measurement . . . all these moments nothing but your river of truth, fiction, and history, nothing but the long nights . . . “ (1997: 156).
26 See Daniel Francis’ National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History. Francis discusses the mythology of the CPR in Canadian national imagination as an icon of Canadian identity. The CPR is representative of the peaceful settler myth of Canada, that masks an often violent process of colonisation. Wah’s reference to the railway imagination is significant in that the railway was “built chiefly on the backs of Chinese coolie labour” (1997: 15); another instance where the stories that Wah writes about are silenced. See also Sky Lee’s Disappearing Moon Café. This text, which mixes fiction and historical fact, also illuminates stories from the margin of Canada’s dominant narratives. Lee, like Wah, makes reference to the Chinese coolie labour on the CPR, “forgotten as chinamen generally are” (1991: 6).
28 According to Ian Buchanan autopoesis—self-invention—has long been central to the work of Deleuze and Guattari. He makes the point that their notion of the subject is focussed on the moment, that is, self-invention for itself rather than what will become or has already become (1997:86).
29 Heather Kerr in “Fictocritical Empathy and the Work of Mourning” (2003: 180-200), addresses this text by Jones. Kerr explores whether “cross-cultural fictocritical writing” functions effectively as a counter discourseby drawing together ethics and aesthetics.
30 The layout on the page (with the extra indentation) reflects the original publication.
31 Fanny Balbuk is described by ethnographer Daisy Bates in her book The Passing of the Aborigines: A Life Spent Among the Natives of Australia (1938) as “the last Perth woman.” Bates is now infamous for her belief that it was necessary for Europeans to “smooth the dying pillow” of Indigenous Australians, who were doomed to extinction.
CHAPTER THREE
DANGER! POSTMODERNISM

INTRODUCTION

Reading ficto-criticism through the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari—as shown in Chapter Two—is not only productive in understanding the main stylistics of the (non)form, but also in reading the themes and debates that surround it. In Chapter Three I explore the key discourse circulated in relation to international ficto-critical forms in English—postmodernism. Here I argue that postmodernism and, in particular, a popular reading of the term based on a binary system has limited and reduced the discussion on ficto-criticism. Specifically, the application of the postmodern label to ficto-criticism has meant that the more interesting and political motivations for writing-between have been overlooked. These will be explored in the subsequent chapters on Australian and Canadian ficto-criticism. The purpose of this chapter is, however, to demonstrate that in Deleuzian terms postmodernism has become an order-word (in relation to ficto-criticism), despite postmodern theorists’ attempts to keep the concept open and mutable. According to Deleuze and Guattari: “the order-word is a death sentence; it always implies a death sentence, even if it has been considerably softened, becoming symbolic, initiatory, temporary, etc.” (A Thousand Plateaus 107). In their philosophy a death is implied through the application of an order-word since an order-word (through becoming codified) blocks the flows of nomadic (desiring) thought keeping us always in the same system of limitation or lack. As postmodernism becomes reduced through the process of being established as an order-word—and caught into a binary relation with modernism—so too does ficto-criticism find itself represented in narrow terms. The application of postmodernism to ficto-criticism—as I argue in this chapter—has thus resulted in particular limiting reading patterns of ficto-criticism; readings that are then coloured by whether you view postmodernism positively or negatively. Bob Hodge’s article “Monstrous Knowledge: Doing PhDs in the New Humanities,” for example, illustrates this
system of reading at work. Hodge discusses the reception of postmodern theses when judged by specific criteria, which do not apply to these texts:

some theses currently being written or examined run the risk of being judged by completely inappropriate criteria: as failing to be good ‘Old Humanities’ theses, when they should be looked at to see if they are good ‘New Humanities’ works.

(35)

Hodge goes on to show the conventions on which a PhD thesis is judged. Here is a selection from his table, clearly showing how a postmodern thesis may be viewed from a modernist perspective:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modernism</th>
<th>Postmodernism (+)</th>
<th>Postmodernism (-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>piece of research</td>
<td>piece of writing</td>
<td>no content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>research v writing</td>
<td>research as writing</td>
<td>too subjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disciplinary</td>
<td>transdisciplinary</td>
<td>undisciplined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-effacing</td>
<td>self-reflexive</td>
<td>self-indulgent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>summarizes the argument</td>
<td>strings quotes</td>
<td>unoriginal, pastiche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>descriptive</td>
<td>creative/critical</td>
<td>not really a thesis (39)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last line aptly illustrates the way in which ficto-criticism tends to be read when judged by modernist criteria and within a binary system. Thus ficto-criticism becomes a radical threat to traditional forms of literature, whether that be criticism, theory or fiction. From the opposing perspective (postmodernism), however, ficto-criticism tends to be celebrated as new and radical. These debates function to over-write other influences on ficto-criticism and the subtleties of individual texts and their politics. By surveying the international literature and texts in English that either display or discuss the characteristics of ficto-criticism, this chapter makes clear that postmodernism, as well as poststructuralist theories (so often simply equated with postmodernism), reduce—in fact crush—the various other aspects of ficto-critical practice. Thus, the many elements of ficto-criticism that run contrary to popular understandings of postmodernism as radical and nihilistic are subsumed. Once the danger of postmodernism as an order-word is addressed, a gap emerges from which to discover that the display of postmodern aesthetics in ficto-critical
texts runs secondary to a concern about the violence of representation and its role in colonising the other. In this chapter I explore a range of texts in English primarily from Britain and the United States to illustrate the process of overcoding at work and to establish the broader context for Australian and Canadian examples. However, to lead into this and to clearly establish the ease with which postmodernism is aligned with ficto-critical texts I first engage in a reading of J.M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals* and the reflective commentary essays included in the 1997 publication. This reading works as micro-model for the discussion that follows. Despite this book displaying strong ethical concerns—including an implied duty to interrogate the ideological function of generic forms in the debates around animal rights—Coetzee’s creative-critical text is repeatedly linked with a binary notion of postmodernism, which implies a mere fascination with the surface.

**The Lives of Animals**

In a recent book titled *The Lives of Animals*, J.M. Coetzee publishes his Tanner Lecture, given at Princeton University. Although Coetzee’s lecture is philosophical in nature—in keeping with the Tanner tradition—it breaks with the typical generic form of the lecture (Gutman 3). Coetzee’s lecture is in fact not a lecture at all, but fiction. Like Garner’s *The First Stone*, *The Lives of Animals* appears to be another example of a trend towards fictionalising academic discourse and the realms of non-fiction: an example of fictocriticism. This fictionalisation of academic writing and discourse manifests itself in a number of ways, yet Coetzee’s narrative adopts a specific literary device, a device strongly associated with postmodernism. In a metafictional move Coetzee’s lecture is the story of a fictional author arriving at an American university, having been invited to speak. The story he narrates in the lecture is, therefore, of an author of fiction being invited to give a lecture, as he has been invited to Princeton to give the Tanner Lecture.

Coetzee’s author-character Elizabeth Costello—an aging Australian woman writer—chooses to speak on a topic close to her heart: animal rights. In her fictional lecture,
Costello gives an impassioned plea for animals. She argues that the emphasis on reason in Western culture functions to diminish the value of animals, judged as bereft of reason. As Amy Gutmann points out in the introduction to *The Lives of Animals*, Coetzee’s decision to fictionalise is strategic and deliberate, containing “a critique of a more philosophical approach to the topic of animal rights” (3). His narrative *mise en abyme* structure draws attention to the conventions of the lecture and by extension the conventions of the academy, which rely on logic and reason. Gutmann reads Coetzee’s use of fiction as an attempt to move away from traditional intellectualised debates around animal rights—a critique of the rational approach that denies emotion and embodiment—toward a more empathetic or emotional identification with the suffering of animals: “The fictional form in Coetzee’s hands...appears to have an ethical purpose: extending our sympathies to animals” (4). Interestingly, Costello’s son works as an assistant professor of physics at the university at which she has been invited to speak. His discomfort with his mother speaking at the university where he is employed within the discipline of science becomes intensified as—predicably—his colleagues reject her argument that reason is overrated. Given the metafictional form with which Coetzee has chosen to present his lecture, might we assume, like Gutmann, that Costello’s defence of animals and critique of the hierarchies that sustain rationality is also his position? Why else has he chosen to write in such a way and challenge normative academic forms of expression by employing fiction? My suggestion is that his generic choice strategically reflects his argument.

Coetzee’s text is interesting not only for its formal inversion of academic hierarchies (those inherent in generic codes), but also for what goes on at the micro-political level. For example, why does his author-character take the form of an aging Australian woman writer, and what is the connection between this choice of character profile and his suggestively ficto-critical form? Is it somehow easier, as a white middle-class male academic, to write such challenges to academic discursive conventions under the guise of an aging eccentric antipodean woman? Alternatively, is Coetzee highlighting, and through that process possibly reaffirming, the structural dualities on which such hierarchical
divisions are made? The division between emotion/rationality and the privileging of rationality that disallows the "voices" of animals, mirrors not only the division of theory and fiction, but also other dualities imbued with similarly structured values.  For example:

- Mind / body
- Theory / fiction
- Centre / margin
- Man / woman
- Europe / antipodes
- Rationality / emotion
- Carnivore / vegetarian

Costello is, after all, with her strict vegan-vegetarianism, her single status, her geographical marginality, and aging frailty, the antithesis of the academics she encounters on this trip. As her son laments:

He wishes his mother had not come. It is nice to see her again; it is nice that she should see her grandchildren; it is nice for her to get recognition; but the price he is paying and the price he stands to pay if the visit goes badly seem to him excessive.

Why can she not be an ordinary old woman living an ordinary old woman’s life? If she wants to open her heart to animals, why can’t she stay at home and open it to her cats? (Coetzee 38)

Elizabeth Costello is clearly not playing by the rules or conventions society has determined for her age and gender. Most importantly, however, she surprises her hosts by delivering a lecture on animal rights, not literature or literary criticism as expected. Her less than academically rigorous lecture that argues for emotion in favour of rationality (in the context of the university) therefore threatens to embarrass her son. Coetzee, too, fails to play by the rules of the academic lecture format when he delivers his metafictional narrative. However, unlike Costello, he avoids the risk of possible embarrassment to both his audience and himself with his highly self-conscious metafictional structure. As a result, he makes it clear that his text—its form and content—has been cleverly and carefully calculated to produce a specific effect. Therefore, what Coetzee does by
employing the metafictional frame story is to draw attention to the question of critical distance and its collapse. By emphasising the process of production by writing about someone lecturing about a topic that is like his form—out of place—he addresses the audience’s assumptions on perspective and carries out a form of self-conscious meta-criticism. He is, in effect, enacting a ficto-critique, challenging established hierarchies of authority and genres, and introducing a certain degree of ambiguity. *The Lives of Animals*, as an example of ficto-criticism that questions truth and reality, becomes an even more powerfully pointed critique of authority when we consider that it is performed within a very prestigious institute of learning: a place where knowledge is established and disseminated. Coetzee’s Tanner Lecture at Princeton University, by deconstructing and thus challenging hierarchies through literary devices like metafiction, displays a number of postmodern characteristics. Not surprisingly, this book as one of many examples of ficto-criticism elucidates the process in which creative-critical acts are so often aligned with, and interpreted through, popularised or dominant notions of postmodernism.

As Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals* suggests with its use of the metafictional frame story, the aesthetic characteristics of ficto-critical texts lend themselves to postmodern association. For example, included in *The Lives of Animals* are four essays written in response to Coetzee’s lecture. Several of these essays directly frame Coetzee’s lecture-narrative in relation to postmodernism, whilst the rest grapple with his deliberate disruption of critical distance (a central concern of postmodernism) and its implications for their own texts. Wendy Doniger, for example, begins her essay with the following line: “It seems somehow reductionistic to respond to these deeply moving readings as if they had been dry academic readings” (93). Immediately, the style of Coetzee’s form seems to have had the desired effect as Doniger questions the appropriateness of dealing with his work in a detached, dry academic voice. Doniger appears compelled to state her position (and self) in relation to her narrative. Similarly, Barbara Smuts writes in a personal voice on her commitment to animal rights, the result of her experience with animals. Whilst critiquing
the lack of reference to real-life relations with animals in Coetzee’s text, Smuts draws attention to academic conventions that distance them (academics) from their subjects:

Why doesn’t Elizabeth Costello mention her relations with her cats as an important source of her knowledge about, and attitudes toward, other animals? Maybe she feels constrained by the still-strong academic taboo against references to personal experience. . . (Smuts 108)

In yet another of these framing essays, Marjorie Garber implicitly emphasises the links between Coetzee’s narrative and postmodernism by discussing the text as an instance of metafiction:

The genre of these lectures, then, is metafiction, and together they constitute a version of the academic novel, though crucially this one is suffused with pathos rather than comedy. The effect is to insulate the warring “ideas” (about animal rights, about consciousness, about death, about the family, about academia) against claims of authorship and authority. (79)

The challenge to authorship and authority Garber identifies in The Lives of Animals is a key tenet of postmodern discourse, and is issued by Coetzee through his metafictional form. According to the dominant literature, in metafiction the author is viewed by their self-conscious inclusion and intrusion into the text as having lost their omnipotent (authorial) authority. Coetzee includes his authorial role by mirroring his experience of lecturing with his character’s almost identical set of circumstances. Writing about writing, the author thus reveals his process and focuses the reader’s attention on their role in constructing this text-world. As his method of constructing an illusionary world is shattered through the self-referential nature of the text, so too is the authority on which that world is created. Coetzee’s literary self-consciousness, then, is what makes his text be perceived as postmodern.

The final essay included in The Lives of Animals similarly contributes to, and affirms, the predominance of postmodernism as the frame for Coetzee’s text. This essay by Peter Singer is itself metafiction. Singer’s essay is about an academic’s process of writing and
thinking through his response to Coetzee’s narrative. Again, the question of the author’s situation in relation to his object of study arises. In this creative piece the academic character (or Singer himself?) states his difficulties with Coetzee’s approach. Addressing his daughter the character says: “Call me old-fashioned, then, but I prefer to keep truth and fiction clearly separate. All I want to know is: how am I supposed to reply to this?” (Singer 86). Ironically, however, despite his character’s statement, Singer has chosen to respond by mixing truth/fact and fiction, much in the same way as Coetzee does. As the daughter-character Naomi observes in Singer’s narrative, the blurring of fact and fiction makes Coetzee’s text postmodern. In fact, Naomi makes it clear that her Dad must know this since it is common knowledge and obvious:

“You mean that he’s going to stand up there and give a lecture about someone giving a lecture? Très post-moderne.”

“What’s postmodern about it?”

“Oh, Dad, where have you been for the past decade? You know, Baudrillard, and all that stuff about simulation, breaking down the distinction between reality and representation, and so on? And look at all the opportunities for playing with self-reference!” (Singer 85)

Like Singer’s essay, The Lives of Animals therefore becomes as much about literature, writing, representation and the construction of meaning as it is about animals and their rights. The aesthetic stylistics and underlying philosophical critique of established truth values in The Lives of Animals—as the accompanying commentary essays suggest—clearly lend themselves to postmodernism. Through this association ficto-criticism becomes caught into the broader debates surrounding postmodernism, in which postmodernism becomes the radical other of modernism.

A closer reading of the accompanying essays in The Lives of Animals illustrates this process at work. All four of the essays included in the book that mark his text as postmodern imply some level of discomfort around his perceived nihilistic and anarchistic challenge to authority and established truth. Despite this discomfort often only being
registered as anxiety around how to approach his text, it suggests a mode of dialectic thinking. That is, as Coetzee throws authority and critical distance into question, his commentators seem compelled to interrogate their own positions; they ask: “can I speak, can I judge?” as they immediately begin to flounder as he undermines these basic academic assumptions. This reflects a binary: a system of thought that can only imagine an either/or. In other words, if Coetzee questions rationality, truth and authority—throwing into dispute our means of knowing the world—can we know true reality? Through their palpable anxiety around how to respond to his text, his commentators cannot help but invoke a certain nihilism, which they inadvertently imply is present in his text (and linked to what they see as his postmodern style).

Yet *The Lives of Animals* is arguing for a truth. Coetzee’s narrative asks—on ethical grounds—that we urgently attend to the very real suffering of animals at our hands. Coetzee is, therefore, making both a judgement and an argument. He has a position even if that position takes a fictional form. His text is not nihilistic, and this runs contrary to the inferred reading of postmodernism brought to, and applied to, his text. Significantly, however, even if Coetzee’s commentators may evoke more sophisticated and nuanced readings of postmodernism in their essays on his narrative, their application of the term cannot help bring into play the dominant binary conception of postmodernism. *The Lives of Animals* reveals then, in part, how easily postmodernism can be (and is) used to frame the phenomenon of ficto-criticism. More importantly, it clearly shows that in this dynamic a particular vision of postmodernism is evoked, and this will either excite or disturb the reader depending on their ideological and political viewpoint. As a small scale and localised example, Coetzee’s book functions as a micro-model or introduction to the argument in this chapter. Firstly, how, within the tradition and conventions of academic writing and research, ficto-criticism can almost not avoid being limited and constrained by postmodernism, and, secondly, how more often than not the form or flavour postmodernism takes in these discourses is very much about it being *post* modern.
Readers are by now very familiar with the complexity of the debates around postmodernism’s meaning and definition. However, this does not seem to prevent many commentators, both academic and other, reducing postmodernism to a simple manageable concept, often as a means to prove their point. As Thomas Docherty argues in his preface to Postmodernism: A Reader, “the term ‘postmodernism’ has become one of the most insistently used terms in the cultural debates of recent years, it is a term which has often been used with a great deal of imprecision” (xiii). Mirroring the anxiety about postmodernism invoked in the commentary essays found in The Lives Of Animals, Docherty begins his list of common miss-perceptions of postmodernism by highlighting the very often-repeated idea that it is nihilistic or anarchic:

For some, postmodern equates with ‘nihilistic’ or ‘anarchic’; for others, it refers to a culture dominated by the banality of televisual representations and Las Vegas-style neon-signs whose presence everywhere reminds us of the McDonaldisation of an otherwise vegetarian world; yet others think of that explosion of poststructuralist theory which arose in the 1960s and 1970s as a postmodern manner of thinking. The prevalence of such populist, rather superficial and essentially misleading characterisations of the postmodern is troubling for anyone who would take the issues of contemporary culture seriously. (Doherty xiii)

The essays accompanying The Lives of Animals thus reveal how the postmodernism Docherty warns of is very much in circulation, and easily brought into play in the context of ficto-criticism since such texts mirror many postmodern stylistic tendencies. Significantly, distracting from ficto-criticism’s more complex workings, this postmodern over-coding or masking is predicated on an understanding of postmodernism as a radical epistemological break from modernism demonstrated by the crisis in representation. The superficial or dominant postmodernism I am alluding to is therefore one that is seen in simple terms as what follows modernism, as a period, style, and view of the world defined in opposition to what is traditional and modern. Popularised postmodernism—viewed in the tradition of Western thought as a challenge to the philosophical and aesthetic traditions that precedes it—is seen as marking the end of grand narratives, the collapse of critical distance, and the
resulting problem with nomenclature. As a consequence, postmodernism is characterised
by such markers as the everyday or local, fragmentation, fluid subjectivity, non-linearity,
polyvocality, generic hybridity, intertextuality, and pastiche sometimes bordering on
plagiarism.  

In relation to literature, postmodernism is understood as a self-conscious literary practice,
which uses and abuses conventions. In literary postmodernism it is the conventions of
realism that are played with. In ficto-criticism—with criticism as the axis—one could
suggest that the self-consciousness and play is around objectivity and its relation to what is
real. It is not difficult to appreciate, therefore, how many examples of ficto-criticism—
which display the stylistic characteristics and concerns of postmodernism—find
themselves deemed a product of postmodernism. What the discourse around ficto-critique
has failed to fully explore, however, are those characteristics of ficto-critical texts that run
contrary to populist notions of postmodernism, and, in some cases, even the more nuanced
understandings of the term. For example, as Coetzee’s The Lives of Animals demonstrated
despite the ethical imperative of his text (including a perceived truth and judgement) it has
still been associated with an uncompromising revolutionary postmodernism in which every
form of representation is invalid. His text may employ postmodern literary devices, but it
is not nihilistic or refuting all reality. What this contradiction illustrates is how the
application of a dialectic view of postmodernism as a radical break distracts from other
workings and tendencies in ficto-criticism. To reiterate, what is of interest here is how
postmodernism—and in particular a binarised notion of postmodernism—functions to
detract from the more dynamic and political aspects of what much ficto-critical writing is
attempting to address: the violence of representation in academic writing. The overarching
use of postmodernism as the means to explain ficto-criticism also works to over-code and
simplify the multiplicities of an expansive range of writing-between. In this context, where
the order-word function of postmodernism is revealed, questions emerge such as: is ficto-
criticism automatically the radical threat that many perceive it to be? Does it really signal
the end of criticism or merely the exhaustion of traditional critical writing models?
ficto-criticism’s main influence necessarily postmodernism? What are the other possible influences? Ironically, the postmodern over-coding of ficto-criticism is carried forward by the conventions of academic writing that encourages singular propositions and mastery. Ficto-criticism, however, attempts to explore what is pushed to the edge by academic discourse and in the process enact a critique of academic discursive conventions.

Consistent with this ficto-critical flavour, which is concerned with contradictions, silences and excesses of academic writing, instead of postmodernism as the defining code I am more interested in the conflicting, inconsistent characteristics of the liminal space that ficto-critical texts occupy. By being attentive to these contradictions, it becomes apparent that the display of postmodern aesthetic style runs secondary in ficto-critical texts to a concern about representation and colonisation in writing practices. This first chapter therefore introduces a range of primary ficto-critical texts and secondary readings of ficto-criticism, to demonstrate the use of postmodernism and poststructuralist theories (often simply equated with postmodernism) to code ficto-criticism. This literature survey also fleshes out some of the contradictions in placing such a varying range of labile texts under the rubric of postmodernism.

The term labile, introduced above, and used throughout the thesis, has been employed deliberately and strategically at this point to signify the unstable and slippery nature of ficto-critical texts. The Oxford English Dictionary gives the definition of labile as: “1. Prone to fall into error or sin;” “2. Apt to slip away, slippery,” and; “3. Prone to undergo displacement in position or change in nature.” All three definitions—including the obvious feminising intonations—I believe are apt descriptors for ficto-criticism. In other words, its use reflects one of the main storylines of the thesis; that is, the dangers of conceptualising ficto-criticism simply and in line with normative academic criticism that demands ordered and linear arguments ending with one climactic finish. For ficto-criticism’s revolutionary potential to be fully realised, ficto-criticism must be analysed in such a way as to draw out the many contradictions and slippages inherent in the condition of being between.
The examples I now address from the United States and Britain will thus help substantiate the need to conceptualise ficto-critique as labile and disparate. These examples are those that fall outside the Canadian and Australian context, and are suggestive of a much more expansive trend towards fictionalising academic writing and other realms of non-fiction (and/or the incursion of theoretical and critical concerns into fiction). Through a survey of the literature, it is clear that a trend toward reading fictional texts as instances of theoretical critique is also developing. That is, there is a tendency from a critical perspective toward not only writing ficto-critically but reading ficto-critically.

Significantly, this survey is not a comprehensive study of all texts that reflect and engage with such hybridity, but a general survey to allow an understanding of the international context (in English) from which Canadian and Australian ficto-criticism has developed. This survey will also explicate the variations in the methods of ficto-critique, whilst at the same time providing a backdrop to highlight the differences between Canadian and Australian ficto-criticism in a broader context.

Ficto-critical techniques appear to be taking hold of the imagination of many researchers, writers and academics. Since the 1980s and across a range of disciplines, one can witness a shift to ficto-critical concerns. For example, in the book *Writes of Passage: Reading Travel Writing* (1999), James Duncan and Derek Gregory point out how travel writing is not only increasingly becoming a focus of academic attention, but also that there has been a distinctive shift in travel books towards personal and subjective accounts. About the bulging number of new travel texts, they say: “bookstores whose travel shelves were once confined to atlases, guidebooks and maps—to normally ‘factual’ and ‘objective’ accounts—now include sections devoted to personal, avowedly imaginative accounts of travel” (1). Until recently, according to Duncan and Gregory, travel writing “not conducted under the sign of ‘Science’ was virtually ignored by [academic] studies” (2). Recognising the ways “travel writing and its cultural practices have been located within larger formations in which the inscriptions of power and privilege are made clearly visible,”
*Writs of Passage* examines the shift to a more personal voice as an act of criticism against the “imperial stylistics” of traditional travel writing (2). Anthropology, like travel writing, with its direct and immediate immersion into another place and culture, has resulted in a similar interrogation of the politics of location, authority and varying power differentials—this time, in relation to the anthropologist or ethnographer. What is of concern—and under attack—is the relation of the subject to its object and the detached “objective” academic or scientific voice. As Judith Okely and Helen Calloway argue in the preface to *Anthropology and Autobiography*: “the ‘race,’ nationality, gender, age, and personal history of the fieldworker affect the process, interaction and emergent material” (Okely and Calloway xi). According to Okely, “the practice of intense fieldwork [in anthropology] is unique among all other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences” (Okely 8). This might, in part, explain why anthropology has in many ways lead and influenced the changes that are represented by the ficto-critical turn. Historically, under pressure to be scientific, anthropologists compartmentalised fieldwork experience. Now, instead of publishing fictionalised or personal autobiographical accounts of fieldwork separately, and often under pseudonyms, more anthropologists are including not only autobiographical detail but are also producing ethnographic fictions. Many of these anthropological ficto-critical texts deliberately play on the division between fact and fiction. A very good example of an anthropological ficto-critique is *Enigma Variations* (1995) by Richard and Sally Price. To set the scene of this “novel:”

In a steamy colonial city, an eccentric Frenchman offers for sale an extraordinary collection of primitive art. The two anthropologists called in to appraise the pieces for the national museum quickly find themselves in a world where the boundaries of authenticity and deception blur in the tropical heat. *Enigma Variations*—in the tradition of *The Recognitions* and *The Crying of Lot 49*—is an entertainment as readable for its intellectual power as for its irresistible drama. (backcover)

The Prices are anthropologists and this is a fiction, yet here the two characters are remarkably like the authors of this text. Is this autobiography (the characters are Richard and Sally), is this a novel (it is clearly narrative), is it an anthropological monograph, or is
it fact? The whole text is bounded by references to authenticity and “fakerie.” As the reviews quoted on the back cover confirm, this text is a “genre-busting meditation on the nature of genre-busting”: “Enigma Variations is a hybrid work that keeps tempting you to read it as fact although it is officially labelled fiction. . .” (Blume and Sokolov respectively). Similarly, George Lamming (again from the back cover) signals the generic hybridity of Enigma Variations, its mixing of fact and fiction: “A rare combination of scholarly passion and an exuberant narrative skill.” The question of the authenticity of the works of art unfolds in the novel as a metaphor for exploring the division between fact and fiction in academic writing, and perhaps all writing. When one is in the business of producing representations “Richard” and “Sally” argue for the need to be mindful of the power differentials between the subject and object of writing:

Refilling our glasses again, we began tossing around the proposition that writers confront a similar tangle of moral issues, that they must constantly conjure with the inequalities of power and knowledge between themselves and their subjects, whether they’re creating a newspaper article, an anthropological monograph, or a work of fiction. (Price 137)

The work of ethnologist Michael Taussig also functions with attention to similar concerns, although it does so in quite a different manner from Enigma Variations.11 The Magic of the State (1997), for example, seems to refute all attempts at ethnographic realism. Taussig creates his own “magic state” in an imaginary South-American republic. The “artefactuality” of Taussig’s narrative has been described by one reviewer, Paul Magee, as an “overly academic fiction—or overly fictive academia” (197). The Magic of the State, undercutting the whole precept of interpretation and judgement through its artificial state and dream-like narrative style, influences Magee. He does not respond to Taussig’s text with a traditional review, as to do so would be to miss (interpret) a central message of the text. The irony of this situation is not wasted on Magee: “How does one judge The Magic of the State without simply laughing at the absurd irony of even attempting to do so? The whole point for Taussig is to maintain, in his text’s wild inscrutability, the anomie upon whose violent repression, through representation, the Law is founded” (198). Magee goes
on to describe *The Magic of the State* as narrative interspersed with shards of theory, a text that only ever arrives at varying degrees of epistemological anxiety. As can be seen, both Taussig and the Prices’ texts foreground a serious concern about the role and effect of representation, as well as the power differential between the author and subject.

The developments in anthropology and ethnography represented by the Prices’ and Taussig’s texts have been addressed, and not without controversy. Taussig, for example, has been described as a “polarizing figure” in the field of anthropology by the *New York Times* journalist Emily Eakin in her article titled “Anthropology’s Alternative Radical.”

Eakin says of Taussig:

> He is the innovator and most extreme practitioner of what he calls fictocriticism and what might fairly be described as gonzo anthropology. Blending fact and fiction, ethnographic observation, archival history, literary theory and memoir, his books read more like beatnik novels than sober analyses of other cultures.

According to Eakin, *The Magic of the State* has been described both as a “terrible book” and a “remarkable achievement,” suggestive of the polarised debates around modernism and postmodernism. Not surprisingly, the challenges to disciplinary and generic boundaries wrought by Taussig and the Prices’ work are identified as postmodern.12

Many of the secondary texts that register these shifts seem imbued with a sense of discovery—the discovery of something radically different from that which preceded it. In the Introduction to *Anthropology and Literature*, for example, Edward Bruner says: “this volume is a product of its time, of the late 1980s/early 1990s ‘experimental moment’ in anthropology and the postmodern turn” (1). The idea that this “experimental moment” in ethnographic fiction is something new—as implied here by the reference to postmodernism defined by a period in history—appears to lock into the dialectic model of modernism versus postmodernism. In this system the reader tends to become focussed in a reactionary way on how codes and expectations are transgressed—what is truth etcetera—
and not on the miniature politics of actual texts produced within a specific historical context. Thus limited readings are applied wholesale to groups of texts resulting in many other possible readings being crushed. For example, describing the reception of several hybrid ethnographic fictions, Bruner says:

But according to the somewhat dogmatic conventional wisdom, isn’t the difference that ethnography is FACT, whereas a short story is FICTION; that one tells the TRUTH whereas the other is FANTASY; that ethnographers are SCIENTISTS whereas writers are ARTISTS? I reject these binaries as too simplistic, but the story does change in the telling. (18)

Ethnographic fiction, therefore, appears to be charged with the same transgressions as Helen Garner’s *The First Stone*, for confusing reality and truth with a fictional subjective representation. Despite their very different agendas and topics, both these genre-busting forms elicit the same reactive responses for breaking the rules of belief, the way we learn to know the world. Traditional thought, stemming from a binary platform, struggles with the writing-between, asking, what is this, how do you read and judge it, and grumbling that it is not playing by the rules. In the provocatively titled *Subcultures Reader* (suggesting a marginal space) Stephen Tyler’s 1986 essay on “Postmodern Ethnography” is reprinted. Here Tyler’s title clearly identifies ethnographic fiction such as the Price’s and Taussig’s as postmodern. Tyler therefore further demonstrates the link between texts that challenge Cartesian logic and those that challenge the postmodern turn. Thus both Taussig and the Prices texts illustrate the interpretative context and the reactions to works that defy the generic expectation for proper, factual and objective academic research and writing.

Travel writing, ethnography, and anthropology, are not, however, the only disciplines that are experiencing generic contamination of their dominant discursive style. Examples arise across a range of disciplines, such as: cultural and literary studies, film studies, performance studies, law, history, philosophy, visual arts, and even beyond the humanities into some areas of the sciences. *A View from the Divide: Creative Nonfiction on Health and Science* (1999), for example, suggests that even the most purely scientific
and objective disciplines are not immune to the ficto-critical turn. Published by Pittsburg University Press, this book is described as being able—by dint of its generic style—to reach and enlighten both a general and specialised readership. Lee Gutkin, the editor of this collection, is the founder of *Creative Nonfiction*, a journal established in 1994. Gutkin is also considered to be one of the leaders of creative non-fiction in America and has played some part in its broadening popularity. In America creative non-fiction is one of the dominant terms given to texts that “sully” non-fiction with what are normally deemed the stylistic devices of creative writing, such as characterisation, narrative, and dialogue. These works of creative non-fiction often include autobiographical detail and might also be described in secondary texts as examples of the personal essay. The reference to the essay form confirms that this essayistic creative non-fiction is not entirely new as early versions of the essay intersect stylistically with this emerging creative non-fiction. What is different, however, is the increasing popularity of this kind of writing and its move into contemporary academic discourse. A recent publication that addresses such concerns is the appropriately titled *Personal Effects: The Social Character of Scholarly Writing* published in 2001. Calling for the human to be put back into the humanities:

This volume collects essays that, taken together, try to show how fundamental it is in humanistic scholarship to take account, in a variety of ways and as part of the subject matter, of the personal and collective experience of teachers and researchers. (Bleich and Holdstein 1)

This shift toward more subjective and localised accounts in academic writing appears to reflect an increasing frustration with existing academic writing models. In fact, I believe such developments highlight the exhaustion of normative academic writing forms. Similarly, they signal the failure to address current cultural, theoretical and political conditions where localised stories are increasingly challenging dominant systems of knowledge. Furthermore, personal criticism might also reflect the recent fashionable intellectual focus on the body, by presenting knowledge as embodied and situated.
In America, the focus in the secondary literature on writing-between is very much on autobiography. Yet whilst I will show that the essay is the preferred framing genre, numerous terms are employed to describe these shifting forms. These texts, which can be loosely described as ficto-critical, for sitting between the taxonomic generic markers of fiction and non-fiction, are also variously described as autocritique, the new belltrism, experimental critical writing, narrative criticism, and literary non-fiction. Often in the secondary texts that address personalised criticism, little is done to delineate or track the differences between these terms and their usage. Similarly, there is slippage around differing kinds of non-fiction, which become interchangeable, such as, criticism, theory and academic writing. The plethora of possible names for these varying ficto-critical works indicates another central problematic of postmodernism and its connection to ficto-critique: nomenclature. This further adds to the postmodern flavour of ficto-critical works.

In the United States, literary and cultural criticism certainly appears to be undergoing an “autobiographical turn,” a phenomenon that Elspeth Probyn identifies in Sexing the Self: Gendered Positions in Cultural Studies (1993). Although Probyn’s focus is on cultural studies, the shift to personal criticism in the academy is not limited to this disciplinary field. This shift in American criticism has been marked by the publication of several secondary texts for example: Critical Fictions (1991), The Intimate Critique: Autobiographical Literary Criticism (1993), An Alchemy of Genres (1994), The Art of the Personal Essay (1994), and Confessions of the Critics (1996), as well as the recent Personal Effects (2001) quoted from earlier. The appearance of so many anthologies would suggest that a shift has occurred in academic writing. Nancy K. Miller in “Getting Personal: Autobiography as Cultural Criticism” muses on the possible reasons for the “efflorescence of personal criticism in the United States in the eighties” (Miller 20). As possible explanations Miller lists late capitalism’s disruption of subjectivity, postcolonialism, and a reaction against High Theory (which she argues required the theoretical evacuation of the social subjects producing it). She also states:
Indeed, one of the reasons for the current proliferation of autobiographical criticism may well be the effect of a crisis over representivity: an anxiety over speaking as and speaking for, doubling the postmodern crisis of representation that has been so repetitively diagnosed. Though the reign of the Master Narratives, we are told, has passed, micro-narratives abound, and with them a massive reconsideration of the conditions grounding authorization itself. At the same time, moreover, through a paradox of reversible effects we are now becoming familiar with, the poststructuralist lesson and the postmodern moment have powerfully imprinted on contemporary productions of identity writing. (Miller 20)

Whilst postmodernism emerges again as a likely influence, as Miller points out in the same paper, feminists have for sometime been exploring autobiographical criticism. This foray into personal criticism was and is a way to explore who is speaking and for who, and to question for whom the genteel and generalised “we” implied and constructed by traditional academic discourse represents (and by extension excludes and represses). What is pressing now, is to think through the reasons why ficto-critical styles are being taken up much more broadly, and at the same time being so heavily coded as postmodern. As Probyn observes:

The very male voice that is now being rendered ‘personal’ served, in part, to exclude feminist work from critical discourse. While this is not to guard the personal jealously within the terrain of feminist thought, it is to remember important feminist articulations of the autobiographical voice. In the midst of all the critical acceptance and appropriation of self-reflexivity, the recognition of previous articulations requires that we question why this particular discursive formation, at this specific time, has gained favour. (Relocating Cultural Studies 106)

Probyn makes the point that earlier feminist articulations of autobiographical criticism were largely ignored. What conditions now bring it to such popularity, and what does this tell us about the theoretical and political milieu we live in?
In the United States the emphasis in secondary texts that address this self-conscious turn toward autobiography in criticism tends to be on the essay as the preferred mode or style, rather than feminism as a possible influence. For example, Diane Freedman in “Autobiographical Literary Criticism as the New Belletrism,” as her title suggests, clearly identifies the essay as the form of personalised criticism. Her conceptualisation of autobiographical criticism as the new belletrism identifies American ficto-critical moves as a return to an earlier form of the essay (before its appropriation as an academic genre and reincarnation as logical formal writing). According to Phillip Lopate in his introduction to The Art of the Personal Essay (1994), the term essay once suggested an irregular undigested piece of writing that focused on the everyday, meandered, put the “I” at centre stage, and was informal in its use of language.25 Lopate believes that the current historical conditions in the United States are ripe for the return of the (personal) essay:

Another opportunity [for the essay] comes from the growing awareness that the United States is a pluralistic, multicultural society, that this is our future as a society, and that we need to listen carefully to the intellectual voices of minorities and immigrants. . . . The personal essay turns out to be one of the most useful instruments with which outsiders can reach dominant culture quickly and forcefully and testify to the precise ambiguities of their situation as individuals and group members. (1)

He also confirms Freedman’s argument that the essay is undergoing a cautious revival ("Autobiographical Literary Criticism"). Lopate argues that this return to the essay is influenced in part by high modernism or postmodernism:

[T]he personal essay’s suitability for experimental method and self-reflexive process, its tolerance for the fragmentary and irresolution, make it uniquely appropriate to the present era, whether we want to label it late modernist or postmodernist. My own sense is that we are going through a cautious revival of the genre. (1)

According to Freedman, who cites Lopate’s collection in her paper as an example of the revival of belletrism, “the New Belletrism refers . . . to the increasing presence of the
literary essay of personal meditation in bookstores, book reviews, and the academy—including in cross-disciplinary scholarship and the writing asked of students as well as what they read” (3). Freedman clearly believes that the personal turn is not limited merely to literary criticism, but is part of a much wider phenomenon. She identifies several belletristic scholars outside literature, including: Anthony Appiah (philosophy/Africana studies), Ruth Behar (anthropology), Norma Field (Asian studies), Eunice Lipton (art history), Sarah Ruddich (philosophy), Carolyn Steedman (psychoanalysis/sociology) and Patricia Williams (law) (Freedman 4). Nancy Miller also compiles a list of autobiographical critics. She includes on her “who’s-who” of personal criticism the following writers: Gloria Anzaldúa, Gayatri Spivak, Jane Gallop, Alice Walker, Alice Kaplan, Carolyn Heilbrum, Frank Lentricchia, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, bell hooks, Audrey Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, and (like Freedman) Patricia Williams (importantly, Miller does not include all of their work).26 Freedman’s list, like Miller’s, is “far from complete.” However, their lists give some indication of the scope and diversity of ficto-critical texts that appear to be challenging the boundaries of academic and non-fiction writing in varying disciplines (and in varying ways).27

Since both Miller and Freedman identify Patricia Williams,28 I now look at some of her work to understand the kind of writing being discussed within the confines of autobiographical criticism. According to Miller, Williams is well-known for her “montage of personal and legal anecdote” (2). Williams’ writing is an interesting and significant example of the potential of autobiographical criticism, scholarship that is at once intelligent, analytically insightful, well researched and personal. Her work—very reminiscent of early notions of the essay—is neither wholly objectivist nor subjective. Williams, a law Professor at Columbia University, writes out of her own experience and analyses contemporary instances of prejudice. Her most recent book The Rooster’s Egg: On the Persistence of Prejudice (1995) employs a consciousness of the dynamics of race, gender, sexuality and class, examining the new forms, or transmutation, of prejudice. Williams inserts into her analytical narrative—that is not structured and clinically ordered
as is traditional academic writing—her own experience as a single parent and African-American woman. In “Scholarly Memoir: An Un-‘Professional’ Practice” Margaret Willard-Traub identifies Williams as one of several writers who have:

demonstrated in their scholarly work, much of which draws on examples from personal experience, how academic and professional languages function to place women, people of colour, and the poor in subordinate positions both outside and within the academy, albeit in different ways and with different consequences. (31)

In one of her essays, “Radio Hoods,” Williams looks at the increasing popularity of racist right wing DJs like the infamous Howard Stern of New York. Unravelling the complex discourses that protect and legitimate such propagators of racism and hate in America, Williams’ argument takes power and meaning not just from her sophisticated analysis but also from her use of personal experience. For example, in the middle of her analysis, she inserts this:

Not long ago I had the misfortune to hail a taxi cab in which the driver was listening to Howard Stern undress some woman. After some blocks, I had to get out. I was, frankly, afraid to ask the driver to turn it off—not because I was afraid of “censoring” him, but because the driver was stripping me too as he leered into the rear view mirror. “Something the matter?” he demanded, still leering, as I asked him to pull over and let me out at the next corner, well short of my destination. (The Rooster’s Egg 52-3)

In the section of text that follows directly—bracketed off by ellipsis—Williams makes a point of telling you what she says she won’t tell: she explains the effect (the psychic violence) of Howard Stern’s voice “a tinny screeching backdrop” inside the taxi (and outside) on her person:

(I’ll spare you the full story of what happened from there—trying to get another cab, having lots of trouble as cabs sped by me while stopping for all the white businessmen who so much as scratch their heads near the curb; a nice young white man seeing my plight, giving me his cab, having to thank him, he hero, me saved—but-humiliated, cab driver peeved and surly. I fight my way to my destination,
arriving in a bad mood, militant black woman, cranky feminazi, gotta watch out for my type, no pleasing that kind).

(The Rooster’s Egg 53)

The effect of telling—yet stating that she isn’t going to tell—highlights the exclusionary conventions of academic discourse and analysis that push such experiences to the margin. By saying politely, considerately, “I’ll spare you the full story,” but telling in a fairly detailed fashion exactly what happened, Williams addresses the (white/male) reader’s anxiety and resulting desire to avoid the messy (emotional/bodily) details. Williams, however, is not silenced by the conventions of polite academic discourse (let’s not take it personally): she tells you what happened next. Hers is, therefore, a situated knowledge, grounded in personal experience and invested with her concerns. The language and writing does not reflect the author-evacuated prose of traditional academic scholarship, and her voice and personality resonate loudly throughout the essays in this collection. Significantly, Williams in The Rooster’s Egg does not defer her authority to particular theorists or other authors. Her method of citation is very low key: this is not a text peppered with footnotes. There are, in fact, none. The bibliography is a simple Notes at the end of the book, keyed by page number and refers mainly to primary texts she examines, not secondary texts employed to back her argument. Her authority comes from herself and her experience. Whilst Williams’ work surfaces in several secondary texts in relation to autobiographical criticism and indeed ficto-criticism, her style of writing is just one example of a myriad of approaches to personal/autobiographical/Belletristic criticism that fall under the umbrella of alternative ficto-critical forms. These critically creative mutations challenge traditional academic thesis-driven writing by refusing (to feign) objectivity and mastery.

As one can imagine, the inclusion of fictional moves like autobiography open the discourses of academic voice and writing to a plethora of labile experimentation(s) lost somewhere between fiction and non-fiction. However, one thing that the varying formations of personalised criticism do have in common, other than the use of personal
experience and voice, is the often-found charge of narcissism or navel-gazing. What is interesting about this charge of narcissism is that it is imbued with the same rhetoric of dismissal that ficto-critical texts receive when labelled as symptoms of radical and experimental postmodernism. They are cast as destroying all that is good and true about normative academic writing and research. The accusations of narcissism echo fears in the West of the increasing “Me” generation viewed as the result of postmodernity. As Edward Bruner signals in *Anthropology and Literature* on the risk of narcissism: “The danger is in putting the personal self so deeply back into the text that it completely dominates, so that the work becomes narcissistic and egotistical” (6). Also, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese critiques personal criticism as a “naked display of one’s personal failings. . .more often than not fall[ing] into a complacent exhibitionism” (74). Significantly, Rachel Brownstein discusses in *Confessions of the Critics*—in this climate of “excessive, obsessive concern everywhere with persons and personalities”—how the cult of the personality has resulted in academics being featured in glossy magazines like *The New Yorker*. No wonder, she argues, that “professors are tempted to talk about themselves rather than about literary texts” (32-3).

Again, this shift in criticism and non-fiction to the personal has been identified as postmodern. According to Peter Brooks: “A recent trend toward the personalization of criticism, indeed toward the cult of the critic’s personality, seems to me regrettable, a kind of academic version of the postmodern replacement of personhood by celebrity—as if one did not really exist until celebrated in *People* magazine” (20). Similarly, Lopate (on the personal essay) suggests that a public “weaned on Oprah, [is] uniquely sympathetic to the sound of authentic witnessing and hard-won experience” (1). Times are, as Lopate has argued, ripe for the personal essay and this certainly seems true of American academic writing. As Miller indicates in her paper on autobiographical criticism: “In England it was suggested to me that being ‘personal’ was in fact being American!” (“Autobiography as Cultural Criticism” 3). Freedman goes even further. According to her, in true American style, “the new belletrism is somehow deeply American (though practiced elsewhere, of course . . .)” (“Autobiographical Literary Criticism” 5).
If American scholarship in the eighties experienced a personal turn in critical or academic writing, so too did British criticism. In Britain, however, this appeared to be mainly confined to one particular field, that of cultural studies. Probyn identifies the work of several British writers such as Carolyn Steedman, Valerie Walkerdine, Angela McRobbie and Rosalind Coward, as demonstrating the effective use of the personal in criticism and theory. According to Probyn, these feminist critics are “not, of course, operating in a vacuum; the mode of theorizing from the ground has a solid history stretching from Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, and Stuart Hall to more recent ethnographic studies by Christine Griffith to Dick Hebdige’s recent work . . .” (“True Voices 118). Theorising and writing “from the ground up,” as Probyn describes it, is not a surprising move from cultural studies theorists. Like feminists, many of the academics in cultural studies write from the experience of having been marginalised, in this case, by their class (if not also their race, gender and sexuality). The cultural studies project of questioning the hierarchies that divide high and low culture—disqualifying certain topics from serious study—has perhaps helped precipitate an interest in autobiographical criticism, as a way to validate not only their experience but also their work. The lives of the British working class—their popular cultural icons and rituals—were, prior to the establishment of cultural studies, not seen as topics worthy of serious critical attention in their own right. With the rise of cultural studies the topics of academic attention have broadened to include the minor stories of popular culture. For example, Angela McRobbie and Valerie Walkerdine’s essays in *Gender and Generation* (1984) (writers whom Probyn identifies) tackle such topics as popular dance trends and the proliferation and dispersion of popular myths of romantic heterosexist love.

Whilst both McRobbie and Walkerdine write from their own clearly stated interests and experience, there are moments of uncertainty about the reception of their work. This seems to suggest that both writing the personal into criticism and defying academic generic conventions was potentially a risky business in the 1980s (and perhaps remains so). For example, McRobbie declares almost apologetically “I should add that my mode of
presentation here is unashamedly unconventional. What I offer here resembles more a series of snapshot profiles than a thorough academic thesis” (130). Similarly, Rosalind Coward in *Female Desire* (1984), another of Probyn’s examples, states:

I don’t approach these things [food, clothes, novels, soap operas, houses etcetera] as a distant critic but as someone examining myself, examining my own life under a microscope. . . . This book has not been written as a result of painstaking academic research on each of the topics, although it is informed by previous theoretical studies of these issues. (14)

What Coward describes here echoes Lopate’s description of the personal essay. However, despite McRobbie’s assertion that her presentation is “unashamedly unconventional,” both her and Coward appear to be explaining or justifying their approach in the face of anticipated criticism. Each foregrounds the fact that they do not intend, or desire, to meet with conventional standards of academic rigour.32 Although these examples were published fairly early in the 1980s—and are early examples of the wider personal turn in criticism—their anxiety and attempts to justify their approach suggests that what they were doing was indeed risky. Particularly risky in terms of their careers as academics: in terms of being taken seriously as scholars. The anxiety demonstrated by their self-consciousness around transgressing the boundaries and conventions of non-fictional genres with personal experience, narrative and vernacular language, may help explain why the personal voice was not taken up by all cultural studies theorists. The little or minor stories of pop culture might now be legitimate topics for study with the demise of the metanarratives. However, the insertion of oneself into one’s work on the level of professional academic presentation appeared to be much less appealing, particularly if one desired tenure.33 It is also worth noting that this insertion of oneself into personal criticism presents as much more than a light-hearted anecdote at the beginning, but informs the topic, mode of study, and writing. As Peter Elbow suggests:

Notice the difference between the discourse of people who are established in the profession and those who are not—particularly those without tenure. Certain
liberties, risks, tones, and stances are taken by established insiders that are not usually taken by the unannealed. Discourse is power. (139)

Elbow makes a good point, echoed by Marianna Torgnovick. She states of her turn to experimental critical writing: “I knew I wanted to write something significantly different in tone and style from my first two books. I had recently been tenured and then promoted to full professor, and I felt that I was no longer writing for committees—I was writing for myself” (25). Similarly, Bruner, discussing the challenges facing early potential fictioneers observes: “A young anthropologist aiming to get on with a career and to achieve status in the discipline would be highly motivated to accept prevailing conventions” (5). This is why early experimentations—of fictional accounts of fieldwork—were published under pseudonyms. The degree of ficto-critical experimentation, whilst dependent on the individual academic and their job security is, of course, predicated on a whole range of other rapidly changing factors, for example the disciplinary stream and the department’s degree of interdisciplinarity. The acceptance of ficto-critical experimentation would also be mediated by the history of the institution in which the ficto-critics might find themselves. Access to publishing, such as refereed journals, journals that would consider writing that challenged academic conventions would similarly influence the degree of experimentation. Ficto-criticism as between genres, however, involves not just the incursion of fictional conventions into academic and non-fictional writing, but also the reverse: the incursion of non-fictional markers—such as theory—into fiction.

**Fiction as criticism**

As the disruption of non-fictional genres with fiction finds itself labelled postmodern, so too does fiction interrupted by non-fictional modes (such as academic writing). The best example to demonstrate this process of codification is metafiction. Typically, metafiction has been deemed postmodern, through its self-conscious awareness and focus on systems of meaning making in language. That is, the incorporation of contemporary theories of language results in metafictional texts staging their own metacommentary. By directly challenging and drawing attention to the conventions of realist fiction, metafiction disrupts
the genre and throws into question its pre-eminence as the fictional mode. The parallels between ficto-criticism and metafiction are therefore substantial (as suggested by earlier discussions of Coetzee’s book *The Lives of Animals*): both are between genres, challenging the conventions of dominant genres. Ficto-criticism for example—by mixing fiction and non-fiction—questions the authority and pre-eminence of academic writing as the critically intelligent mode, as metafiction questions realism. The conventions of realism, like those of academic writing, have become, for a range of reasons, virtual clichés. No longer able to deal effectively with the current prevailing historical conditions—the breakdown between reality and fiction—traditional realist texts have become increasingly intertextual, and increasingly contain moments of metacommentary. As Michael Boyd argues in *The Reflexive Novel: Fiction as Critique* (1983) metafiction is “a species of criticism in fictional form” (23). If metafiction is a form of literary criticism, then a variety of self-conscious fictional texts must be considered as potential ficto-critiques. However, it is often the context in which they appear that determines how easy it is to make that identification. It also depends on how much space or flexibility you wish to give to conceptualising ficto-criticism as a space between. For example Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals*—a metafiction and ficto-critique—could, if one did not know its history (that is, its academic frame), be viewed as merely a collection of short stories that seem to be commenting on academic discourse. Coetzee’s text emphasises the academic connections and thus the meaning of his text as a commentary on, or critique of, academic convention and reason. However, other fictional examples that predominantly seem weighted toward fiction rather than criticism, theory or non-fiction are less easily viewed as potential examples of ficto-criticism. In looking at them as between genres, where does one draw the line—what degree of fictionalisation or non-fictionalisation in their opposing defining genre—makes them ficto-critical? Interestingly and somewhat ironically, it is precisely the conventions of literary criticism that help override these ambiguities by encouraging singular readings, preferring to be in a position of mastery over the fictional text. If a work of fiction begins to enact its own metacommentary or be viewed as a critique in its own right, is criticism in its present form still relevant? The implications of this genre busting
on pedagogy are substantial, as has been hinted by several writers on ficto-critical texts.\textsuperscript{36} This is an important point, yet one that has failed to be explored in any detail. What effect will ficto-criticism have in the current economic rationalist environment of tertiary education, given the way it undermines the division between the virtual and the real?\textsuperscript{37}

If one begins to accept ficto-critique as writing-between—as I argue in this thesis—broadening out the possibilities of the space and spaces between, then a whole range of labile texts surface. For example, if metafiction can be considered a critical act in creative form as Boyd suggests, then historiographic metafiction must also be considered under the umbrella of potential ficto-criticism. Yet, Alison Bartlett, an Australian ficto-critic, pushes the boundaries of criticism even further. In a paper titled “Other Stories: The Representation of History in Recent Fiction by Australian Women Writers,” she argues that the historical fictions she examines represent an intersection between theory and fiction. Rewriting history, often from the local and everyday, historiographic fictions disrupt the grand narrative of history by presenting an alternative vision of events. Are these texts also to be considered creative acts of criticism that are theoretically informed? Bartlett argues that they are, in fact, ficto-critical. She links these historic fictions with ficto-criticism by suggesting they reflect varying theoretical approaches. However, whether they are ficto-critical in the sense that they arrive at self-reflexivity—examining their own process—she does not indicate. Self-reflexivity is an important theme of ficto-criticism and can be played out in varying subtle ways. Bartlett’s paper therefore highlights the complications in determining what constitutes writing-between, confirming that there is without doubt contestation over this space and its meanings. The texts she selects “are all concerned with retrieving historical female subjects through the medium of fiction and,” in the process, they explore the “overlapping discourse of historiography and historical fiction.” As Bartlett points out “[t]hrough the medium of fiction, they are able to negotiate and experiment with the problems of representing history” (“Other Stories” 165). In this way, she identifies these texts as theoretical fictions, reflecting their own historical origins through their particular theoretical approaches. What is significant about Bartlett’s
paper is that she identifies texts categorised primarily as fiction, as instances of theoretical critique.

Significantly, this approach is not Bartlett’s alone. For example, in the realm of ecocriticism recent academic work has identified contemporary literature informed by a deep ecological approach, to be examples of theoretical critique. Patrick Murphy, in his paper titled “The Women are Speaking,” discusses a range of texts that he argues constitutes theoretical commentary and that raise certain issues around theories of ecology and political activism. According to Murphy, the ecofeminist literary non-fiction, fiction and poetry he examines enact a theoretical critique by linking the oppression of women with the exploitation of nature, and by developing theories of political action. His inclusion of poetry as examples of ecofeminist theoretical critique further expands the space between to include other literary genres beyond the fictional. There are, significantly, a number of ficto-critical texts that appear primarily as prose on the page yet are interspersed—or broken—with poetic form. Whilst not ecocriticism, several of Rachel Blau DuPlessis’ pieces in her book The Pink Guitar (1990) carry out such experimental crossing of non-fictional borders. Susan Griffin is however a well-known ecofeminist critic and she, in her collection Made From this Earth (1982), includes poetry into some of her pieces. It is not surprising to discover that Griffin’s experimental essays have as their target the barriers between the pairs mind/body, nature/culture, and male/female. In ecocritique as much as in feminism a major target of criticism is the abstraction or disembodiment of theoretical and political arguments that render issues like ecological devastation devoid of physical reality and, as a result, less pressing. Deep ecology—that informs ecocriticism—also enacts a similar politicisation of the personal, by requiring us all to examine on a tangible personal level how our everyday practices (theoretical, philosophical and literal) impact on the environment.38

Imagining the space between fiction and non-fiction as expansive enough to include fictional/poetic works like the ecocritical examples Murphy describes, and Barlett’s
historic fictions, has the potential to generate methodological problems for my dissertation. This approach—somewhat ironically—becomes problematic in the face of thesis conventions that require students to contain their topic and manage it within prescribed generic requirements. While reading writing-between as inclusive of these creative texts opens up ficto-critique, it could also result in charges of conceptualising it too broadly, so that almost everything becomes (potentially) ficto-criticism. This criticism might be partially justified. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, it seems justified only if one remains within the existing paradigm of academic discursive conventions, and it is this traditional critical paradigm that ficto-criticism is concerned with exploring. This catch 22 situation aside, there are some other very logical, intellectual and methodological reasons for approaching ficto-criticism as a between practice. To understand the shift to ficto-critique and to explore its overcoding as postmodern, there needs to be some attention to, and consciousness of, the ways in which (primarily) fictional creative texts are now being read as examples of theoretical critique. Examining and considering these instances helps contextualise and understand the shift to ficto-critique across a range of disciplines. 

Contextualising the emergence of these changes to critical reading practices enables one to recognise them as not isolated incidents, but as reflective of wider social and cultural shifts that challenge and examine knowledge and the process of its production. Including these texts in an initial literary survey also helps demonstrate and understand how postmodern overcoding eradicates and suffocates so many differences and contradictions that arise in these varying ficto-critical texts. As Murphy and Barlett’s papers signal, there seems to be something peculiar to this milieu that is emerging, and resulting in, an increasing trend towards reading such texts as critique. The texts Murphy examines are, after all, labelled ecocriticism. Similar ecological concerns were—without doubt—expressed in earlier fictional texts. What is it, then, about this period in literary criticism (and beyond) that is resulting in the foregrounding of both fictional devices in non-fiction and non-fictional
critical aspects in fictional texts? This is a question that will be explored in the subsequent chapters that address Australian and Canadian ficto-criticism.

In another paper, another term arises in relation to critical fiction. In this instance, novels are again being read as criticism. Norma Bouchard in her paper titled “‘Critifictional’ Epistemes in Contemporary Literature: The Case of Foucault’s Pendulum,” discusses “critifiction,” which she argues is a sub-genre of the academic novel. In this paper Bouchard develops a lengthy argument for the inclusion of Umberto Eco’s novel Foucault’s Pendulum into this critifictional genre, a genre that she argues incorporates “novels written by British authors David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury” (474). In fact, Bouchard, quoting Siegfried Mews, defines critifiction as a new form of the academic novel, “penned by critics and professors of literature who consciously endeavour to combine critical theory and fictional practice by engaging in the production of both sorts of texts” (Bouchard 498). Despite the critifictional label implying hybridity, this definition maintains a separation between academic and creative genres. For example, the words “the production of both sorts of texts” imply that the combination of critical theory and fiction cannot be combined successfully within a single text. The combining of fiction and theory is carried out through an author who writes both, not through the recognition that a text can be both fictional and theoretical. Therefore, regardless of the implied similarities between ficto-criticism and critifiction—suggested by its hybrid label—the generic divide implied by Mews’ definition is inconsistent with ficto-critical practice. In other words, Bouchard uses critifiction to name this style of writing, but the definition does not imply genre blurring as the label would suggest. However, despite this anomaly in her paper, she is attempting to identify a form of writing that mixes fictional and non-fictional genres. For example, the academic novel implies the combining of academic interests and concerns with the novel form. Similarly, the term critifiction implies a kind of fictional writing that has, as its primary focus, the critique of something. According to Bouchard, in the case of Eco’s text, the focus of the critique enacted through the combination of critical theory and fiction, is deconstruction. Bouchard states:
Using a textual and intertextual approach, this essay establishes a metonymic relation between Eco’s recent theoretical stance against deconstruction and his latest novel. Eco’s major critical essays from the mid-eighties will provide the background to support a critifictional reading of *Foucault’s Pendulum*. (497)

Interestingly, deconstruction—a highly complex analytic procedure that disrupts the seeming continuity of the idealist tradition from Plato to Hegel—is often reduced to a form of poststructuralist theory, and then placed under the umbrella of postmodernism. Bouchard’s paper thus links academic novels, critifiction and postmodernism. To demonstrate further the easy conflation of poststructuralism, critifiction, and postmodernism, one need only look at the original text from which Bouchard borrowed the term. Federman’s monograph on critifiction is titled *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays*. As a result—and through these kinds of slippery associations—we find that another example of creative criticism is associated with postmodernism. Again, this occurs through the reduction of complex terms.

Bouchard’s paper on critifiction, therefore, is interesting for a number of reasons as it suggests several things worth emphasising about the supposed relationship between fictocriticism and postmodernism. For example, although it associates another potential ficto-critical form with a theory aligned with poststructuralism and thus postmodernism, the academic novels used as examples in this paper are, in fact, antagonistic to deconstruction (seen as an excess of theory). Put another way, the critifiction she describes critiques deconstruction and, as a result, does not seem celebratory of the radical nihilistic postmodernism deconstruction tends to be aligned with. In fact, according to Bouchard, these critifictional novels are parodying the so-called nihilism of deconstruction.40 There is, therefore, a contradiction. If Bouchard’s argument that these novels work to critique deconstruction is correct, here is another example of a creatively-critical (ficto-critical) form that cannot automatically be assumed to support postmodernism, even though it may display postmodern literary aesthetic traits. This scenario demonstrates that a more
complex approach must be applied to ficto-critical texts, one that can dialogically explore
the grey areas between polarised binary structures.

Although Bouchard quotes Mews for her definition of critifiction, the term actually comes
from Raymond Federman. This is an important detail since Federman’s definition of
critifiction contains a significant emphasis on self-reflexivity. For Federman, critifictional
discourse is one that is critical, fictitious and self-conscious. The importance of reflexivity
to his notion of critifiction is demonstrated rather than stated categorically. This he
achieves via both an explicit and implicit critique of traditional critical modes, which he
clearly reads as lacking self-reflexivity. In his essay “Critifiction: Imagination as
Playgerism,” Federman carries out an attack on normative criticism through his style of
ficto-critical writing. His critique appears to be based on an understanding of traditional
critical writing as limiting and reductive to the object of his attention. However, despite the
use of Federman’s self-conscious term critifiction, the novels Bouchard discusses as
examples of critifiction seem more about parodying or lampooning academic life and
intellectual fashions (such as deconstruction) than self-consciously examining their own
mode of production and authority. Significantly, the whole reasoning behind critifiction is
to develop a self-concious critical writing practice as a counter to normative critical
writing, seen as powerfully lacking self-consciousness. Bouchard acknowledges the
emphasis on lampooning in the academic novels she examines. For example, she cites
David Lodge who speaks of satirising and carnivalising in his academic novels the same
contemporary theories he employs in his academic work (499). Malcolm Bradbury’s Cuts
(1987), whilst not analysed by Bouchard, illustrates the lampooning of academic life and
intellectual pursuits that goes on in academic novels.41 For example, the main character of
Cuts is Henry Babbacombe. He is overtly satirised and stereotyped, as is the theory of
deconstruction (here interpreted banally as meaning everything is fictitious). Throughout
the novel there are numerous references to reality not existing at all, and there seems very
little evidence of self-reflexivity. In fact, the only trace of self-reflexivity is the emphasis
on the provisionality of knowledge, via the consistent talk about the unreality of reality.
For example, in the words of Babbacombe: “It was certainly a very mixed and funny sort of world, the modern world of today, and probably quite engrossing if you could find a way of writing about it without getting too involved in reality, which of course did not exist anyway” (Bradbury 79). As this quotation suggests, the main theme of this academic critifictional novel is to lampoon academics, their isolated and overly academic lives, and their fashionable theories that tend to become dogma. Therefore, any self-reflexivity achieved through the play on fictionalising one’s argument is undermined by the overarching attack on deconstruction (carried out in a very didactic manner). Similarly, the novel does not examine its own immersion in some powerful discourses as a means to represent and reconfirm a particular world view. There is also a difference between enacting a critique—as well as acknowledging the partiality of one’s perspective—through employing fictional devices, and merely playing on the notion that reality may be a fiction. The extreme satirising in such academic novels as *Cuts*, therefore, reflects and perpetuates popularised readings of postmoderism, and as a result can be read as a defensive move to counter what is perceived as the threat of postmodernism to our reality (and our understanding of how we make that reality mean something to us). What all this signals is the importance of reiterating the complexity of creatively critical genres, and the dangers of trying to capture and contain ficto-criticism under the heading of postmodernism. As many of the academic novels Bouchard describes as critifiction demonstrate, whilst they challenge a key poststructuralist theory—deconstruction—they still can employ aesthetic styles normally aligned with postmodernism. Some ficto-critical texts may challenge high theory, while others are heavily informed by contemporary theories.

Questions thus need to be raised regarding the increasing identification of these potential critical-theoretical fictions, and, as already signalled, why they are so easily and predominantly coded as postmodern. Much earlier texts—outside dominant conceptualisations of postmodernism as specific to a historical period—have played with and challenged generic boundaries and offered alternative forms of critique. Is the difference now that many of the emerging texts are more overtly conscious of language as
a system of meaning making? Or is it that as critics we are more attuned to reading in this way, reading texts as agents that create realities and influence their audience? This post semiotics self-consciousness around language and meaning might also explain the trend in academic writing, in a more candid self-conscious fashion, to explore both the critic and the writer’s relationship to their object of study. What seems consistent, however, in all of these examples of texts that lie between fiction and non-fiction, as well as the secondary texts that examine them, is a concern with generic conventions and the referentiality of language, which foregrounds their power to shape our reality.

Not surprisingly, where other novel-length (and primarily fictional) texts have been identified as a form of criticism—that is, as between fiction and criticism—the majority of secondary critical texts continue to mark them as postmodern. These fictional texts find themselves generically between for incorporating contemporary theories and enacting self-reflexivity through foregrounding the referentiality of language. Bartlett, Murphy and Bouchard are not the only writers to argue that such texts are criticism dressed up in fiction. Freedman also reads novel-length texts as criticism. It does indeed seem, therefore, that more academics are inclined to read largely fictional texts as alternative forms of criticism. For example, in her paper “Autobiographical Literary Criticism,” Freedman reads texts like Maxine Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior and China Men as representing “a paradigm shift in academic writing” (4). Similarly, Michael Hostein in his thought provokingly titled paper “Creative Writing as Comparative Criticism: Maxine Hong Kingston and the Vision of the Bicultural Writer,” draws a similar conclusion in relation to Kingston’s novels. What does this say about the state of criticism and academic writing when creative texts such as Hong Kingston’s are considered acts of criticism, and seen as a challenge to its traditional paradigm? One possible answer is that criticism—in its current dominant form—appears to be reaching a point of exhaustion: it no longer reflects the social and political reality of both the experiences of its readers or the texts that it wishes to explore.
Two other creative writers whose work is also imbued with out creative-critical acts, are Kathy Acker and Jeanette Winterson. Both writers cross generic boundaries and conventions, incorporate a high degree of intertextuality, and play on words, story structures and meanings to create alternative realities. Both also confront many cultural and social conventions in a wider sense. Like Costello, Coetzee’s character in *The Lives of Animals*, Winterson and Acker generate discomfort by transgressing societal rules. As in *The Lives of Animals*, these writers’ generic transgressions mirror their disruption of other conventions of polite ordered society. Acker does this with her colourful language and hyper-real pornographic scenes, and Winterson with her ambiguous sexuality and lesbian eroticism. Given the self-referentiality of their texts, their choice of material, and their challenge to generic conventions, several of their texts can be interpreted as acts of criticism. Their texts ask whose reality is being represented by mainstream literature; who makes the rules, both societal and generic; and most importantly who has the right to judge or interpret?42

Not surprisingly—given the characteristics of their writing—both Winterson and Acker’s work has, like ficto-criticism, been predominantly framed by postmodernism. A brief search through MLA’s electronic database for texts on Winterson reveals numerous secondary works that discuss her texts in relation to postmodernism. For example, Christy Burns describes Winterson as a “British postmodern author” in her paper “Fantastic Language: Jeanette Winterson’s Recovery of the Postmodern Word.” Burns states: “Like many British postmodern authors, Winterson is dissatisfied with mere realism, and she . . . would graft new possibilities onto the received social order” (291-2). Emphasising Winterson’s metafictive interruptions (“I’m telling you stories. Trust me.”), Burns foregrounds the postmodern characteristics of Winterson’s Romantic prose. Noel King, however, goes even further in framing Acker’s work. According to King, Acker’s writing constitutes both a post-critical and postmodern act. In “Kathy Acker on the Loose,” he says her experimental fictions seem close to postmodern practices in the other arts (“Kathy Acker on the Loose” 335). Floating in an orbit of “pomo echoes,” King says, Acker’s
“‘ficto-critical’ mixing of genres makes [her] a writer whose work pushes the boundaries of what we recognise as literary” (‘Kathy Acker on the Loose’ 334).

If predominantly creative novel-length texts such as Acker’s and Winterson’s—and indeed Hong Kingston’s—are to be considered within the ficto-critical space between, then ficto-critique does not seem to be limited to a certain length of text. At least it does not in this open conceptualisation of this hybrid form that, by its very transgeneric nature, demands a certain open-ended-ness and flexible approach. This is, after all, the (generic) space between. Quite logically, therefore, writing-between includes and mixes many literary forms: script, prose, poetry, non-fiction, theory and autobiography. As demonstrated by the literature thus far, ficto-criticism is indeed a slippery and contradictory category. Yet, for this very reason—its conceptualisation—length is an issue for ficto-criticism. If one places the emphasis on criticism (ficto-criticism as an act of criticism that plays with other genres) then the length of the text becomes a defining characteristic. Notably, the majority of secondary texts and anthologies examined so far focus on texts of a certain essayistic length. This implies that ficto-critical acts are generally seen in opposition to the academic article, and this is a common view of ficto-critical texts. However, this conceptualisation enacts another binary that distracts from ficto-criticism’s between nature. For example, in Estranging the Familiar: Toward a Revitalised Critical Thinking, Douglas Atkins establishes the essay (in its original Montaigne formula) as very different—indeed as an alternative to—the critical academic article. Whilst suggesting that ficto-criticism disrupts traditional critical conventions, this conceptualisation still maintains the traditional divide (at least in literary criticism) between the interpretative text (of a certain essayistic length) and the text to be interpreted (novel-length, poetry/script, etcetera). In broader terms, if seen as mainly critical and therefore constituting a certain essay length, ficto-criticism loses much of its revolutionary power as the boundaries between object and subject of analysis are left in place. When considered as only being defined as a certain length or kind of text, the generic border crossing that ficto-criticism is focused on achieving is thus left relatively unrecognised. Of course, other factors figure in deciding what length piece
of writing works for criticism. For example, the conventions of academic journals and conferences affect the length of critical writing. These conventions of space and time close off texts into neat manageable endings, producing a finished piece in its own right, not a work in process to be continued, or an unruly long text. Significantly, this reflects the conventions of normative academic writing: a form judged on its ability to contain its subject/material and lead it to a logical conclusion via a persuasive linear argument.

Therefore, whilst questioning academic convention is without doubt a major focus of ficto-critique, thinking it through with one’s eyes focused on the critical aspects results in closing down writing-between much in the same way that (over) coding it as postmodern does. As writing-between, ficto-critical acts of creative-criticism spiral outward to include a myriad of texts of varying lengths and in differing forms. As this chapter demonstrates, confining ficto-critique to a narrow range of texts is not only impossible in the face of the examples arising, but illogical philosophically speaking in imagining what a space between may encompass. In subsequent chapters the open approach to ficto-criticism established in this chapter is refined as the thesis begins to explore more fully the implications of this labile space. Yet, as indicated earlier, to enable an imagining of the space between and its wider social and cultural influences, it is necessary to first examine both the varying forms and contexts in which these texts emerge and the ways in which they are named and discussed.

Given the shift in criticism and academic non-fiction to creative experimentation, and the increasing tendency in criticism to interpret fictional texts as instances of criticism, it is no surprise that many of the writers engaging in this ficto-critical discourse are creative writers. These are creative writers in their own right, or academics who write creatively for an audience outside the university. As a result, one of the terms that is used as a label for ficto-critics is poet-critic. In America this is a term that turns up repeatedly in relation to creative-criticism. In An Alchemy of Genres: Cross-Genre Writing by American Feminist Poet-Critics Freedman describes a new critical mode that runs parallel with other ficto-
critical practices. She speaks of a criticism that blurs boundaries: crossing the personal/private with the public; body with mind; subjective with objective; a process of becoming both/and not either/or. The primary writers Freedman engages with in this book and identifies as poet-critics are: Adrienne Rich, Marge Piercy, Susan Griffin, Alice Walker, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherie Moraga, Maxine Hong Kingston and Louise Bernikow. Whilst Freedman is concerned with feminist articulations of poet-criticism, the term poet-critic is not limited to women writers. Freedman describes it as a feminine form of writing open to both men and women, one grounded in a situated/bodily knowledge that breaks hierarchies, is personal, and open-ended:

Writers in this mode use language not to gain power but to create intimacy, intimacy often achieved through self-reflexive statements on the why and how of their practice. Such metadiscursive comments commonly announce the substitution of unconventional or multiple genres for the traditional essay, argue for personal over fixed terms. (An Alchemy of Genres 3-4)

Therefore, like the ecocriticism and other forms of ficto-critique already discussed, criticism written by poet-critics offers a challenge to authority, fixed centres and meanings. Since this is also a common theme of poststructuralist and postmodernist discourses, the trend in secondary texts to align ficto-critical practices with the decentering project of the posts is a logical move. To demonstrate the ease with which this is done one need only look at the term post-criticism. Post-criticism illustrates just how easy it is to draw an alliance between creative-critical experimental writing, postmodernism and poststructuralism. This term comes from a paper on ficto-criticism by Gregory Ulmer in the very well-known book on postmodernism: The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture (1983). In “The Object of Post-criticism,” Ulmer explores the contemporary trend in critical writing to problematise the representation of the object of study. Given that this was an early text to address creatively-critical texts and that it appears in a popular book, this article by Ulmer is pivotal in the discourse of ficto-criticism. Through what seems to be a Lyotardian prism, postmodernism is read as a continuation of the avant-garde practices of high modernism. Ulmer examines the work of Derrida, Barthes and Benjamin
in the area of post-criticism, and their use of high modernist techniques such as collage and
montage; Derrida’s *Glas* (1974) is drawn out as one of Ulmer’s main examples of post-
criticism. Ulmer’s use of the prefix post to identify this trend in contemporary criticism—
by writers associated with poststructuralism—appears therefore as not only a logical move
but also ultimately the right move. Despite his implied application of a Lyotardian model
of postmodernism, his use of the term post-criticism to describe these playful, creatively
critical texts tends to lend itself to less sophisticated readings of postmodernism as very
different from modernism, indeed, beyond modernism.

The centrality of Ulmer’s paper as one of the key texts on experimental creative-criticism
simultaneously explains the predominance of the posts in secondary texts that examine
ficto-critical discourse, and illustrates the easy and superficial compatibility of these
varying forms with dominant or popular understandings of postmodernism and
poststructuralism. The trend toward creative-critical texts, however, does not necessarily
indicate the dissolution of criticism any more than post-modernism represents the end or
passing of all aspects of modernism. In other words, the prefix of post enacts a binary. A
binary that is not only problematic for representing a form that is between, but also
problematic since it works as a force that distracts from the power of ficto-criticism. As
this chapter has demonstrated, a disparate selection of hybrid texts fit in the space of ficto-
criticism, and many have contradictory elements. They do not fit together homogeneously
with each other, nor do they necessarily meet all the formal characteristics identified as
postmodern. Yet binarised readings of poststructuralism and postmodernism—as refuting
all truth, value and reality—are often applied directly to ficto-critical practices, or
implicitly through easy critical association with popular notions of postmodernism. Put
another way, despite the range and scope of these ficto-critical texts, one thing they do
seem to have in common is their external identification as manifestations of
postmodernism.
Even Freedman, in her overtly feminist study *An Alchemy of Genres*, is compelled to acknowledge the connections between women poet-critics and poststructuralism. Freedman highlights some of the commonalities between the two projects. Quoting Terry Eagleton she observes, “there is no clear division for poststructuralism between ‘criticism’ and ‘creation’: both are subsumed into writing as such” (qtd. in Freedman 91). Her inclusion of this reference implies the influence of poststructuralist discourse on feminist poet-critics, thus subtly eliding their differences. This is an effect of academic convention. Ficto-critical texts that explore the powers of discourse, blur categories and acknowledge the social construction of the subject appear to lock in unison with postmodern discourse. Subsequently, and given the dominance of postmodernism as a model to explain the conditions of life in the twentieth-century, ficto-criticism has become—overwhelmingly—a postmodern phenomenon.

What makes it so necessary to acknowledge the influences of postmodernism—even within feminist focused texts like Freedman’s—are the prevailing conventions of scholarship. It is necessary to show that one is aware of and conversant with contemporary intellectual theories and movements; to leave out postmodernism in a discussion on ficto-critical texts would surely be to leave oneself open to criticism. One should know the field of thought relevant to one’s own research interests. But what is the cost of the adherence to such conventions—at the cost of alternative paths of discovery and knowledge? As demonstrated, postmodernism clearly emerges as a very relevant frame to explain and contextualise experimental critical moves. Yet this process of codification—ficto-criticism stamped postmodern—ironically places postmodern decentring in a central position, leaving little room for other influences to surface in any meaningful way.

Even French writers like Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, who clearly incorporate poetics into their highly theoretical texts, find their women centred work subsumed under the framework of poststructuralism, thus becoming another example of the link between ficto-critical practices and postmodernism. These writers have certainly
been influential on other women writers interested in writing against masculine literary traditions, yet they too are easily reclaimed and categorised under postmodernism—in a broad sense—through their theoretical focus on language (via semiotics) and the style of their writing. Their capture under the large banners of poststructuralism and postmodernism tends to override the political feminist impetus of their work. Cixous’ writing, for example, has been described as critical fiction or fictional criticism by Verena Andermatt Conley, and it displays all the characteristics of postmodernism:

Postmodernism . . . is committed to modes of thinking and representation which emphasize fragmentations, discontinuities and incommensurable aspects of a given object, from intellectual systems to architecture . . . Postmodernist analysis is often marked by forms of writing that are more literary, certainly more self-reflexive, than is common in critical writing—the critic as self-conscious creator of new meanings upon the ground of the object of study, showing that object no special respect. It prefers montage to perspective, intertextuality to referentiality, “bits-as-bits” to unified totalities. (Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies 234)

Compare, for example, Cixous’ Rootprints, published in English in 1997, with the postmodernism described above. Rootprints is fragmentary, self-referential (through its autobiographical approach), intertextual, and unresolved. It also visually reflects this approach as passages of text are reproduced in different fonts, and in some cases separated off in boxes. The challenge enacted by writers such as Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva to what is popularly identified as the tradition of modernism demonstrates the easy application of the discourse of postmodernism to their work.

Another term that arises to label experimental criticism as postmodern is the American expression theoretical fiction. It, too, finds itself in bed with postmodernism. Steven Shaviro—a literary, cultural and film theorist—uses it to identify his particular irreverent approach to writing criticism or commentary on contemporary culture. Doom Patrols: A Theoretical Fiction about Postmodernism (1997) is an exemplary text as it again illustrates
the easy alliance between postmodernism and critical acts that defy traditional paradigms of knowledge and the authority it garners. *Doom Patrols* is an “in your face,” “no holes barred” critical narrative. Very much a fast-moving critical pulp fiction, Shaviro deliberately and provocatively invokes popular cultural icons as a model for his critical text. His title, for example, comes from the popular American comic *DOOM PATROL*. This invocation of his critical text as a comic book simultaneously pokes fun at the seriousness of normative critical texts, and his own culturally and historically placed text that attempts to describe our current milieu. According to Shaviro: “*Doom Patrols* is not a work of historical scholarship or objective description or ideology critique or in-depth interpretation. I have scrupulously followed Oscar Wilde’s two fine maxims, that the critic should avoid ‘careless habits of accuracy,’ and that e [sic] should ‘strive to see the object as itself it really is not’” (preface, no page number given). Speaking of the comic *DOOM PATROL* (yet invoking his own textual production through the shared title) he also says: “these comic books aren’t made to last. They are cheap commodities, printed in limited quantities on low grade paper, designed for rapid turnover and almost instantaneous obsolescence” (3). By beginning his text with a discussion on *DOOM PATROLS* (the comic) and its transient significance as one of many popular cultural possibilities, Shaviro sets up (for those not initiated into the ficto-critical world) the context in which to read his text. He is not offering the definitive or authoritative (grand) narrative on postmodernism (or anything else for that matter). As he states in the Preface: “This book is a theoretical fiction, because I treat discursive ideas and arguments in a way analogous to how a novelist treats characters and events” (no page number given). Consistent with this approach, Shaviro titles each of his chapters with the name of a celebrity. For example, there are chapters titled: “Bill Gates,” “Andy Warhol,” “Dean Martin,” “Cindy Sherman” and “Walt Disney.” Shaviro’s shifting, multiply-positioned-person narrative therefore mirrors the postmodern fascination with personalities. However, as he also suggests, these are not real identities but singularities; they are fictional constructs even though they ostensibly refer to actual individuals. In this way, Shaviro’s theoretical-fiction—although labelled by him as autobiography—differs from the autobiographical criticism described
earlier. It differs as he, much more overtly, problematises in a self-conscious fashion the self/ves constructed through his narrative and evokes an identity much less reliant on notions of a stable or fixed self/identity. One way he does this is through the use of varying gender neutral pronouns like “e,” “em” and “eir.” In other words, Shaviro draws attention to the kind of self/ves productively growing from his theoretical fiction: self/ves that is/are then actively developed in contradictory and confusing ways, undercutting the reader’s expectations of not only fixed identity rooted in a tangible reality, but also literature. For example, his Preface ends with: “Needless to say, this book is autobiographical. Every word.” This final introductory statement—foregrounded by “needless”—works to throw into sharp relief the conventional generic expectations of readers of autobiography (that it is true/based on truth), and also the exact opposite (that it is not true/maybe a lie or fiction). With this same statement Shaviro also invokes the conventions of realism. He achieves this by directly addressing the reader in the style of early realist novelists. (“Dear reader, this is how it all happened.”) By undermining the truth value of such statements, he highlights the increasingly cliched nature of conventional generic practice, questioning truth itself and the rules we know the world by. He achieves this destabilising effect for the reader by simultaneously undermining and reaffirming the trust and intimacy between the narrator and reader, suggesting that perhaps the generic contract will not be honoured. (This text is not autobiography, not non-fiction, not fiction and not a comic book.) His theoretical fiction is therefore a shifting text, based on neither a fixed identity as the story keeps changing, or a knowable reality. Shaviro’s book does not reproduce the stable, argumentative, convincing voice of normative critical discourse, assured and reaffirming a hypothesis. Nor is it a typical fictionalised narrative. Doom Patrols therefore achieves a sophisticated and subtle level of self-reflexivity, a self-consciousness that requires a reader versed in the nuances of literary theory and tradition to be fully realised. The alignment of his text with postmodernism through its subtitle (A Theoretical Fiction about Postmodernism), and the implied statement in this subtitle that the style of writing is consistent with his subject, makes clear that theoretical fictions or creative-critical texts develop out of an engagement with the ethos of postmodernism.
One final example, which concretes the overwhelming presence of postmodernism in the international discourse of ficto-critical texts, is the work of Ihab Hassan. Significantly, his concept of the paraliterary irrefutably illustrates the connection between postmodernism and the discourse of ficto-critical practice. In his writing, creative-criticism—here labelled paracriticism—is tied to the development of postmodernism. In _Paracriticism: Seven Speculations of the Times_ (1979) Hassan’s paracritical essays concern themselves with the role of criticism in a postmodern context. He asks: “When will criticism confront the implications of its own queries, and what then will it become?” (xv). In his preface to the collection he states his desire to “break out of criticism,” and that he does not know into what genre his paracriticism—his alternative critical form—fits (xi). In other words, Hassan’s paracriticism is between genres, as suggested by the prefix para. According to the _Oxford English Dictionary_ para has:

the sense ‘by the side of, beside,’ whence ‘alongside of, by, past, beyond,’ etc. In composition it had the same senses, with such cognate adverbial ones as ‘to one side, aside, amiss, faulty, irregular, disordered, improper, wrong;’ also expressing subsidiary relation, alteration, perversion, simulation, etc.

Hassan’s paracriticism is imagined, thus, as a hybrid, suggestive of a number of other postmodern (non)genres including Shaviro’s irreverent theoretical fiction and Ulmer’s notion of post-criticism. Hassan’s paracriticism, like ficto-criticism, mixes personal and creative genres with criticism. A number of his paracritical speculations also play with text on the page, like poetry, defying more conservative critical models. Speaking of chapter two of his book _The Postmodern Turn_, he says: “This paracritical style of the chapter deforms the page, hoping less to mime its subject than to suggest alternative critical discourses” (xiii). Significantly, Hassan parallels the development of postmodernism and paracriticism (as an alternative critical form); here postmodernism is a place where “literature and criticism constantly blend” (_The Postmodern Turn_ xiii).
Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated ficto-criticism—imagined as writing *between*—constitutes a disparate and labile collection of texts. Although imagined and conceptualised as a symptom of postmodernism there are many elements of ficto-critical texts that run contrary to its popular understanding. These instances, as in the example of Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals*, tend to be overcome by the anxieties and debates around postmodernism. These texts do display postmodern aesthetic markers, yet there are often opposing characteristics that speak of other influences. As I have shown, some ficto-critical texts react against high theory (read poststructuralism), while others like Shaviro’s *Doom Patrols* actively acknowledge the influence of poststructuralist theories. Similarly, the return in academic texts to more personalised, autobiographical and situated critical writing—again effectively a form of ficto-criticism—often seems reliant on a unified individual, not the fragmentated, fluid and unfixed self equated with postmodernism.

Despite this, autobiographical criticism is often aligned with a postmodern fascination with personalities. Interestingly, the same people will critique these varying texts, as they are positioned between fiction and non-fiction, for contradictory reasons suggesting some inconsistency in how they are read and perceived. For example, as Cathy Davidson has observed in “Critical Fictions,” the use of personal detail in criticism may find itself disliked by the same people who reproach academics for being too jargon-orientated and out of touch with reality (1071). What they are objecting to is the challenge to convention implied by the inclusion of the personal. Since postmodernism and ficto-critical texts both question authority, value, representation and meaning they tend to be conflated. The application of postmodernism has, therefore, resulted in a diverse range of experimental ficto-critical forms being effectively lumped under one determinate label—or order-word—crushing other potential readings of this ficto-critical turn. Subsequently, given the debates and anxieties around postmodernism, ficto-criticism is often read as either all radical and challenging or dismissed as not rigorous, intellectual and disciplined. However, as I will show in the chapters that follow, ficto-criticism is actually somewhere between these two poles, and has much more to do with postcolonial discourse than
postmodernism. In subsequent chapters the open approach to ficto-criticism established in this chapter is refined as the thesis begins to explore theoretically the implications of this labile space. As Freedman has noted:

Perhaps the more marginalized one feels, the more one wants to blur the division between public and private life and language and to resist both dualism and separatism by crossing from language to language, genre to genre, discipline to discipline, writer to reader. (*An Alchemy of Genres* 71)

The postmodern/poststructuralist label, however, has reinforced a hierarchy of order and value—reflected in binary pairs like masculine/feminine and west/east—in relation to a style of writing that attempts to critique such systems of domination. Indeed, the binary of modernism versus postmodernism limits the revolutionary impetus of a form that must remain open to experimentation as a space between if it is to be able to imagine a different relation to the other.
This title is borrowed, in part, from a work by artist Richard Tipping. His 1992 screen print shows a typically stylised sign warning of danger. The entire sign reads: DANGER: Postmodernism Doesn’t Give A Flying Duck. I would add to this, in the context of the argument of this chapter, “and neither does ficto-criticism.” However, as will become clear, divisive statements such as this, of course, mask much more complex meanings and relations.

As Hélène Cixous points out in her creative-critical paper “Sorties”, “Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it transports us, in all of its forms, wherever a discourse is organised. The same thread, or double thread leads us, whether we are reading or speaking, through literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation, of reflection” (1975: 90).

The kinds of debates and reactions that ficto-criticism generates— as demonstrated with The First Stone and The Lives of Animals—are parallel with the rhetoric surrounding the debates of the “culture wars” (witnessed in recent years in theoretical and critical discourse).

I have taken these commonly understood and general markers of postmodernism from The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought.

This notion of literary self-consciousness as the marker of postmodern literature comes from Linda Hutcheon. Significantly, in The Canadian Postmodern she suggests that the need to situate oneself as a critic is also a postmodern phenomenon (1988: viii).

Significantly, however, it might be the conditions of postmodernism that makes these texts more visible as one becomes sensitised to, and begins to recognise, the border crossing signs of this dynamic (non) category of ficto-critique.

See my paper "Ficto-criticism: THE END of criticism as we write it?" Here I argue that the emergence of ficto-criticism, rather than suggesting the end of criticism, is about problematising the critical act, and challenging traditional criticism’s power to present the truth (1998).

For a more complete discussion on the break down of ethnographic authority in the twentieth-century see James Clifford’s “On Ethnographic Authority” in The Predicament of Culture (1988) published by Harvard UP.

The influence of modern ethnography on self-referential criticism has been acknowledged; see Elspeth Probyn’s “True Voice and Real People: The ‘problem’ of the autobiographical in cultural studies” (1993:105), and Peter Brooks in “Aesthetics and Ideology: What Happened to Poetics?” (1994: 520).

For an interesting example of anthropological methodology that shows the breakdown of scientific objectivity in the discipline see Sex, Sexuality, and the Anthropologist (1999). In this collection anthropologists describe the experience of having to acknowledge that their hosts see them as gendered and sexual beings, instead of objective observers.

Taussig who was born in Australia, immigrated to America in 1969, and identifies with the term ficto-criticism. This is one of the few examples of ficto-criticism being used outside Canada and Australia. Taussig’s friendship with the Australian ficto-critical advocate Stephen Muecke might explain his use of the term.

For example, Richard and Sally Price’s book, Enigma Variations, is likened on the back cover to two well-known books that have been identified as postmodern: The Recognitions and The Crying of Lot 49.

See Ross Chambers’ book Loiterature (1999), for example. His book examines what he describes as the Western literary tradition of “loiterature” (diervesive, wayward texts that celebrate failure). Chambers argues for a literary criticism that is consistent with this literary tradition and which is against closure and control. He uses the metaphor of canine philosophy (what humans can learn from dogs) to argue for a form of literary criticism which embraces digression.

In “The Pressure of the Unconscious Upon the Image,” Susan Dermody argues for a model of documentary that is neither factual or fictional. In keeping with her argument she writes in a manner that is sketchy and open, and critiques scholarly writing for maintaining an absent self. In effect, her article is ficto-critical. (1995: 292-310). For a discussion on self-reflexivity in documentary film, which deals with the issues of “ficto-criticism,” see Jeanne Allen’s “Self-Reflexivity in Documentary” (1991: 103-10). Also see “Performing Documentary” by Bill Nichols (1994: 92-106). Nichols explores examples of documentary that defies generic borders much in the same way as performative writing or ficto-criticism.

See Della Pollock’s “Performativ Writing” in The Ends of Performance (1998). The kind of performative writing she argues for is ficto-critical.

See Lee Hoamacki’s Stumbling Toward Justice: Stories of Place (1999). In a series of highly personalised narratives, Hoamacki, in a philosophical treatise, critiques the notion of progress. Former Dominican priest, political scientist and subsistence farmer, Hoamacki says of his text: “I must discover and improvise my own story as I go along.”

See Chapter Four and Five for more examples of ficto-criticism in the field of visual arts.
one is already a well-established author. Jarratt is specifically talking about male writers who “out” Veeser in plausibility of their scene and cohort which required an objective style” (1991: 15). Similarly, H. Aram criticism: “Academic women wanting jobs and tenure (and most of us did) conformed to the ‘critical fondly believe, from being careless or subjective or unfair” (1990: 27).

To the fiction of completeness and coverage that the academic style preserves. This style protects us, we scholar—to be able to read everything that has ever been written about a subject. According to her: “we cling to the fiction of completeness and coverage that the academic style preserves. This style protects us, we fandom believe, from being careless or subjective or unfair” (1990: 27).

Another example is Christine Brooke-Rose’s 1991 book Stories, Theories and Things, published by Cambridge UP.

Patricia Williams also surfaces as influential for several Canadian ficto-critics. Her earlier book, The Alchemy of Race and Rights (1992), is also written in the same personal style.

Donna Haraway’s book Simians, Cyborgs, and Women discusses the notion of situated knowledge. The cyborg writing she describes could well be taken as a form of ficto-criticism for its hybridity, partiality and embodied view. For example, when she describes cyborg writing she could well be speaking, in this instance, of the hybrid work by Williams:

“...”

The politics of the bibliography is one thing that cannot be overlooked when examining ficto-criticism, as it is a useful tool for thinking through ficto-critique and its role in the academy and traditional pedagogy. In “Experimental Critical Writing” Mariana Torgovnick speaks of the impossibility—as today’s scholar—to be able to read everything that has ever been written about a subject. According to her: “we cling to the fiction of completeness and coverage that the academic style preserves. This style protects us, we fondly believe, from being careless or subjective or unfair” (1990: 27).

In “Getting Personal” Miller discusses the pressure to conform to an objective model of academic criticism: “Academic women wanting jobs and tenure (and most of us did) conformed to the ‘critical plausibility’ of their scene and cohort which required an objective style” (1991: 15). Similarly, H. Aram Veeser in Confessions of the Critics quotes Susan Jarratt who signals that writing personally is easier when one is already a well-established author. Jarratt is specifically talking about male writers who “out”...
themselves as a “feminine writer” yet this might also be applied to more established women writers who have more freedom to experiment.

34 Despite numerous publications that cite very early examples of metafiction, such as *Tristram Shandy*, metafiction does not escape being theorised and explained as postmodern.

35 This can be seen in a variety of texts from advertisements for pizza to Hollywood blockbusters and highly successful situation comedies like *Seinfeld*.

36 See H. Aram Veeser in *Confessions of the Critics*: He states that “confessional criticism means drafting new rules for judging scholarship, ranking journals, and preserving decorum, etiquette, and style” (1996: xi).

37 The ramifications of ficto-criticism’s impact on pedagogy are not addressed in any detail in this thesis, since this is outside the scope of the project. However, it this would make a very interesting and worthwhile line of investigation particularly if interest in ficto-criticism continues.

38 Interestingly, Freedman in *An Alchemy of Genres*, talks of feminist poet-critical writing (another term that stands in for ficto-criticism) as “ecological” in the sense that it reuses, transforms and incorporates many voices (1992: 108-110).

39 According to Stanley Trachtenberg in his review of Federman’s book *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays*, critifiction is when art becomes a “participatory exercise often merging criticism with fiction in a single form” (1994: 858). This confirms Federman’s intention that critifiction is a hybrid generic form.

40 In an interview with Richard Kearney, Derrida critiques the way deconstruction has been taken up in English speaking universities (as has poststructuralism generally) to mean that there is no truth. Derrida states: “I totally refuse the label of nihilism” (1984: 124). See *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage* published by Manchester UP, 1984.

41 This novel is not addressed by Bouchard, however, she does look at Bradbury’s other academic novels and this one, published in 1987, fits well into the time frame she establishes for critifictional academic texts. Bouchard identifies a number of academic novels “written from the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s by British authors David Lodge and Malcom Bradbury” as examples of the academic critifictional novel (1995: 497).

42 See Winterson’s recent book *The. Powerbook* (2000). In this text she makes a clear connection between technological developments and their impact on narrative conventions. Like many of her books, *The. Powerbook* is highly self-reflexive, unravelling the narrative conventions of story telling. Her book can be read as an act of theoretical criticism through the constant self-commentary, critically engaging with her narrative and narrative traditions. Changing the story and challenging the ending Winterson breaks narrative convention by telling it differently. Here, however, she draws a parallel between technological developments such as the internet and email, and the obvious narrative challenges that a rhizomatic and data-filled world presents to all those familiar stories of our culture, worn through with use.
CHAPTER FOUR
BECOMING-WOMAN:
AUSTRALIAN FICTO-CRITICISM

To extract the concepts which correspond to a multiplicity is to trace the lines of which it is made up, to determine the nature of these lines, to see how they become entangled, connect, bifurcate, avoid or fail to avoid the foci. These lines are true becomings, which are distinct not only from unities, but from the history in which they are developed. Multiplicities are made up of becomings without history, of individuation without subject (the way in which a river, a climate, an event, a day, an hour of the day, is individualized). (Deleuze and Parnet viii)

INTRODUCTION

Although in Canada the term ficto-criticism is limited to a handful of writers, in particular Aritha van Herk, in Australia the term has currency as the label to identify creative-critical writing more broadly.¹ This makes the Australian published discourse on ficto-criticism unique since it is the only English speaking country where one term has gained substantial recognition in literary and academic circles.² Whilst this recognition tends to be limited to the fields of literature, cultural studies and the arts, it remains meaningful that the term “ficto-criticism” emerged in this country with some currency. The fact that its validity has more recently become the topic of some heated debate does not detract from the significance of the Australian ficto-critical phenomenon.³ The precarious position of the term illustrates ficto-criticism’s between-ness, at once recognised as viable and under contestation. The story of how this one term rose to dominance is significant, as I believe it demonstrates something fundamental about ficto-criticism. To reiterate the Deleuzian terms discussed in Chapter Two, ficto-criticism should be seen as a potential line of flight or molecular revolution, that desires to challenge the molar hole of normative critical writing. In this equation molar corresponds to structure, whilst molecular corresponds to flows. What forces caused the establishment of such a genre in Australia, and what does
this process reveal about the revolutionary capacity of a minor literary form such as ficto-
criticism? These are questions that are explored in this chapter.

Continuing from Chapter Two, which outlined the Deleuzian framework chosen to
elucidate the issues surrounding ficto-criticism, the present chapter further explores the
applicability of Deleuzian theory to ficto-critical practice. This time, however, it is
undertaken primarily in relation to a specific concept: the theory of becoming. This theory
is engaged with in this chapter to advance that in order to maintain its revolutionary
potential ficto-criticism must imitate the movement that constitutes becoming—at both the
levels of practice and its conceptualisation. As a minoritarian practice—or minor
literature—ficto-critical writing must refuse the magisterial position and colonising
practices of normative academic writing; it must remain in contact with/as the other. In
other words, when it solidifies into a practice with leading figures, codes and conventions,
ficto-criticism cannot help but lose its radical political edge and, indeed, its relevance.

This chapter thus encompasses a diverse range of material and purposes. It explores the
history of ficto-critical practices in Australia, and critically introduces the concept-tool of
becoming. In particular, the notion of becoming-woman, which is, according to Deleuze
and Guattari, the becoming that all becomeings must first pass through. In this chapter the
introduction of becoming-woman is timed strategically, deliberately intertwined with the
history of the term “ficto-criticism” in Australia. Rather than separating and distilling the
theory as the analytic framework at the beginning, this approach is consistent with my
understanding of the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari and how they envisioned its use:
more like a tool than a systematic and inflexible methodology. My application of their
theory thus functions to reiterate my reading of the concept-tool of becoming by
highlighting some true lines of ficto-critical flight, that is, those not incorporated into the
official history. However, this application is also pragmatic. Not surprisingly, as I will
demonstrate, the texts one discovers on the margins of Australian ficto-critical discourse
are those that embrace the movement of becoming. This contextualised use of a Deleuzian
concept, therefore, simultaneously reveals the similarities between Deleuze and Guattari’s approach, especially their notion of theory as a tool-kit, and ficto-critical practice. As Michel Foucault has written, when one applies theoretical concepts as if they were a tool-kit—rather than a system—they become powerful instruments able to reveal localised power struggles. When theory is applied as a tool-kit the analysis also becomes historically grounded and detailed, since it can only be carried out step-by-step (Foucault 145). Ficto-criticism, after all, seeks to collapse the distinction between disciplines and genres such as theory or criticism, on the one hand, and creative writing or fiction, on the other: at its best it is a means to explore the power relations between the self and other in a specific context.

Given these considerations, I begin this chapter by mapping the history of the term’s use in Australia, spiralling out to explore a range of ficto-critical texts that may, or, may not, identify as ficto-critical. Ficto-criticism, the word, thus functions at two levels here. Firstly, it works at the level of nomenclature, and so I examine the term’s deployment in Australia, and, secondly, it represents writing that is identifiable as ficto-criticism. As foregrounded by Deleuze, true becomings are distinct not just from unities, but from the history in which they are developed. The Australian genealogy of the word will therefore work as the initial part of the chapter’s narrative. Later, alternative histories and framings of ficto-criticism in Australia—as a practice (unlabelled and unnamed)—are imagined.

Stephen Muecke, Noel King and postmodernism

Like the international discourse of creative-critical or post-critical acts, ficto-criticism in Australia is strongly associated with postmodernism. What is significant in Australia, however, is how two writers in particular influenced the rise of ficto-criticism as a known practice—with postmodernism as its theoretical framework. This phenomenon can be explained by examining the earliest known reference to the term in Australia: Stephen Muecke and Noel King’s “seminal” 1991 paper titled “On Ficto-Criticism,” published in The Australian Book Review. The alleged centrality of this paper—that is, its construction as the first on ficto-criticism—shows the process through which these authors become the
“Kings” of Australian ficto-criticism. It also shows how ficto-criticism became known in Australia as an effect of postmodernism. Later in this chapter I question Muecke and King’s reign over Australian ficto-criticism and, as a result, more broadly the dominance of postmodernism over creative-critical writing. However, as I first need to establish their position I therefore begin by discussing Muecke and King’s paper “On Ficto-Criticism,” as a means to map their use of the term “ficto-criticism.”

The first and most significant reference to ficto-criticism in the Muecke and King paper is to a statement by Fredric Jameson. From a published interview, they cite Jameson talking about a kind of fictionalised criticism. He is quoted as saying:

> It is very clear that there has been a flowing together of theory and criticism. It seems that theory can’t exist without telling little narrative stories and then at this point of criticism, criticism seems very close to simply telling stories. It is an advanced and energetic form of conceptual criticism. (9)

These words from Jameson are used to explicate ficto-criticism, the term that Muecke and King establish here to identify this creatively critical practice. They also make reference to Rosalind Krauss’ term paraliterature, which is used to describe a seemingly parallel form of writing that deliberately blurs the distinction between literature and literary-criticism (Kerr, “Ficto-criticism, the “Doubtful Category” 93). Notably, paraliterature, which at many points appears to be almost interchangeable with ficto-criticism, continues Muecke and King’s emphasis on the critical aspect of creative-critical texts. In this sense, they do not focus on the fictional characteristics of ficto-criticism; it is the contamination of the critical text with fiction that fascinates them. Although Muecke and King do not quote directly from Krauss on paraliterature, they not only invoke her term but also collage some of her words into their text when they discuss Barthes’ more recent work (as well as Derrida’s). In her article Krauss states:

> [Barthes’ more recent work] cannot be called criticism, but it cannot, for that matter be called not-criticism either. Rather, criticism finds itself caught in a
dramatic web of many voices, citations, asides, divagations. And what is created, as in the case of much of Derrida, is a kind of paraliterature. (292)

This is, then, how Muecke and King construct ficto-criticism and these references to Krauss and Jameson are significant, as they have informed the visible (that is, published) discourse of Australian ficto-criticism. In particular, Muecke and King’s paper has strongly influenced the production of an Australian ficto-critical practice that can only be couched in terms of postmodernism. As their references to Derrida, Barthes and Krauss demonstrate, ficto-criticism is conceptualised here within in a postmodern and poststructuralist context. Krauss’ article is, after all, titled “Poststructuralism and the Paraliterary,” and not unlike the broader field of international ficto-criticism, the label of poststructuralism in this context comes to signify postmodernism. Whilst postmodernism and poststructuralism are not one and the same these two words and movements are often conflated, with poststructuralism being broadly associated with the postmodern moment (Wolfreys et al). Significantly, Krauss’ text demonstrates the way in which the reduction of complex theories and positioning(s) occurs. Derrida certainly would not appreciate being identified as simply a poststructuralist, yet here Krauss has grouped him with another contemporary French theorist, Barthes, under the umbrella of poststructuralism. Whilst she is not wrong to do so, many of the subtleties of Derrida’s work are lost. She further demonstrates the collapse of postmodernism with poststructuralism in her paper when she states that postmodern literature is the critical text wrought into a paraliterary form. Krauss states: “what is clear is that Barthes and Derrida are the writers, not the critics, that students now read” (Krauss 295).

In the same way, and in keeping with this postmodern theme, Muecke and King’s paper opens with a quote from Don DeLillo’s *White Noise*, a text renowned for its postmodern characteristics. Similarly, in the interview with Jameson, from which the quote on ficto-criticism arises, the discussion begins with a question about postmodernism. These references intersect both with Jameson’s words, which are used to explain ficto-criticism, and with Krauss’ theorisation of paraliterature. These intersections work to naturalise of
the notion that postmodernism has heavily influenced the invention of ficto-criticism. By quoting Jameson, an academic with an international reputation as a postmodern theorist and commentator, Muecke and King affirm that postmodernism is the context in which to discuss ficto-criticism. Ficto-criticism and paraliterature are thus both constructed as an effect of postmodernism.

It is not, however, just postmodernism that is brought into play but also the notion of postmodernism as a radical crisis or rupture in knowledge. The same systems and structures at work in the international world of ficto-critical writing are thus reproduced in Australia. Muecke in “On Ficto-criticism,” for example, quotes King who says:

Jameson’s description of the crisis in which ‘the hermeneutic gesture’ now finds itself is an exact description of the problem confronting the relation of literary-culture studies to an increasing array of postmodern fictions and/or various lines of ficto-critical flight. (13).

Similarly, they add: “With both postmodernism and ficto-criticism you have a return to storytelling and a shift away from the dense, intense, intransitive language of the high modernists such as Joyce and Faulkner” (14). Whilst some of the references in the paper are more ambiguous about postmodernism as a delineated category, this last sentence sets up a binary between modernism and postmodernism, and is suggestive of more simplistic visions of postmodernism as the radical other of modernism. In “On Ficto-criticism” there is also a tangible excitement around this new genre of writing. This excitement and the less than conservative style and tone of the paper further confirm the radical flavour of both ficto-criticism and postmodernism as well as the fact that they constitute a challenge to established paradigms of writing and knowledge.

Other early texts confirm the influence of not only Muecke and King and but also postmodernism, thus validating and naturalising these author’s version of ficto-criticism. For example, in 1992 Bob Hodge and Alec McHoul published a paper in Textual Practice called “The Politics of Text and Commentary.” In it they put forward Reading the Country
(1984) by Muecke, Krim Benterrack and Paddy Roe as a model for a new type of positive self-reflexive commentary. Hodge and McHoul call this kind of writing “ficto-criticism or critical fiction” (209). This reference to Muecke’s co-authored book as a potential new form of critical commentary called ficto-criticism, and the publication of his ficto-critical text *No Road* in 1997, has helped ensure his influence as one of the ficto-critical writers and theorists in Australia.\(^\text{10}\) This is something Muecke claims for himself. As part of his e-mail signature, for example, he states: “‘No Road’ has developed a new genre of writing, ficto-criticism, which responds to the demands for an imaginative treatment of problems in contemporary cultural settings.”\(^\text{11}\) Similarly, the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), where Muecke works, promotes *No Road* on its web site as “the first ficto-critical monograph published in Australia.”\(^\text{12}\) King also has credence beyond the co-authored paper with Muecke, as there are two other papers by him that address ficto-criticism. They are “Occasional Doubts: Ian Hunter’s Genealogy of Interpretative Depth” (1993) and “My Life Without Steve: Postmodernism, Ficto-criticism and the Paraliterary” (1994). These publications add to King’s credentials as one of the key writers who engaged very early with this emerging form. Given that it is so hard to find sources dealing with ficto-criticism on available scholarly electronic databases (they could until recently be counted on one hand),\(^\text{13}\) Muecke and King appear well and truly to have ownership over the territory of Australian ficto-criticism.

Significantly, even more texts affirm Muecke and King’s influence and central position. In 1995, for example, a panel discussion on ficto-criticism was held as part of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature conference held in Adelaide. Two of the three published papers resulting from the conference, by Heather Kerr and Simon Robb, discuss ficto-criticism in relation to postmodernism. Notably, these papers reference the definitions given by Jameson and Krauss that Muecke and King quote, or reference one of the other texts by King that addresses ficto-criticism, suggesting the influence of Muecke and King.\(^\text{14}\) Similarly, Alison Bartlett in her 1993 paper titled “Other Stories” published by *Southerly* cites Muecke and King and quotes the same 1987 interview with Jameson (165).
In the introduction to *The Space Between: Australian Women Writing Fictocriticism* published in 1998, Amanda Nettelbeck both cites the Jameson interview and refers to Krauss’ paraliterature, saying that “[t]he connection between the fictocritical and the paraliterary made here is indebted to King’s essay” (15). Nettelbeck also uses postmodernism as the main theoretical reference in her introduction, limiting other possible framings. Many of the pieces of ficto-criticism in this anthology were—interestingly—passed on to co-editors Amanda Nettelbeck and Heather Kerr by Muecke and King when their own ficto-critical collection, to be called “The Morning After the Eighties,” failed to reach publication.

King and Muecke’s use of Jameson’s interview and Krauss’ notion of the paraliterature has thus shaped the official or visible discourse of Australian ficto-criticism. The intersections with, and references to, postmodernism in that 1991 article has meant that at its official point of inception Australian ficto-criticism became associated with postmodernism, and seen as a new practice. One cannot discount the fact that ficto-critical writing also looks very postmodern: thus, their use of postmodernism as a frame is a very logical move. However, both the reduction of ficto-criticism to being merely an effect of postmodernism and indeed the identification of a ficto-critical moment are symptoms of the conventions of academic writing and publishing, which are antithetical to a writing style that is heterogenous and multiple. What else has influenced ficto-criticism’s development in Australia? Is it as new as Muecke and King would have us believe?

Significantly, academic writing and publishing relies on the discovery of new knowledges and movements: ideas to be identified, circulated, and on which academic reputations and publishing successes are built. Muecke and King are, in fact, responsible for the widespread employment of ficto-criticism to describe Australian creative-critical texts, and the resulting export of the term to England and America. Despite the similarities between ficto-criticism and paraliterature and despite the fact that King seems to use the two terms interchangeably, they seize on ficto-criticism as the preferred label. One wonders why they tended toward the word ficto-criticism instead of paraliterature. Is it because Jameson uses
it? Muecke and King also discuss both Derrida and Barthes, the writers whose work Krauss describes as paraliterature. Still, they adopt ficto-criticism over paraliterature as the label for hybrid works. What is interesting is that ficto-criticism (the term) was already in use in Canada pre-1991. In fact, it is not Jameson who first used it in the interview published in 1987 that Muecke and King reference. Instead, it is his interviewer, Canadian Andrea Ward, who first uses the term in her question to him (in the original published and complete version of the interview, “ficto-criticism” appears in quotation marks). I explore the earliest sources of the word in the next chapter on Canadian ficto-critical practices. For the moment, I will survey the small number of other Australian texts that directly address ficto-criticism (the term). I will also begin to illustrate what Australian ficto-criticism might be beyond Muecke and King’s conceptualisation, despite their 1991 paper being known as the “germinal moment” (Brook 3).

**Other uses of “ficto-criticism” in Australia**

The focus of this chapter now becomes broader as I begin to question the implicit claim that Muecke and King discovered a thing called ficto-criticism, and the subsequent pervasive function of postmodernism in this story. The examples I will introduce shortly illustrate other instances in which the term has been employed, and begin to display the multiplicity of Australian ficto-critical practice. However, as I show, the deployment of the term continues to reflect an emphasis on the way in which ficto-criticism questions the authority and hegemonic role of the traditional critic or expert. If this is indeed the project of ficto-criticism—and I argue it is—then it must constantly and self-consciously undermine the will to power of the traditional critical act. Muecke and King’s dominance over ficto-criticism is thus in direct conflict with this practice, which wishes to undermine mastery and authority. I now begin to lay the groundwork that will allow me to introduce the Deleuzian concept-tool of becoming-woman. This concept-tool will simultaneously show why ficto-criticism must remain deterritorialising and explain the power relations that have resulted in earlier ficto-critical work being overlooked.
After the initial small flurry of publications in the early to mid-eighties in printed form, the introduction of the internet saw a number of electronic texts published that addressed ficto-criticism. These references to ficto-criticism begin to multiply the applications of the term in Australia. Ironically, whilst the overwhelming framing of ficto-criticism as a symptom of postmodernism has obscured other possible influences and framings, the effects of postmodernity’s technological developments have certainly aided the researcher who seeks to discover how the term is being employed. For example, electronic journals like *antimony* have called for examples of ficto-criticism to publish, as has the South Australian based multimedia centre Ngapartji. Recently, more journals have ficto-criticism listed as a generic form accepted for publication. *antiTHESIS* from the University of Melbourne, for example, and *dotlit*, from the Creative Writing section of the School of Media and Journalism at the University of Queensland, both list ficto-criticism as an acceptable form for publication, as does *Senses of Cinema*, an online film studies journal. University online handbooks have also surfaced when searching for ficto-criticism, both Monash and the University of Tasmania offering courses on ficto-criticism. “HEA435 Fictocriticism,” for example, at the University of Tasmania, describes ficto-criticism as hybrid (part critical, part creative) postmodern writing that is aiding the reformation of literary and cultural studies by exploring “the crucial questions of subjectivity, objectivity, value and cultural politics.” In this unit students are allowed to write ficto-critical work for assessment. Macquarie University’s Women’s Studies department similarly offered a course that dealt with ficto-criticism. In their 1999 Topic in Women’s Studies, the seminar titled “Writing Indigeneity: Voice, Genre, Style” considered “the issues of marginality, race, gender, identity politics, questions of indigeneity, community and culture, and ways of speaking.” Readings for the seminar were from “Canadian and Australian contexts, and contributions from poststructural theory, feminist theories of embodiment, critical culture theory and fictocriticism.” In 2001 the School of Creative Arts at the University of Melbourne offered as part of their Postgraduate Diploma in Arts Criticism, a course on "New Critical Practices.” Focusing specifically on ficto-criticism, described as an emerging practice, this course examined:
“The act of critical writing as a creative endeavour . . . This subject considers the use of autobiography in criticism and imaginative responses to the critical object.” There are several other references to Australian university courses to be found on the internet, but this sample gives an idea of the varying ways in which the term is employed in Australian academic circles: primarily a critical act that incorporates creative effects. In relation to universities, ficto-criticism can also be found as a research interest of a number of Australian academics, listed on their web profiles. Apart from Muecke, the high profile ficto-critical advocate in Australia, Anne Brewster, Heather Kerr, Amanda Nettelbeck, Anna Gibbs and Marion Campbell have listed ficto-criticism as a research area at various times over the last five years.

With the introduction of the internet and other electronic databases ficto-criticism has, therefore, become more easy to track as high-powered search engines scan complete electronic texts. No longer does ficto-criticism need to appear in the title to enable a researcher to find texts. For example, when searching for ficto-criticism, several references appeared to writing by Brenda Ludeman who applies the term to describe her writing on the visual arts, and to other writers who have adopted the term. As the references to the use of the word cited above indicate, ficto-criticism appears to have just as much to do with art criticism, postcolonial discourse, feminism, identity politics and marginality, as it might have to do with postmodernism or Muecke and King. Australian ficto-criticism thus begins to develop as a diverse field with influences and connections beyond those provided by the sanctioned discourse. Put another way, there are many other examples of ficto-criticism going on at the margins. The more risks texts take in defying conventions not only means that they more closely resemble the deterritorialising process of becoming-woman, but also that they are much more likely to go undiscovered or recognised by the mainstream.

When I apply the concept-tool of becoming-woman to Australian ficto-criticism later in the chapter it will become clear that—ultimately— Muecke and King’s placement as the
ficto-critical forbearers limits the productive connections desired by writing-between. As the negative reviews of Muecke’s ficto-critical text No Road may suggest, his ficto-criticism does indeed represent a release of desire—a challenge to normative modes of writing. However, his majoritarian placement as a father of Australian ficto-criticism renders any potential flows into a structure that blocks desire. The alignment of Australian ficto-critical practice as an effect of postmodernism, and as a new genre identified (and created?) by the subjects Muecke and King, overcodes ficto-criticism, diverting and suffocating its revolutionary potential as it is coopted into familial or arboreal relations. It also tends to reduce Australian ficto-criticism to its aesthetic or formal characteristics, glossing over or detracting from the political imperative of such rhizomatic writings. This process of limitation is in direct conflict with ficto-criticism as a line of flight or becoming. Ficto-criticism is a writing practice that works to refuse the magisterial position and colonising practices of normative academic writing; it is not a state of domination. Yet, here it has been coded and colonised.

This capture is, however, inevitable. According to Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism functions by releasing flows of machinic desire which are then blocked by the molar aggregates of, for example, the family, school, church, political party and nation. Ficto-criticism(s), as multiple assemblages or becomings between fiction and non-fiction are alliance-based rather than familial, as Muecke and King’s dominance would suggest. Muecke and King’s position as the fathers or inventors of ficto-criticism crushes multiplicity, as the labels attached to ficto-criticism function as an Oedipal structure in the context of Deleuzian thought. This is not a question of whether these labels are false, but how they operate in this system of knowledge production. In this sense not only postmodernism but the fathers of Australian ficto-criticism are the molar aggregates that threaten to extinguish the molecular flows of ficto-criticism. Under their rule ficto-criticism cannot become, nor is it a becoming. By reading Australian ficto-criticism with becoming-woman as a tool, as I do in the next section, another space beyond Muecke,
King and postmodernism comes into view, a space where other possible influences on the development of ficto-criticism in Australia can be seen to flow.

**ON BECOMING-WOMAN, BECOMING-IMPERCEPTIBLE**

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari perform (rather than define) becoming with an assemblage of different becomings: becoming-intense, becoming-animal, becoming-woman, becoming-minoritarian, and becoming-imperceptible. The notion of an assemblage also comes from Deleuze and Guattari and is suggestive of a heterogeneous group that is not ordered and is without hierarchy. Becoming, in Deleuzian thought, is thus a radical destabilisation of meaning or identity. They speak of becoming as always involving a pack, a multiplicity, since it has no subject distinct from itself; there is no order or logic, never a question of organisation, only of composition. In their assemblage becoming-woman is an absolute deterritorialisation, which cannot be achieved through a majoritarian relationship. This explains their use of woman in the equation of becoming-woman, since women are always other to man as the norm or standard. It also explains why becoming-woman is, in their words, “the key to all the other becomings” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 277). Rather than enter into the same system of power relations—the will to power—Deleuze and Guattari call for the radical destabilisation of that structure through releasing the flows of desire, taking risks and refusing established patterns of knowing and being known (individuation). In this sense, there is no becoming-majoritarian, only the molecular movement of becoming-minoritarian. According to Deleuze and Guattari:

> Becomings are minoritarian; all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian. When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian: white man, adult-male, etc. Majority implies a state of domination, not the reverse. It is not a question of knowing whether there are more mosquitoes or flies than men, but of knowing how “man” constituted a standard in the universe in relation to which men necessarily (analytically) form a majority . . . In this sense women, children, but also animals,
plants, and molecules, are minoritarian. It is perhaps the special situation of women in relation to the man-standard that accounts for the fact that becomings, being minoritarian, always pass through a becoming-woman. (*A Thousand Plateaus* 291)

It is important to remember that Deleuze and Guattari are not referring to a subject woman in their concept of becoming-woman, but woman as representative of a subordinate or minoritarian positioning in relation to patriarchy and the man-standard. Becoming-woman is not meant to suggest any inherent qualities of a woman or women, but works as a shifting metaphor. Significantly, and, not surprisingly, their use of “woman” in their theory has attracted some criticism from feminist theorists. Shortly, using a text by Elizabeth Grosz, I will deal with the concerns Deleuzian theory presents for feminism and, in fact, the problems their work raises for all minority politics. However, as I will argue, their theory remains relevant and useful in understanding ficto-critical practice as a critique of the will to power of normative academic writing. In their theoretical oeuvre Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate a consistent desire for an (albeit risky) shift away from dominant structures and ways of knowing in order to open up a space for alternative knowledges. In relation to ficto-critical work, becoming-woman not only opens a space for a different approach to critical and academic writing it also opens a space for the other to emerge.

**GROSZ ON DELEUZE**

As alluded earlier, the concept becoming-woman presents its own particular set of problematics for traditional minority politics, and these need to be addressed. Elizabeth Grosz in her book *Volatile Bodies* examines the relevance of Deleuzian thought and, in particular, becoming-woman for feminism (160-83). Grosz’s chapter on Deleuze and Guattari is useful as it summarises the objections to, and problems with, becoming-woman for feminism (and by extension other minority theories). It is also pertinent since it demonstrates how the common assumptions made in critiques of Deleuze and Guattari mirror the system of lack, which they are trying to imagine a line of escape from. In other words, many negative readings of Deleuzian thought (as disempowering for the other) continue to judge the conditions of their oppression from within the same system that
excluded them (the other) to begin with. As ficto-criticism—the deterritorialised other of normative academic writing—might be judged as inadequate and a failure from the perspective of dominant codes and conventions, Deleuzian thought can be “misread” and dismissed if one does not release one’s reliance on established ways of knowing and being. The dismissal of both Deleuzian thought and ficto-criticism thus seems predicated on the same problem—a reading out of context. Yet as Grosz signals, while there are risks involved in thinking differently the benefits may be substantial. For example, in the context of Australian ficto-criticism, the use of Deleuzian thought helps one discover a different body of ficto-critical work. These texts, through their failure to adhere to dominant standards of the academy, have become “feminine” and imperceptible. Within this same context of power relations, becoming-woman also allows one to critically interrogate the dangers of ficto-criticism developing into a kind of writing with its own set of codes and conventions.

In her chapter “Intensities and Flows” Grosz gives her “very serious objections or reservations” on the relevance of Deleuzian thought to feminism. First, she warns that the metaphor of becoming-woman is a male appropriation of women’s political struggles and theories. These appropriations function, she argues, to depoliticise women’s radicality. Grosz is also concerned with the romanticising of women’s very real and visceral conflict with patriarchy. Secondly, this same metaphor neutralises women’s sexual specificity, and, thirdly, Deleuze and Guattari’s work involves a “romantic elevation of psychoses, schizophrenia and becoming, which on one hand ignores the very real torment of suffering individuals and, on the other hand, positions it as an unlivable ideal for others” (163). Fourthly, the technocratic metaphors employed—such as machinic—utilise tropes that can only function on the denigration and exclusion of women. Whilst Grosz’s critiques are specific to feminism and women, the objections she raises resonate for other minority theories and minority groups that might wish to utilise Deleuzian thought. For example, becoming-woman may immediately invoke the reality of women as they employ the word woman, yet as already established, woman here stands in for the position of women as
subordinate to man as the standard. As Grosz herself points out, here, “woman” is not a literal woman. Woman’s relevance in this equation of becoming-woman is based on the position of woman as the privileged other in Western culture. Becoming-woman thus represents a becoming-minoritarian; woman could be exchanged for another minoritarian group in a different context. As Deleuze and Guattari state, immediately after warning that even women must become-woman: “Even blacks, as the Black Panthers said, must become-black” (A Thousand Plateaus 291). Thus, the problems Grosz signals, such as the erasure of the specificity of woman’s experience in the concept of becoming-woman, could be extended to another minoritarian group within the movement that is becoming in Deleuzian thought. Their concept of becoming-woman, it could be argued, thus reduces and depoliticises the specificity of particular minority struggles, romanticising their domination.

Grosz’s critiques are without doubt very relevant concerns and objections. However, these critiques—whilst very valid—are contradictory within the oeuvre of Deleuzian thought. This might perhaps explain Grosz’s own ambivalence toward the concept of becoming-woman. She seems to struggle with her reservations, at once wary of what she describes as Deleuzian phallocentricism yet at the same time seeing some very positive potential benefits in their concepts for feminist theory. For whilst she makes very clear the need to approach Deleuze’s theories critically—to be attendant to their limitations—Grosz is also positive about their potential to help clear the ground so “that women may be able to devise their own knowledges, accounts of themselves and the world” (164). For example, Grosz states:

Deleuze’s writings may provide unexpectedly powerful weapons of analysis, critique, transgression, and transformation. They may demonstrate . . . other kinds of theoretical approaches, other intellectual paradigms, new ways of conceptualizing knowledge, power, bodies, representations . . . (165)

Significantly, to embrace the movement that characterises Deleuze and Guattari’s writings, one is required to take risks, as one is required to release one’s reliance on established
paradigms and ways of knowing. It does not mean, however, that everything is automatically up for grabs. Like ficto-criticism, for example, one must think differently and challenge the conventions of writing and knowing. Yet, at the same time, the taxonomy of genre will always define ficto-criticism—in its refusal of such categories. To remain focused on these known territories, defending their worth and relevance, however, will keep us fixed in systems of domination. Grosz herself acknowledges the emphasis on experimentation in Deleuzian theory:

There is no hierarchy of being, no preordained order to the collection and conjunction of these various fragments, no central organization or plan to which they must conform. Their ‘law’ is rather the imperative of endless experimentation, metamorphosis, or transmutation, alignment and realignment. (167)

In keeping with this reading of Deleuze and Guattari, in the introductory section of the paper, Grosz discusses the best way to approach their writing. She says of their critical style, that one must suspend the critical attitudes one usually approaches texts with, at least until some broad patterns emerge (166). Grosz thus acknowledges the considerable shift from traditional ways of knowing and critical reading that Deleuzian theory requires. Despite this, her critiques of Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming-woman (yet not the paper overall) remain firmly connected to established or fixed territories of knowledge, contradicting Deleuzian thought. Her concerns about becoming-woman erasing the specificity of women’s sexuality, experience and struggles, for example, keeps woman fixed in a space of domination by reproducing the metaphysical oppositions that deny and devalue women’s experience. In other words, her critique can itself be critiqued for doing the same thing as she critiques Deleuze and Guattari for doing with their concept becoming-woman. Grosz’s critique of Deleuze and Guattari—consistent with academic intellectual tradition—takes an oppositional stance, it is adversarial, combatant, and relies on established territories and systems to work. Yet as Deleuze and Guattari point out, what concerns them is not the truth-value of a belief like Oedipus, but how Oedipus crushes the desiring machines. They ask quite different questions of a problem or situation, their emphasis being on creative desiring production rather than desire as a product of lack.
Whilst attendant to the need to suspend traditional critical approaches when reading Deleuze and Guattari’s work, it is precisely when Grosz focuses on how their work lacks from within existing conceptual frameworks that she brings the full weight of the critical tradition to bear on their writing. As a result, she crushes the flows of desire. However, her overall attitude toward their work in the paper reintroduces ambivalence, demonstrating, in an academic setting, the tensions between de- and re-territorialisation. It seems that Grosz is attracted to their potential to imagine new territories of knowledge, but is somewhat hesitant about the repercussions that may also be apparent in such an approach. The machinic flows of desire are released as Grosz identifies with their theories—at times she seems inspired—but her cautious approach recodes productive desire into a relationship of lack.

It is Deleuze and Guattari’s intention with the concept-tool of becoming-woman to move beyond desire conceived as reflecting a deficit, and beyond the accepted solid territories of knowledge, beyond the categories of man and woman. Importantly, despite this and their use of “woman” in the concept becoming-woman, it does not mean that they are dismissive of molar feminist struggles. In fact, they argue:

> It is, of course, indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view to winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity: ‘we as women . . .’ makes its appearance as a subject of enunciation. But it is dangerous to confine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping flow. (A Thousand Plateaus 276)

In Deleuzian thought, then, to keep the flow from the spring from drying up, one is required to take risks. In other words, oppositional politics must shift their focus away from their critique of oppression; they must also look at the systems and conventions that prevent one from thinking differently. As Grosz forcefully states:

> This, then, is a risky undertaking, one in which there is a danger that one may lose one’s way, be pulled astray from the path one has chosen; but the risks and rewards may be worth taking insofar as new paths of exploration, new goals, new
theoretical paradigms and frameworks, may be made possible which could bypass the dilemmas posed for feminists by binary or dichotomous thought. (166)

In the context of conceptualising ficto-criticism as a between formulation there is a need to also take risks. To destabilise molar entities and energise becomings, ficto-criticism requires that you release established patterns of bifurcation and reject the majoritarian position and its state of domination. In other words, ficto-criticism’s enactment of a becoming-woman requires that the ficto-critic take a minoritarian position. As Grosz suggests, this is a politically dangerous ground to walk on. However, she adds: “if we do not walk in dangerous places and different types of terrain, nothing new will be found, no explorations are possible, and things remain the same. The risks seem to me worth taking...” (173). Yet one of the risks in becoming-woman and becoming-minoritarian is that you risk being quite literally imperceptible, and this does not sit well with the tradition of the academy.

AUSTRALIAN FEMINIST FICTO-CRITICAL MOVES

If one continues to trace ficto-criticism in Australia, both the practice and the use of the term, a very different history begins to emerge from the one presented thus far. It is a history in which Muecke and King’s dominance is displaced. This history is much less visible, takes place on the margins, and ironically (almost poetically) reproduces the subordinate position of women that Deleuze and Guattari reflect upon. In fact, not only was the term in use in Australia prior to Muecke and King’s 1991 paper but also the practice of ficto-criticism was clearly in evidence some sixteen years earlier, primarily employed by feminists. Indeed, while unlabelled and unnamed, ficto-criticism was very much in use by women writers. Inasmuch as this may appear as unsurprising to anyone familiar with feminist work it still seems necessary to make the assertion given the overwhelming gender neutrality inherent in the framing of Australian ficto-criticism. The postmodernist turn has seen experimental writing forms such as ficto-criticism discovered as new, excluding and obliterating the effects of feminist work on such practices. As other feminist writers working in disciplines that have undergone a postmodernist turn—such as...
anthropology—have observed: “The lie of excluding feminism has characterized most postmodernist writing by males” (Mascia-Lees et al. 232). According to Mascia-Lees et al., books such as Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences (Marcus and Fischer 1986) and Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography (Clifford and Marcus eds., 1986) ignore experimental feminist writing in these fields and a substantial body of feminist theory:

what appears to be new and exciting insights to these postmodernist anthropologists—that culture is composed of seriously contested codes of meaning, that language and politics are inseparable, and that constructing the Other entails relations of domination (Clifford 1986a: 2)—are insights that have received repeated and rich exploration in feminist theory for the past forty years. (227)

In the field of Australian ficto-criticism, the publication of The Space Between: Australian Women Writing Ficto-criticism in 1998 (the first ficto-critical anthology) attests to its relevance as a writing practice for women under the influence of feminism. This is something that has been left unconsidered in the published material on ficto-criticism by Muecke and King. Frustrated with traditional forms that fail to accurately represent their experiences and point of view, women have been producing hybrid writings that reflect a ficto-critical approach for some time. Women in the academy have felt compelled to ask: “Is it the patriarchy that teaches that discussion of literature has to take that kind of impersonal form, that nondialogic form, that emotional-after-the-fact form?” (Koppelman 77). There is a substantial number of feminist texts—both recent and past—that address the adversarial, impersonal, masculinised style of academic writing. It has been argued these texts centre on individual achievement and break any sense of “connectedness to others” (Frey 60-1). For example, in the Introduction to Private Voices, Public Lives Nancy Owen Nelson states that the book was “the direct result of our desire, after years of academic training, to break out of the masculinist mode of communication . . .” (xvii). Excluded and alienated by the authoritative, colonising practices of traditional academic criticism, women have helped bring about a re-evaluation of the ways in which academics write. As Frey has said: “To put it bluntly, if it were not for women, we might not be
questioning the way that we write literary criticism” (61). Dissatisfied with established generic forms, many women have been working to create ways of writing that do not disavow their experience. One such woman in Australia, Alexandra Pitsis, strongly reinforces the connection between feminism, ficto-criticism and minority politics.

In 1988, three years before the publication of Muecke and King’s article, Pitsis submitted her Masters thesis at UTS, describing it in her abstract as ficto-critical. Drawing on what she describes as the “ficto-critical work of writers such as Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous,” Pitsis writes her own ficto-criticism. Writing after the 1987 interview with Jameson, which Muecke and King draw upon, Pitsis might have come across the term through any number of associations. What is interesting though is her use of the term to describe the work of the “French feminists” in a thesis concerned with opening “up general textual arguments about women’s writing, and women’s relation to language in general.” Pitsis’ own personal experience makes up much of her thesis material, which is concerned with:

the ways an individual functions within an educational institution and other institutions, considering certain ‘differences’ that set up conflicts, problematics and contradictions.

The ‘differences’ inherent in being a woman, coming from a non-Anglo background and having lived a relatively ‘disadvantaged’ life, are also explored in the manner in which these are carried through into the various realms of ‘life’ and its institutions. (Pitsis i)43

By including her own personal stories in creative form, Pitsis destabilises academic writing and by extension the institution of the academy:

This writing, locked in private discourse, banished from the academic realm, is like an act of political resistance in that it reveals its grief at the multiple positions of not only the feminine but of all other terms like madness, ethnicity and poverty. It is a striking-out . . .. (Pitis 22)
Her political striking-out seems informed by her sense of exclusion from the academy and how the conventions of the academy (having gained access) deny her experience as a Greek-Australian woman: “She has to be mad to make any sort of space for herself, and at the same time step back into the space designated for her, and to, grapple with that ‘reason’ that exists to exclude her” (Pitsis 24). She states: “In a way, my project is to bring a sort of writing to where it previously couldn’t exist or function” (36). While Pitsis’ thesis demonstrates the aesthetic markers of postmodernism, such as pastiche, her text is not consistent with the popular conception of postmodernism. Instead it is a highly political piece of writing from someone who is minoritarian and situated:

For me that marginal space is not apolitical, or ahistorical but is tied in with the silent, unsaid methods of exclusion that work as ‘a silent code of ethics’ in academia, and other social institutions. The writing I do chronicles that process, in part. That is, the narrator’s experience is not just a disembodied voice that flows out of metaphoricity but is in a way fixed. (Pitsis 23-4)

Pitsis’ work is, then, imbued with an immediate subjective experience that is historically placed. Like Fred Wah’s *Diamond Grill*, examined in Chapter Two, Pitis’ thesis is not ahistorical, apolitical, objective or disembodied. Her textual style is, in fact, her subject in the sense that its hybrid personal creative mode reflects her political intent: the form is the argument. Here, the connections with feminist theory and writing are obvious. As Susan Rubin Suleiman reconfirms, the shift toward personal criticism in the last two decades has been influenced by not just the demise of structuralism but also “the growth of a politically self-conscious feminist criticism, intent on confirming that ‘the personal is the political’” (*Risking Who One Is* 1). As Probyn has written in “True Voices and Real People: The ‘problem’ of the autobiographical in cultural studies:”

This discovery of autobiography should be more aptly described as a re-emergence. While my own hesitancy about autobiography stems in part from its overnight popularity amongst some male theorists, I also feel a sense of deja-vu. I mean have we not gone through this before, raised our consciousness as to the importance of everyday histories and lived the personal as the political? The memory of being
excluded on the grounds that the realm of the personal is not social scientific
knowledge lingers. (105-6)

The exclusion of women and their stories has long been predicated on the assumptions that inform academic writing and research. The cultural markers of femininity are antithetical to normative academic writing. Therefore, ficto-critical writing that includes the excesses ghosting the edges of the academic essay (such as fiction, poetry, personal detail, memory, and bodily experience) challenges authority as much as the generic hierarchies and divisions on which the canons of knowledge are established. For example, Valerie Ross, in “Too Close to Home: Repressing Biography, Instituting Authority,” argues that the exclusion of biography in the formation of the literature department expresses a “condensation of institutional anxieties about women, class, popular culture, affect, social and domestic existence, and other ‘outside’ challenges to institutional authority” (137).

The inclusion of the personal and extratextual is not just a way in which ficto-criticism marks out hybridity, it also “ruptures the fantasy of autonomy and control” implicit in the traditional academic essay by introducing the other (Ross 155). Ross argues that the resistance to biography in traditional literary studies results from the fact that it constitutes a private/inside space that is gendered feminine. Although Ross focuses her discussion on biography, her argument can easily be extended to include autobiography, which also functions as feminine in this context. The inclusion of biography and autobiography, therefore, has the potential to contaminate the work of literary studies by locating it in the domestic and social; provoking “shame, embarrassment, [and] the taint of naivety” (Ross 39 and 155). These are the critiques waged against ficto-criticism from the dominant or majoritarian perspective. They demonstrate the threat such hybrid writings represent to the academy as an institution; hence the powers brought to bear on such machinic flows.

Pitsis’ text is thus—from a traditional perspective—self indulgent, discontinuous, and schizophrenic. As Pitsis writes, clearly suggestive of Deleuzian theory, “So she exists as a schizophrenic in academia (not in the romantic or the clinical sense)” (24). Representing the characteristics aligned with the feminine—defined through their opposition to the
masculine values of objectivity, rigour, disciplinarity, and rationality—her text reveals the ideological imperatives inherent in the traditional academic essay as neutral frame. Pitsis’ ficto-critical act thus not only demonstrates an earlier use of the term in Australia, but also draws together feminism and ficto-criticism. Most importantly, however, her thesis demonstrates her minoritarian position within the academy as a major influence on her desire to break free from existing modes of academic writing that exclude her experience. It also demonstrates the political nature of her ficto-critical act as an example of becoming-minoritarian, becoming-woman. By refusing the conventions of the academy—the majoritarian voice—Pitsis has, quite literally, become imperceptible. She has been excluded from official history of ficto-criticism in Australia.

If one continues to map ficto-critical writing in Australia, evidence of a long-standing relationship between the form, the term, and feminism continues to emerge. This history is much less visible, however, since these references to the term take place on the margins and not in mainstream journals with broad distribution. For example, in a postgraduate student journal titled *Postscript* from the University of Queensland you can find an article that challenges Muecke and King’s place as the fathers of Australian ficto-criticism. Significantly, this paper is not cited on any electronic database or search engine (such as Google, MLA or AustLit). Christopher Hill’s paper “On Ficto-Criticism: A Reading for a Writer’s Festival” playfully echoes Muecke and King’s article on ficto-criticism. In it he gives his first encounter with the term, an encounter that provides an appropriately anecdotal and unofficial location from which to continue to explore an alternate history of ficto-critical practice in Australia:

it was in the mens [sic] toilets at UTS scrawled high up on the facing door below a rather inaccurate undergraduate representation of female genitalia and a more than life-size penis. A genius had responded to the ‘Ficto-Criticism Rules, OK!’ with ‘SAYS WHO?’ Because of the proximity of the slogan to the line drawings many responses could be read as referring to either the assertion about Ficto-Criticism, or to the line-drawn penis. Some overtly tolerant cleaner had allowed a dialogue to
evolve. The first response was an anonymous ‘ME’ followed by ‘PROVE IT.’ This was followed by a perfectly notated reference to an article in ABR [Australian Book Review] and a local night spot with time and date. This was followed by ‘BARTH,’ to which was added an ‘ES’ above a ‘NOT LIKELY.’ Then came ‘DERRIDA’ neatly transformed into ‘DERRIDA’S DICK’ with directional arrows. And finally ‘KING MUECKE’ with a ‘THEY WOULD KNOW!?!!’ added for good measure. (Hill 15)

The dialogue reported on in this quotation refers directly to the article by Muecke and King published in the Australian Book Review. This excerpt from Hill’s paper is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it reaffirms the marginal nature of the dialogue on ficto-criticism, implying that it is just as likely to appear in a student publication or on toilet walls than in a refereed journal. Secondly, it again signals King and Muecke’s dominance in the discourse on ficto-criticism in Australia. Yet apart from this irreverent framing of Muecke and King’s ficto-criticism, Hill’s paper is also interesting because it strongly asserts the influence of women writers on ficto-critical writing in Australia.

In their paper Muecke and King make reference to the anthology No Substitute, which was the result of a writing group located in Perth. Published by the Fremantle Arts Centre Press in 1987 this anthology was co-edited by Terri-ann White, Anna Gibbs, Wendy Jenkins and Noel King. Muecke and King imply that No Substitute is the primary Australian ficto-critical text. King’s involvement in the group, and his role as co-editor, reinforces the myth reflected on UTS’s toilet walls that King and Muecke were central to the discovery of ficto-criticism. Notably, Hill is critical of the “boys own’ self-congratulatory” tone in the 1991 paper, and the way in which they suggest they have “discovered a thing called ‘Ficto-Criticism’” (Hill 15). Here, Hill’s reference to the more than life-size line drawing of a penis on a toilet wall becomes glaringly telling. This is about the phallus; this is no becoming-woman. It is all about power—the majoritarian position—and the space to name. However, according to Hill there is an alternative history of ficto-criticism in Australia: one that challenges the privileged position of King and Muecke. Hill claims to
have at that time been closely associated with a member of the writing group that *No Substitute* sprang from: “I do think it worth making the point that all these ‘Ficto-Critical’ pioneers were women” (17). Although *No Substitute* includes pieces by men, the ficto-critical texts—those texts that work the boundaries—are by women. In fact, in their “On Ficto-Criticism” paper Muecke and King themselves make special mention of several women writers included in *No Substitute*: Anna Gibbs, Susan Melrose, Leslie Stern, Marion Campbell and Zoë Sofia. Furthermore, Hill says of the writing group connected to *No Substitute*:

> Things were centred on the Academe—Murdoch University—but the players—the women, were also in a real sense strangers to it. They were interested in working at the boundaries: challenging the reliability of orthodox landmarks and the accepted tools of order-making. Everything seemed to be up for grabs . . . (Hill 17)

Everything did indeed appear to be up for grabs, including, it seems, the right to name and own a thing called “ficto-criticism.”

Interestingly, the politics of whether or not to name one’s (feminist) ficto-critical practice has been discussed elsewhere. For example, an American group of academic women—working in the area of autobiographical or personal ficto-critical writing—have addressed the very problem of naming their method of critical writing. In an interview with Jeffrey Williams titled “Writing in Concert,” Cathy Davidson, Alice Kaplan, Jane Tompkins and Marianna Torgovnick speak of the supportive and inspirational nature of their long standing writing group, a group that helped enable their experimentation with writing forms, particularly critical and academic writing. Torgovnick talks to Williams about their experimental critical writing: “You’re making me feel as if we need a name for what we’re doing, because otherwise somebody else is going to give us a name. I think we’ve been resistant to giving it a name . . . “ (Williams 67). Williams shortly after this statement asks the group whether “Twenty years from now, couldn’t people say that you were in a salon?” Torgovnick responds:
I don’t have any problem with being in a circle. I think we probably do represent a movement and we are passing up a power-move in not naming it. It’s a temptation that women have always succumbed to, not naming the movement, and then some man comes in and names the movement. (Williams 67)

In a 1997 article published in TEXT, Anna Gibbs observes the possible effects of failing to name the practice of ficto-criticism in Australia as performed by women. She states in “Bodies of Words: Feminism and Fictocriticism—explanation and demonstration:”

There’s a strange forgetfulness around the term fictocriticism as it’s used in Australia now—for fictocriticism made its appearance here in the writing (mostly non-academic) of women very well aware of those strange, exciting and provocative texts emanating first of all from France and then later from Canada from the late seventies onward. (1)

In the same article Gibbs argues that the collection Frictions: An Anthology of Fiction by Women, published in 1982, is one of the first Australian texts to include ficto-criticism. She gives her own work and work by Anna Couani, Kathleen Mary Fallon, Wendy Morgan, Kerryn Goldsworthy and Sneja Gunew as examples of ficto-criticism. She says that ficto-criticism is:

Not so much a genre as an accident, even a hit and run guerilla action, tactical rather than strategic. A precise intervention into a specific situation, surprise being of the essence, and no two impasses in writing or debate are ever exactly the same.

(Gibbs, “Bodies of Words” 1)

As a result, Gibbs suggests that “ficto-criticism was never a genre that was One;” its performative and processual character being essential in its effectiveness in challenging both conventions and the knowledges which rely on such conventions. By the same token, to limit ficto-criticism to certain writers and movements in intellectual thought effectively reduces its revolutionary potential and, in Deleuzian terms, demonstrates how such movements are captured and contained. Gibbs opens Australian ficto-criticism up and away from purely the influence of Muecke, King and postmodernism into the realm of feminism as she identifies a number of influential texts by women. Marion Campbell’s
first novel, *Lines of Flight* (1985), for example, is cited as having “incalculable” influence. Gibbs also links the development of ficto-critical writing in Australia to the influence of French feminist writers such as Irigaray and Cixous. In this context, it is intriguing that Muecke and King would limit their references to French hybrid writing by only Derrida and Barthes.51 As Gibbs’ paper suggests, would not the theories of French women writers such as Cixous, Irigary and Kristeva be just as relevant, even perhaps more so? Think of Cixous’ concept of *écriture feminine*, for example.52 Pitsis makes this connection when she strongly links the work of Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous to ficto-criticism.

Still earlier examples of ficto-criticism by women exist—but continue unlabelled and silently performed. The earliest example of ficto-criticism that I have located is Finola Moorhead’s review of *Mother I’m Rooted* originally published in 1975 by *Meanjin*. Moorhead’s piece displays the characteristics and concerns of ficto-critical writing. In it she says: “Allow me to continue in an illogical, wandering, emotional, ‘feminine’ way, in other words, don’t ask me to prove what I know one way or another: this is not a masculine country” (*Quilt* 67). Sybylla Press in 1985 republished this review in Moorhead’s book *Quilt*. In the same collection Moorhead has several other pieces, which are experimental and which make reference to her frustration with the established rules of writing.53 For example:

> Of experimental writing, now. Form cracks open and contents spill out, as sticky, fascinating and loose as the yolk of an egg. Mess. Messy. People who judge too soon reach for a mop. Whatever is there goes into the rubbish bin. They try to flush it down the sink.

> Dismiss it. How many reviews do this! They dismiss without examination or twist the new writing into some preconceived notion of their own.

(Moorhead, *Quilt* 127. Italics in original.)

Notably, not just *Quilt* but other publications by Sybylla have included ficto-criticism. Yet, like Moorhead’s writing, there is no label—such as ficto-criticism—applied.54 I think it is
no coincidence that Sybylla Press is a feminist collective committed to publishing work by women that might not ordinarily see publication. As stated in the introduction to another of their publications, *second degree tampering*, Sybylla is committed “to publishing and writing which radically challenges hegemonic ideas about women and writing.” *Second degree tampering*, published in 1992, includes work by Anna Gibbs and Jyanni Steffensen (that I have read as ficto-critical), but also work by Marion Campbell, Linda Marie Walker and Noelle Janaczewska, and all of the writing is highly subversive and experimental. *Motherlode* (1996)—also published by Sybylla—has ficto-critical works by Marion Campbell (“Spectacular Motherhood”) and Norie Neumark’s “Girlz in the ‘hood.” *Motherlode* also included the republished “Spacing Out in the Mothershop” by Zoë Sofia, which was first published in *No Substitute* (and which Muecke and King isolate for special mention in “On Ficto-Criticism”). Although she does not use the term ficto-criticism, Terri-ann White in her review of *Motherlode* states:

    For me there were many pleasures: a recognition of how much good work is being made currently in Australia through hybrid elements. A mixing of forms, breaking down the niceties and codes between different expression. In *Motherlode* there is work made for the project but there is also extant work made in the essay form, the theoretical essay form, as work for performance, fiction and poetry, as politics/propaganda. (Rev. of *Motherlode* 126)

Here, White reaffirms the political nature of ficto-critical practice by women.

Despite Muecke and King’s place in the history of Australian ficto-criticism as the alleged authors of its “germinal moment,” these writings by women demonstrate that ficto-criticism had been around for some time in Australia pre-1991—performed by women—but unnamed. The invisibility of this version of Australian ficto-critical history in the mainstream published articles ironically reproduces the kind of power dynamic that ficto-criticism works to reveal: the colonising aspects of academic research and writing. It also reveals the underlying assumption of ficto-criticism—as a self-reflexive practice—that truth is contingent and informed by your position.
My purpose here in reiterating the influence of feminist writers on ficto-critical practice in Australia is not necessarily to establish an alternative to the reign of Muecke and King or postmodernism as the definitive frames for ficto-criticism, but to recognise another equally valid determining factor. Feminism applied here through the conventions of academic argument has the potential to become the new molar aggregate, smothering other influences on Australian ficto-critical discourse. To do so is not my intention as it would be contrary to the notion of becoming. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, making an important distinction between a minority and minoritarian:

It is important not to confuse “minoritarian,” as a becoming process, with a “minority,” as an aggregate or a state. Jews, Gypsies, etc., may constitute minorities under certain conditions, but that in itself does not make them becomings. One reterritorializes, or allows oneself to be reterritorialized, on a minority as a state; but in a becoming, one is deterritorialized . . . Becoming-woman necessarily affects men as much as women. In a way, the subject in a becoming is always “man,” but only when he enters a becoming-minoritarian that rends him from his major identity. (*A Thousand Plateaus* 291)

In other words, the practice of ficto-criticism embodies a potential becoming—in terms of its relation to molar structures and its self-reflexive politics—but it does not guarantee this movement. As Muecke and King’s dominance of Australian ficto-critical discourse reveals, even a practice such as ficto-criticism requires an attentiveness to one’s micropolitics. Being of a minority—or writing in a minority form—does not automatically result in becoming-minoritarian. In this context then, feminist writing with its focus on autobiographical detail, has the potential to limit ficto-criticism to creatively critical personal explorations, leaving out other forms of ficto-critical experimentation. Who else might be writing ficto-critically in Australia, and what other generically between forms do they take? What other lines of flight apart from feminist ficto-criticism exist?
In this sense, ficto-criticism can be conceptualised as a strategy of the other. Indeed, in a book of ficto-criticism by Australian academic Alison Bartlett\(^6\) (who incidentally employs Cixous’ theory of *écriture féminine*) there is a pointed reference to minoritarian positioning and the challenging of established forms. While ficto-criticism may be a practice that women writers have taken up in Australia, it might also have just as much appeal for other minority writers who find existing generic styles limiting. In the same way, experimenting with genre may be one way that those banished to the margin can resist reproducing the established forms and structures that have traditionally worked to exclude them. Susan Hawthorne, in Bartlett’s ficto-critical “Polylogue: Writers Theorising, a Performance,” states:

> I think that women at the moment are experimenting more with form and with content, and style and with genre—the whole thing. I think it’s also happening amongst other groups, like, black writers, indigenous writers etcetera, people coming from cultures which are not currently in dominance. I think that part of the reason that’s happening is because we haven’t had a voice, and the old forms don’t necessarily suit us. When you have something different to say then you are forced to say it in different ways and so you have to seek out a form that’s going to suit your needs . . . (qutd. in Bartlett, *Jamming the Machinery* 21)

Ficto-criticism presents itself as a means to interrogate the violence of representation, to legitimately explore what is inevitably left out and/or misrepresented through that process. The following readings of two contemporary Australian ficto-critical texts reveals the desire released in their defiance of established conventions. They creatively and experimentally re-imagine those stories and truths which have been excluded from dominant narratives. The two texts are Terri-ann White’s *Finding Theodore and Brina* and Kim Scott’s *Benang: From the Heart*.

**Finding Theodore and Brina**

In 2001 one of the people involved in *No Substitute* published a book that, although officially labelled “fiction” by the publisher, constitutes an ambiguous hybrid mix of
fiction and non-fiction and, consequently, and can be read as an example of ficto-criticism. The book is Terri-ann White’s *Finding Theodore and Brina*, published by the Fremantle Arts Centre Press (FACP). FACP has published several other examples of ficto-criticism, including the anthology *No Substitute*, Marion Campbell’s experimental feminist novel *Lines of Flight*, and Muecke’s *No Road*. Notably, despite its association with Muecke’s writing and research, and its currency in 1997, the term ficto-criticism was—as with *Finding Theodore and Brina*—not used in publicity material when *No Road* was released.57 White’s *Finding Theodore and Brina* appears to be a fictionalised biography of her family history. Set largely in Western Australia—where White comes from—the text is (ambiguously) factual. However, its self-reflexive play, emphasis on fictional techniques, and constant references to invention, means that categorising this book non-fiction would have been—commercially—a risky business. It might have an extensive bibliography and several appendices incorporating archival material, but labelling it fiction must have seemed a much safer option in terms of sales. Is this why it is categorised fiction? The label fiction also guarantees the author much more leeway for creative experimentation in the eyes of reviewers who might be less than enthusiastic about texts that jumble fiction and non-fiction. Calling a text fiction means that an author can be less attentive to notions of truth and truth telling. In *Finding Theodore and Brina* White’s narrator seems conscious of her role as divulger of family secrets. If the book is presented as fiction to a general public, perhaps members of her family might be less likely to object? Strangely, though, calling this generically hybridised family memoir fiction induces the reader to become very conscious of truth-value and the ways in which histories are constructed.

The generic pedigree of *Finding Theodore and Brina* is, without doubt, obscure. It is a bastard form, and reviewers have noted this. For example, Donna Lee Brien describes the book as creative nonfiction,58 suggesting that because of the “self-consciousness of the narrator [it becomes], in part, a meta-discourse about the writer’s process and progress, the difficulties and pleasures of the research, the improbable coincidences, the secrets uncovered, the amazing stories found” (2). As Brien notes, there is a metafictive element
to White’s text by means of the narrator’s self-reflexive attention to the processes of writing and research. Similarly, Finding Theodore and Brina demonstrates the other two characteristics of ficto-critical texts. Firstly, it is written in first person and includes many personal details, encouraging the reader to identify the narrator as White and the text as autobiography. Secondly, the prose passages and quotations are arranged in collage-like sequences. Brien is positive about White’s book of “creative nonfiction,” yet she ends her review on an almost apologetic note, adding this qualifier to the end of the last sentence: “whatever genre we might label the product” (3).

White’s text is an interesting example of Australian ficto-criticism as it draws together a range of issues that circulate and intersect with ficto-criticism in Australia, and more widely. White is a creative writer, not an academic, and whilst the discussion here has so far focused on ficto-criticism largely in relation to the academy, Finding Theodore and Brina signals the much broader implications of hybrid forms like ficto-criticism. The implications of generically transformative texts are not something specific to academics writing ficto-critically. The same issues and concerns emerge around White’s book, particularly given that it is labelled fiction, as they do around short pieces of ficto-criticism written by academics for academic journals. As Brien’s review illustrates, even if you are in favour of hybrid or creative nonfictional writing, not being able to label texts one thing or another, as in the case of White’s, presents problems. Dominant concerns prevail: is this fact or fiction; is it a real story? Questions of judgement, validity, representation, and quality rebound, and this I would argue is a deliberate performative strategy on the part of ficto-critics. Although this modus operandi may be more immediately obvious in texts that appear in an academic context, since academic writing has traditionally been associated with science and truth, the same strategy of creating uncertainty around these concepts is apparent in ficto-critical texts like White’s. The ambiguity created by the ficto-critical text around value judgement and notions of truth supports their narrative arguments, which are often centred on stories and histories excluded from, or devalued by, official literatures. This is the case with White’s book, as it is with the texts examined in the previous chapter.
The identification of *Finding Theodore and Brina* as a book of fiction foregrounds its political imperative (as long as this narrative strategy doesn’t become merely another instance of aesthetic and textual play under postmodernism). In other words, the hierarchy of genre is brought into sharp relief through reading this book: although it is labelled fiction it seems more closely related to non-fiction, since it relies heavily on non-fictional sources. For example, not only does *Finding Theodore and Brina* have appendices of historical documents and a bibliography, but it includes footnotes: it is referenced like a piece of non-fiction. The reader cannot help but start to question the rules that constitute fiction and non-fiction, and by extension history and fact. Clearly transgressing the generic markers of non-fiction, White’s book is something between fiction and non-fiction: fictocriticism. Her text constitutes a minor literature that appears wrought out of the experience of only being able to find faint and elusive traces of her great grandparent’s lives and characters. White’s narrator is forced to invent, work on hearsay and scraps of unsubstantiated tales. She states: “In attempting to return to these stories, I come to a conclusion that I may have to invent most of it” (211).

Faced with so many unofficial, contradictory, broken and missing stories of her ancestors and her family’s history, the narrator sets about searching for a form that can deal with such unconvincing research material. At one stage the narrator discusses adapting the *yizker bikher*, or Jewish memorial book, as a means to remember. The narrator’s ancestors, Theodore and Brina, were Jewish, and the memorial book seems a likely model; the desire to remember lost stories from the margins—not to forget—intersecting strongly with Jewish history and the European Holocaust.

From the perspective of official discourses, her family’s history is too obscure: it has been lost, overlooked, and cannot be rediscovered through the traditional methods of historical research. But the narrator does not want to forget:

I don’t want to forget Theodore Krakouer and Brina Israel even if everybody else in the world has. There is so little passed down that I have become a collector of
shards: of memory, what might have been told to me at the end of this long line of
tales. I want to catch these half-lit, often, paste jewels. I don’t know how authentic
they are, but does it even matter? For me it doesn’t matter because I want to see
what can be made anew, built from the remains. To honour the fleeting, the
fragment, fractured histories and stories. None of this passed down; it has to be
dredged up. (198)

In this passage White signals her creative and productive approach to the material she does
find through her process of research. She makes no promises of authenticity, in fact, quite
the opposite: she can only speculate (160). Finding Theodore and Brina is thus a
becoming-minoritarian, as White refuses authority and fixed territories. She does not act as
interpreter of her material; rather, she engages creatively—experimentally—making anew
from what little information she does have. She fills the silences of her family members
who are situated on the margins of history. For example, unable to find records of her great
grandmother’s journey by sea to Fremantle from England in 1852, she invents letters.
Based on manuscripts documenting the shipboard diaries of working-class people, who
undertook the same journey in the middle of the nineteenth-century, the narrator creates
her version of Brina’s letters home detailing her lengthy and difficult journey. Seizing on
this historical material as a basis to start from, she says: “Here is a genre to work within, a
model” (144). This statement implies that she, the narrator, had difficulty locating a
suitable form for her imaginings. Earlier, she discussed the Jewish memorial book as a
possible model. However, in the end, White chooses the ficto-critical form, employing a
variety of genres.

Less concerned with truth-telling and historical facts, the narrator takes the “paste jewels”
offered to her: “I am circling around fantasy and what I know, both from the present and
the past. Open to persuasion, to changing my mind, to imaginings, to seeing the world in
entirely new ways” (159-60). In the context of normative historical research and writing
her text is, therefore, a becoming that destabilises and deterritorialises the molar lines of
dominant historical narratives. It is a line of flight. As Deleuze and Guattari argue “. . .
writing should produce a becoming-woman as atoms of womanhood capable of crossing and impregnating an entire social field, and of contaminating men, of sweeping them up in that becoming” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 276). Significantly, in the process of dredging up the fractured stories of her ancestors, other stories that have been silenced surface from the margins of official history. In *Finding Theodore and Brina* you will find the cultural transgressions of madness, illegitimacy, miscegenation, and murder. These transgressions are processes of deterritorialisation, crushed and denounced by the molar lines of institutional systems. In the chapter titled “searching for meaning: Julie,” for example, the narrator speaks of her cousin who died as a result of concealing her pregnancy. There are few traces of her in official stories; “The pure silence around that girl and her baby. Folding into itself. A grief without a voice” (62). In this chapter, the narrator writes: “Nobody will be injured by any of this candour, not now. This impulse is about challenging the convenient myths that we have inherited and, in good faith, perpetuated. It is charged with thinking about the way forward” (36). By discovering and revealing such lines of flight, White’s ficto-critical text, therefore disrupts central narratives and their supporting ideologies such as the family, religion, law, morality, notions of sexuality, the individuated subject, and even Australian national identity.

For example, in one of the narrator’s self-reflexive moments she tells the tale of her naivety around miscegenation in Australia, a naivety revealed—as verging on comical—through the hindsight of her research. The narrator had believed the popular myth of how Aboriginal people came to have European surnames:

> For so many years when Aboriginal people were identified with the mark of British names, for generations, it was always explained as the practice of the blacks taking the name of their bosses or masters. That white masters named their property was obvious: mark it as yours. The mark of the oppressor. And people believed it. So when I started thinking of my family line, the Krakouer family, in the 1980s, and the famous football players Jimmy and Philip Krakouer became heroes, I was assured that it was because their grandfather or his grandfather had worked for
David or Rudolph or Raphael in the South-West some time around the crossing of the centuries. (123-4).

It is on such mythologies that white Australia maintains its national identity and ability to ignore such important issues as reconciliation. By admitting her naivety White’s narrator allows marginalised stories to speak. Revealing her failings, the secret of her inadequacies, the narrator is becoming-minoritarian. She reveals her failure to see through such racism: where slave like relations of domination and ownership are preferred as the explanation (a symptom of the times) over the horror of acknowledging miscegenation. When she discovers a reference to her great-grandfather as the defacto partner of an Aboriginal woman, Sophie Smith, her first instinct is to close the book: “Back then, I had quietly closed the book and kept it to myself. It felt like a time bomb; I didn’t want to detonate it” (125). The secret of her failings as she perceives them—her naivety and initial inability to disrupt the family’s stories and societal rules—becomes the secret of miscegenation. As Deleuze and Guattari write: “The secret is not at all an immobilized or static notion. Only becomings are secrets; the secret has a becoming” (A Thousand Plateaus 287). In other words, it is the becoming that brings the secret. In revealing her secrets, and the family’s, the text’s self-reflexive confessional politics come to the fore. In Finding Theodore and Brina there are many societal secrets that signal becomings. There are also the stories behind knowledge and textual production. Significantly, in many ficto-critical texts there is a confessional element as the narrator reveals their text’s weaknesses, exploring the processes of writing, and even visiting the reality of their own shortcomings. Ficto-critical texts are not magisterial and authoritative. The secret confessional moments of ficto-critical texts are not held gravely they are marked by transparencies and speed. Notably, Deleuze and Guattari discuss the secret as divulged by women in terms of confession and an active micropolitics. Men, however, have their secrets, which are held with grave (molar) importance:

they end up telling everything—and it turns out to be nothing. There are women, on the other hand, who tell everything, sometimes in appalling technical detail, but one knows no more at the end than at the beginning; they have hidden everything
by celerity, by limpidity. They have no secret because they have become a secret themselves. (A Thousand Plateaus 289)

To put it differently, with such a flood of information—of deterritorialised flows—it becomes impossible to measure and interpret against any pure form. Her confession becomes indiscernible to logic. They state: “it is curious how a woman can be secretive while at the same time hiding nothing, by virtue of transparency, innocence and speed” (A Thousand Plateaus 289). Not surprisingly, confession has become a discursive practice associated with the feminine. In Confessional Politics Irene Gammel connects confession, the female voice, and a lack of authority:

. . . confessional readings frequently entail a process of devaluation of the female voice. The female voice relating personal experience, like the sinner’s and the patient’s, belongs not to the realm of abstract and official langue but to parole, to familiar and intimate speech, and is thus characterized by a low degree of formality and authority, as it is perceived as ephemeral or trivial. (4)

The confessional moments in ficto-critical texts thus help challenge both genre and confessional politics, with their play on texuality, fiction and truth. For example, confession is traditionally aligned with truth telling. Yet, in Finding Theodore and Brina the text’s confessional moments are not unmediated cries from the heart, they are performative and self-reflexive. This is achieved by the ambivalence around whether the text is fiction or non-fiction, and whether White is actually the narrator. Is the text really autobiographical? At this moment there is a loss of the Oedipal subject and the emergence of subjectivity as autopoeisis. In Finding Theodore and Brina for example, the narrator is mediated through the fragmented multiple nature of the text, fictional performativity and the play on patriarchal hermeneutics. The subject is not fixed; she can be changed through her research; she is historically contingent. At one point, she asks: “Can a researcher become contaminated by her material?” (134). Similarly, her ideas are not fixed; she is open to “seeing the world in entirely new ways” (160). There is also no arboreal tracing of the family tree, as might be expected in a family memoir, no guide at the beginning of the text so the readers can track a linear family narrative. Instead, the text is made up of a
rhizomatic collection of scraps of information, imaginings and memory informed by a process of pick-up. Thus, White’s *Finding Theodore and Brina* populates the margins of history without ever really specifying either genre or individual.

The ficto-critical form of this book is reflective of the need to reclaim stories banished to the margins. In the process, the text’s focus increases beyond merely the narrator’s family as it becomes a piece of cultural commentary on contemporary Australia. Past and present collapse, a warning for today against continuing such exclusions and the bigotry that informs them:

History is a discipline of selection and we weren’t chosen . . . The story of this family is enmeshed within the story of Australia but to prove all of it is beyond anyone’s charter. It contains shameful records, neglected or unacknowledged.

Figures rush out of the landscape and they are not always Krakouers. (217) The figures referred to in this paragraph are Aboriginal, and the landscape is postcolonial. The violence enacted against minority groups, excluded from history and official discourses, is thus (often) both physical and semantic. Atrocities are not carried out on a purely physical level, but also at the level of language and culture, as an active politics of forgetting is enacted. Such stories, however, cannot be erased and prevented from resurfacing. The fact that both Theodore and Brina were Jewish resonates profoundly in this ficto-critical text; the attempted genocide of Jewish people runs parallel with the politics of genocide inherent in early Western Australian legislation. Based on eugenics, the Western Australian government attempted to “breed out” Aborigines, and absorb them into white society. White’s narrative outlines one family’s story, a remembering of people forgotten. However, ghosting her story is a much greater story of silence and forgetting, only now really coming to the fore in Australia. As the narrator of *Finding Theodore and Brina* states: “Where once the stories of the British majority were the dominant stories of our culture, now it is the stories held along the edges that begin to be heard” (122). The figures rushing from the landscape approach dominant Australian culture (Anglo, male and middle-class) both physically and semantically, hence the need for a self-reflexive ficto-
critical form that is consciously attentive to not reproducing the structures of domination and exclusion.

**Benang: From the Heart**

The second Australian ficto-critical text I wish to look at is Kim Scott’s *Benang: From the Heart* (1999). This book by Scott has something in common with White’s *Finding Theodore and Brina*. *Benang*, quite literally, represents the (Aboriginal) figures rushing forth from the landscape—the stories from the margin—that White’s narrator describes. It is also a fictionalised account of Scott’s personal history. According to an interview conducted by Susan Midalia, “*Benang* . . . was written as a fictionalised version of family history, in order to investigate non-Aboriginal attitudes to Aboriginality, issues of power, and the psychosis which Kim [Scott] believes lies at the heart of mainstream non-Aboriginal culture” (1). Not unlike his first novel *True Country*, Scott’s *Benang* is an investigation into the violence of colonisation. I am choosing to read this text (also published by FACP) as ficto-criticism because it is in-between in many ways: not only a sophisticated critique and analysis of colonising processes through its mix of fiction and non-fiction, but also an attack on the binary systems that maintain divisions between white and black, reason and emotion and intellect and body.

The story told by Scott is from the perspective of the “first white man,” Harley, who is the product of his grandfather’s amateur eugenics project. His grandfather Ernest Scat is inspired in the 1920s by A. O. Neville to undertake a controlled breeding program with Nyoongar women. Significantly, Neville was the Chief Protector of Aboriginals from 1915 to 1940 in Western Australia, during which time he implemented a systematic program to eliminate Aboriginality (assigned to skin colouration), by controlling the lives of Aboriginal people, in particular, those who were of “mixed race.” Nyoongar people of mixed race were labelled and described by such words as quadroon and octoroon. Those with light skin were removed from their families and communities, educated and socialised into white society, and only allowed to marry those with light skin. Harley’s grandfather
Scat reproduces Neville’s disturbing experiment, naturalised by the discourse of eugenics, which was popular during that period. Scat is, in the novel, Neville’s fictionalised cousin, and like Neville he employs the Western concepts of rationality and science to the same disturbing ends:

 Whatever the confusions of my genealogy, there seems little doubt that my grandfather intended to be my creator. It was he who, if not indeed forming the idea, applied it as Mr Neville was unable to do.

 For Ernest, it was a rationalisation of his desire. It was a challenge. It was as if he—a little too late to be a pioneer, and not really cut out to tame the land—could still play a role in taming a people into submission. (32)

The proximity and personal nature of Scat’s experiment powerfully works to bring home the pathology and self-interest of those involved in the policies of genocide written into Western Australian law during that period. Harley discovers the records of his grandfather’s grotesque experiment whilst recovering from a car accident, and begins to trace his Nyoongar family.

On the back of the book there is a reviewer’s comment from Amanda Lohrey. Lohrey is quoted as saying: “Kim Scott . . . uses a cool, almost matter-of-fact style to brilliantly render a form of white madness that ravaged the Australian continent in the disguise of Reason.” Lohrey’s commentary is telling, as it focuses on a central tenet of Scott’s book Benang, which is not, it seems, coincidentally subtitled From the Heart. This text is not disembodied and lacking emotion, yet, nor is it lacking logic or sense. With his clever and humorous unravelling of dichotomous binaries, Scott critiques the authoritarian, disembodied, and fascist position of the (in this case amateur) scientist who constructs himself as rational purveyor of truth. Scat, Harley’s grandfather, through his project of eugenics, is attempting to control and categorise the other through the discourse of science and reason. He is also attempting to stabilise meaning. Nyoongar identity is thus objectified and limited in a violently reductive fashion. Yet, as Scott demonstrates, there is
nothing objective, civilised, or rational about his method or science. For example, as one reviewer of *Benang* has noted, Scat’s fleshy existence intrudes on his research (Slater 223).

At one point, Scat finds himself with an erection:

*Absorption*, he said, it’s possible. *Assimilation*.

For some reason the words aroused Ernest; perhaps because he was still struggling to free himself of certain erotic memories and guilt. Indeed, his erection threatened to intrude into his mental note-making, as if wanting to prove that there was plenty of lead in this pencil. (Scott 46)

Clearly, Scott’s novel can be easily read as a critique of colonisation and the systems of knowledge that underpin such arrogant and paternalistic brutalities. But Scott’s critique does not reproduce those same systems of domination by operating generically within the conventions of serious, rational criticism. His text is ficto-critical as he destabilises genre, the subject, rationality, science, and even dominant notions of Aboriginality and whiteness.

Harley, contemplating his grandfather’s writing, compares his reason with his Nyoongar family’s reason/s:

It was never random, it was never just wandering, it was never wilderness. I think it was more like my own wondering, even as I made my way through my grandfather’s papers, looking for traces, for essences, for some feeling of what happened, for what had shaped it this way. Fanny [Pinyan Benang Wonyin—a Nyoongar relative of Harley’s] led her family though a terrain in which she recognised the trace of her ancestors, and looked for her people. She brought them back. I would like to think that I do a similar thing. But I found myself among paper, and words not formed by an intention corresponding to my own, and I read a world weak in creative spirit. (471-2)

As Lisa Slater has written about *Benang*: “In reading white writing (that is, white making and remaking of the world), as weak in creative spirit, the gaze is being turned upon the construction of whiteness” (220). In other words, instead of merely setting himself in opposition to racism and colonisation, Scott creatively imagines another space in which the categories of both whiteness and Aboriginality may be transformed. For example, the
concept of assimilation—the absorption of Aboriginal people into white society—is
playfully and creatively reappropriated in Benang. Scott incorporates quotations from
historical sources, such as this one from Neville: “As I see it, what we have to do is uplift
and elevate these people to our own plane . . .” (qtd. in Scott 11). Harley has a literal
“propensity for elevation” (12). He floats. As the first white man, Harley physically hovers
above the landscape. Here, Scott is playing with language as a discursive practice, and his
text has been consciously constructed to function (at a formal level) to support his
theoretical argument:

Benang is thus designed to make the reader think and feel. Highly self-conscious
about its aesthetic and political principles, it requires the reader to think about
history, representation and ethics, and to question our own actions, beliefs and
attitudes. (Midalia 4)

Scott’s attack on binary systems at many levels in his text is therefore a political act: it is
not just aesthetic textual play that concerns Scott it is power. According to Deleuze and
Parnet:

It is wrong to say that the binary machine exists only for reasons of convenience. It
is said that “the base 2” is the easiest. But in fact the binary machine is an
important component of apparatuses of power. So many dichotomies will be
established that there will be enough for everyone to be pinned to the wall, sunk in
a hole. Even the divergences of deviancy will be measured according to the degree
of binary choice; you are either white or black, Arab then? Or half-breed?
(Dialogues 21)

Notably, despite Scat’s efforts, Harley’s identity as the first white man is not stable, as he
neither settles into whiteness, nor is completely at ease with himself as Aboriginal.
According to Slater, “Scott’s textual politics position identity formation as complex and
multi-voiced as the novel: intersubjective and culturally and historically contingent. In
doing so, Scott destabilises the black/white binary” (222). As a result, Scott’s narrative
muddies the system of bifurcation that works to stabilise meaning and contain the other.
Scott’s ficto-critical form is, therefore, both strategic and symbolic. At one point, for example, Harley suddenly discovers some new characters that populate his family story, his statement about their discovery self-reflexively playing on representation and genre. They may only be characters in this story, but they are family to him: “I worried, as any reader must also do, at this late and sudden introduction of characters. Except that for me it was not characters, but family.” This statement, that has metafictive intonations, reverberates with Australia’s dominant national narratives. Like *Finding Theodore and Brina*, *Benang: From the Heart* calls on us to question the hierarchies that underpin not just generic taxonomy but also white/black, Australian/Aboriginal, intellect/body and reason/emotion. In conclusion, *Benang* is (generically) not just a work of fiction but a highly inventive text that incorporates theoretical insight, historical documentation, and which—importantly—is embodied in that it speaks “from the heart.” It is critical (that it not be dismissed as merely fiction).

Another Australian author whose work blurs the line between fact and fiction as a means to acknowledge and explore the partiality of different truths is Drusilla Modjeska. In March of 2002, she is quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as identifying “government fictions and lies and corporate fictions and lies” as one of the reasons why “literary non-fiction” and memoir are so popular. She says: “We are an information-heavy culture, hungry for facts. We have to face the possibility that in a time of moral and political confusion, non-fiction has more to say” (Wyndam 76). Modjeska’s comments are interesting as they suggest a perspective on literary non-fiction or ficto-criticism that confirms the influence of the molecular/minoritarian in undermining the validity of molar/majoritarian discourses. From Modjeska’s perspective, for example, part of the interest in literary non-fiction and memoir is the result of the negative influence of postmodernism on fiction. In the same *Sydney Morning Herald* article she is reported as saying: “Part of the problem for fiction had been a stream of novels from students of creative writing and postmodernism, many of them ‘tricky and unsubstantial’” (Wyndam 76). Modjeska’s comments are suggestive that there is no clear or singular factor that is
influential on the development of writings that explore the space between. Muecke and Gibbs have both argued for the influence of creative writing programs in Australian universities on the development of ficto-criticism, yet according to Modjeska the “tricky and unsubstantial” fiction coming from creative writing graduates has helped initiate the interest in literary non-fiction (ficto-criticism). In other words, postmodernism is not the only culprit in producing ficto-critical texts. However, despite these contradictions around influences, the one thing that most ficto-critical forms of writing have in common is a desire to creatively explore what is at the margin: to tell a different story and to tell it differently. It is a search for new narratives, and signals the exhaustion of established stories and their generic forms. Writer Gail Jones, for example, explores what is left out of official discourses in both her ficto-critical academic work, discussed earlier, and her ficto-critical fiction. Jones explains how her collection of short stories, *Fetish Lives*, came about: “A lot of the stories in *Fetish Lives* arose from a kind of interrogation of the orthodox version [of history and biography] and an attempt to reconstruct what seemed to me to have been pegged to the margin” (Interview with Mair 18). Jones’ collection explores odd details left unexplored from famous figures of history through historiographic metafiction. She states, “my style of writing is one that doesn’t pretend to be fact. It actually draws attention to artifice all the time and the fact that history is also an artifice of narrative . . .” (Interview with Mair 18). Like Jones’ *Fetish Lives*, Modjeska’s books *Poppy* (1990) and *The Orchard* (1994) also weave fact and fiction. Her books are fiction, but include footnotes. Interestingly, Modjeska’s writing has been described by Brenda Walker “as that which includes speculativeness, erudition and the techniques of the essay;” evoking the critical nature of her work (7). In an interview with Bronwyn Rivers in *Meanjin* Modjeska—also an academic—discusses her pull away from the Logos world of the father towards a “kind of inner, less logical, less rational voice” (320). According to her:

One of the characteristics of women’s writing is that you’re always having to deal with that non-universality, with writing out of the third term . . . Where are you speaking from? How do you look without being looked at? How do you look while
being looked at? . . . I think women are forced, by their very nature and by the culture, to address those sorts of issues in a way that men don’t have to. (322)

Modjeska’s reference here to women’s nature as the impetus for them to be self-reflexive is problematic. However, her identification with woman’s position within patriarchal culture reinforces what has been demonstrated by this chapter: her acknowledgment of the cultural placement of women as minoritarian in relation to the man-standard helps explain why women have employed, and are employing, ficto-critical modes. In *Poppy*, for example, a biography of her mother, Modjeska is forced to make things up to fill the gaps where information didn’t exist. She describes the shift from the historian’s “rather stitched-up, academic voice, always trying to prove something,” to a more conversational dialogic voice as liberating (320). Similarly, experimental writer Ania Walwicz speaks of the same frustration with the limited critical voice within the academy. This is a frustration with the molar lines of institutionalised guides and rules for writing and being:

The formal essay. You must do a formal essay now. The mode. The presentation. The guide. The guide will guide you now. The formal essay, the quotation. The neoclassical emphasis on unity, continuity and linearity. The book that speaks to books now. I enter a formal essay now. I do my debut. The entry. I wear a pink dress now. The docile body of the institutionalized student. The docile body of the institutionalized subject. (“No, No, No—The Reluctant Debutante” 335).

According to Walwicz, in the academy: “You can write a poem but you can’t write a personalized essay, not yet. No, no, no. Daddy tells me” (“No, No, No—The Reluctant Debutante” 336). Walwicz’s reference to the power of Daddy within the academy and the docile body of the institutionalised student gendered feminine (in a pink dress) again reconfirms the ficto-critical flight as a line of becoming-woman. Not surprisingly, ficto-critical tendencies are often evident in works by creative writers who are resistant to the powers of the critics, who often limit the possible interpretation of a creative work with their rational voice from on high.64 Walwicz, for example, has written that she is uncomfortable with the way the critic objectifies both the writer and their texts, and wishes to avoid being limited to one category or position (Walwicz, Interview with Jenny Digby
Instead, she includes literary theory in her creative works and appropriates the critic’s role: “I become the critic in red roses, and actually comment on my work right there inside the book” (836). Reacting to the violence enacted on her texts by the literary critic, Walwicz challenges their right to speak with authority over her texts.

CONCLUSION

In Australia and internationally there seems to be an increasing trend toward writing-between fact and fiction as a way to explore the stories and histories left out of the official or molar narratives of historical fact, and to write back to those who determine the stories that get heard by undermining the chief generic form that helps them construct their point of view. Ficto-criticism strategically employs its generically transformative style to interrogate the binaries that inform systems of domination, such as patriarchy, colonisation and racism. In ficto-critical texts the form is not just the vehicle for the story; the form is part of the message. The ficto-critical shift can, therefore, be conceptualised in terms of a resistance to institutionalised knowledges and the genres that inform them. If ficto-criticism can be thought of as a genre it can only be done in so much as what it resists.

By inducing the reader to question meaning and meaning production through disrupting generic expectations, ficto-critical texts thus undermine the systems that inform fixed territories of knowledge that exclude difference, what is understood in this generic context as excess. As already established, the inclusion of the other in academic writing destabilises the authority of the academy. Yet, as the dominance of Muecke and King in Australian ficto-criticism suggests, ficto-criticism risks manifesting as a false refuge—a simulation of becoming—unless its movement at a micro political level actualises a line of flight. Escape can never be guaranteed, which is why a case-by-case approach must be undertaken. This theme will be engaged with in the final chapter where I argue that ficto-critical writers must risk themselves—not just the other—if they are to fully embrace ficto-criticism as a political tool, a way to self-reflexively explore the violence of representation.
The use of “ficto-criticism” in Canada will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

The upcoming 2003 Australian Association of Writing Programs conference titled “Negotiations: Writing, the Academy, and Publishing” suggests that the term ficto-criticism is still very much in circulation. Several of the abstracts listed on the University of New South Wales website address ficto-criticism. The conference is due to be held from 27th November to 30th 2003 at the University of New South Wales. Online. Google. 17 Nov 2003. Recent issues of Cultural Studies Review (formerly UTS Review) also include papers that address ficto-criticism.

See the debate in TEXT, specifically Muecke’s letter to the Editor in 4.1, 2000. He asks: “Anyone know what happened to ‘fictocriticism’ as a name for this [Creative Non Fiction] kind of writing; would have thought it was a candidate, given it is an Australian label . . .” www.gu.edu.au/school/art/text/. For an outline of creative non from an Australian context see the interview by Donna Lee Brien with Lee Gutkind published in TEXT 4.1, 2000. The interview is titled “Creative Nonfiction: A virtual conversation with Lee Gutkind.” http://www.gu.edu.au/school/art/text/april00/gutkind.htm


In the recent Key Concepts in Literary Theory by Wolfreys, Robbins and Womack, the section dealing with postmodernism states: “Subsequently in the late 1970s and 1980s postmodernism became confused with the equally vague term poststructuralism, particularly the alleged emphasis on the part of the latter phenomenon with textuality and play” (2001: 128).

Barthes positioning as a poststructuralist is based on his later works since his earlier work is unashamedly structuralist. His later book Roland Barthes (1995), for example, is ficto-critical as it is autobiographical, personal, critical and theoretical. In fact, the texts that Krauss refers to in her paper include his later works such as, Roland Barthes, A Lover’s Discourse and The Pleasure of the Text (1986: 292).

Derrida comes from a very different philosophical background from Barthes. Derrida’s work constitutes a more rigorous critique (deconstruction) of Western metaphysics.

Some ficto-criticism can, however, be just as difficult—just as dense—as the work of Joyce and Faulkner. This is particularly so for those readers not familiar with academic language and references. Many reviews of ficto-critical texts critique them for being filled with jargon, “sometimes sacrificing clarity.” See Kristen Henry’s review of WEDGE in TEXT, April 1997. www.gu.edu.au/school/art/text/

Scott Brookes says “it’s no secret FC [ficto-criticism] was first employed in Australia in Stephen Muecke and Noel King’s 1991 ABR essay-review” (2003: 10).

Muecke was not, however, using the term in relation to his work at the time of the publication of Reading the Country.

“Signature” attached to an email received from Muecke, March 2002.

Online. Google. 11 April 2002.

Christopher Hill also had difficulty finding references to Australian ficto-criticism. For example, in his paper “On Ficto-Criticism: A Reading for a Writers Festival” [sic] he states he has difficulty finding published articles on ficto-criticism (1997).


See my review of The Space Between, “Situation Occupied in The Space Between.” Here I argue that the emphasis in the introduction to this book on postmodernism and poststructuralism tends to dilute the influence of women and feminism on this form, despite it being a collection by women. For example, Nettelbeck says in the introduction to The Space Between: “It is here, at the intersection of literature and postmodernism, that fictocriticism appears as an increasingly familiar form” (1998: 3). This was to be published by Wakefield Press in 1996. Online. Yahoo. 3 March 1997.

By “publishing successes” I am not intending to suggest that academic publishing is successful in a commercial sense, but a sense of discovery, and newness (of having to be up to date with new developments) helps generate interest and sales in academic publishing. Similarly, notions of originality are central to academic research and writing. Ficto-criticism, whilst portrayed as “new,” is not necessarily commercially or academically viable (as many of the critiques demonstrate) as it breaks with generic convention and readers’ expectations.

Australians Leslie Stern and Lucy Sussex, teaching and/or publishing in the United States, and writing ficto-critically, have contributed to the term’s arrival there. I’m assuming that their use of the term stems from its wide spread application in Australia. In 1997 Lucy Sussex published a piece of ficto-criticism in SF
Eye, an American science fiction journal. In the article Sussex uses “fictocriticism” and “ficto-biography” to describe her style of writing. Leslie Stern’s The Scorsese Connection (1995) has been described as fictocriticism. Martin is less than complimentary of ficto-criticism (the term); he says: “an ugly but unavoidable term” (1997: 219). Stern’s more recent publication, The Smoking Book (1999) is also ficto-critical and was described as such in reviews. Stern was a visiting scholar at the Getty Research Institute in 1998. During this time she gave lectures that employed the term. Notably, Stern published in No Substitute. In other words, she was involved with the early writing group that Muecke and King identify in their paper “On Ficto-Criticism” as helping contribute to the development of ficto-critical writing. In 1998 Marilynn K. Loveless, then from Griffith University, delivered an interactive workshop on William Shakespeare’s work titled: “Deconstructing Willy: Ficto-criticism and Other Strategies of Dissent,” at Texas A&M University. Her presentation was part of an Interdisciplinary Conference on Language and Literature, hosted by the English Graduate Student Association (Online. Infoseek. 12 December 1998).

Online. Yahoo. 3 Feb. 1997. This journal didn’t, however, seem to get off the ground.


Recently, the journal Imperium has begun to advertise online for ficto-critical submissions. Imperium is based at the University of Luton, England. This suggests that the term is now being used more widely, not just in Australia and Canada.

Online. Google. 16 April 2002. See also volume 8.2 of antiTHESIS for an example of writing identified as ficto-criticism, Keith Ansell-Pearson’s “Poison: (Scrambled Extracts From a Viroid Life).”


Online. Hotbot. 11 Dec. 2000. Wendy Waring and J Biddle are listed as the course coordinators.

Online. Google. 16 April 2002.


Muecke also comes up periodically when searching for “ficto-criticism” on the internet. For example, in the online version of Real Time, a free cultural review publication based in Adelaide, he was interviewed by Annemarie Lopez. In the interview he discusses his writing practice, pedagogy and ficto-criticism. Real Time has also published reviews that are ficto-critical. For example, see Linda Marie Walker’s review of Oraculos. Linda Marie Walker’s work has been identified by Adrian Martin as ficto-criticism (see his review of Sterne’s Scorsese Connection). Walker was involved with Paul Hewson with the online journals Parallel Gallery and Journal and G.A.P: Grievous. Angel. Press. These journals included a number of ficto-critical works (not identified as such but clearly ficto-critical) by Jyanni Steffensen, Brenda Ludeman, Simon Robb, Linda Marie Walker, Michael Tawa, David Broker and others. Last updated in November 1995 these journals appear to no longer be current. Online. Yahoo. 25 September 1997.


Several continue to list ficto-criticism as an area of research interest, for example, Anne Brewster.

See, for example, “Carolyn Eskdale: The Fabric of Fiction.” This is a creative review of Eskdale’s work. Also, her essay accompanying Carolyn Lewen’s exhibition “Countenance” at the Centre for Contemporary Photography in Melbourne also describes itself as ficto-critical. Online. Excite. 15 Nov 1997.

See Owen Richardson’s review in The Weekend Australian and Jenny Pausacker’s brief commentary in The Age (1997).

As Deleuze and Guattari state: “It is not a matter of saying that Oedipus is a false belief, but rather that belief is necessarily something false that diverts and suffocates effective production.” (1983: 107).

Still, as Deleuze and Guattari also warn, you must not confuse minoritarian with becoming.

Deleuze and Guattari, for example, state: “The Women’s Liberation movements are correct in saying: We are not castrated, so you get fucked” (1997: 61).
Paul Dawson, in a recent article in *Westerly*, discusses the development of ficto-criticism in Australia (2002: 139-51). He acknowledges feminist influence on ficto-criticism, but spends much of the paper on Muecke and King and overall tends to fall back to postmodernism as an explanation or frame for the practice. He states, “[i]t is now possible to argue that fictocriticism is a textual space for the postmodern writer-critic. . . “ (2002: 148).


43 Layout as the original.

44 See, for example, Melody Graulich’s highly personal essay “Somebody Must Say These Things: An Essay for My Mother,” in which she begins with: “ I have opened this essay with a conversation long established in feminist criticism, the personal voice, not simply to establish my relationship to my subject but because the engagement between critic and subject and how it shapes both reader and text is my subject” (1993: 176).

45 Ross, however, misses one very important indicator of minoritarian status (as a challenge from “outside” to institutional authority): race. Significantly, it is often those excluded from major literatures, on the grounds that they will destabilise authority, who are choosing to write ficto-critically.

46 Ficto-criticism is often a style of writing employed by students. Honours theses, Masters and PhDs are being written ficto-critically, or, at least, will contain a ficto-critical element. See Antonina Yvette Lewis’ ficto-critical Honours thesis from Griffith University and work by Rae Luckie, for example “Notes towards a fictocritical exegesis,” which was presented at the 1999 Association Australian Writing Programs Conference, Perth, Western Australia. Cassandra Lee Atherton completed her MA thesis at the University of Melbourne in 1998 titled “Crush: A Creative Exploration of the Lolita Complex.” Sylvia Martin, who reviewed *The Space Between for Australian Women’s Book Review*, is working on her PhD in women’s studies at Griffith University. She is working in ‘the space between’ academic and creative writing. Anthologies publishing the work of creative writing students will also include ficto-criticism. See publications such as *The Naked Eye* from Curtin University, for example.

47 In a 1997 examination for 9639 Honours English at the University of Adelaide the examination paper titled “Studies in the Essay: Poststructuralist Writing,” asks students of discuss what kind of essay writing characterises a number of terms including ficto-criticism. Significantly, after the term there are a number of writers listed in brackets. All men, they include Jameson, Muecke, and Hodge and McHoul (presumably due to their 1992 paper “The Politics of Text and Commentary” where they identify Muecke’s co-authored *Reading the Country* as ficto-critical). Google. 17 Nov 2003.

48 Notably, Murdoch University was during this time a place where such experimentation was being encouraged. Despite this, I believe the experience Hill describes of the women feeling somewhat alien to the reified environment of the University holds true.

49 Mary Fallon along with Anna Gibbs, Beth Spencer and Linda Marie Walker are identified as ficto-critical writers by Adrian Martin in his review (titled “Call It Scorsese”) of Lesley Stern’s book *The Scorsese Connection* (1997: 219).

Gibbs, in her history of ficto-criticism, however, makes reference to a publication that does not exist. There was no special issue on ficto-criticism by *Westerly*. This reference to a non-existent publication further muddies the history of ficto-criticism and adds to its “less than rigorous” reputation.

51 As another example of the tendency in Australian ficto-critical discourse to limit influences to Barthes and Derrida (and post-structuralism) see Paul Dawson’s “What is a Literary Intellectual? Creative Writing and the New Humanities.” Dawson states: “Yet post-structuralist theory deriving from work of Barthes and Derrida (regularly cited as influences on fictocriticism) has been castigated for its introspective self-reflexivity and political quietude” (2003: 35).

52 In the introduction to *Confession of the Critics*, Veeser signals the influence of *écriture feminine* on autobiographical criticism in the United States (1996: xiv).

53 See also Moorhead’s “Miss Marple Goes to Ayers Rock: A Performed Reading.” This piece is also ficto-critical, creatively critiquing the media’s role in the Lindy Chamberlin case. The piece, designed for performance, includes a lecture from Miss Marple, prose, poetry, lists and a diagram. Evoking the detective genre, this performative essay self-reflexively plays on the notion of truth suggesting that all truth may be fictional and contingent.
For another early example of writing by Moorhead which is ficto-critical see “The Landscape of the Egg” published in *Difference: Writings By Women* (1985). This anthology contains work by poet-critic Audrey Lorde.

Lyotard’s notion of “the jews” discussed in *Heidegger and “the jews”* holds some interconnections with the Deleuzian concept of becoming. Like Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard makes the distinction between Jews as a people and “the jews.” “the jews” does not represent a nation, or a political, religious or philosophical figure, but rather what they come to represent in relation to (and in) dominant Western thought: radical alterity. Like becoming-woman, “the jews” is a concept determined through its relation to dominant standards. Plural, in lower case and quotation marks it represents those outside—those who must be removed or excised—and this is not limited to Jews alone. As radical alterity the concept of “the jews” suggests a becoming which is then blocked and repressed. In this quotation from Deleuze and Guattari, however, they are making a distinction between a minority group (like Jews) and a becoming. One does not guarantee the other. Merely being part of a minority does not mean one is deterritorialised.

Gail Jones in her review of *Jamming the Machinery* describes the work as ficto-criticism, and congratulates the Association for the Study of Australian Literature for publishing Bartlett’s book, as “so brave an endorsement of the principle of creative disruption” (1998/99: 31). Jones also states on the risks involved in writing ficto-critically that: “This audacity of mode signals a welcome expansion of the possibilities of academic writing, and its theoretical confidence, evident above all in performative gestures, reminds us that critical renewals and appropriations require both gumption and assertiveness” (1998/99: 30).

Instead Muecke’s book was promoted as travel writing. This was a decision deliberately taken, as it was feared that labelling *No Road* ficto-criticism might limit its sales. However, despite often being reviewed as ficto-criticism *No Road* was (for a small publisher like FACP) a reasonable success. In the “Gleebooks Gleaner” (newsletter for the famous Sydney bookshop Gleebooks) of May 1997, *No Road* was listed as their fifth best seller in the category of literature. For examples of reviews that use ficto-criticism, see Owen Richardson’s review in *The Weekend Australian* and McKenzie Wark’s in *The Australian*, both apply the term to Muecke’s *No Road* (1997). See the Works Cited for details.

Incidentally, Brien is a proponent of the label creative nonfiction in Australia. See her paper “The Place Where the Real and the Imagined Coincides” in *TEXT* (2000).

Interestingly, this paragraph is suggestive of some ambiguity on White’s narrator’s part about completely facing the implications of her unquestioning acceptance of this myth. For example, there is some slippage between the “blacks” having some agency and being wholly marked by the process of colonisation. In one part of the section quoted the “blacks” “take” the names of their white bosses. This is followed by an assertion that the “blacks” are marked as the property of their colonisers. This ambiguity makes the confession less meaningful, watering down the violence of colonisation. It is almost as if the narrator wants to hold onto the myth of paternal ownership instead of the reality of sexual abuse and rape. This is especially true since the following admission, that people believed the lesser explanation, is made in third person: “And people believed it.” The narrator, with this statement, distances herself from her culpability in maintaining the myth. At the same time it rings with an embarrassed guilty tone (I believed it too).

In his first novel, *True Country*, Scott explores a landscape populated by similar issues.

Nyoongar (alternatively spelt Nyungah) represents the Aboriginal peoples of the South West of Western Australia.

See Anna Haebich’s *For Their Own Good: Aborigines and Government in the Southwest of Western Australia 1900-9140* (1988).


According to Kevin Brophy, factional or ficto-critical writing has defused some of the tensions between creative writing and critical-theoretical texts (1998: 228).
CHAPTER FIVE

BECOMING-MINORITARIAN:
CANADIAN FICTO-CRITICISM

Movement always happens behind the thinker’s back, or in the moment when he
blinks. Getting out is already achieved, or else it never will be. Questions are generally
aimed at a future (or a past). The future of women, the future of the revolution, the
future of philosophy, etc. But during this time, while you turn in circles among these
questions, there are becomings which are silently at work, which are almost
imperceptible. We think too much in terms of history, whether personal or universal.
(Deleuze and Parnet 2).

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Four I argued that rather than replicate the mastery of normative academic work
ficto-criticism must imitate the movement of becoming to maintain its revolutionary potential
and relevance. This must occur at both the level of its conception and in its practice. I
illustrated the contradictions inherent in limiting the form through the identification and
discovery of an Australian ficto-critical movement with key proponents, codes and
conventions all bound together with (the construction of) an original document (Muecke and
King’s “On Ficto-Criticism”). Notably—and antithetical to the political intent of ficto-
criticism—this origin is imbued with a narrative of mastery consistent with dominant modes of
academic research and writing. By illustrating the less documented stories of Australian ficto-
criticism by women I linked their social and cultural position with their desire to write ficto-
critically, as a practice of becoming-woman. By writing ficto-critically those at the margin can
strategically undermine the power of academic writing—as the pinnacle of non-fiction
(truth)—which excludes and/or misrepresents them and their experience. In this chapter I
extend this argument by continuing to map the genealogy of the term. As I argue, “ficto-
criticism” originated in Canada rather than Australia and, significantly, was the direct result of a writer’s highly radical and experimental practice. Given her nomadic style, the author of this ficto-critical practice, Jeanne Randolph, is both largely unknown in Canada and unheard of in the official discourse of Australian ficto-criticism.

Closely following the structure and theme of the last chapter, I thus begin Chapter Five discussing the ficto-criticism of Jeanne Randolph and the context from which the term emerged. Firstly, I demonstrate the process through which her ficto-critical practice has been overlooked in Australia, despite her work being the impetus for the development of the term and the explanation for its arrival in Australia. Secondly, I argue that whilst she is (indirectly) responsible for the emergence of ficto-criticism as an identifiable Australian practice, she remains absent from that discourse as her ficto-critical work is highly deterritorialised. Randolph’s lack of presence in the discourse of ficto-criticism in Australia illustrates the incompatibility of becoming-woman and the academy, and mirrors the experience of many women Australian practitioners. In Canada, on the contrary, while her work also remains marginalised, it is, however, starting to attract some critical attention and this is largely due to an increasing interest in ficto-critical practice internationally. As suggested above, the story of Canadian ficto-critical writing may be very different from its Australian counterpart, yet there appear to be some very startling intersections that strongly reinforce one of the main propositions of this thesis: that ficto-criticism, either in its Australian or Canadian expression, is a specific literary intervention; a political practice that interrogates the power of representation and interpretative value.

Thirdly, after examining the writing by Randolph that inspired the term, and briefly exposing how it was exported to Australia, I discuss the work of Aritha van Herk, another key Canadian writer who uses the term to describe her writing. In this context, I argue that van Herk’s adoption of a ficto-critical practice was—like Muecke’s Australian ficto-criticism— influenced
by the work of Jeanne Randolph. Finally, I examine in relatively less detail a diverse selection of Canadian authors, writing both in English and French (in which case I study the texts in English translation) who employ the tropes of ficto-criticism. Most importantly, I examine the Québécoise writer Nicole Brossard whose practice, I argue, has heavily influenced Canadian creative-critical writing. However, the decision to sample a wide range of Canadian texts is a deliberate strategy intended to reflect the fact that ficto-criticism is both an open, labile generic space between and a practice increasingly prolific and visible in a growing range of contexts. Furthermore, this analysis of varied examples underwrites the assertion put forward in the previous chapter that ficto-criticism is a form wrought out of the conflict over difference and minoritarian politics. As a result, Canadian feminist writing is prominent in this chapter, as is the work of many writers of colour. These writers, I argue, employ ficto-criticism as a political tool, as they are concerned with the critique of critical writing. This critical practice, in fact, exposes the violence of representation that is normalised through the language, genre and style of rational academic discourse.

WHO KILLED JEANNE RANDOLPH? (CANADIAN) FICTO-CRITICISM AND HOW IT ARRIVED IN AUSTRALIA

As already established in Chapter Four, the references in the published ficto-critical discourse in Australia suggest that the term is Muecke and King’s. As discussed in “On Ficto-Criticism” Muecke and King cite an interview with Jameson made in 1987, where he states that there has been a flowing together of theory and criticism. However, what Muecke and King fail to make explicit to their readers is that the term is actually used in the published interview with Jameson. Significantly, the citation from Jameson that they reproduce leaves out the sentence “‘Ficto-criticism’ makes a lot of sense to me” (9). In fact, this sentence precedes the section they quote.¹ As a result, by neglecting to include the sentence where Jameson uses the term prior to describing what creative-criticism might be, Muecke and King’s paper implies that
“ficto-criticism” is their own term. What is significant about this editorial decision (or oversight) is that unless you read the original interview with Jameson, it really appears that Jameson is quoted to merely affirm Muecke and King’s conceptualisation of a “new” practice that they have already identified. Contrary to what Muecke and King would have us think (or believe) the writing that caused the emergence of this term comes neither from Muecke and King nor from Jameson but from an obscure cultural critic based in Toronto named Jeanne Randolph. Indeed, the Jameson interview that Muecke and King quote from was published in *Impulse*, a visual arts journal based in Toronto. A quick scan of the text of this interview shows that it is the interviewer Andrea Ward who introduces the term rather than Jameson. Ward’s familiarity with the ficto-criticism can be explained by the fact that she was a student at the Ontario Centre for Arts (OCA), where Randolph was a teacher, and that several years prior to Ward’s interview with Jameson Randolph’s writing on local visual arts had already been described as ficto-critical. In other words, the term was already in circulation in Canada and Jameson was merely responding to a question that made reference to it. In her interview Ward also leads the discussion toward conceptualising ficto-criticism as an attempt to address what she describes as the corrective power of criticism. The genealogy of the term is significant as argued in Chapter Four, as ficto-criticism must characterise becoming in order to achieve its political work. Therefore, Randolph’s invisibility in the Australian discourse on ficto-criticism reveals her practice as a becoming silently at work, that is, as a movement toward becoming-imperceptible.

Randolph is a psychiatrist and cultural theorist who had been writing ficto-criticism on the visual arts in Canada since the late 1970s. Her ficto-critique has as its main target the binary structures that inform the mainstays of critical writing; her work constitutes an attack on authority, judgement, and legitimacy. As Randolph states:

My entire writing production has been to argue against the rhetoric propelled by setting up dualities (binary thinking) in which topics being explored are analysed by
perpetuating categories explicitly or implicitly, such as “bad” vs “good,” “authentic” vs “phony,” indeed “nature” vs “culture.” (qtd. in McGregor 55).

Two collections of Randolph’s writings illustrate her commitment to unravelling binary systems: *Psychoanalysis and Synchronized Swimming* (1991) and *Symbolization and its Discontents* (1997), both published by the artists’ collective based in Toronto, YYZ Books. These texts contain many examples of ficto-criticism in the characteristic style of Randolph. With titles such as: “Truth Disguised as Lie,” “The Predicament of Meaning,” and “Sleepy Time Tales,” these ficto-critical works are playful, creative-critical texts that engage so subjectively with the artwork in question that they make a mockery of normative art criticism, and indeed any form of critical, interpretative writing. Randolph does not just combine elements of fiction and non-fiction, such as autobiographical criticism and experimental writing, but also breaks the rules of citation and sense. Randolph’s highly provocative work is located on the extreme edge of ficto-critical discourse for breaking down traditional critical writing into virtual nonsense. For example, one critic has described her writing as ambiguous, wilfully duplicitous and often difficult to decipher, arguing, “one is forced [when reading her work] to settle for guesses” (McGregor 56).

As a psychiatrist Randolph developed her ficto-critical theory of writing on the visual arts based on the psychoanalytic object relations theories of D.W. Winnicott, particularly his book *Playing and Reality*. Although Randolph writes on the visual arts, her concerns relating to the tradition of modernist art criticism echo the concerns of literary and cultural critics, as well as fiction writers, who write performatively and self-reflexively between fiction and non-fiction. Her affirmation of a ficto-critical practice, outlined in her paper “The Amenable Object” and first published in the Toronto art journal *Vanguard* in 1983, interrogates Freud’s conceptualisation of “Art-as-Neurosis.” Instead of a Freudian understanding of art as a symptom in need of an interpretative cure, according to Randolph’s reading of Winnicott, art is a mix of both subjective and objective experiential responses (30). Randolph argues that
Winnicott’s conceptualisation of art “raises the possibility that in art it is the ambiguity between the objective and subjective that gives an artwork a unique psychological validity” (26). Instead of the art object as a symptom of neurosis, that is a sublimated communication from the artist’s unconscious, the creative impulse is an act of play: an “adaptive relationship with the mysterious world” (30). Obviously the product of this adaptive relationship does not remain static, but changes depending on, firstly, its context and, secondly, the subjective experience of both the producer and viewer of the artwork. It is in this ambiguous space between the objective and the subjective that the art critic might imagine a mode of writing about art as a way to link the intellect with the senses. As Randolph suggests: “Like the soles of the feet curved gently upon the contours of the brow, the intellect must be limbered until it can reach around to meet the heart, gut and spleen” (21). The viewer’s subjectivity, therefore, comes into play, as the artwork becomes the amenable object, informed and in a sense reproduced by the viewer’s experience. Randolph describes this process as “systematic subjectivity,” a notion of subjectivity that echoes Guattari’s autopoesis. Here both the viewer and artist interact subjectively and productively with the artwork. As the following quote from Randolph’s “Amenable Object” illustrates, the subjectivity she imagines is not fixed, nor is the meaning of the artwork. Subsequently it cannot be limited by one interpretative key:

Reshaping Winnicott’s theory to the aims of art criticism allows a way to interact with the artwork as an intentional revelation of the artist’s version of experience, intentionality that need neither be explicit or disguised. Unlike art-as-neurosis, this is not a theoretical model of an artwork from the purportedly objective view of someone who wants to study how the artist creates it. This is a view of the art object once the artist has left it in public. (31)

Randolph’s “The Amenable Object” works as her ficto-critical “manifesto.” Randolph, however, does not use the term here and although from the late 1970s she had been writing art criticism in the style of ficto-criticism, it was not until the early 1980s that the term appears in print, applied to her work by Bruce Grenville. In 1986 Grenville, in a discussion of art
criticism in Canada, published an article that argues for an alternative critical practice: ficto-criticism. This is the first published reference to the term that I have been able to locate. In it he identifies Randolph’s work as an example of writing that perverts traditional art criticism. According to Grenville:

We can no longer support the notion of art criticism as an authoritative text which reveals the meaning and establishes the legitimacy of an artwork to a submissive audience. Nor can we look to criticism as a qualitative judgement handed down from above. Instead, it must be recognised as a form of speculative fiction. (15)

Grenville goes on to discuss Randolph’s critical work as “speculative fiction,” arguing that her inclusion of a number of critical voices breaks down the dominant authoritative critical voice. He adds that her self-reflexive proposition that her writing is fiction undermines any claims to authority or legitimation. Grenville further argues: “she has developed a form of writing which might best be described as ‘ficto-criticism’” (“Art Criticism in Canada” 15). In a later article Grenville revisits Randolph’s ficto-criticism, stating that it “offers the clearest instance of an intervention into modernist critical practice” (56). Appropriately titled “Lines of Flight” this article reflects the synergies between Deleuzian thought and ficto-criticism and again argues for an alternative critical practice to “project us into a line of flight from the binary machine and its will-to-truth” (58).6

Difficult to describe, Randolph’s ficto-criticism often appears as collage, sometimes with personal reference, but most often it is confronting and confusing, leaving the reader grappling with meaning. One text, which gives an indication of the polyvalent nature of her work, is the piece “Mincemeat—A Recipe for Disaster.” Originally published as the introductory essay for an exhibition titled “Verge: Sheila Ayearst” in 1990, “Mincemeat” can be read as a critique of traditional (art) criticism. Instead of a key to the works on display—a framework or reference point for the viewer—Randolph inverts and parodies the expert art critic’s role by presenting us with a detailed recipe for mincemeat. On the one hand, she diminishes or reduces the act of
art criticism to the feminised world of cooking: who is, after all, traditionally expected to cook at Christmas? On the other hand, she reclaims its importance by appropriating the voice of an expert, in this case the voice of the food historian, by including historical, folkloric and popular information on the ingredients and the dish itself. This kind of double-sided-ness or ambiguity is common throughout “Mincemeat” and other ficto-critical works by Randolph. By using the (pompous) tone of the expert’s voice, yet peppering the text with untruths or fictions, the mincemeat recipe challenges traditional art criticism that dissects the work to reveal its secrets for the passive and uninformed viewing audience. There is no discussion here on the compositional meaning of Ayearst’s brush strokes, nor are there any historical references to earlier works of art as a frame. Instead, the reader of this exhibition catalogue gets a bizarre cooking lesson:

Combine a quarter pound of each of dried, candied, chopped citron, orange and lemon peel. Combining ingredients and submitting them to culinary technique is a venture that emboldens the cook, for she savours the process of accidents and cunning from which results the concoction that, when presented to the dinner guest, confounds the distinction between material and immaterial, between physical sensation and figurative effect. There exists of course no recipe the realization of which does not permit additions or substitutions of ingredients to heighten or perturb either the nutritive or evocative power of the dish. Accordingly, you may wish herein to substitute candied kumquat for the citron. Kumquats once grew profusely along the sand dunes of Spain’s Mediterranean coast. (Psychoanalysis and Synchronized Swimming 109)

This passage—in the context of an exhibition catalogue—highlights the metacritical aspect of Randolph’s work. There are enough elements and terms in “Mincemeat” that suggest it is about the artwork, such as, “material and immaterial” and “figurative.” At the same time it is a confusing treatise on the ingredients and recipe for mincemeat, full of contradictions and slippery half-truths. For example, the authoritative and expert tone of the narrator is undermined by statements such as the one referring to kumquats growing “along the sand
dunes of Spain’s Mediterranean coast.” The reference to the exotic Mediterranean and the tone and language are convincing despite the fact that, when reading the sentence, one begins to wonder what kind of citrus tree would survive in the coastal conditions suggested by sand dunes. In fact, kumquats originated from China, not Spain as the sentence implies. Yet the obscure nature of this piece of general knowledge and the convincing authoritative tone, places enough doubt in the reader’s mind to make them unsure, thereby striking up an uncomfortable feeling that something is not quite right. Similarly, there is no explicit statement that kumquats actually do originate from Spain, rather it is merely implied. This makes the ground even more unstable, making it difficult to rebuff. This is just one example of a number of contentious and contradictory assertions that confuse the reader throughout “Mincemeat.” Nevertheless, this example, as representative of the whole piece demonstrates the slippery ambiguity Randolph crafts in her ficto-criticism. As a result, there is no single reading for one to rest on. This swinging-to-and-fro against any solid position is characteristic of Randolph’s anti-dialectic stance. One is always constantly shifting one’s reading as the text seemingly changes and moves beneath you. Ironically, in the context of the exhibition catalogue the readers expecting traditional criticism find themselves swiftly unsettled by a very traditional recipe.

Faced with this creative and slippery work in a catalogue that accompanies a visual arts exhibition, readers find themselves confronted by a text as equally creative and indeterminate as the collection of images that make up the exhibition. There is no traditional authoritative interpretative gesture to shed meaning and light. Nor is there any attempt to provide one. Here, ficto-criticism can be seen to break down the boundaries between science and art and between literature and criticism. Randolph has herself spoken of viewing her ficto-criticism as a practice parallel with the artwork she writes in response to. According to Grenville in the introduction to Psychoanalysis and Synchronized Swimming:
From theory to criticism, to fiction and ficto-criticism, Randolph questions the nature of critical practice within the Canadian art community. She challenges the conventions of critical writing by undermining its claims to authority, scientific objectivity, and the Real. In so doing, she disrupts the traditional representation of the art object and its claims to unity and authenticity. Through a conflation of psychoanalysis, art criticism, fictional literature, critical theory, the politics of representation and the ethics of interpretation, Randolph constructs a tenable counter-narrative for contemporary critical practice. (12)

Randolph’s ficto-criticism is therefore a key example of creatively critical writing as it is representative of the hybridity ficto-criticism has the potential to imagine. Indeed, Randolph seems to follow Deleuze and Guattari’s call for “experimentation against any kind of interpretation.” In relation to the territorialising project of normative critical interpretative writing, her texts are thus becomings. Refusing authority over the object of attention and by making transparent the rules of knowledge production through her metacritical commentary, Randolph’s ficto-criticism operates to refuse the either/or dichotomy at both a formal and philosophical level. Thus, ficto-criticism becomes a revolutionary force, imagining and allowing the flows of desire in a creative drive of “and, and, and, and,” instead of either/or, that is, instead of good versus bad, culture versus nature, subject versus object and self versus other. Far from objective her art criticism is an example of a systematic subjective and creative response to a work of art made available to the viewer.

Her performative lectures are similarly challenging, as she deliberately works to unsettle the audience’s expectations and undermine legitimation. For example, in a presentation made for a panel discussion in 1999 for the OCA in Toronto Randolph collaged a number of quotations together from Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Sartre on the question of objectivity. These quotations are all suggestive of a stance critical of objectivity. That is, out of context they appear to question whether objectivity is obtainable, or indeed, even useful. For example, from
Kierkegaard she quotes: “Let us not deal unjustly with the objective tendency (and you might call it pantheistic self-deification) but let us rather view the objective tendency as an essay in the comical” (Randolph, Notes to “The Ethics of Ficto-Criticism” 5). Like her published ficto-criticism, Randolph’s performative lectures playfully undermine the objective stance and her own authority. Most significantly, in this presentation she promises a citation that will mirror Canadian identity, but later in the performance she misplaces it:

“Now,” I claimed, as I scuffled and rummaged through the eight paperback books, the loose scraps of paper, and the sky blue file folder I had before me, “I shall hold a mirror to Canadian Identity.” And this is the performative moment in my presentation, where I spend time shifting through this mess looking for a citation. . . . “Oh my where the hell is that quote? Where the FUCK did I put it. Bare with me, I was re-reading it just half an hour ago before this panel began. Oh it’s a good one. Where the hell? . . .” I paused rummaging fitfully.

“You know what? I can’t find it! I can’t find the perfect mirror of Canadian identity. I tell you what. Let’s not spend any more time watching me shuffle papers and fret. I’ll give you my email address and if anyone wants me to send them the quote that serves as the perfect mirror of Canadian Identity, just email me . . .” (Notes to “The Ethics of Ficto-Criticism” 7).

The point is that Randolph would not and could not present the quotation that holds a mirror to Canadian identity. Instead, if you chose to ask for the quotation (and only one in the audience did) you would find yourself with several that speak of the importance of clear communication and “order and harmony,” and, again, more quotations that comment on the subjective. For example:

We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages.
These quotations may be relevant comments on Canadian identity, and how Randolph might see Canadians as searching for and relying on categories, rules and polite contact through clear well-bred speech. However, as Randolph suggested in an interview with me shortly before this panel, she deliberately plays on the reader or listener’s desire for what constitutes truth. As McGregor has said of Randolph’s work:

By setting up these pieces [of ficto-criticism] . . . in such a way that they can’t be read with confidence as either fictive or factual, she destroys the grounds on which we usually determine “truth value,” thus forcing the reader/viewer to arbitrate for himself or herself not merely the meaning of this text, but the relationships borne by all/any texts (including art) to each other and to the world-at-large. (152)

By misplacing the promised citation, Randolph interferes with the audiences’ desire for knowledge and understanding. Present at several of Randolph’s performative presentations, Grenville states:

I have seen her deliver them . . . and they can be quite frightening to observe, not only because the response from the audience can be most vociferous, but also because she is invariably delivering a complex subject through a process that is extemporaneous, contingent and provisional. (Grenville, “Doubt” 7).

Her performance in the context of a conference panel discussion thus raises questions about the pedagogical imperatives of such structured scenes of knowledge production. Randolph goes beyond merely articulating her theoretical and critical position; she enacts it through her performance. Randolph’s ficto-critical work sits between genres in a very radical and mixed-up fashion, breaking down the rules of interpretation, judgement, and the binaries that inform such gestures into virtual nonsense. Furthermore, her ficto-critique radically destabilises the core practices of knowledge production and pedagogy by shifting and twisting potential readings of her work. In this way, Randolph refuses both authority and legitimation to the
extent of denying her own involvement in or relevance to the development of ficto-criticism, despite clear evidence to the contrary. It is perhaps because her writing replicates the movement of becoming that she has remained literally imperceptible in ficto-critical discourses in Australia.

**CRYPTO-FRICTIONS AND GEOGRAFICTIONE:**
**Aritha van Herk’s ficto-criticism**

Continuing with this genealogy I turn to the work of another Canadian woman writer who uses the term ficto-criticism. Aritha van Herk’s work is of interest here, not only due to the fact that she uses “ficto-criticism,” but also because there is convincing evidence to suggest that Randolph influenced her. Her work, like that of many ficto-critical practitioners, is also significant as it shows a clear link between identifying with the margin and the desire for creative-criticism. Notably, despite van Herk’s international reputation and extensive identification with the term, she too is absent from the published discourse of Australian ficto-criticism. Given her international profile, van Herk’s invisibility in Australian ficto-criticism seems even more unlikely than Randolph’s. Her profile, added to the fact that there are such a small number of writers employing the term, would suggest that one could reasonably expect those writing on ficto-criticism in Australia to have heard of her. A simple search on the internet reveals her association with the term, as she has written several books of ficto-criticism. Her collection of writings *A Frozen Tongue* (1992), for example, is actively identified as ficto-criticism on the back cover. Furthermore, the book’s publisher, Dangaroo Press, has an office in Sydney, thus demonstrating that her work has been accessible in Australia. As her earlier collection *In Visible Ink*, published in 1991, also contains the term ficto-criticism, it is reasonable to assume that van Herk has been responsible in both Canada and Australia for spreading the word on ficto-criticism among literary and cultural theorists. Yet in the same year that van Herk published her first book of collected ficto-critical writings, Muecke and King published their paper on ficto-criticism in Australia; a paper which, as
discussed earlier, was imbued with a sense of discovery. However, even as late as 1998 Muecke had not yet heard of van Herk, or her ficto-criticism.\textsuperscript{11} Whilst I can find no direct published reference to van Herk in relation to Australian ficto-critical writing, Anna Gibbs does signal the influence of Canadian women writers on ficto-criticism when she speaks of the forgetfulness around the term as it is currently used in Australia (“Bodies of Words” 1). Van Herk’s absence, like Randolph’s, reconfirms the gender divide around Australian ficto-criticism, and the two very different stories of its inception in Australia.

In Canadian literary circles, however, ficto-criticism is associated specifically with van Herk’s work. Yet, at the University of Calgary where van Herk teaches, students are beginning to employ the term to describe their creatively critical theses.\textsuperscript{12} How did van Herk come to apply the term to her writing? Notably, she discovered the term in an art journal. In an interview in \textit{Canadian Literature}, in response to Karin Beeler’s question on what first encouraged her to combine fiction and criticism, van Herk states:

\begin{quote}
Well, it’s not actually my term at all. It’s an art criticism technique, because I think that art critics and those people who appreciated art grew very, very tired of reading art catalogues that used a particular language which we all know is used, over used, over inscribed . . . they began to write parallel narratives to the art that they were watching. It really began as a New York phenomenon in the 80s. (“Shifting Form” 82).
\end{quote}

Despite her assertion here that ficto-criticism is an American word, associated with art criticism and discovered by her in an art journal, when I met with her in Calgary in 1999 van Herk was unable to find the original reference where she first came across the term. Nor could she remember the title of the visual arts journal. However, at the time, she did recollect that the term appeared in reference to the work of a woman art critic. During my research trip to Calgary, I spent considerable time reading through the van Herk Papers, without finding any trace of the journal or other references to the origin of the term.\textsuperscript{13} It is quite possible, in
consequence, that the art journal van Herk was referring to was Canadian and that the ficto-critical writing that inspired her was Jeanne Randolph’s, as all existing references to ficto-criticism are in relation to Randolph, Australian sources, or van Herk herself. This assertion is based on extensive research on the internet and on electronic databases such as Art Index, where one would expect to find some reference to “ficto-criticism” if it was employed in America in the 1980s. If it actually was a term used in New York during this time, then the total lack of evidence indicates that it must have been a very marginal, short-lived phenomenon. By the same token, if it was in circulation in the New York world of art criticism, it may well have been influenced by Randolph’s work, given the proximity of Toronto to New York. The international journal *Impulse*, which published the Jameson interview mentioned earlier, also published many examples of Randolph’s ficto-criticism. Grenville has confirmed Randolph’s profile as an art critic, stating she has “written extensively for all of the major Canadian art periodicals” (“Art Criticism” 15). This evidence combined with the fact that the earliest references to the term are clearly made in relation to Randolph’s work, confirms that she was highly instrumental in the development of ficto-criticism as an identifiable practice. While there may well have been others writing in a similar style on the visual arts, what is of interest here is the way in which the term has been taken up and what this says about the practice and its intention to destabilise established knowledges. Indeed, it seems appropriate that the origin of the term remains vague, as its imperceptible beginning(s) are consistent with ficto-criticism as a multiple, contingent, experimental and process driven form of writing.

From establishing the genealogy of ficto-criticism (the word), I turn now to examining some of van Herk’s ficto-criticism as a starting point to exploring other Canadian writing also located between fiction and criticism. As this chapter shows, there is a clear link between minority politics and the emergence of ficto-critical practice in Canada. Van Herk’s gender,
her experience as a Dutch immigrant child and her identification as a Western Canadian writer has shaped the development of her own ficto-critical style.

In January 1987 van Herk published her first work of ficto-criticism, “Witness to Private Motives,” written to accompany an exhibition held at the Alberta College of Art in Calgary. Compared to her later ficto-critical writing this is a relatively unsophisticated example, where she explores the act of looking at the artwork from her own acknowledged subjective position. I describe the piece as unsophisticated because it is largely a descriptive response to the works of art. For example:

Viewing these works is an act of surreptitious pleasure which takes the viewer unawares. It is also an act of nervous presentiment. We want to cry out, ‘Stop! Look out!’—to warn the figures of the motion contained by what we see. We tiptoe away, tiptoe back to watch again . . . We see inevitably ambiguous images, both ordinary and ominous, caught and held in postures that are incomplete . . .. (“Witness to Private Motives” 5).

Clearly, this text is very different from the work of Randolph discussed earlier, as it is more coherent and obviously linked to the works on exhibit. However, as van Herk states in the interview with Beeler, her ficto-critical writing practice has evolved over time:

So the ficto-criticism that I started with evolved into crypto-frictions, which I really see as secret codes and a desire to get the critic to start reading the story to uncover a kind of critical position. That’s been a lot of fun for me, because for me it’s play, and I think we need to recognise the gestures of play in our work, or we’re going to become deeply boring (laughs). (“Shifting Form” 82).

In 1991 with the publication of In Visible Ink: Crypto-frictions, van Herk had therefore further developed her ficto-critical writing practice, and her conceptualisation of the term, with the invention of “crypto-frictions.” As Elspeth Cameron has written, “’crypto-frictions’ [are] hidden or secret messages ignited by rubbing together criticism and fiction” (226). In Visible
Ink is part of the Writer as Critic series edited by Smaro Kamboureli and published by NeWest. Importantly, van Herk’s playful and amusing paper “Blurring Genres: Fiancee as Ficto-Critic” is republished in this collection in this collection. Originally presented at a conference in Edmonton in 1988, this essay is an irreverent attack on the conventions of writing. It also reveals a strong theme in van Herk’s ficto-criticism: a parallel between the rules of writing and the rules of patriarchy, both of which restrict and confine her spirit and creativity.

The narrator of “Blurring Genres” who we are encouraged to believe is van Herk through references to plausible incidents, develops an alter ego: the buchaneer. The narrator or ficturee develops this alter ego—her doppelganger—because “her fiction didn’t want her committing infidelities (genre crime) with other forms” (14). Not wanting to spoil her fictional reputation, the narrator and fiction writer develops the character of Hannike Buch the buchaneer, who then begins to take over, bullying the narrator into an acknowledgment of her genred position:

“You are impossible,” says the ficturee. “You want to rob me of what order and shape there is to my art, if not my life.”

“Art! Life! You need to learn how to evade plot, my dear,” says Buch. “I am the alter ego, and I am standing here, vibrating like a cello behind a great bunch of funereally-arranged flowers, trying to convince you that genre is something like a long line of nicely varnished but implacable coffins ready to slam their lids down on you, alive or dead, the moment you choose one.” (22)

Here the ficto-critic can be seen to be playing with the conventions of genre, strongly developing a case for ficto-criticism: “It is, dear ficturee, a ficto-criticism, a necessary departure from genre and its expectations” (23). The doppelganger or alter ego of the author signals an internal struggle, watched over in van Herk’s crypto-friction by the genre police. They are present to ensure that the ficturee does not carry out any genre infidelity. Van
Herk’s essay is thus very playful and humorous. However, the seriousness of crossing borders (of thinking differently) is foregrounded by the concept of the genre police, constructed here as though part of the secret police, and charged with special powers. These special genre police might even have the power to make you disappear if you fail to follow the rules and end up committing genre infidelity. Susan Gingell articulates the literal imperceptibility of ficto-criticism in her amusing open letter review of *In Visible Ink*. With reference to the buchaneer, Hannike Buch, Gingell in her own ficto-criticism says:

> But damn it, Aritha. Look what you and Hannike have done to my thin veneer of academic decorum. Wouldn’t it be a perfect irony if the *UTQ* [*University of Toronto Quarterly*] editor doesn’t publish this . . . this . . . whatever this generic hybrid is, and *In Visible Ink* goes unreviewed. (153-4)

Gingell, it seems, has responded to the buchaneer’s (and van Herk’s) irreverent gibes and pushes, their case for writing ficto-critically, but she warns of the dangers of doing so. *In Visible Ink* may risk becoming imperceptible if the reviewer responds to the text ficto-critically. The internal struggle voiced by Gingell in the quotation above, replicates the struggle between the fictioneer and buchaneer, which in turn is suggestive of the tension between classification and what lies outside (or is classified differently). According to van Herk the chains of convention have to be examined and acknowledged before an escape can be imagined: “Houdini’s struggle is the artist’s struggle to escape that coffin of conventions, named and policed by genre” (“Blurring Genres” 37). These categories and their conventions must be transgressed, and this is exactly what van Herk does as ficto-critic.

In “Viscera and Vital Questions,” for example, van Herk writes:

> I want to trouble the reader—to upset, annoy, confuse; to make the reader react to the unexpected, the unpredictable, the amoral, the political.

> I want to explode writing as prescription, as a code for the proper behaviour of good little girls. (131)
Therefore, instead of traditional generic forms of writing, she offers her crypto-fictions, produced by the friction between fiction and criticism:

After reading a text, fiction or not, she would write a parallel text, a story or not a story that was ficto-commentary on the fiction she was supposed to ‘elucidate’ . . . There were no footnotes, which distressed everyone. Instead, there were long meanderings and stories and denials and harangues and poetry and repetitions and exaggerations and ignorings and sometimes even drunkenness caught in those ficto-criticisms. She was trying to avoid plot. She was trying to avoid position, she was trying to avoid form . . .

(“Blurring Genres” 41)

Van Herk’s irreverent method of citation (her lack of footnotes) and her admission to weakness, such as drunkenness, undermine her authority and the authority of other writers who conform to the conventions of critical writing. As Anthony Grafton has written in his book *The Footnote: A Curious History*, “footnotes confer authority on a writer” (8).19 Throughout “Blurring Genres” van Herk makes reference to well-known authors and critics, yet she employs their words casually, never using the correct method of referencing. For example: “Genre is an act of nomenclature too, a designation, even though (and here’s a footnote), the root of the conception of genre seems to be the relation of the literary work to its audience (check Frye for this, and Aristotle too)” (36). The bracketed reference to Northrop Frye and Aristotle gives the essay an unfinished flavour of a work still in process. Similarly, in one section the narrator quotes a secondary text on Claude Levi-Strauss. She does not cite them properly, nor can she locate the original text by Levi-Strauss: “Buch is damned if she can find her own reference to him. Does she dare leave him, dangling there?” (39). This self-reflexivity highlights the metacritical stance of van Herk’s ficto-criticism. In other words, her failure to cite correctly is not an oversight. It is a deliberate strategy. Like Randolph, therefore, van Herk undermines her own authority, in this case, by playing self-reflexively with and around the footnotes. Van Herk’s method of subverting her authority is less subtle (in this instance) than Randolph’s slippery untruths, which are convincingly portrayed as fact in
“Mincemeat.” Despite these differences, both van Herk and Randolph work to critique and undermine the mastery of established critical traditions, both literary and artistic, through their hybrid texts. They both also destabilise the binary system. As Ellen Quigley has written: “Van Herk continually destabilizes binary opposition and creates deferral” (66). This is achieved by her generic hybridity and the conflicting narrative lines and characters, which interrupt, oppose and contradict one another (Quigley 61). For example, the voices of the buchaneer, Hannike Buch, fiction writer, narrator, fictioneer, and ficto-critic generate a polyvocality, undermining the unified and fixed Oedipal subject of normative critical writing. Her slippery use of ficto-criticism, crypto-friction or crypto-fictions, in “Blurring Genres”—terms never really determined—adds to this continuing process of deferral.

Taking both her concept of crypto-frictions and her play on the pair gender/genre even further, van Herk developed a “geografixtione” in Places Far From Ellesmere (1990). In this book-length ficto-criticism van Herk offers us a text that incorporates autobiography, fiction, contemporary theory, literary criticism and feminist theory and criticism. Places Far From Ellesmere is a fictional non-linear narrative that has been identified as enacting a form of literary criticism by reviewers.20 In this text she un-reads and re-reads three locations, places where she spent her childhood, youth and early adulthood (Edberg, Edmonton and Calgary respectively). All are far from Ellesmere. Place, memory and self become intertwined in a “geografixtione” that offers the possibility of re-reading those locations, her memories of them, and herself. In the last section, mapped onto Ellesmere Island, van Herk re-reads Tolstoy’s Anna Karenin from a feminist perspective and critiques his moralistic treatment of his character Anna. By extension and association, van Herk’s critique incorporates a re-reading of all women who dare to read alternatively and imagine possibilities outside the constraints of the life that patriarchy offers them. From this last section the argument extends backwards to the first three sections of the geografixtione where respectively the narrator, as a girl, young woman and mature woman, is constrained by the fictions of patriarchy. By
imagineing an alternative fiction for Anna, Ellesmere Island, and herself as the author, the narrator of *Places Far From Ellesmere* also envisions an alternative reading of the landscape feminised and colonised by European explorers who mapped and charted only one inflexible fiction. Van Herk, therefore, also implicitly enacts a critique of how male writers have colonised the landscape with stories in which women are fixed as “mothers/saints/whores, muses all” (van Herk, “Women Writers in the Landscape” 8).

*Places Far From Ellesmere* thus functions as cultural and literary criticism; a feminist text that works narratively to clear a space for alternative stories to emerge. According to Quigley, “van Herk uses the nomadic landscape to erase the binary definitions of Self/not Self (Other), presence/absence, origin/construction, and matter/matrix that embody the phallogocentric construction of knowledge, desire, and subject positions” (52). Self-reflexivity is thus part of her parodic critique of normative modes of writing, which, policed and enforced by the critic, limit the self, the imagination, and creative play. Her project of undermining authority through disrespectful ficto-critical border-crossings simultaneously undermines the authority of both the critic and the canon, suggesting a “recuperative insurgency” (16). According to van Herk: “Because such [border-crossing] texts refuse to occupy the space cleared and approved by genre, they are uncanonical, spurious, will go nowhere. By estranging themselves from the safety zone of genre, they participate in their own marginalization” (van Herk, “Spectral Tattoo” 16). This quote from her paper “Spectral Tattoo: Reconstructive Fictions” is significant as it reconfirms the minoritarian politics of such desiring cross-genre texts. As Freedman has written: “Perhaps the works that best exemplify the crossover and even cross-fire mode are those writers who have had literal, geographic borders to cross, those writers exiled from both home and dominant, white, heterosexist, bourgeois culture” (*The Intimate Critique* 14). Although not unconscious of her problematic relation to the centre, van Herk identifies herself as articulating a minority voice. She self-reflexively writes:
The privileged (and don’t I know how privileged I am now, since I haven’t been
privileged for very long) need to remind themselves, each other, not to rely on the
ascendancy of that privilege, but to think themselves into the different position of the
different . . . The space and place to speak/write her own experience, without
encroaching, appropriating, taking over. We need to back off . . . And I am not black or
native, so as feminist or fictioneer I’m not sure I should appropriate difference to
aggrandize either my own fiction or my own feminism. (133)

Despite her vacillation around whether her appropriation of difference is valid or right given
her relatively privileged position, van Herk ultimately (in this ficto-criticism) identifies as
“one who is part of a colonised sex” (In Visible Ink 133). Her ficto-criticism, such as Places
Far From Ellesmere, thus foregrounds her cross-boundary writing as a practice informed by
feminism, and wrought out of her experience as a woman within a patriarchal society.
Similarly, the impact of other normalising narratives on van Herk does not go
unacknowledged in her ficto-critical writing. For example, her childhood experience as the
daughter of poor Dutch immigrants appears to have contributed to her desire to write story
differently. Dominant narratives that punish and exclude difference, in this case around
ethnicity and class, have similarly impacted on her. She writes: “As an immigrant daughter,
poor and different, a funny name, funny clothes, funny parents, DP [displaced person], the
kids called me, even if I was born in Canada, branded with a story I had no choice but to
regret” (In Visible Ink 137). The stories forced on her as a woman, poor immigrant daughter,
and writer, appear to have not only positioned her to critique dominant Canadian narratives,
but also to have aided her desire to write differently. In an article for the Montreal Gazette, for
example, she identifies strongly as colonised other in a postcolonial landscape:

I am a western Canadian woman writer. Every one of these elements is colonized . . . I
am a writer colonized by words—a language that thinks itself omnipotent, a canon that
creates a great tradition as arbitrary and egocentric as the male poets it valorizes, the
tradition that constantly traps my pen into silence. And yet, because I am other I will
not be silenced: I can afford to speak, here on the fringes of the world. . . No one cares what I write: I can write what I want. (“We are robbing artists”)

In other words, her experience of the margin (as she sees it) has influenced her ficto-critical practice, and her call for those who are privileged to “think themselves into the different position of the different” (*In Visible Ink* 133). In the same newspaper article van Herk says: “The impulse to dominate, control, exploit, is the most (wrongly) admired and rewarded of desires in our contemporary world.” In fact, the whole article argues for the recognition of the value of being at the margin, a space of creative potential. Is van Herk calling upon the privileged into becoming-woman? She argues:

> All the distinctions we succumb to are man-made . . . We cannot permit ourselves to scuttle back to ghettos and divisions, to the perverted sanctity of family, heterosexual orthodoxy, race, class, colour, where we are separated by walls of words, their different meanings differentiating us in too many directions. (*In Visible Ink* 133)

Inevitably, van Herk’s self-fashioned identification as marginalised and colonised other is not without its own set of problematics, particularly given her current relation to the centre. Critics of her work have noted that in some instances her writings reproduce a similar process of colonising to the one that she sets herself up as a feminist to un-read. This time, in relation to those more othered than van Herk herself, namely, the First Nations people of Canada. For example, Asta Mott argues that van Herk’s conceptualisation of the North as a *tabula rasa*, a blank page, reflects the European imagination of Southern Canada (“Aritha van Herk’s *Places Far From Ellesmere*”). Mott suggests that whilst “*Places Far From Ellesmere* successfully subverts the masculine North, it paradoxically also replicates the traditional [European] portrayal of the North as a blank space ready to be used for one’s own purpose and narrative” (103). In constructing the North as a *tabula rasa* van Herk has been accused of romanticising and idealising a marginalised space that in the Canadian imagination has always functioned as the other, that is, a means to define the centre. Her article in the Montreal *Gazette*, concerning the benefits of being othered and positioned at the margin (both understood as productive
creative conditions) could similarly be read as romanticising a reality that for many is beyond any romantic conceptualisation, particularly those who live daily with the reality of racism, violence and prejudice. Other critics, however, have defended van Herk, arguing that her project revolves around countering the canonical European and colonial literary discourse. They argue that this project is in this context successful, given the role of the North in colonial masculine fictions (Neuman, “Writing the Reader” 225).

However, her current position as a successful white writer and university professor complicates van Herk’s use of the margin. Yet, van Herk is not denying oppression or attempting to undermine the reality of those at the margin. Rather, I believe, she is attempting to render more complex the man-made divisions that allow othering to occur. That is, through her ficto-critical writing practice she is attempting to address the underlying fascism (in a Deleuzian sense) inherent in codes of writing, pedagogical tradition and knowledge production. For instance, in the section quoted earlier where she self-reflexively addresses the problems of difference, privilege, appropriation and speaking for others, van Herk articulates a desire for an anti-racist feminism that is open to multiple differences (Quigley 58). As Quigley has argued, whilst racial binaries are present in van Herk’s work, “they are often placed within a parodic context that recognizes and criticizes the problematic theory that emerges when working between the forms that establish the many binaries of dominant culture” (58). This is not to say that van Herk’s writing itself is completely without moments of potential micro-fascism (where appropriation and colonisation may be subtly traced). As Mott has asked of Places Far From Ellesmere—hinting at the problematics involved in assuming that a radical form always equals a revolution—“is everything in this text revolutionary and subversive?” (107). These tensions suggest both the difficulty in accomplishing a line of escape and the very real risks involved in imagining an alternative space. Ultimately, it might be due to van Herk’s higher profile, compared to Randolph’s, that her texts must adhere to certain conventions. These questions and tensions are fully explicated in the final chapter where I
problematise ficto-critical writing by unravelling some individual texts that display ficto-critical characteristics. The exploration of these tensions reconfirm the difficulties implicit in absolute statements concerning the space between, something that van Herk has acknowledged: “. . . what is given in one ficto-critical circumstance may be utterly subject to question under another ficto-critical circumstance” (van Herk, “Anhang” 91). In order to illustrate the variable range of Canadian ficto-critical texts, I now move to explore fiction-théorique, arguing that the writing of Québécoise women writers—particularly Nicole Brossard—has had considerable impact on the development of creative-critical writing in English Canada. Brossard’s identity (French speaking, Québécoise and a woman) on the margin of dominant Canadian culture, I argue, has influenced the development of her own very specific creative-critical style.

**Fiction-théorique**
**Québec Women’s Writing:**

As I have argued, van Herk’s ficto-criticism—her desire to write story differently—appears to have developed largely out of a minoritarian consciousness influenced by her experience as a woman writer, immigrant daughter and postcolonial subject. As many critics have noted, and as van Herk declares herself, her writings are underwritten by a strong feminist perspective. Significantly, as Shirley Neuman has suggested, the “e” of van Herk’s geografictione not only firmly signals the feminine and feminist bent of Places Far From Ellesmere, it gestures toward the tradition of Québécoise women authors writing in the feminine (222). Although van Herk writes in English, she has indicated the influence of Quebec women writers on her work, in particular, the well-known lesbian and feminist Québécoise writer responsible for the now famous statement: “To write: I am a woman is heavy with consequences” (These Our Mothers 45). Indeed, Nicole Brossard’s statement is suggestive of what has motivated her transgressive practice of fiction-theory (fiction-théorique). In “Laying the Body on the Line” van Herk celebrates the writing of Brossard, signalling her influence: “Let me confess: I want
to write/read the horizontal texts that Nicole Brossard calligraphies. I want to write the same body’s same passion . . . I savour Brossard’s page and pleasure . . .’” (87-8). Whilst van Herk’s writing is very different in style from Brossard’s, there are parallels between their projects insofar as they both identify with a minoritarian position and articulate a desire to write through convention as a political act. Their work is also materialist and both write with a focus on language informed by feminist theory. Similarly, as the name fiction-theory suggests, this is a hybrid form like van Herk’s ficto-criticism. Brossard, who has had tremendous influence on women’s writing in both English and French Canada, destabilises genre through writing-between. As she has written, “Always: overcome what obstructs with synthesis” (These Our Mothers 69). While Brossard’s writing-between may be very different in style from van Herk’s and Randolph’s, ficto-criticism, geografictione and fiction-theory appear motivated by similar concerns; all three are imbued with a desire to blast open binary pairs and the conventions that keep the latter in place.

Since Brossard has a tremendous body of work behind her, having published her first collection of poetry in 1965, I cannot examine in detail her oeuvre or do it justice due to my reliance on translations. Instead, I explore the concept of fiction-theory to establish the character of this writing as minoritarian, that is, as informed by Brossard’s experience as woman, lesbian and Québécoise. In this chapter, I do not embark on detailed analyses of her texts, since I am concerned less with their meaning and more with the implications of their hybridity. As a between practice Brossard’s work is sometimes described as deconstructive. Whilst critical, its focus is on creating alternative spaces beyond the stereotypes and ideologies that limit and contain woman. Brossard’s famous line as quoted earlier (“To write: I am a woman is heavy with consequences”) comes from her text These Our Mothers (L’Amèr), the book in which it is said she first developed the concept of fiction-theory (1983 and 1977 respectively). According to Louise Cotnoir, the “to-and-fro between fiction and theory nourishes their [Québécoises’] works, now known as writings in the feminine” (15). Speaking
about why she moved toward a practice of fiction-theory, she says “when I was writing L’Amèr, I felt I had to move reality into fiction because patriarchal reality made no sense and was useless to me” (qtd. in Godard, “Theorizing Fiction Theory” 53). Brossard’s highly political identification in her writing as a woman explains her experimental style, which breaks with syntax, code and category. It is fragmentary, poetic prose, which also plays with the layout of text on the page.27 In These Our Mothers, she critiques the patriarchal figure of mother:

The shattering of difference like an entrance into fiction. An active bliss of rupture. At the same time my body opens. But a fissure and not the fragment. Opening into the density of matter. One day and the consciousness of a sharp explosion in the slit. Inside the opening all differences are excited since colour is sensation, from mauve to red, difference. Or while the body is being tattooed on the outside. But within my own difference I see clearly. (40)

This section of a paragraph illustrates Brossard’s style—its non-linear track—that, as a result, requires a different reading approach. In its experimentation and immediate identification with the experience of women within a patriarchal culture, Brossard’s fiction-theory clearly resonates with Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming-woman. In her own words:

In fact, we know that patriarchal language discredits, marginalizes, constitutes the feminine as inferior, when it takes us into account; but most of the time, language makes women non-existent, obliging us to perform rituals of presence which exhaust the most vulnerable, while electrifying the most audacious among us. Thus to write I am a woman is full of consequences. The work on re/presentation and appearances draws us into a trajectory which goes from fear to desire, from aphasia to memory, from fragmentation to integrity, from humiliation to dignity, from alienation to consciousness, from auto-censure to transgression. (“Corps d’énergie: Rituels d’écriture” 9)
Brossard’s writing is full of desire for another way of being in the world, which is envisaged through the practice of fiction-theory. As she has written in These Our Mothers, “could it be said when imagination catches fire, it ends up a fuse and political” (70). Originally published in French in 1977, These Our Mothers has as its subtitle for the English translation “Or: The Disintegrating Chapter.” This subtitle is indicative of her intention to disrupt literary norms. Barbara Godard demonstrates the way Brossard’s fiction-theory explodes literary convention:

Fiction theory: a narrative, usually self-mirroring, which exposes, defamiliarizes and/or subverts the fiction and gender codes determining the re-representation of women in literature and in this way contributes to feminist theory. This narrative works upon the codes of language (syntax, grammar, gender-coded diction, etc.), of the self (construction of the subject, self/other, drives, etc.), of fiction (characterization, subject, matter, plots, closure, etc.), of social discourse (male/female relations, historical formations, hierarchies, hegemonies) in such a way as to provide a critique and/or subvert the dominant tradition that within a patriarchal society has resulted in a de-formed representation of women. All the while it focuses on what language is saying and interweaves a story. It defies categories and explodes genres. (“Theorizing Fiction Theory 59-60)

In another article, Godard extends the cross-border thesis of fiction-theory to identify how it works to challenge the objective neutral work of theorising, a process that alienates and excludes difference. According to Godard, “Realigning the boundaries, shifting the frames, fiction/theory brings into the shape of narrative the dislocating work of theorizing, to expose the ‘matter’ of fiction as gendered (heterosexist) and racist conditions of production and reproduction” (“Women of Letters” 298). This confirms the political nature of Brossard’s work—as a self-reflexive means to resist the colonising role of representation. This is achieved through the hybridity of fiction-theory and its defiance of convention. Godard is not, of course, alone in realising the political implications of Brossard’s fiction-theory. Forsyth, for example, has mapped Brossard’s career in political activism, arguing that her writing has
always been informed by a radical political view. In the article, “The Political in the Work of Nicole Brossard,” Forsyth outlines the context from which Brossard’s writing developed, a period of intense, postcolonial agitation. In what follows I briefly outline the context from which Brossard’s fiction-theory evolved, to establish more acutely how her position at the margin has influenced the development of her own specific ficto-critical practice. As I shall show ficto-criticism is a highly political form of literary intervention, which has been informed by the experiences of those who advocate its practice.

Graduating from the Université de Montréal in 1965, Brossard became involved with the publication of a new journal, La Barre du Jour (the first light of dawn). This journal, according to Forsyth, was partially influenced by the socialist nationalist movement Parti Pris and their journal by the same name, which had begun in 1963, during the period of the Quiet Revolution:

The combination of poetic creativity and revolutionary fervour was most effective during the Quiet Revolution in formulating political goals, while releasing creative energy and allowing a dynamic collective imagination to form a vision of a new society. The writers of the Parti Pris group proved by example that a dynamic text, incorporating a poetic and theoretical dimension, is an effective weapon in the struggle for social change. ("The Political Work" 159)

In the 1970s, however, Brossard’s focus shifted from the local political struggle of Quebec to feminism, and La Barre du Jour began publishing special issues dedicated to feminism and women’s writing. What is significant about her position as a Francophone citizen of Canada, influenced by and involved in nationalist political movements, and her position as lesbian, is that both manifest as otherness within the landscape of the Canadian nation state. In effect, as a Québécoise lesbian, Brossard is triply displaced through her gender, sexuality and colonised cultural position. Much has been written, for example, on the particular and role of women in Quebec, where it was not until 1940 that they attained
suffrage, some twenty-two years after it was awarded federally in 1918 (by 1922 all Canadian provinces except Quebec had given women the vote) (Wachtel). Cast as symbolic mothers, women were seen as the reproducers and defenders of a threatened culture, as a result, any divergence from this role was judged as an act that would potentially undermine the whole fabric of French-Canadian society (Smart 9). Whilst language played an important role in nationalist movements, women’s position in Quebec was therefore consistent with the linguistic role of the feminine in French, as mute “e.” In “E muet mutant” Forsyth argues that Brossard aggressively assumes the linguistic symbol of her powerlessness and marginal position: “She declares the silent, humble letter to be in mutation. According to Brossard, women must take possession of language and turn it to their own ends” (“The Political Work” 162). Here, the influence of French women writers such as Luce Irigaray is apparent, and, like Irigaray’s work, Québécoise writing in the feminine risks the charge of essentialism. However, as Louise Dupré has stated, writing in the feminine, rather than constituting an essential notion of woman, is about the relation of woman to man as the standard: “It’s not a question . . . of sending woman back to her ‘feminine nature,’ a consequence of the ‘eternal feminine.’ Let’s say rather woman perceived as other has been excluded from language” (26). Dupré’s observation reconfirms the minoritarian positioning of women as the motivation for writing ficto-critically, rather than any inherent characteristic of femininity. This is why ficto-criticism is a practice often employed by communities located at the margin.

Brossard’s minority location, first as a colonised Francophone citizen of Canada and secondly as a lesbian, thus appears to have informed her political practice of fiction-theory. However, as Parker warns, Brossard’s marginal location is slippery, as it is determined by her position in relation to the dominant centre:

Lesbian is neither who or where the poet is, but rather a quality of emotion and desire that defines itself in terms of differences with regard to the prescriptive norms that
regulate social relations. Like her textual practices, her personal angle of vision is transgressive. (3)

Her subjectivity as lesbian writer is not, therefore, fixed as it can be revisioned through her radical texts. However, there is a consciousness around her minoritarian placement in relation to masculine heterosexual reality. As a result, her location at the margin becomes a productive and transgressive space in which to view the fictions of dominant realities. As Brossard has written in her more recent fiction-theory titled *She Would Be the First Sentence of My Next Novel* (1998):

she had become aware of the marginality to which the feminine was confined, would remain confined unless and until a second marginality, the consequence of becoming aware of the first one, set her free. In other words, a woman, she would keep feeling inferiorized in her marginality unless and until she found the words that would make her even more marginal, but this time fully conscious and in control of her double marginality. Without this double marginality, there was nothing to tell that would make the difference. (37)

In revelling in her marginality and making it a tool for her agency, Brossard’s fiction-theory not only strategically disrupts the system that defines her place on the edge by refusing to aspire to authority, she also reimagines difference as productive and creative. Both by moving beyond genre and defying narratives of closure, Brossard’s fiction-theory breaks the conventional split between mind/body, thus disrupting the authority of a unitary subject. Refusing authority, Brossard’s texts neither claim objectivity or to represent fixed truths. Instead, they are highly subjective writings, influenced by her embodied experience (Forsyth, “Errant and Air-Born” 15). The intertextuality, polyvocality, heterogeneity, fragmentation and multiplicity of Brossard’s fiction-theory shatters “the tight little boundary of the ego” (Lamy qtd. in Godard, *Gynocritics* xi). As Brossard has stated: “[a]bolish conquest” and “[f]or once I want to speak neither of nor for other people” (*The Ariel Letter* 49 and 37 respectively). There is substantial evidence, therefore, not only in her own words but also in the words of the
writers who engage with her writing, to support the assertion that her minoritarian experience informs her desire to write differently and to be wary of the power of representation (in her attempt to maintain a multiplicity). In the same way, the subjectivity that she engages in this process is unlike the ego-driven self of normative critical writing, as she is neither removed from her environment nor is she unchanged by it.

The factors contributing to Brossard’s influential practice of fiction-theory, therefore, appear strongly informed by radical politics and wrought from her experiences of being at the margin. These experiences, particularly those of being woman and lesbian, are the ones most often given as influential in the development of fiction-theory in Canada. However, several other influences appear at the margins of the official feminist story of fiction-theory. For example, not only contemporary French women theorists, such as Irigaray, have been influential, but also contemporary French male theorists. These writings were available much earlier to Francophone Canadians, compared to English Canadians, as they did not have to wait for translations to be published. As Parker has suggested, Brossard’s location at the intersection of European and North American thought gave her “direct access to philosophical and literary movements of the last century. These include the avant-garde practices of modernism, modernity and postmodernisms, as well as Marxism, psychoanalysis and poststructuralist thought . . .” (1). Here, Parker’s comment reintroduces some complexity to the ficto-critical or fiction-theory equation through highlighting a range of influences on Brossard’s practice. She also indicates the effect of postmodernism as an intellectual fashion on Brossard’s readership. According to her, Brossard’s “poetry and ‘fiction-theory’ have attracted . . . writers, academics, critics and students of postmodernist texts” (3). Whilst this quotation signals how well fiction-theory translates into “the postmodern” aiding its visibility, it is at the same time a highly politically motivated practice informed by feminism. Its simultaneous positioning as postmodern, feminist and political reiterates the difficulty in limiting writing-between to singular readings. Can practices such as ficto-criticism be at the same time the product of
postmodernism and a reaction against it? Can feminist writing such as fiction-theory be influenced by, yet also a departure from, phallocentric tradition? As Parker asserts, a range of factors has influenced Brossard’s development of fiction-theory. This is also true of ficto-criticism more generally, as I have already demonstrated. If ficto-critical writing does have something in common—and this is certainly true of the works I have examined so far—it is a desire to throw into question the underlying structures of knowledge that inform the process of othering. It is their minoritarian movement, that is, their becoming-woman that defines them. In other words, ficto-critical texts are often concerned with ethical dilemmas. What the ficto-critical writings of Randolph and van Herk share with Brossard’s fiction-theory is that they appear to emanate from an identification with what it means to be at the margin. That is, they work politically to unravel majoritarian discourses.

As Forsyth has argued in “Nicole Brossard and the Emergence of Feminist Literary Theory in Quebec since 1970,” Brossard has become since the 1970s a major writer in Quebec and has had a major effect on Francophone Canadian women writers. According to her, Brossard’s influence has also extended to critics, forcing them to recognise a distinctive body of feminist thought (211). Unlike Australian ficto-critical writing, in Canada there is a much stronger and more visible link between such hybrid forms and feminism. Brossard is the high-profile feminist, author of fiction-theory, yet she is not the only Quebec woman writing experimentally in a creative-critical form. The same period of intense creative activity in Quebec that began in the seventies (and which witnessed Brossard’s arrival) saw the emergence of other Québécoise women writers. Many of their texts are both contemporaneous and similar in their intention with Brossard’s fiction-theory and writing in the feminine. These texts include writing by Madeleine Gagnon, Louky Bersianik, Louise Dupré, Jovette Marchessault, France Théoret, Carole Massé, Yolande Villemaire, and the Anglophone writer Gail Scott among others. According to Forsyth, in the same paper on feminist literary theory in Quebec, it was Francophone feminist writers that initiated the self-reflexive, creatively critical
text in Canada. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that Brossard’s influence, as well as the influence of other Quebec women writers of fiction-theory, has greatly impacted on many English Canadian women writers. For example, in the same paper, Forsyth finds herself influenced by Brossard as she consciously considers her own critical practice. She speaks of becoming “increasingly uncomfortable with the language of presumed objective detachment” (the language which her literary training had taught her to use) (215). Forsyth suggests that to do as Brossard asks—to write as a woman—is highly charged politically:

whenever the feminist critic reads or writes a text, she will necessarily begin with the lucid awareness that she is participating in the literary fact as a woman. As Nicole has suggested, the consequences of such awareness are enormous, since it will lead to a re-situation of self, a departure from the beaten critical path and a constant search for a new kind of literature. (“Nicole Brossard and the Emergence of Feminist Literary Theory” 215-6)

The relation of women to majoritarian discourses has, not surprisingly, meant that Canadian and Québécoise women writers share a desire for a new kind of literature. Whilst English Canadian and French Canadian women writers have different approaches to both writing in particular and language in general, as well as very different histories and literary traditions, they share a preoccupation with and suspicion of language. In that sense, Godard argues that as “Explorers in language, women’s writing and feminist criticism cross [the] linguistic frontiers [of English and French]; the common element of gender and marginality provide the point of border blurring” (Gynocritics ii). Significantly, this quote comes from the publication Gynocritics: Feminist Approaches to Canadian and Quebec Women’s Writing, which resulted from the Dialogue conference held at York University in 1981. Godard, who edited this bilingual collection, signals that it is not just linguistic borders that are crossed through these women coming together. She also states that it is the aim of the contributors to this publication “to break down the barriers between critical discourse and creative activity, between subject and object of reflection, and between subjective and objective approaches . . .” (x). Feminist
writers in English Canada may have a different approach from Québécoise women writers, yet both appear to have as their target the hierarchies of division that enable oppression. Their critique, as has been shown, mobilises a refusal to play the game of binary opposition.

**Canadian Women Writing-Between in English**

Writing-between in English Canada is diverse, and does not have a specific and well-known term to identify it, as it does in Australia. However, some women writers in English who are also bilingual have been influenced by fiction-theory and have aided its propagation in English-Canadian feminist literature. Their bilingual abilities meant that they were introduced early to Québécoise and French feminist writing and theory. These writers are Daphne Marlatt and Gail Scott. Both have substantial profiles as feminist Canadian writers, particularly Marlatt. According to Peggy Kelly, “[by] the early eighties . . . Daphne Marlatt and Gail Scott were . . . writing fiction-theory” (69). She identifies their experimental novels, Marlatt’s *Ana Historic* and Scott’s *Heroine*, as examples of fiction-theory as a feminist practice. Kelly outlines the accepted conceptualisation of fiction-theory (as deconstructive of genres, language-centred, situated in its materiality, and feminine), arguing that *Ana Historic* and *Heroine* demonstrate these characteristics. According to Kelly, as these texts are underwritten by a “feminist analysis of andocentric cultural constructs,” central to fiction-theory, they also work to deterritorialise other concepts and structures of dominant culture (70). She extends the fiction-theory praxis to include the deconstruction of history and a pre-occupation with non-unified subjectivity, suggesting that both novels clearly feature these aspects. Both Marlatt and Scott are feminist writers intent on unravelling the majoritarian discourses of patriarchal society, and in this quest they have developed a practice of writing-between. Marlatt, for example, has written: “Feminist writing, when it destroys the reader’s expectations of normative language use, form and genre, can be seen as a subversion of conventional/patriarchal reality embedded in those expectations” (*Readings From the Labyrinth* 167). Significantly, one of the main characters in *Ana Historic* is married to an
academic. At one stage this character, Annie, speculates on her husband’s reaction to her writing (her scribbles): “but this is nothing, i imagine him saying. meaning unreadable. because this is nothing is a place he doesn’t recognize, cut loose from history and its relentless progress towards some end. this is undefined territory, unaccountable. and so on edge” (81). Annie scribbles when she is supposed to be working on her husband’s research, his “Big Book.” She imagines her clichéd place in the acknowledgments: “‘and to my wife without whose patient assistance this book would never have been written.’” (79). She admits, what she really wants is to tell her own story (79). Similarly, Scott has written in her ficto-critical collection *Spaces Like Stairs* (1989) that women—forced to operate in language from a negative semantic space—have no choice but to seize language and find new ways to use it (26).

As I have argued, many women writers who identify and theorise their position in patriarchal society as colonised other are drawn towards the deterritorialising practice of ficto-criticism. This identification with the minoritarian is not, however, necessarily limited to gender, as, for example, in the case of Brossard who strongly identifies as a lesbian and as Québécoise. Similarly, Marlatt also identifies as a lesbian writer, and Scott—as an Anglophone in Quebec—has spoken of her position as a minority in “a largely French milieu” (“Virginia and Colette” 30). Sexuality, race, ethnicity and class surface as markers of difference in Canadian culture. Furthermore, it is often out of an identification with, and recognition of, the exclusion of such difference that Canadian ficto-critical writers in English appear motivated to write between, questioning representation. As a result, a diverse range of stylistic approaches function ficto-critically. In order to illustrate this, I now briefly survey key anthologies and journals that have published ficto-criticism by women, including an examination of select Canadian ficto-critical texts in English. While not being an exhaustive study, due to the large number of between texts, this survey includes close readings of specific feminist mobilisations of ficto-critical practice.
Unlike Australia, in Canada there have been several important feminist conferences—such as the Dialogue conference in 1981 that produced *Gynocritics*—which have acted as productive spaces for not only celebrating feminist writing practices and theories, but also for the dissemination of ideas. These conferences have aided the development of experimental women’s writing in Canada—particularly English Canada—through introducing the work of Quebec women writers. The most significant of these events was the 1983 Women and Words/Les femmes et les mots Conference, held in Vancouver. Marlatt has described the event as bringing:

> together scores of Francophone, Anglophone, white, First Nations, Asian and Black women writers, editors, publishers, translators, critics and readers for a spirited series of discussions and performances. It was the first and largest gathering of women across the country . . . . (*Readings From the Labyrinth* 9)

According to Gail Scott, “The Women and Words conference . . . seems to have been a turning point, with feminists showing new appreciation for the relationship between their struggle for profound change and so-called ‘experimental’ writing by women” (“Virginia and Colette” 33). Scott goes on to suggest that Quebec women writers played a vital role in this sea change, with their focus on language-centred writing. However, as noted by those involved, whilst these conferences generated exciting dialogues during the course of the event, everyone then “returned to their isolation” (Godard, “Women of Letters” 263-4). As a result, feminist collectives emerged to maintain connections through publishing.44

One prominent feminist journal, *Tessera*, was largely the result of these events and effects (263-4). Involving Marlatt and Scott, *Tessera* held its first editorial meeting during the Women and Words Conference in 1983 (Marlatt, *Readings From the Labyrinth* 9). *Tessera* has published much fiction-theory, and as Barbara Godard has written one of the imperatives of the original editorial board was to invent a new critical voice that illuminated women’s texts
rather than oppressing them. She argues: “What is at stake here is not just antagonism to a masculine academy, but recognition, love even, for women writers” (259). According to Godard, who was part of the original editorial team of *Tessera* (with Kathy Mezei, Daphne Marlatt and Gail Scott):

> Writing *through* has been *Tessera’s* concern, through the marked binaries of feminist debate displacing the opposition itself: mind/body, theory/criticism, theory/feminism, psychoanalysis/materialism. Another boundary *Tessera* erases in its work on the in-between is that separating the academy from the literary institution at large. (“Women of Letters” 270).

*Tessera*, with its emphasis on criticism as life writing, actively blurs the distinctions between theoretical and creative texts; fiction-theory being the stated editorial focus of *Tessera* (Binhammer 9). In an effort to destabilise the traditional divide between writers and critics, the first editorial collective was deliberately made from active writers and literary critics. In other words, there was an intention—as with the writing published—to cross the boundaries dividing public/private, fact/fiction, object/subject and self/other. As a result, *Tessera* is a journal that has published many examples of ficto-criticism, in particular, the special issue in 1986 that focused specifically on fiction-theory. In 1994 *Collaboration in the Feminine: Writings on Women and Culture From Tessera*, was published. This anthology, edited by Godard, includes work published in *Tessera* over the ten-year period from 1983, and is an excellent source of Canadian ficto-criticism in English, with some notable examples, including jam ismail’s “Diction Air,” Janice Williamson’s “Tell Tale Signs,” and Marlene Nourbese Philip’s “Whose Idea Was it Anyway?” These pieces are of particular interest as the theory is absorbed into the texts in creative play, rather than being constantly foregrounded. 45

Consistently, these ficto-critical texts enact through their hybridity a desire “to disrupt the normal(izing) individualist and impersonal practices of writing and reading, to critique representation” (Godard, “Women of Letters” 264).
In a special issue of *Tessera* dedicated to textual corporeality, two pieces emerge that articulate ficto-criticism’s critique of the institutional rules of writing and speaking that guarantee authority: Erin Soros’ “sentence” and Janice Hladki’s “hook, line, and sync her: fishing in/out questions of competency, regulation, and authority.” In “sentence” Soros takes up Foucault’s analysis of pedagogical structures and applies it to the modern educational written form *par excellence*, the essay. Soros asks why Foucault never takes his analysis of disciplinary institutions such as the clinic, madhouse and prison—which are all described as schools—further, to include a focused study on the school or university itself. In her work, Soros plays with the written assignment demonstrating its role in inscribing the student body. The layout of “sentence” on the page reproduces the form of experimental poetry and includes images and pieces of text from different sources, such as the imagined voice of the educator. For example, “You can usually blame a bad essay on a bad beginning,” “the thesis must be a coherent document,” and “coherence means that the parts of the paragraph should be logically connected.” Soros’ text is not, of course, logically connected or coherent in the traditional sense, thereby enacting a critique of the use of conventional rules of the essay as a means to demonstrate the student’s mastery over their material. The text also self-consciously foregrounds the exclusion of the personal and subjective from academic writing forms:

> Your writing should not be subjective (based on the imagination) but should be objective (based on textual evidence and supported by examples). Perpetuate the concept that the ‘true self,’ the imagination, the psyche, the subjective, the body is somehow outside the writing, the textual evidence, the citations, the present tinting of explyanation, the analysis, the ch/using of ex ample, some how? not constructed with/in the e.s. say structure itself and we cling to this sp/lit. (21)

At the end of “sentence” Soros includes a chart titled “Composition Evaluation,” a grade sheet for the reader, which outlines the rules of composition within traditional pedagogy. Clearly, her work would fail such an examination.
Hladki’s piece is similarly focused on academic forms, this time the academic presentation. As a doctoral student, Hladki takes the form of the academic presentation and turns it into a performance (as did Jeanne Randolph). She asks, what are her “investments as a doctoral student in learning what might constitute a ‘legitimate’ academic presentation” (108). “hook, line, and synch her” thus functions self-reflexively, much like Soros’ piece: “Our speaker is:/ a large presence on the intellectual horizon/ an academic persona/ part of a star-studded intellectual stable” (113). Her text consequently undermines the authority of the academic and their modes of knowledge transference.

The other key journals that have published women’s experimental writing-between include *Fireweed*, *Lip, Room of One’s Own*, and *Raddle Moon* (this is by no means a definitive list). Not surprisingly, special issues, such as the 1991 issue of *Room of One’s Own* that focused on the problems women confront with criticism (as both readers and writers), includes ficto-criticism more readily since they explicitly deal with literary conventions. An examination of the substantive role of critics as maintainers of convention presents playful scenes for women—traditionally excluded from the canon—to explore interpretation, judgement and explication. Experimental women’s writing can also be found in journals not specifically dedicated to women’s writing, such as *Brick, Open Letter, Prairie Fire* and *West Coast Line*. *Canadian Fiction Magazine* has also published ficto-criticism. Increasingly, journals are publishing ficto-critical forms as criticism. However, Canadian ficto-criticism in English has tended to be concentrated in publications that both focus on and encourage feminist explorations of writing. As Godard has written in “Ex-centriques, Eccentric, Avant-Garde,” “The more forcefully they [women] have asserted their feminism, the more disruptive their literary productions have been.” (58). The anthology *A Mazing Space: Women Canadian Women Writing* (1986) is a publication that illustrates the diverse range of women’s experimental writing including a number of notable examples of ficto-criticism, many of which demonstrate a determination to write through the conventions of language and
The anthologies *By, For and About: Feminist Cultural Politics*\(^52\) (1994) and *Language in Her Eye*\(^53\) (1990) similarly contain work by women that break the conventional rules of literature, taking the space between fiction and criticism. Significantly, Wendy Waring, uses the term ficto-criticism in the introduction to *By, For and About* to describe the work of Janice Williamson included in the anthology.\(^54\) Similarly, she calls Lee Maracle’s piece “Oratory” “theory as story.” Margaret Christakos’ text “Post-Cards” is another ficto-critical example, where she reflects on the academic world. Christakos talks of her inability to carry out the required radical separation between mind and body. In *Language in Her Eye* there are also several works that deliberately and very consciously make the connection between the style of the writing and the content. These writers are questioning whether traditional critical modes of writing reproduce the systems of domination that many authors purport to critique. For example, according to Himani Bannerji\(^55\) in “The Sound Barrier: Translating Ourselves in Language and Experience”:

> A whole new story has to be told, with fragments, with disruptions, and with self-conscious and critical reflections. And one has to do it right. Creating seamless narratives, engaging in exercises in dramatic plot creating, simply make cultural brokers, propagators of Orientalism and self-reificationists out of us. My attempt here has been to develop a form which is both fragmentary and coherent in that it is both creative and critical—its self-reflexivity breaking through self-reification, moving towards a fragmented whole. (40)

Throughout these ficto-critical writings there is a constant consciousness around writing—at the level of syntax and form—and a call for writers to think through the notion of style as an extension of content.

**Ficto-criticism: Writing through race**

In the previous section I suggested that Canadian feminist writing-between has been influenced by a desire to write differently and challenge the authority of critical academic
writing, as the discourse that has traditionally excluded women’s experiences and voices. In this section I expand the proposition that the defiance of generic convention in feminist creative-criticism is motivated by the writers’ political convictions and location at the edge of dominant masculine society. In view of this, I would like to examine closely Marlene Norbese Philip’s “Whose Idea Was It Anyway?” This text, one of the notable pieces of ficto-criticism published in *Collaboration in the Feminine* (the anthology devoted to ten years of publishing by *Tessera*), is interesting for several reasons. Philip’s text warrants particular attention not only because it is an inspiring work of ficto-criticism but also because it is informed by a critique of racism, colonialism and capitalism. Published in a feminist journal, this text functions pivotally to open out ficto-criticism—now clearly established as a form relevant to Canadian feminism—to other minority groups in Canada. Born in Tobago and having immigrated to Canada in 1968, Philip identifies as an “Afrosporic” writer (Philip, “Who’s Listening” 144). Philip’s text “Whose Idea Was It Anyway?” demonstrates that writing-between is not only centred on issues relating to gender in Canada, although this has been the tendency most actively spoken about thus far. The space between theory and fiction, that is, between criticism and literature, is a strategy of writing that has also been employed by writers of colour, who, like women, have specific interest in debunking the fiction of objectivity. Philip’s work is significant as it powerfully renders the potentially destructive and dehumanising function of ideas, when they become depoliticised abstractions or concepts voided of materiality. Since her work deals with issues parallel to Kim Scott’s *Benang* certain similarities between their strategies emerge.

In “Whose Idea Was It Anyway?” Philip speculates on whom exactly it was who came up with the concept of slavery. This essay-length ficto-critical work enacts a critique of racism through its exploration of the question it raises through the title. Yet, it also does much more through its choice of form. By choosing a ficto-critical mode, Philip’s essay removes an idea from the abstract and places it into the realm of the personal and actual. This strengthens her
argument, which is not articulated in the depersonalised tone of an academic who deals with abstract ideas and values, but within the intimate space of oral storytelling. This is a world of real people, real bodies, and personal stories. At the same time the text is not merely fiction. In other words, Philip re-personalises slavery by playing on the generic divide between fiction and non-fictional modes. In her text slavery is now up close and personal, no longer an abstract question belonging to history. “Whose Idea Was It Anyway?” thus becomes a personal question for the reader, particularly the white reader who is blind to their privileged position and ignorant of the contribution that slaves made to the burgeoning wealth of first worlds. Borrowing from what appears to be a slave ship’s log, she lists the names of the inevitable commercial losses on the journey:

Cuffee  African man of some 30 years—jumped overboard

Quesaba    Negro woman of undetermined years—died this day of wasting illness

Quarshie  Negro man of some 30 years—passed away from dropsy

Abena     Very young woman—under 20 years—taken suddenly by fever . . . . [and the list goes on] (197)

As demonstrated in the reading of Scott’s *Benang*, there are parallels between the logic that enables racism and that which enables objective, academic discourses. The same system or economy that allowed the dehumanisation of African people, an economy that relies on the split between mind/body, self/other and master/slave, informs the codes and conventions of academic (historical) writing. By asking whose idea was it anyway and seeking the owner of such a brilliant, commercial idea—asking them to take their place in history—Philip makes the connection between the economy of knowledge and the economy of slavery. It is the same arrogance and will to power that allowed Africans—black ivory—to be packed in the hundreds into the bowels of ships and sent abroad as chattel, which controls and determines authorised knowledge and reality. Her parodic use of a question common to historical research works to undermine these economies, as there appears to be no one willing to own up to the conception of slavery. Philip, however, answers the question for the reader: “It is hard to tell in
the dim light, but his eyes are blue, like the painted ocean, his hair is blonde, his skin is fair and he laughs again and again.” “Whose Idea Was It Anyway?” begins with a description of a room, a scene consistent with a novel from the period of the slave trade and then collages together different dialogues, word definitions (such as transubstantiation and idea), with stories of mastery and commercial success. Her work is creative, researched (it lists works cited) and embodied. In other words, Philip’s ficto-critical text does not reproduce the same binary economy as the one she critiques.

Language is a consistent theme in Philip’s work, as is a desire to undermine the concepts of universality and objectivity. In fact, the ficto-critical form is a common choice for her, whether she is writing prose or poetry. For example, her poem “Discourse on the Logic of Language” incorporates a critique of colonialism, sexism and racism; while theoretically informed it is also poetic and creative. In this work she looks at the role of language through an extended play on tongues, speech and silence, and the way in which language was used as a tool to control slaves. Through an analysis of scientific discourses, she makes a connection between the inherent racism in these objective sciences and other universal discourses constructed by the West. Philip has said of “Discourse” that her intention was to shift the “canon of objectivity and universality,” to permanently disturb it (“Notes From a Working Journal” 17). The other work by Philip that extends similar themes—particularly around silence—is her novel-length text *Looking For Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (1991). This is also written ficto-critically, and, simply put, overtly critiques the construction of the dark continent as a place of silence and uninhabited in any meaningful way. The text, however, is complex, language focused and contains a range of generic forms (poetry, letter, prose, and biographical reference). Her collection *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture* (1992), similarly crosses generic divides. While the texts in *Frontiers* are consistent with the genre of the essay, within the context of institutionalised knowledge Philip’s text would be judged emotive, personal and far too subjective. The quality of its intellectual rigour may also be
challenged as a result of its very subjective tone. In this sense, the essays published in this collection challenge traditional critical writing, and most definitely the neutral or universal quality of dominant discourses. Philip’s work is written out of a particular historical and social context. As Carol Morrell has written in Grammar of Dissent: Poetry and Prose by Claire Harris, M. Nourbese Philip and Dionne Brand, “[t]his writing against is essential because language encodes the cultural and political facts of dominance and exclusion” (15). In this quotation Morrell is talking about the work of Philip, Claire Harris and Dionne Brand, all writers of colour. As Morrell’s words suggest, Harris and Brand’s work—whilst different from Philip’s—maintains a similar challenge to literary tradition as a means to undermine the inherent racism in dominant discursive forms. As she herself points out, her work manifests a refusal to comply with either the boundaries of genre or the physical margins of the page (Morrell 32). Harris’ poetry, for example, focuses on language and its power to shape reality:

Daughter there is no language
i can offer you no corner that is
yours unsullied
you inherit the intransitive
case Anglo-Saxon noun
(Morrell 78)

Clearly, as this quotation illustrates, Harris is intent on foregrounding the lack of self forced onto the woman of colour. Significantly, Brand’s collection of prose poetry, No Language is Neutral (1990), similarly functions through a metafictive use of language to undermine majoritarian fictions. Here Brand focuses on the fictions of heterosexuality, history and race. Of particular ficto-critical interest, however, is her collection Bread Out of Stone: Recollections, Sex, Recognitions, Race, Dreaming, Politics (1994). In the essay from which the title is taken, according to Brand: “there is only writing that is significant, honest, necessary.” Here she signals the ethical nature of her discourse, as politically situated. All of the essays in this collection are highly personal and maintain as central Brand’s racial and
lesbian identity. As she states, obviously frustrated by the conventional line drawn between writing (or art) and politics:

> It is probably not even necessary to say ‘poetry and politics’ as if those words are distinct, but I’ve become so used to explaining and explaining their dependency on each other to Canadian reviewers and audiences that I’ve forgotten that it is unnecessary here. (*Bread Out of Stone* 25)

Significantly, like Philip’s work in *Frontiers*, the essays in *Bread Out of Stone* most obviously resemble what has been described as the autobiographical turn in academic writing. However, this interpretation and classification is predicated on the assumption that Brand and Philip aspire to be judged against academic language and speech. Is the distinction between writing forms even relevant? As the text quoted above suggests, Brand sees no separation between her politics, self and writing. The choice to remove her skin is not open to her as her colour always marks her difference (as does her gender and sexuality). Because she emphasises her writing as a political act, she cannot adopt the neutral voice, which, due to her identity, is not readily available to her anyway. On her writing she says:

> There is never room, though there is always risk. There is never the room that white writers have in never speaking for their whole race, yet in speaking the most secret and cowardly language of normalcy and affirmation, speaking for the whole race. (*Bread Out of Stone* 23)

The possibility of not writing autobiographically—in a situated manner—is not so readily available (if at all?) to writers of colour who are constantly expected to articulate their racial and cultural differences. Yet for them the risks involved in doing so are much greater since they risk being essentialised (and dismissed) as exotic other through a perceived naïve autobiographical stance, and/or seen to speak for their whole race. This dynamic—forced on them by their position as other—ironically reproduces the kind of universalising that keeps them at the margin. The rise of ficto-critical writing in the academy—with an increasing interest from white males—illustrates that (for many) the choice to write ficto-critically
reflects privilege. As Hiromi Goto—another author of ficto-critical texts—has written: “choice is a position of privilege/That needs to be addressed” (220.) In her work titled “Body Politic” she discusses with her usual wry humour the space she is forced into, and then marginalised for:

I can never unzip my skin
and step into another.

I am happy with my colour until someone points
out how it clashes with my costume.

I hold my culture in my hands and form it on my own,
so that no one else can shape the way
it lies upon my body. (“Body Politic” 220)

Goto, primarily known for her creative writing, has also addressed issues of race through ficto-criticism (and her fiction). For example, “Alien Texts, Alien Seductions: The Context of Colour Full Writing,” ficto-critically combines two generic styles. The first is a highly personalised subjective voice—suggestive of feminist writing—which we are encouraged to understand as the author, due to the use of “I” and the descriptions of events pertaining to her writing and its acceptance/non-acceptance. This is the voice of a woman writer who is Japanese Canadian, who writes “well aware of race,” and who addresses the writer directly asking hard questions about their attitude to “aliens” (266). The second generic form used is fiction. Interspersed throughout the essay are scenes of an alien abduction. Goto begins by stating that aliens have never abducted her, yet she still has a fascination for them. The opening paragraph self-reflexively engages with the kinds of discourses espoused by white people on the racialised other or alien. Her parodic use of the perception of the other by dominant white culture works in several ways. Firstly, it brings her own relationship to the other (the alien) into play: how does she alienate them? How does she colonise their voice? Secondly, it functions to bring into view for the white reader a consciousness around how they
may construct the narrator—a “Canasian”\(^{60}\)—as exotic other. The personal tone of the essay-like segments intensifies this process, since the alien is not out there, but here speaking to you.

The fictional accounts of alien abduction work in a similar way in the sense that they undermine the neutrality of whiteness, and the reality of different perceptions. The first scene (“Scene 1 or Chapter 1”) of alien abduction is told from the perspective of a male human. Jim is obviously white, although he is not racialised, due to his central role in the story (alien abduction only happens to whites, doesn’t it?). In other words, we can only determine his race by applying the universal perspective of the dominant; this functions to make us aware as readers of the process of meaning making going. Jim wakes up to find himself on a cool smooth surface in the presence of an alien: “The figure was slight, short, could not have been over five feet in height. The head was large, hairless, with flattened facial features. It was the eyes, the alien eyes, black and horribly slanted” (263). As the text describing the abduction continues, marked by italic font, there is a slight slippage as the alien becomes more humanised. However, the story continues to be told from Jim’s perspective: “the alien’s visage was so—inscrutable.” In the next fictionalised scene of alien abduction we are shown events from the perspective of the alien. We discover in the following scene (subtitled “Seen 1 Too Many”) that the alien is, in fact, a woman college student called Sharon. Jim is the intruder in her residential accommodation: her bed. This shifting point of view raises questions of audience, meaning making, perspective and the process of alienation. The ambiguity around Sharon’s race illustrates the desire to know and identify the other, and raises the question of appropriation and authenticity. Can she be alien, Asian, other and called Sharon? Jim describes her as slanty-eyed and inscrutable, but who determines identity and reality when perspective is so subjectively informed? Significantly, Goto extends her play on alien to include other alienated groups, reflecting on her own particular focus on race. She does not want to reproduce the same systems of exclusion, yet she makes no apologies for writing in
“Full Colour” (as the subtitle to this piece suggests). According to Goto, these alien abductions must end.

The texts discussed only lightly touch on a substantial body of ficto-critical writing by Canadian writers of colour, which strategically play on the divide between fiction and non-fiction to model the arbitrary divisions that allow the process of othering. These works refigure a range of majoritarian discourses, including history, subjectivity, heterosexuality, identity and family. As Goto’s text illustrates, ficto-criticism can be a powerful tool, which renders complex ideas and theories into critical fiction. The use of narrative devices do not detract from the validity of the opinion or argument put forth, as it would in an academic context. Instead, they actually constitute a substantive part of the argument. Yet, ficto-criticism requires one to step forth into new critical territories. For example, in a special issue of *West Coast Line* titled “Colour: An Issue” editors Roy Miki and Fred Wah describe their process of selection as being determined by a desire for writing that “unsettle[s] the unquestioned authority of certain controlling critical terminology” (preface). This issue of *West Coast Line*, therefore, contains many examples of ficto-critical writing. One of them is Aruna Srivastava and Ashok Mathur’s short piece titled: “Preston Terre Blanche, Snow White, and the Seven Deadly Disclaimers, or The Dos of Racism (a not so far off fairy tale).” Their fairy tale is actually a list of comments from several academic and artistic gatherings in Alberta, and reveals the racism encountered in these situations by the writers who identify as anti-racist activists. Their work is interesting as it highlights the relationship between a materialist ficto-critical practice and their work as activists. Both Srivastava and Mathur are academically trained and display their anger with the institutional structures of the university in perpetuating prejudice, despite claims to the contrary. In fact, Srivastava has written elsewhere about her frustration with what she sees as the hypocritical rhetoric of anti-racist and anti-sexist academic discourses. Calling for praxis, something beyond academic analysis, she states:
As so many theorists of race and anti-racism have suggested, the only way to do cultural work is to recognize that it is, in fact, cultural work, not ‘purely’ or limitedly academic. The disciplines and isolation of institutional life make those of us who have complicated investments in academe, those of use who are subjected to the domination of institutional norms, histories, and denials, forget that it is working across these boundaries and borders, in coalitions (as fractious as these may be), that allows us to mount the most effective resistance. (125)

This fragment comes from a paper by her on anti-racist teaching, which is written ficto-critically. In this case, while the ficto-critical form is primarily autobiographical, it also contains an element of collage. In other words, Srivastava crosses generic borders as well as those between the institution and actual communities. Her text is highly personalised and connects her ficto-critical style with her anti-racist pedagogical approach. Srivastava articulates her failure, as she worries that her colleagues will judge her oral, fragmented and collaborative presentation as not constituting the work of a proper scholar (“Anti-Racism Inside and Outside the Classroom” 113). The self-policing that she experiences, which undercuts her confidence, is the internalised voice of academic discourse. Put another way, Srivastava articulates the difficulty she is experiencing in escaping the genre police, the institutional forces that render the body of the woman of colour silent. For Srivastava her anti-racist and anti-sexist work requires her to write as an embodied subject. Yet, in another ficto-critical work Srivastava lets the body speak even more inappropriately in an academic context.

In a collaborative text with Louise Saldanha she allows the reader to witness her experience of being a South Asian woman who is chronically ill within the academy. Both Saldanha and Srivastava suffer serious illnesses including epilepsy, diabetes and lupus. Here, they speak plainly of the incompatibility of illness and the academy, both of which are intensified by their gender and race:
In academia, we valorize the mind over body split. Admitting to illness is a threat to rationality and order because it threatens our sense of control . . . Illness, like gender and race, becomes a character flaw: a sign of weakness, unreliability, vulnerability. (Saldanha and Srivastava 5)

Therefore, like their racialised and gendered bodies, their illness brings the body very visibly into play within the context of the university, a milieu that relies on a polite, docile, absent and neutral body to actualise its knowledge production. As Salhanha and Srivastava state: “To be ill is to admit that your body is in the way; it is to be impolitely embodied” (5). By bringing their bodies back into play, by disclosing their illnesses, they make apparent the regulatory function of the tertiary institution: “To be ill, especially chronically ill, in the academy, then, is to realize how ubiquitous and complex the systematic regulation of our selves is” (6). As the examples listed above clearly show, ficto-critical writing at the hands of those situated at the margin has as its target the neutral, objective language and discursive practices of dominant culture. Within the academic environment this ficto-critical dynamic reaches its peak through bringing into sharp relief the function of normative academic writing in controlling, excluding and repressing the other.

Another writer whose work powerfully articulates the effects of neutral objective truth or fact on those clearly at the margin is Lee Maracle. Her book *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology* (1996), for example, analyses the effects of colonisation on First Nations peoples, and calls for readers to react to her stories with humanity. She does not present her analysis as objective or neutral. Written self-reflexively, Maracle makes no apologies for writing in first person with an acknowledged subjectivity. She states: “Few writers are willing to state their personal feelings about things before subjecting things to the cold light of analysis. I do not believe any opinion is free of bias and the preceding words reflect my particular biases” (103). Similarly, she challenges the division between fiction and non-fiction by showing that the story is always changing and arguing that this does not invalidate it (Maracle 5). Her work is
undoubtedly indebted to oral traditions, as is the work of European Canadian writers. Maracle, in her preface, makes the same connection as the other ficto-critical texts I have examined. This reinforces the early connection between minority positioning and ficto-criticism; hence the large number of texts by feminists and writers of colour that possess an in-between character. That is, these writers have identified the parallels between objective rational thinking, writing and processes of colonisation and domination.

Women are not deserving of power because we are emotional beings, beings who are incapable of ‘objective, rational’ thinking. This is especially true of Native women, whose cultures require that we put our hearts and minds together in the thinking process. I have come to realize that all decision-making is subjective and emotional, that the rational thinkers among the Europeans struggled to rationalize their own emotional attitudes and re-name their beliefs in vain. It is ultimately better to face the feelings we have and struggle to grow from them to a better place than to deny the heart and make heartless decisions. (Maracle xi).

While Maracle’s writing is not the sophisticated language-focused writing of fiction-theory it nevertheless embodies in its materiality and ficto-critical form a similar critique of majoritarian discourses of the nation state. Interestingly, Lynette Hunter has written in Outsider Notes (1996) about the critical embarrassment of academics when confronted with autobiographical texts by Native women writers, expressing an unease with their perceived lack of sophistication and describing these writings as indecorous. Hunter is not speaking specifically of Maracle’s work, yet her comments could be applied to Maracle given her personal and at times emotional tone. Maracle talks of the importance of heart; would this work in defence of a text’s value? The unease and embarrassment Hunter describes is a telling commentary on literary criticism in the academy and its role in the nation state, something that Hunter is also conscious of. She argues that these texts require that literary critics recognise that genre is used differently by different communities. Indeed, another Native writer, this time Jeannette Armstrong, has said that the development of new genres in Canada “is based on
an exploration of how Native traditions of expression can be applied to English literary tradition.” (Anderson 53). Questions of quality exclude texts perceived as theoretically unsophisticated, and yet the dissemination of these very important texts can be visibly increased if taught at university.64 Because they fail to meet certain European standards of genre and sophistication, should they be excluded? According to Hunter there is a need to change the perception of these texts, which “are often dismissed by the institutions that teach literary criticism . . . as ‘low-status’” (146). This is another instance of the invalidation of knowledge not deemed important by those at the centre who construct disciplines. Maracle, however, argues for a valuing of community, love, spirituality and understanding. Canada may have recognised the importance of shifting the perception of their own national literatures—to replace the English canon with Canadian writing—yet at this molecular level (if Hunter is right) there seems to be an inability to apply the same analysis to a different set of texts. Hunter calls for “engaged reading” as a means to overcome the problems of repression and appropriation often occurring to texts that stand outside the molar. Engaged reading is for Hunter a social action, which seeks to look at the difficulties and differences that texts from marginalised social groups present to mainstream readers and to work out ways to articulate those issues without repressing and appropriating. Could ficto-criticism work as a kind of self-reflexive engaged reading? At its best it presents a powerful tool to redress the violence of representation and to dismantle the bifurcating structures of rational Western thought. For those at the margin it is a form of literary intervention that provides the author a means to question and critique the genres and forms that are historically linked to their oppression. Kim Scott’s Benang: From the Heart is an excellent example of the agency the ficto-critical form may provide to writers who speak from the edge, and who recognise that to be heard they must dismantle the discourses that deem compassion, heart, and feeling irrelevant to fact. Yet, are the implications of ficto-critical practice the same for those from the margin and centre? And will ficto-critical texts always reflect the politics suggestive in Hunter’s notion of an engaged reading practice?
Conclusion

The diverse range of writing-between discussed in this chapter presents many differences and styles of ficto-critical writing. In the context of this thesis it is not expedient to examine in detail every, and all, ficto-critical writing in Canada. Rather than present the definitive ficto-critical texts, here I have brought many together to highlight the commonality of their concerns in their multiplicity. The danger in this approach is the risk of eliding differences and this is in evidence here. At the same time, it is essential that I keep ficto-criticism open and multiple. Not doing so would suggest my failure to comprehend the centrality of ficto-critical experimentation as a means to imagine new ways of being in the world as a critical subject. What I have hoped to have shown is that what these diverse texts have in common is a focus on breaking down the universality and neutrality of supposed objective academic or critical writing. The works I have discussed demonstrate that, by bringing into play the other of academic discourse yet combining it with a critical (and often implicitly theoretical) analysis or position, ficto-criticism problematises the concepts of judgement, interpretation and representation. In addition, it mixes fact and fiction, self-reflexively entertaining its own fictionality as a means to situate itself socially and historically. In other words, ficto-criticism is a form of writing wrought out of the conflict over difference and minoritarian politics. It is a highly political discourse that demonstrates the characteristics of a minor literature. Ficto-criticism as a process that enables an autopoetic conceptualisation of the self destabilises the traditional subject of academic critical writing and dissolves the mastery of official discourses. It also reveals the fiction of genre. Ficto-critical forms make a connection between the style of writing and the content, asking both writers and readers to examine at the level of form what structures of domination are in place in our own writing and reading practices. Many ficto-critical works thus function as models for a mode of critical writing that does not colonise the object of its analysis, but attempts a reading of and with the text/subject; an empathetic engagement that understands subjectivity as informed by and changing with context and event.
In the next chapter I critically examine ficto-critical forms in order to assess whether they indeed do what they seem to suggest they do, answering the question whether ficto-criticism is necessarily an effective measure against the spectres of repression and appropriation.
The complete section on ficto-criticism from the original published interview by Ward (AW) with Jameson (FJ) reads as follows:

AW: Do you think that the nature of ‘ficto-criticism’ is successful in undermining the ‘corrective’ power of criticism?

FJ: ‘Ficto-criticism’ makes a lot of sense to me. It is very clear that there has been a flowing together of theory and criticism. It seems that theory can’t exist without telling little narrative stories and then at this point of criticism, criticism seems very close to simply telling stories. It is an advanced and energetic form of conceptual criticism. (1987: 9)

In the Muecke and King paper, they begin their citation from “It is very clear . . .”

2 Other Canadian writers on the visual arts that write ficto-critically include Lorne Falk, Anne Brydon and Sigrid Dahle. See, for example, Falk’s “L is for Letting Go,” in *semiotext(e) canadas* (1994: 295).


4 See also Gary Ditchburn’s 1993 MA thesis “The Search for Criteria in Theory-Based Criticism,” presented at York University, Ontario. Ditchburn dedicates much of his thesis to attacking and undermining Randolph’s ficto-critical practice, which he aligns with poststructuralism. He describes her writing as slack, uncritical (184), dogmatic and failing to measure up to his criteria for good art criticism (1993: v).

5 The second reference to ficto-criticism is in Gaile McGregor’s review of several new Canadian publications titled “The Mainstreaming of Postmodernism: A Status Report on the ‘New’ Scholarship in Canada.” Published in 1989 in the *Journal of Canadian Studies* this lengthy article reviewed two new visual arts journals *Vanguard* and *Parachute*. Under the subheading “Artwriting” McGregor discusses Randolph’s work. She says: “Randolph’s most interesting contribution . . . is her experimentation with a genre she calls ficto-criticism” (1989:152).

6 Published in *Culture Lab* (1993: 49-58).


8 Van Herk’s first novel won the Seal First Novel Award and was subsequently published in the United States, England and Europe. Several of her books have been translated (*Judith, The Tent Peg* and *No Fixed Address*) into other languages, including: German, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, French and Italian. In *Contemporary Canadian and US Women of Letters* by Thomas Gerry, ficto-criticism is used to describe van Herk’s text *In-Visible Ink*.

9 Notably van Herk has also visited Australia several times and presented her work at conferences.

10 My own introduction to the term was, indeed, through van Herk’s writing, taught in an undergraduate creative writing class by Anne Brewster at Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia. Brewster also included work by Nicole Brossard and Hélène Cixous in the readings for this creative writing class.

11 Personal interview. 12th July 1998.

12 For instance, Yasmin Ladha, a student of van Herk’s at the University of Calgary, describes her Masters in Creative Writing titled “Circum the Gesture” (1993) as ficto-criticism; Ladha’s thesis was published as *Women Dancing on Rooftops* (1997). Kim Suvan’s Masters “Humbling Heroines: A Ficto-Critical Investigation of Fairy Tale Motifs” (1997) was also supervised by van Herk, as was “Remailed: Post-ing ’The Drover’s Wife’” by Elizabeth Dozois (1991). All of these theses have had ficto-criticism applied by the authors to describe aspects of the writing.

13 van Herk Papers, University of Calgary, Alberta.

14 Art Index is an electronic database that indexes articles in international arts publications, yearbooks, museum bulletins, exhibition lists and film reviews from 1984 onwards.

15 In an email to me Grenville confirmed his understanding that ficto-criticism was Randolph’s term (25 March 2000).

16 In the first book in this series by George Bowering, *Imaginary Hand: Essays*, Kamboureli speaks of the Writer as Critic series as inviting readers to read criticism as literature. Linking his notion with the work of writers such as Lyotard, Blanchot and Derrida, she suggests that this approach to criticism is common in Canada (1988: vii).

17 This paper was given in November 1988 at Toward a History of the Literary Institution V in Edmonton, Alberta, and in April 1989 at the Blurring Genres Conference in Calgary, Alberta.

18 Coincidentally, van Herk discusses another reviewer’s reaction to her writing-between. She has stated: “There was a recent review of *The Oxford Anthology of Short Fiction by Women*, which said that *In Visible Ink* wasn’t a story and didn’t ‘belong’ in the anthology. This kind of orthodox admonition makes me crazy; women write in all kinds of ways . . .” (qtd. in Tihanyi 2000: 54).
This is an entertaining book on the history of the footnote. Published in 1997 it indicates the increasing self-consciousness around the conventions of writing, particularly scholarly writing.

For example, see Leona Gom’s review where she states: “I would prefer to find more such literary analyses in such unacademic places” (1991: 126).


This has been variously translated, and is also known in English as: “Writing I am woman is full of consequences” (Forsyth, 1978: 31).

On the influence of Brossard on writers and critics from Quebec, see Forsyth, “Nicole Brossard and the Emergence of Feminist Literary Theory in Quebec Since 1970” (1987: 211). Alice Parker also describes Brossard as a writer of now “imposing status” (1998: 3).

Brossard quoted in and translated by Parker, states, “we have to credit writing in the feminine with a decompartmentalization of genres.” (1998: 8).

Much of the work performed by Brossard is, for example, reliant on her play on French grammar, in particular gender agreements. In English there is no equivalent, it is therefore reasonable to suggest that even with an excellent translation some of the subtleties will have been lost.

Barbara Godard et al., “Theorizing Fiction Theory.” See also Alice Parker, Liminal Visions of Nicole Brossard (1998:7). Earlier texts by Brossard also demonstrate much in common with her fiction-theory in These Our Mothers. For example, see Turn of a Pang (1976), originally published in French as Sold-Out (1973).

See Brossard’s Daydream Mechanics (1980), for example. The format of the book is long and slim, and the text is only present along the very top of the page: Brossard frequently experiments with the white space of the page in relation to the text.

Another key text of fiction-theory by Brossard is The Ariel Letter (1988) (originally in French La lettre arienne (1985)).

See also Patricia Smart’s paper titled “Voices of Commitment and Discovery: Women Writers in Quebec” (1978: 17-18).

See also Alice Parker’s Liminal Visions of Nicole Brossard (1998: 1).

La Barre du Jour ran under this title from 1965-76, becoming La Nouvelle Barre du Jour in 1977.

See Patricia Smart’s paper “Voice of Commitment and Discovery,” where she says of the 1977 special issue of La Barre du Jour on feminism: “[it] can be frustrating on a first reading, for they consciously avoid the logic, linearity and rationalism of what is considered a bankrupt male intellectual tradition and seek instead a blend of poetry and theory which allows for depth, verification of theory by experience and the gradual emergence of the idea. The barriers between the traditional genres of the ‘essay’ and ‘creative writing’ are ignored” (1978: 15-16).

According to Cotnoir, Brossard’s Masculin grammaticale (1974) reworks Irigaray’s Speculum of the Other Woman and This Sex Which Is Not One.

Within the realm of renowned French women theorists Hélène Cixous’ work on écriture féminine would appear to intersect strongly with “writing in the feminine” by Quebec women writers. However, as Karen Gould points out, there is a significant difference between Cixous’ approach and that of Quebec women writers: in Quebec “writing in the feminine” is gender-specific, it is not a practice available to men. Cixous, however, believes that all men have access to the feminine and thus can also write in the feminine (1990: 38).

Whilst Lamy is speaking more generally about the multiplicity of Quebec women writers’ texts, the same can be applied to Brossard’s work.


In “Virginia and Colette” Gail Scott speaks of her early introduction to ideas not as easily accessible to Anglophones (1986: 34).

See Lola Lemire Tostevin’s ‘sophie for an example of fiction-theory, which is, in part, a feminist critique of Derrida. The apostrophe signalling absence: (philo) ‘sophie. Tostevin is highly critical of Derrida’s failure in a seminar to be consistent with his theories:

In spite of claims that his deconstructive method of analysis allies itself with the voiceless, the marginal and the repressed, Jacques Derrida doesn’t much care for questions by women. During the seminars of his two week course, The Political Theology of Language, he spent at least fifteen minutes disseminating most questions from men, while he only spends two or three minutes disseminating questions from women and even then he manages to trivialize them to the point of eliciting laughs from
Derrida likes to question the masters, in his classes master and students stay in their respective places. In Derrida’s seminars women remain seminally divided. Keep to the margins to bear witness to what he tells. (1988: 45)

Fiction-theory is probably the term most often applied to writing-between in Canada. For example, Christl Verduyn reads Margaret Atwood’s Murder in the Dark as fiction-theory. See her paper titled “Murder in the Dark: fiction/theory by Margaret Atwood” (1986: 124-31). Marlatt has used the term fictionanalysis, and others have used biotext, and biofiction. Academic Lorri Neilson, based at Mt St Vincent University in Halifax, uses the expression “arts-based inquiry” to describe a practice that results in a text that could be described as ficto-criticism. In this approach the focus is on the research methodology, which (as the expression suggests) is an approach to academic research that is creative. For an overview of what constitutes “arts-based inquiry see AJER (Alberta Journal of Educational Research), issue 48.3 (2002). Neilson has also edited with Ardra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles The Art of Writing Inquiry (2001), published by Backalong Books and The Centre for Arts-informed Research, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Scott’s “Virginia and Colette on the Outside Looking In” where she discusses the influence of French writing generally, and Quebec feminist writing, on her own work. Marlatt also acknowledges the “theoretical energy” of Quebec feminist writers as stimulating in her collection Readings from the Labyrinth (1998: 9).

In the preface to this notable collection of ficto-criticism Scott suggests it is that her feminist practice that has led her toward a sense of the essay as both fictional and self-reflexive: “In other words, a text where the everyday, the political, the cultural meet, risking syntax in the process of position and dissolving ‘meaning’ (notably the traces of male dominance), and the (traditional female) subject” (1989: 10). Lorna Jackson explores Scott’s Spaces Like Stairs as an example of the dissolution of the boundary between the literary and the critical, in the process undermining the authority of the conventional academic essay. See Lorna Jackson’s MA thesis “Writer/Critic/Hysteric: Who’s (Reading) Who in Spaces Like Stairs, Errata, and Talking” (1993).

Marlatt also talks of her experience as an English immigrant, and the way in which her accent and use of words marked her as different. Earth, for example, was dirt in Canada, and the woods were bush. Of this linguistic difference Marlatt says: “you experience the first split between name and thing, signifier and signified.” Her experience in Penang as a child also added to her sense of displacement on arrival in Canada. Their Englishness even more marked through an already articulated nostalgia for England, as her mother ("Mummy") worked hard to maintain her children’s “Englishness.” Marlatt says that “It leads to an interest in and curiosity about language, a sense of how language shapes the reality you live in . . .” Readings from the Labyrinth (1998: 23).

In the Feminine:Women and Words/Les Femmes et les Mots (1985) are the published conference proceedings for the Women and Words conference. This text demonstrates the kind of energy circulating around feminism and women’s writing at this time in Canada (Ed. by Ann Dybikowski, Victoria Freeman, Daphne Marlatt, Barbara Pulling and Betsy Warland).

See also the publication Telling It: Women Across Cultures (1990), which resulted from the conference by the same name, held in Vancouver in 1988.

In “Representation and Exchange: Feminist Periodicals and the Production of Cultural Value” Godard discusses the problems that feminist journals face when competing for funding. She argues: “The institutional desire for purity, for upholding the law of genre with its norm of disinterestedness, positioned the hybrid publishing ventures of feminism with its explicitly engaged art-making on the margins” (1997:1 11). Tessera met with some of the criteria for funding (quality and Canadianness), however, according to Godard it failed to attract a wide readership (ultimately the price paid for its innovation) and thus overall failed the funding criteria. This placed the journal in a contradictory position, as in order to widen its readership it would have to become less experimental.


For another example of ficto-criticism by Soros, see “‘Anorexia’: Flesh Speaking Word.” Tessera 23 (1997: 60-7).

Some examples of ficto-criticism published in Fireweed are Rozena Maart’s “Language and Consciousness,” Kyo Maclear’s “Not in So Many Words: Translating Silence Across ‘Difference,’” and “Oxalá” by Ana Dos Santos. See Works Cited for details.

Room of One’s Own 14.4. In this issue, for example, Charlene Diehl-Jones and Aritha van Herk, in their work titled “diallage,” playfully celebrate the need for creative play which is closed down by rules and convention, such as narrative closure. According to Susan MacFarlane in the introduction to this issue, Diehl-Jones and van
Herk’s “diallage” illustrates the “interdependence of fiction and theory,” their style adding a further dimension to their content (1991: 5).

50 See Nicole Shurkin-Simpson’s “ESSAIII!!!” in *Prairie Fire* 16.3 (1995): 139-48. From a materialist feminist perspective Shurkin-Simpson explores the essay form. This piece again links the personal, feminism and ficto-criticism.

51 Canadian Fiction Magazine hosted the third issue of *Tessera*. See number 57 (1986).


54 Williamson’s *Crybaby!* is an excellent example of ficto-criticism.

55 Bannerji is a writer who has written extensively on the established critical method. See her contribution to *Literary Pluralities* (1998) edited by Christyl Verduyn. See also Bannerji’s collection *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism* (1995).

56 See Walter Benjamin’s “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov” for a full discussion on storytelling as a social act entrenched in the experiential. Unlike the novel that relies on a solitary individual reader, storytelling is based on a tradition linked directly to experience. Benjamin laments the demise of storytelling, which he argues was overcome by the novel with the invention of printing. According to Benjamin the audience of storytelling is left to interpret “things the way he [sic] understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks” (1969: 89). In the context of Philip’s piece—with its oral storytelling tone—ficto-criticism is set in opposition to normative critical writing as the model for imparting the facts.

57 In “Whos’ Listening” Philip addresses the question of audience, articulating the difficulties that those who are colonised have in reaching their audience. Who is their audience? The question of audience is foremost for those at the margin. If they choose to write out of their tradition, they risk alienating their own communities (since they are often better versed in the traditions of the coloniser). At the same time, they risk being stereotyped as exotic other through identifying with their own culture. This dilemma reflects the double bind articulated by the centre/margin paradigm (1995; 129-49).

58 Whilst racism is a focus of these writers, they do not only critique racism and colonisation. Sexuality, gender, and class also figure in their writings.

59 As Harris writes, the “I” spoken is not a naïve autobiographical usage. It is instead an “I” constructed in narrative that is located in a specific body (of a female African); it is neither disembodied nor universal.

60 See “Translating the Self: Moving Between Cultures” (1996: 112). Goto adopts the label of “Canasian” in a sarcastic tone, conscious of the racism inherent in such a label.

61 In other works, Mathur uses the term biotext to describe a critical practice that is situated in his experience. See “The Margin is the Message: On Mistry, Mukherjee and In Between.” His novel *Once Upon an Elephant* (1998) is fiction, although it incorporates postcolonial theory such as Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak,” and is clearly a critique of racism in Canada. He has also published another short ficto-critical work as part of the exhibition Taking it to the Streets; titled “Trouble Makers in Training: Notes Towards Anti-Racist (art) Activism,” Mathur critiques the failure of academics to incorporate praxis in their academic lives. He states: “These academics often contain themselves solely within academic circles, expressing belief that their work, which may critique racism in numerous venues, is best performed only at (but rarely against) academic institutions” (1998: 28).

62 See, for example, her co-authored essay with Louise Saldanha titled “Why Do We Do This Anti-Racist Work in the Classroom?” The article is structured as a dialogue between Saldanha and Srivastava and articulates dissatisfaction between the institutional conventions and the kinds of practices that help enable anti-racist teaching in the university. Both write in a highly personal manner, discussing both successes and failures (1998: 4-11).

63 See Nicole Ward Jouve’s book *White Woman Speaks With Forked Tongue: Criticism as Autobiography* as an example of another argument for writing ficto-critically. She argues: “Thinking is not the management of thought, as alas it is too often taken to mean these days. Thinking means putting everything on the line, taking risks, finding out what the actual odds are, not sheltering behind a pretend and in any case fallacious and transparent objectivity” (1991: 5).

64 My assumption that these texts are important is based on an understanding that they present opportunities for readers to address racial stereotyping and provide an alternative perspective from the literature of European Canadian writers.
In *Captivity Tales* (1993) Elizabeth Hay brings together a number of different genres. The text is written from the perspective of a Canadian woman living in New York and explores different stories about Canadians in New York (mainly historical). The narrative includes the character’s story of the research process, mixed in with personal reflection and detail. Significantly, one of the main themes of the book is the position of Canada in relation to America, exploring Canadian identity and the relationship between the two countries. Although the book appears as fiction I believe it also functions as a critical text—indeed—a ficto-critical text. What is interesting is that, again, the minoritarian position of the narrator seems to have informed the generic choices.

Significantly, Canadian postcolonial theorist Diana Brydon has identified “postcolonial fictocritique” as a focus of her research in progress (“The Ends of Postcolonialism: Challenges and Limits”). This is important since clearly Brydon is identifying the practice as one that has relevance to postcolonial discourse in its function as a minor literature. Some of the writers she intends to discuss include those examined in this thesis: Gail Jones, Lee Maracle, Marlene Nourbese Philip, Aritha van Herk and Ashok Mathur. Online. Google. 17 Nov 2003. http://publish.uwo.ca/~dbrydon/dynamic/research.html
CHAPTER SIX
RISKING THE SELF, RISKING THE OTHER

INTRODUCTION
The final chapter draws together the main thesis arguments by illustrating the complexity of the issues arising in relation to ficto-criticism. Does ficto-criticism really signal the exhaustion of traditional critical conventions to the point where they will no longer have any relevance? Does the emergence of something identifiable as ficto-criticism mean that we are reaching a state of post-criticism as Gregory Ulmer’s term would suggest? These are the questions I explore in this final chapter.

Through carrying out close readings of several ficto-critical texts—whilst remaining attendant to their micro-politics—this chapter examines the success of ficto-criticism in countering the colonising forces of normative academic discourse, as a means to measure its revolutionary potential. In the process I continue to establish the heterogeneity of writing-between. By examining both the author function and the use of autobiographical detail employed in ficto-critical texts, I show that not all ficto-criticism is as radical as it may seem on first examination. For instance, ficto-critical texts that appear primarily as creative texts may never manage to undermine established ways of knowing and the conventions they rely on since they are too easily reappropriated as mere literature and discharged of their critical intent. Thus, through these close readings I reaffirm the ficto-critical author’s need for constant self-reflexive attention to the text’s micro-politics. If ficto-criticism is to really disrupt the mastery and colonising violence of critical writing it must be freed from prescriptive rules of interpretation or analysis. Similarly, when ficto-criticism is removed from the system of binaries that normative academic discursive tradition relies on, the questions it raises become much more complex. In this context, it may be tempting to launch into broad generalities to contain ficto-criticism’s excessive and contradictory elements. However, detailed and specific
case studies reinforce what ficto-criticism attempts to grapple with: that truths imposed from above repress the difference and a multiplicity implicit in all knowledge. As I demonstrate in this chapter, ficto-criticism must self-reflexively focus on risking the self, rather than merely continue to jeopardise the other in the masterful tradition of dominant critical writing. In other words, it is not enough to superficially or temporarily undermine one’s mastery of the subject of critical attention. Instead, one must take consistent and considerable risks with one’s own identity and critical style to undo the will to power.

The texts that I examine in this chapter are Smaro Kamboureli’s critical work *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada* (2000), one of Robert Kroestch’s “postmodern” essays titled “The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues,” and Dany Laferrière’s “non-fiction fiction” *Why Must a Black Writer Write About Sex?* (1994). Readings of these texts will, firstly, reaffirm the complexity of the issues arising in relation to ficto-criticism and, secondly, begin to address the question of whether ficto-criticism actually marks the end of critical writing as we know it. Since I am reading ficto-criticism as symptomatic of specific historical conditions and writing-between, it is necessary to think through the intensities of ficto-criticism at a micro-political level through specific texts. The different speaking positions of these authors, and their varying identities and backgrounds, illustrate the reason why case-by-case studies are required, and how the reading of ficto-criticism varies tremendously depending on the material conditions of the text’s production. As I show in view of Kamboureli’s and Kroetsch’s texts, some expressions of ficto-criticism are more easily absorbed into institutional practices since they neither risk the author’s authority or identity, nor do they actually challenge the colonising function of critical writing. Laferrière’s text, in turn, makes clear that the disruption of literary convention has different meanings, depending on the author’s speaking position and, in particular, their own position of power.
Scandalous Bodies

Smaro Kamboureli, in the first chapter to her last critical book, begins by discussing her recent experience of "political paralysis," an 'inability to make difficult critical choices,' and, along with that, a reluctance to commit to the fixity of words on the page" (1). In the period leading up to writing Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada (2000), Kamboureli seems to have reached a “critical impasse” in her academic career, a difficulty “in negotiating, let alone incorporating into [her] study, what both personal experience and theoretical insight compelled [her] to confront” (3). What Kamboureli appears to be articulating in this introductory chapter (“Critical Correspondences”) is a frustration with the slippage/s between her theoretical and intellectual position and the lived reality of her experience as a woman, academic, Canadian, and diasporic Greek. In relation to the whole book, Kamboureli’s first chapter is significant as it moves towards enunciating many of the issues that both inform and influence ficto-critical discourse; a discourse that implies the exhaustion of traditional modes of critical and theoretical writing. In the context of ficto-critical discourse, therefore, Kamboureli’s critical or secondary text thus becomes the primary text for analysis.

Significantly, in her first (and highly personal) chapter, she relates her concerns about the relevance of her work and argues for a more contingent, self-reflexive approach to critical analysis. Yet, while her first chapter’s features are clearly ficto-critical, the rest of the chapters are consistent with normative academic writing (perhaps only with some minor variations).

The complex tension between the first and following chapters, and the possible readings of her text as a whole, makes Scandalous Bodies a very relevant starting point to begin the ensuing discussion on whether ficto-criticism achieves what popular conceptual framings suggest. In fact, the discussion of Kamboureli’s Scandalous Bodies makes evident the conditions that appear to have contributed to what she describes as her critical impasse, and foregrounds the similarities between these influencing and those that inform ficto-criticism.
As the texts examined in the thesis thus far illustrate, ficto-criticism is a discourse that implicitly critiques the universality of traditional critical objectivity on which majoritarian discourses rely. Kamboureli’s critical crisis similarly appears informed by an increasing or renewed unease with the complicity between the academy and the nation state. She recalls the period in which her critical crisis found its beginnings: “This was the time of the presumed certainties of political correctness, the ‘politics of blame’ (Said 1986, 45) and vociferous advocacies, but also a period of global upheavals” (1). Significantly, the period that Kamboureli identifies as marking the beginnings of her critical paralysis—the age of political correctness—began in the 1980s. This is the same period when ficto-critical texts were becoming increasingly visible. This is no coincidence as both Kamboureli’s anxiety and ficto-criticism are responses to a number of effects, including the destabilisation of truth and authority as foundations of academic discourse. In fact, the molecular multiplicity of marginalised voices questioning the molar lines of the academy and society appear to have informed Kamboureli’s anxiety over her role as an academic and critic. In view of this, she states:

As academics, we have learned to tread gingerly on these paths of [colonial] history. Indeed, those ‘labelled,’ and others like them, are no longer the objects of our studies; they are the subjects of their own discourse—at least that is what many of us academics argue. But who are we? Whose interests do we represent beyond our own academic interests? Who do we write for, and why? . . . And, for that matter, what is the range of states of being and mind that colonialism covers? Does self-location, that most frequently recurring and debated issue today, suffice to immunize academic discourse against the perils of representation (speaking for or about others), against the politics of the institutions that we are complicit with—however strong our avowed desire to change them? What cultural and political dynamics does the theatre of the classroom dramatize? How do we as individuals negotiate our political stance vis-à-vis
the history of both ideas and of the institutions in whose contexts we teach?

(Scandalous Bodies 2)

The dynamics she describes—underwritten by contemporary theories of domination—seem to have informed Kamboureli’s reappraisal of her critical approach. In her chapter she appears to be asking herself why colonising systems remain so pervasive despite rigorous academic analyses and critiques (including her own). Symptomatic of the current crisis in critical writing suggested by ficto-criticism, the quotation above demonstrates Kamboureli’s anxiety around her complicity with an economy of institutionalised domination that represents and represses those at the margin. It must be noted that Kamboureli’s desire to question her own complicity with the institution and nation state appears informed by pressure from within the academy, that is, her peers, to interrogate the neutral, disembodied position of traditional academia. As argued earlier, in the academic world to be embodied is a political act since this world’s functionality relies on disembodyment and author evacuated prose. Kamboureli asks how she fits within these debates, and what her responsibilities are as a diasporic critic.

Kamboureli’s anxiety over her role in maintaining systems of domination illustrates the increasing pressure on academics to think through their role and relation to the centre. The same dynamic also explains the association between some ficto-critical writers and the notion of the popular academic who writes for the people, signalling a desire to break down the ivory tower of academia and influence social change more directly. What do academics contribute to society and how can they best make that contribution? Whilst clearly informed by concerns around the repression and representation of the other (as the quotation from Kamboureli demonstrates), economic changes have also influenced the growing need to respond to such questions. For example, as funding to universities is squeezed, academics must increasingly justify their role. The need for justification in this economic climate is often more intense for scholars in the humanities, as they must answer questions from both inside and outside the academy about the relevance of their work to the university and society more broadly. While
the sciences appear as more immediately practical and generative of funding, employment and industry, what is the contribution of the humanities? Kamboureli acknowledges these pressures, suggesting that they have factored in her need to think through these issues.\(^3\)

Ironically, as the humanities become more interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary as well as less concerned with fixed notions of truth, authority and knowledge, economic pressures on universities to become corporations could potentially see a return to departmental and disciplinary structuring. It might also see a return to an emphasis on objective scientific language in the humanities, as a way to justify their value. However, as Kamboureli’s critical impasse demonstrates—as does the critique engendered in ficto-criticism—objective neutral language remains overall the dominant practice in universities despite changes to theoretical and disciplinary modalities. Yet, given all these complicated and somewhat contradictory details, it still appears reasonable to suggest that Kamboureli’s crisis is in part driven by a consciousness of the failure of cultural and literary criticism to fulfil its traditional role of providing answers to current cultural and social malaise (even though theoretically it may no longer be deemed appropriate).\(^4\)

To put it differently, what is the use of the humanities since they appear to have failed to achieve their disciplinary goal? The humanities, therefore, find themselves in a double bind. To truly develop strategies for creating a better world free of discrimination—to make them more valuable to society—they need to interrogate their own complicity with such systems. And this includes the alienating and colonising role of conventional modes of academic writing. At the same time, there is immense pressure on academics to conform to more traditional pedagogical practices and disciplinary boundaries as students become clients; vessels to be filled with applied knowledge so that they may find employment.\(^5\)

Put another way, desire for social change is constantly caught by the molar lines of the nation state. This double bind illustrates the difficulties in making absolute statements in relation to ficto-criticism, and marks a specific and potentially critical moment in pedagogy, particularly within the humanities. Theoretically the humanities are not responsible for finding the answer to society’s malaise, yet socially, politically and economically they need to justify
their worth. Ironically, despite her theoretical position and her critique of the history of ideas, Kamboureli’s struggle would appear underwritten by a desire to fulfil the traditional role of the humanities. Her crisis is marked by an underlying concern about potentially failing her critical and political project.

**The politics of self-location**

As Kamboureli signals, the response of many academics in the humanities to questions about their contribution to social change has been to situate themselves in their critical writing, identifying their position in terms of their relation to the centre or the margins. This is a reaction to difficult questions about the academic’s role colonising processes (such as, the violence of representation) and about their value to society. Concerned about their relation to the centre, academics have begun to declare themselves in their texts in terms of their racial, sexual, class and gendered identity. It must be noted that this generally superficial practice of self-location often stems from privilege; a guilty realisation of one’s advantage in the face of the sort of vociferous advocacies Kamboureli speaks of. To have the choice of self-disclosure—that is, either to refute the neutral universal voice of academic writing or continue speaking in that way—one must be in a central position in the first place. For Kamboureli the answer does not, however, lie in a politics of self-location. Interestingly, self-location through autobiographical detail is often enacted in ficto-critical texts. The act of self-location in academic writing thus functions like a very mild form of ficto-criticism, in that it attempts to acknowledge the power relations at work behind the conditions of its production. While it nominally introduces the notion of an embodied academic, it is not a very effective response to the violence of representation, working as a weak, untheorised panacea that fails to adequately address the specificity of texts and their production. Kamboureli is right in being suspicious of such unsophisticated almost knee-jerk responses, but even she seems drawn into declaring her position. Her opening chapter functions with some degree of self-location through its autobiographical detail, as she speaks quite intimately about her critical impasse. Ironically,
given the personal nature of this chapter, Kamboureli is highly critical of self-location and the pressure she feels on her as an academic to place herself in terms of an assumed authenticity. She argues that her subjectivity is not fixed and her hybrid position as diasporic critic, (privileged) academic, and Greek woman makes it more difficult for her to place herself in terms of some authentically marginal or central position:

The pressure I felt to position myself, instead of resolving my tensions, kept pointing to various layers of my subjectivity, revealing my identity to be unsettled, continuously disrupted, determined by different alliances on different occasions. (5)

Kamboureli thus rejects the act of self-location as an adequate answer to the problems implicit in the representation of the other in academic writing. How can she define herself in such reified absolutes when her subjectivity is already hybridised? The alternative to self-location, that is, traditional academic objective neutrality, is obviously even less appealing to her, as she is more than conversant with the theoretical hypocrisy such a role would engender. How does Kamboureli resolve these issues? What do the increasing economic, theoretical, and ethical pressures on academics really mean for academic research and writing?

The contemporary theories that underwrite Kamboureli’s reluctance to situate herself have been established in Australian and Canadian universities for some years. These theories, which inform cultural and literary studies, critique our commonsense ways of being in the world that often collude with the oppression of difference. Yet, as Kamboureli concedes, little has changed for those at the margin who continue to live with the reality of prejudice. Her professional crisis signals how easily theories that challenge institutional knowledge such as poststructuralism, deconstruction, feminism, and postcolonialism can be taught in universities in abstract terms. They are often enlisted as theoretical tools to read the forces of power at work in texts “over there,” without any requirement that they could be applied at the individual, micro-political or local and institutional levels. Whilst contemporary theory has been influential in sparking the anxieties underlying Kamboureli’s crisis and ficto-criticism, it
alone has not been enough to cause significant shifts. This, I believe, reflects the continuing division between mind and body, public and private and non-fiction and fiction. Yet, at least for some ficto-critical writers, such as Kamboureli, these arbitrary binaries are no longer taken as given. Her palpable anxiety illustrates this well. The critical impasse expressed within Kamboureli’s opening chapter is thus significant and interesting as it demonstrates the difficulties facing academics, pedagogical practice and universities as their left-liberal emancipatory politics are being thoroughly interrogated, particularly by voices from the margin. Even literature is speaking back, metafictively incorporating its own critical commentary. As Kamboureli has suggested, the objects of academic study are now the subjects of their own discourse. Their arrival has helped cause an examination of individual politics at the micro-political level, including one’s writing and teaching style. Her struggle over these issues is fundamental to understanding the forces productively informing ficto-critical discourse and the historical conditions that have aided its recognition and circulation.

Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, for example, articulate the effect of the increasing pressure on academics during the 1980s to address the politics of their own practices. In *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence* (1989) they say:

> As American academics at this moment in history, we feel it is somehow dishonest to speak of power and violence as something that belongs to the police or the military, something that belongs to and is practiced by someone and somewhere else. (4)

How easy is it to escape the violence of representation? How does one remain in the university and effect change? How long can most academics continue to work without actively applying a critical analysis to their own practices and privileged position, particularly when the analysis of power, representation and ideology is their focus?
Kamboureli, however, manages to resolve her anxieties by articulating a working solution to her concerns about her role in the violence implied in representing others. *Scandalous Bodies* is testament to her success in finding an answer to her personal and intellectual dilemma brought on by these factors. Moved beyond her political paralysis, and refusing to enter into a politics of self-location, she develops a manifesto calling for a self-reflexive and responsible practice, which she names “negative pedagogy.” According to Kamboureli, negative pedagogy stands in opposition to positive pedagogy. For example, instead of teaching understood as a teleological narrative, negative pedagogy “redefines the object of knowledge as nothing other than the process leading towards ignorance” (25). Within this concept, Kamboureli is thus encoding a critique of enlightenment narratives. As a result, in negative pedagogy both teacher and student are learners; a process in which there is no pretence of non-complicity or innocence in relation to power systems and their reinforcement through knowledge production. According to Kamboureli, “[w]hat this [negative pedagogy] means for learners is that they don’t simply learn knowledge as a specifically designated object: they also learn how knowledge is produced, perceiving the power relations usually concealed behind the force of knowledge” (26). This answer is her way of resolving concerns about the politics of representation in academic writing and the relevance of theoretical work to actual social and political struggles.

Developing the relationship between Kamboureli’s text and ficto-criticism becomes increasingly complicated at this point: whilst she does not actively write ficto-critically, her first chapter is informed by similar concerns to those of ficto-critics. In other words, through the use of autobiography her chapter functions nominally as ficto-criticism. Containing a ficto-critical sensibility, as she challenges the authority and voice of the normative academic discourse, her text breaks down the distinction between self and other, taking risks and challenging traditional pedagogical models that rely on discursive mastery. For example, at times her chapter acquires a confessional tone as she describes her anxieties about her
professional practice, thus revealing her own process of learning and offering a personalised account of a period of intellectual uncertainty. Kamboureli’s disclosures are risky in the context of the academy since, in this environment, demonstrated mastery is always desirable. Although, in the end, Kamboureli seems to recover a sense of mastery by articulating a solution to her concerns (negative pedagogy), there are moments where she reveals her personal ambiguities, fears and difficulties. For example, speaking of her research at the time of her crisis, she states:

I felt that my study was in search of a different author. It kept changing direction, resisting the narrative threads I was intent on following, moving in and out of Canada and its literature, conflating various temporalities—and thus revealing my historical imagination to be other than what I thought it was. I soon began to show signs of personal and academic weariness, the effect of the seemingly tangible gap that separates academic discourse from social reality, government and institutional policies from practice, the intricacies of academic argument from the heat and pressure of personal emotions and engagement. (2)

Interrogating the role of academic work in institutional power—albeit focused primarily on the classroom—Kamboureli’s manifesto, through its self-declared wish to disturb binaries, functions as a form of ficto-criticism. In fact, there are manifest parallels between the notion of negative pedagogy and ficto-criticism. As I have shown earlier, some academics who engage with ficto-critical techniques also demonstrate an interest in alternative pedagogical approaches (Anne Brewster and Aruna Srivastava, for example). Both Kamboureli’s negative pedagogy and ficto-criticism are concerned with self-reflexivity and both focus on revealing the power relations at work behind knowledge.

However, despite these similarities—and Kamboureli’s nominal foray into autobiographical ficto-criticism as the opening for her book—overall Scandalous Bodies is not written ficto-critically. It is the relationship between her introductory chapter and the rest of her book to
which I now turn. The tension between the content of Kamboureli’s first chapter (including its personal style) and the remaining chapters illuminates some of the potential problems of fictocriticism as a discursive form. In an effort to come back to the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter, I use this close reading of Scandalous Bodies as a springboard into discussing what kinds of ficto-critical expressions at the micro-political level constitute a line of escape or becoming. Throughout the ensuing discussion, it becomes increasingly apparent that hard boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are inappropriate to such a labile concept as ficto-criticism.

What is most interesting about Scandalous Bodies’ first chapter is not Kamboureli’s use of autobiography but, given the political imperative of this manifesto, the contradiction between the style of this chapter and the generic choices for the rest of the book. For example, despite declaring in her manifesto that she wishes to “radically question knowledge and its modes of production,” the rest of the chapters in Scandalous Bodies are written in a style consistent with normative academic writing (25). They do not demonstrate the process of her learning in relation to their individual analyses, nor do they take many risks by contravening generic convention. Therefore, despite her stated anxiety around her complicity with the violence of representation, Kamboureli limits her self-reflexive negative pedagogical approach to the first chapter of her book and the absence of a resolute ending. I would question the efficacy of this generic and textual choice for the rest of the book, given her self-proclaimed desire to develop a responsible practice that reveals the power structures at work behind knowledge production. It appears that overall at the level of form Kamboureli’s book largely follows the conventions of academic writing. Whilst her preface and introductory chapter are not authoritative in the traditional sense, the chapters that follow are quite traditional in their style and analysis. She continues to use first person throughout the book, yet the syntax, tone and language are consistent with critical writing. Her self-reflexive ficto-critical leanings, therefore, seem contained in the opening statements, a gesture which is consistent with
normative academic writing in terms of the conventional role of the preface or introduction. She may acknowledge the value of multiplicity, a need to begin in *medias res*, to avoid traditional pedagogical processes of justifying method, and referring to established arguments, yet overall *Scandalous Bodies* seems firmly planted within the system of institutionalised authority. There are, for example, many citations of renowned critics and theorists as she draws on established authority to give weight to her argument. She also justifies her approach in a way consistent with normative academic writing and research, despite refuting the imperative to do so. The content may be lacking a cohesive syntax or single unified argument, as she defensively states in the preface, however, she still seems very much connected through her overall choice of textual style to a tradition that is informed by the enlightenment narratives she so forcefully attacks. Kamboureli’s voice may not be wholly authoritarian or author-evacuated, yet I would argue that there is little difference between her book and the traditional academic criticism that informs and supports the positive pedagogy she wishes to do away with.

My intention here is not to critique Kamboureli for her failure to be wildly ficto-critical (in fact, my thesis, also a product of institutionalised learning, is itself conventional). Clearly Kamboureli’s focus is not on ficto-criticism and the conventions of academic writing. However, what is of interest here is that, despite her sophisticated theoretical insight into language, knowledge and power—and her acknowledgment of a need for negative pedagogy (her critical impasse)—she only extends her self-reflexivity relatively superficially at the level of content. What does this say about the compelling power of academic convention, and the investment academics must have in such conventions to survive in the academic environment? Her defensiveness of her approach in the preface confirms the risks involved in writing as becoming for an academic. Even though Kamboureli takes relatively few risks, she is defensive in her explanations and justifications of her failure to meet academic conventions such as, for example, a resolute ending. In “Reflections on Academic Discourse” Peter Elbow
notes how quickly academic discourse is changing in disciplinary terms, yet still clings to traditional modes of writing:

it seems to me that many academics seem more nervous about changes in discourse—and especially incursions of the vernacular—than about changes in ideas or doctrine. Many happily proclaim that there is no truth, no right answer, no right interpretation; many say they want more voices in the academy, dialogue, heteroglossia! But they won’t let themselves or their students write in language tainted with the ordinary or with the presence and feelings of the writer. (152)

As already argued throughout this thesis, autobiography causes embarrassment in the context of traditional academic discourse. Lynette Hunter’s self-reflexive observation (referred to in Chapter Five) that impassioned autobiographical texts by Canadian Native women writers cause academic or critical embarrassment reveals the theoretical and professional unease such naivety generates among academics. Since Kamboureli is a theoretician, I would suggest that whilst her reluctance to situate herself is theoretically motivated, the theory also allows her a certain protective distance. What would happen if she were to extend the voice and register of her preface and first chapter into the rest of the text? What if she were (as Elbow has put it) to leave her rubber gloves off and continue to touch her meanings with her naked fingers?

According to Ursula Le Guin, “People crave objectivity because to be subjective is to be embodied, to be a body, vulnerable, violable” (151).

So whilst Kamboureli makes a temporary foray into ficto-critical terrain in her introduction, the following chapters of her book function to reappropriate much of the revolutionary power she sets up in the first. As Elbow has suggested about many academics, there appears to be a theoretical willingness and desire for multiplicity, but a failure to make substantial changes at a discursive level. To give a brief example of the kind of textual choices made in the remaining chapters, here is a sample from “Sedative Politics” (Chapter Two):
Between the 1920s, when Grove wrote his first novel in English, and the second half of the 1990s, when I am writing this, a lot has changed about the perception and status of ethnicity in Canada. Notably, the literature written by the descendants of the ‘New Canadians’ of Grove’s time and by later immigrants has gained a measure of both popular and academic legitimacy and of cultural and political weight. (81)

Apart from the use of “I,” personal reference has been voided from the text. This is a phenomenon which has been observed by other writers interested in criticism and autobiography and who have written about the return in academic writing to speaking the “I.”

For example, in “Criticism and the Autobiographical Voice,” Susan Rubin Suleiman makes a significant distinction between different applications or usages of autobiography in critical writing. Published in 1996, her article begins by discussing the shift toward autobiographical writing by academics in the last decade. She says that:

> an increasing number of academic critics have sought to reach a larger audience, beyond the confines of specialised disciplines and vocabularies. Without sacrificing complexity of thought, they have tried to write in a language accessible to more people. Part of that process has been abandoning what use to be the first rule of academic writing—Never say “I”—in favor of a more personal way of discussing literature and culture. (“Criticism and the Autobiographical Voice” 256)

Notably, the time frame Suleiman outlines for the shift to autobiography in critical writing intersects with the emergence of ficto-criticism as a defined practice, and the beginnings of Kamboureli’s difficulties in writing critically. Suleiman identifies two different kinds of autobiographical acts in critical writing. The first is what she calls necessary, and the second contingent. As the terms she employs suggest, a necessary use of autobiographical detail is crucial to the essay and its argument. However, where the critic makes personal or anecdotal reference as an aside or introduction, this constitutes a contingent use of autobiography in critical writing. Suleiman says: “To remove the first type from an essay would radically alter its meaning and structure; to remove the second would merely deprive the reader of a
pleasurable diversion” (257). Within the confines of Kamboureli’s first chapter to remove the personal detail would do exactly what Suleiman describes, it would radically alter its meaning. Its use here is necessary or crucial to her point. However, if one looks at *Scandalous Bodies* in totality, the analytical chapters would remain relatively unaffected if one were to remove this first chapter, which, while framing the book, in no way fundamentally changes the arguments that follow. Even though Suleiman’s description of the use of autobiography as a pleasurable diversion cannot be said of Kamboureli’s introduction, since it is about an intellectual and professional crisis the analytical chapters clearly do not incorporate this crisis. According to Suleiman it is not enough to merely use the “I” there must also be a willingness “to expose personal weaknesses or embarrassments” (260). Alone, the “I” does not constitute an autobiographical voice. If Kamboureli’s argument for negative pedagogy—explored through an autobiographical voice—is understood to be an acknowledgment of the contingency of her knowledge and authority, then her use of just the “I” in the remaining chapters seems like a shift back toward the neutral academic voice. Interestingly, Suleiman goes on to state that the use of the autobiographical voice in criticism is probably just a trend, it cannot be permanent since the inclusion of the creative keeps criticism “open to the unforeseen” (260). Kamboureli’s *Scandalous Bodies* replicates the dynamic described by Suleiman by containing the personal confessional moments to the introductory chapter and, whilst speaking the “I,” fails to expose any further weaknesses or potential embarrassments. Kamboureli’s transgression is, therefore, only temporary. Significantly, this dynamic of inoculation in *Scandalous Bodies* demonstrates—through the distinctions Suleiman makes—the ease with which some instances of ficto-criticism can function to relieve the tensions raised by the recognition of the other, without any real shifts in power. Although Kamboureli attends to the power dynamics at work in the university through her concept of negative pedagogy, as the application of this theory in the classroom undermines the authority of the teacher and institution, what of the similar hierarchy (particularly in a critical text) between the author and reader? What of the notion of the expert and their authoritative relation to the reader? Indeed,
it would appear reasonable to question the effectiveness of Kamboureli’s discursive choices for most of her text given her stated project. While she is right to question whether the politics of self-location immunise academic work against the perils of representation, in many ways her first chapter functions very much like an act of self-location. After stating her concerns about her institutional complicity—and to some degree locating herself (albeit in unfixed terms)—she then goes onto carry out a mode of analytic writing that virtually replicates the disembodied critic.

Ficto-critical texts—as demonstrated in the thesis thus far—work to destabilise the molar unities of the nation state by disrupting generic expectation and thus encouraging the reader to interrogate their own processes of meaning making. This is probably the reason why the most common form of ficto-critical transgression into critical academic writing is autobiography. Yet, as Kamboureli’s book shows there are degrees of intensity and risk involved in different autobiographical acts. Reinstating the first person pronoun into academic writing is the most obvious place to begin questioning the universal neutrality of academic discourse. As the analysis of *Scandalous Bodies* suggests, this alone is not enough to disrupt the discursive power of academic texts based on objectivity. However, as the Chapter Three demonstrated, autobiographical criticism is certainly the most established or accepted ficto-critical expression. Based on the history of ficto-criticism in the academy, therefore, autobiographical critical acts appear most likely to be easily reappropriated by the institution. In fact, the personal turn in critical writing was one of the first manifestations of ficto-criticism, largely influenced by feminist discourse. Feminist critiques of objective neutrality and the mind/body split saw many women writers begin to reinvest critical writing with an embodied voice informed by an experiential feminist materialism. They would no longer follow tradition and write out of a neutral (masculine) space free of historical, social and political reality. The use of autobiography and the personal voice is now quite commonplace in academic criticism, although it surfaces much like it does in *Scandalous Bodies*, as a partial and temporary
moment of transgression. Autobiographical moves tend to be the most conservative ficto-
critical response to an escalating anxiety over the violence of representation. The partial
acceptance of autobiographical or personal criticism by the establishment illustrates its relative
ease with institutional lines. What I wish to do now is to look closely at different signifiers of
autobiography in critical writing to explore whether it works effectively to interrogate and
undermine the neutral, authoritative and objective voice of normative academic writing.

**Problematising the self**

Since women were the first in the university to experiment with autobiographical fiction in
non-fictional writing, it is not surprising to find that women writers have already interrogated
the use of “I” and autobiographical detail in critical writing. For example, Susan David
Bernstein’s 1992 paper “Confessing Feminist Theory: What’s ‘I’ Got to Do With It?”
problematises the kind of self employed in feminist autobiographical criticism. According to
her the use of experience is an act of representation and thus requires critical analysis. Indeed,
this is something lacking in most critical texts that address ficto-critical writing. Like
Suleiman, Bernstein makes a distinction between different autobiographical acts in criticism.
She identifies two modes of confessional criticism: a reflective mode and a reflexive mode.
Significantly, Bernstein prefers to use confession rather than autobiography, since she argues
that confession implies a much greater act of transgression (121). To confess is to admit to or
acknowledge something, usually associated with a wrong. Thus, in confessing one places the
self at much more risk. Her choice of words acknowledges the disruption to authority that the
intrusive “I,” as a rhetorical event, can effect (Bernstein 121). Thus, autobiography becomes in
this context a much less dangerous exercise for the author, as it does not necessarily mean
revealing one’s weaknesses or failures.

In her paper Bernstein offers four modes of reflective confessional acts, making a distinction
between these forms and reflexive critical writing. These are highly useful distinctions as
through this taxonomy she illustrates that the incorporation of confessional experience into critical acts does not automatically constitute political action. Echoing Suleiman’s distinction between necessary and contingent modes of autobiography in critical writing, Bernstein affirms that the confessional mode has the potential to become a matter of style, “a renovation rather than a reformation” (131). Her taxonomy shows us the different forms of confessional politics at work in critical writing. I would like to offer a brief outline of the four modes of reflective confession identified by Bernstein, since these aptly illustrate the complicity of many modes of autobiography with dominant structures (as my reading of Kamboureli’s text also suggests). Notably, many autobiographical ficto-critical texts fail to adequately address the power at work behind their text’s production, taking relatively few risks with their power and authority. After this outline I then discuss Bernstein’s reflexive mode of confessing, which she sets up in opposition to reflective, and argue that reflexive confessing is more consistent with the notion of ficto-criticism as becoming-woman. Indeed, since in the reflexive mode the author engages with the struggle between the “I” and the “it,” this mode presents much more risk to the author, and their implied objectivity and authority.

The four modes that Bernstein places under the heading of reflective confessing are: contestatory, expressionist, exhibitionist, and hypertheorized.14 In the first mode, “contestatory confession,” the first person is used as a rhetorical device to redress the limitations of critical discourse. As I have indicated, and as Bernstein argues, all autobiographical manoeuvres begin here. She warns that if this becomes obligatory—as the dominance of autobiographical forms of ficto-criticism suggests—then it will lose its revolutionary potential. Significantly, this is the form that Kamboureli employs throughout most of her text. Like self-location in critical texts, the use of “I” does little to challenge the critic’s authority and power if it is merely used as a rhetorical strategy. The second kind Berstein identifies is “expressionist confession,” where emotion is relied on to undo objective authority in critical writing. This form, however, does not problematise the “I,” and “Daddy knows best” finds itself replaced by “I, woman,
knows best” (125). This alone does not guarantee any disruption of the speaking position of the critic or their identity. The third kind is “exhibitionist confession.” Here personal disclosure becomes rhetorical nudism, reinforcing “a hegemonic subject position through the force of its sensational revelations” (125). Fourthly, and finally, there is “hypertheorized confession.” This mode exploits theory to sanitise a troubling personal disclosure. As Bernstein effectively demonstrates, the use of autobiographical or confessional detail does not necessarily go far enough to question the authority of normative critical modes. As a result, it does not automatically constitute a radical political act at all and may function more like a mild panacea. According to Bernstein, “[i]f the ‘impersonal’ voice effaces the means of production, the ‘personal’ voice does not necessarily make those conditions more accessible” (128). She goes on to state that “[s]o many of these confessional ‘I’s’ signify the unexamined use of example that stands in for truth itself” (Bernstein 131). The same, therefore, can be said of many ficto-critical acts that rely on autobiographical detail to enact hybridity, and which fail to adequately interrogate and address their own complicity with the nation state at a micro-political level. At the macro level—of genre—ficto-criticism challenges tradition and conventional rules, yet at the micro-political level the terrain is much more convoluted.

In contrast to these reflective modes of confessional criticism, Bernstein suggests a reflexive mode. Significantly, this concept of reflexive confessional criticism comes much closer to ficto-criticism conceptualised as becoming-minoritarian. In her words, reflexive confessing “is primarily a questioning mode, one that imposes self-vigilance on the process of subject positioning both in language and discourse and at a specific historical moment or a particular cultural space” (Bernstein 140). In other words, this mode of critical writing explores the struggle between the “I” and the “it” in a specific context and is suggestive of an autopoetic engagement with the other. To demonstrate reflexive confessing Bernstein identifies Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “French Feminism in an International Frame” as an example. According to Bernstein the shift from third-person to first-person in Spivak’s piece illustrates the politics
of subject construction. As a reflexive confessional mode, Spivak’s text demonstrates that this kind of writing can function effectively as a strategy for imagining new territories of knowledge. This is enabled by the simultaneous attention it gives to the construction of subjectivity through discourse, history and ideology. It is the reflexive model of confessional criticism in which the construction of the critical subject is dramatised.

THE ETHICS OF FICTO-CRITICISM

MOMENTS FOR REFLECTION: ROBERT KROETSCH’S CRITICAL ESSAYS

If ficto-critical texts are about attending to the representational violence of writing, and more specifically critical writing, then, as Suleiman and Bernstein suggest, these texts will need very pro-actively and self-reflexively to attend to their own powers of self-representation. This self-consciousness will have to move beyond the kind of reflective gestures that, for instance, Garner carries out in *The First Stone*, or the implied self-reflective rhetoric of merely employing the “I” in critical writing used by Kamboureli throughout most of *Scandalous Bodies*. Other autobiographical or confessional acts must similarly be critically interrogated. Also very crucial to this process, and lacking particularly from Suleiman’s analysis, is a theoretical or critical sensitivity to the different speaking positions of various academics and critics. As some commentators have noted, ficto-critical risks undertaken by tenured academics have quite a different tone about them to those made by more junior academics with less job security. Tenured professors can afford to take far more risks with the critical genre (if they choose to do so). In the same way, ficto-critical acts by academics from differing sexual orientation, class, racial, ethnic and gender identities cannot be considered by the same set of criteria. For example, confession has very different meanings across different cultures, and for many non-Western cultures it is an unsuitable or inappropriate strategy. In the same way, the act of speaking is a substantial act in itself for some women writers of colour, an act that challenges dominant ideologies and their power structures. What one needs
to be attentive to when reading ficto-critical texts, therefore, are the specific conditions of their production.

Robert Kroetsch’s critical essays, for example, are a case in point. They are interesting examples to read in view of Bernstein’s notions of reflexivity and reflection, since they surface at the intersection of several of the themes related to ficto-criticism: identification with the margin or periphery, a challenge to authorised knowledge, and postmodernism. His critical essays reveal the complicated relationship between ficto-criticism as a category with identifiable characteristics, and the reality that ficto-critical texts often run contrary to the labels assigned to it. A close reading of his hybrid critical essay “The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues” reveals that not all his creative critical texts challenge all conventions, and that the form of autobiography employed here, in fact, reclaims a relatively coherent, conservative and unmediated self. The identity produced through the text is not the fractured postmodern self one would imagine, but an individuated self, consistent with much more traditional concepts of knowledge and history. In other words, whilst Linda Hutcheon has described his critical essays as postmodern for blurring fiction and non-fiction, they do not always achieve a level of self-reflexivity one would call transgressive (161). Applying Bernstein’s terms, this particular critical essay by Kroetsch would be reflective rather than reflexive. Thus, Kroetsch’s “The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues,” as with many of his creative critical essays, fails to adequately dramatise the critical subject, and the self-reflective gestures he incorporates often function to increase his authority rather than decrease it. As such, one begins to question Hutcheon’s description of him as “Mr Postmodern.” This seems a particularly relevant comment since the kind of postmodernism evoked by Hutcheon is very much postmodernism as a radical break from that which preceded it. For example, according to Hutcheon, in his critical essays “Kroetsch deliberately subverts academic convention: they are wilfully fragmentary, discontinuous, asystematic, incomplete—and provocative because of this. . . . As postmodern, Kroetsch’s work combines the theoretical
and the creative..." (160-1). However, as Diana Brydon and Janice Kulyk Keefer have suggested, there is a contradiction in her methodology and analysis in relation to postmodernism. They state, “although she writes of the postmodern attempt to ‘rethink binary oppositions completely in terms of the multiple, the plural and the heterogeneous’ (52), her own text consistently undercuts this pluralist focus to reinforce binaries and even, at times, to privilege one of them” (42). Brydon and Keefer go on to question the willingness of Canadian critics to enshrine Hutcheon as “Ms Postmodern.” Ironically (although unintentionally) mirroring the contradiction inherent in Hutcheon’s representational fixing of Kroetch as “Mr Postmodern,” they argue that her identification as “Ms Postmodern” raises “troubling questions about the nature and uses of authority, especially for theorists anxious to unseat and interrogate the wielders of that authority” (47). As she becomes “Ms Postmodern,” and presumably the expert, Hutcheon’s authority increases. I now wish to explore the question concerning these contradictory moments, by examining Kroetsch’s failure to question his own privilege—to problematise the construction of the writerly self—in his postmodern creative-critical writing.

Kroetsch has written that Canada is a postmodern country, a country of margins, feminised and invisible (“Disunity as Unity”). He has also famously stated (and is often quoted as saying that) “Canadian literature evolved directly from Victorian into Postmodern” (Boundary 2 1). According to Kroetsch criticism is merely another version of the story of our search for story (Neuman and Wilson 30). These kinds of statements have, undoubtably, aided Hutcheon in her identification of Kroetsch as “Mr Postmodern,” par excellence. Notably, Kroetsch identifies with the margin. In “The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues,” through the description of his experiences of growing up on a farm “way hell and gone out in Alberta,” he constructs an image of himself as feminised and bookish. He is doubly or triply ex-centric. At the margins of a place that is itself far from the centre, in a country on the periphery of Europe and America:
My upstairs bedroom, quite by accident, looked out on the yard; I became a kind of juvenile Flaubert, staring out at a world that I would capture in words. The hired men, in turn, made no bones about telling me I was a disaster, sixteen years old and still reading books, often to be seen in the garden doing women’s work when I should be out pitching bundles or working the summerfallow. I couldn’t be trusted with a team of horses, partly because of a tendency to day-dream, against men. (4)

Whilst this essay contravenes the traditional form of critical writing by including autobiographical passages, and by combining fragments of experience with quotations and critical analysis, there are also (as suggested by the passage above) moments in which a traditionally romantic, individuated author is invoked. He actively plays with notions of narrative and fiction—the search for story—and his essay is fragmentary and incomplete. Yet, many of these aesthetic markers of postmodernism are negated by the speaking voice, which encourages us to identify with Kroetsch as an authority, that is, as a man of letters. He may believe himself to be ex-centric and he certainly reflects on his position through his play on story, but he still appears very much the master of his fictionalised world. As Candice Lang has written in “Autocritique”: “The trendy ‘I’ that beams out at the reader from the ‘personal’ critical essay can be every bit as oppressive and subtly seductive as the detached, authoritative voice of the ‘impersonal’ ‘third-person’ text” (50). The overriding coherence of the speaking voice, which relies on the oral tradition of storytelling, works to bring the discontinuous fragments back into some order and coherence.

Of the four modes of reflective confession outlined in Bernstein’s taxonomy, Kroetsch’s essay employs three: contestatory, expressionist and exhibitionist. For example, disrupting the convention of critical writing that uses the detached voice of the critic, he redresses the authority of normative modes of critical language (contestatory). In the same way, he uses emotion to undo that same objective authority (expressionist). However, his failure to question his own critical self constructed via these rhetorical structures means that the voices from the
centre (Europe, America, Eastern Canada) are merely replaced by the voice of self-confessed ex-centric (postmodern) Kroetsch. Finally, his revelatory moments of personal disclosure reinforce a hegemonic subject position (exhibitionist). For example, he confesses to his readers his sexual encounter at age twenty-one with a Métis woman. He says, encouraging an atmosphere of sensational detail, “I’ve never written about that experience until this moment” (10). This implies that his experience is some kind of a dark secret, which perhaps should not have been spoken. This is his secret of having been “taken to bed” by a Métis woman “who knew much more about sex than [he] did” (10). Does this speak a fear of miscegenation, or merely the eroticisation of the other? Alternatively, one wonders if perhaps he has kept his secret until now out of gentlemanly respect. In the tradition of Hemingway, the young aspiring writer seeks experiences to inform his writing. He may have been sexually inexperienced, but there is nothing risky in this revelation, after all he was only twenty-one at the time. His confession does nothing to disrupt the critical or masculine (heterosexual) authoritative self, or any of the dominant narratives that support such an identity. Rather than undermining traditional notions of the individual, Kroetsch’s self-confessing reinforces a very romantic and heterosexual masculine notion of the writer. Therefore, does his essay necessarily break with or question dominant structures of knowledge? Does it represent a becoming? Rather than disrupting his authority, the disclosures he makes reinforce his masculine, white, writerly character, at the same time as he claims a marginalised position. His encounter with the Métis woman, for instance, seems more like a confirmation of his attractiveness and adventurous spirit. A feminist reading of this passage discloses no acute risk of the self and wonders about the voice of this woman.

Kroetsch argues that he responds to discoveries of absence, invisibility and silence in the Canadian landscape and imagination by making up a story, “our story” (2). However, one is compelled to ask, who exactly is the “we” invoked by his “our”? One of the consistent questions in “The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues” is “How do you write in a
new country?” (5). This gives us the answer to the question of who this “we” is. Kroetsch is obviously speaking from the perspective of the dominant white settler. Thus, this search for story is predicated on an understanding that the Canadian prairie was uninhabited prior to settlement by Europeans:

Our inherited literature, the literature of our European past and of eastern North America, is emphatically the literature of a people who have not lived on prairies. We had, and still have, difficulty finding names for the elements and characteristics of this landscape. The human response to this landscape is so new and ill-defined and complex that our writers come back, uneasily but compulsively, to landscape writing. Like the homesteaders before us, we are compelled to adjust and invent, to remember and forget. (5)

In no way does Kroetsch acknowledge the existence of First Nations people and their relationship to the land in this essay. What is particularly disturbing about this paragraph is Kroetsch’s sentence, which begins with “[t]he human response to this landscape is so new.” Through the use of human, Kroetch’s text can be seen to be denying not only First Nation people their prior ownership to the prairies, but also their existence as human. Similarly, his ease at appropriating First Nations’ cultural icons such as the trickster figure demonstrates his failure to adequately problematise his own immersion in powerful structures of privilege. He writes:

I wrote a series of poems called ‘Old Man Stories.’ I had discovered the literature of the Blackfoot—the stories they might well have told along the Battle River though the many generations when that river was a kind of boundary between the Blackfoot and the Cree. The Blackfoot trickster figure was (and still is) called Old Man. And those old stories are appropriate to the new Province of Alberta . . . . (2)

Kroetch then goes on to quote from his series of poems a story of the Old Man and the Fox. In her review of his collection The Lovely Treachery of Words (in which this essay appears), Aritha van Herk is right to say that “These essays dare to be unsure about themselves, they
dare to ask questions, they declare themselves susceptible” (“The Critic as Inhabitant of the
Margins” C6). Kroetsch’s essays are indeed much more open than the traditional critical
mode, and the discontinuity produces ambiguity and uncertainty around interpreting and
judging his text. Yet, the overwhelming voice in this example reclaims a relatively unmediated
self, whose value resides in the rhetoric of exposure. Yes, a self constructed as a persona and
which engages with questions of representation, but one which fails to address self-
representation. His construction of a reader like “him,” for example, functions to elide
difference. The fragmentary textual character of his essay is reclaimed as coherence, since his
discourse is based on the assumption of universal values and shared perspectives. In the end,
while it may be slightly transgressive, overall it maintains a conservative position and is in no
way transformative.

The increase in autobiographical moves in academic or critical writing can, therefore, be seen
as a complex political issue, much more politically complex than its simple codification as postmodern suggests. Postcolonial critics, for example, have noted the function of (self-)
reflection in the writings of white (Western) academics. For example, according to Asha
Varadharajan:16

The reflection on subject positions has become unavoidable for the sympathetic
Western critic who chooses to engage with the other without presumption or patronage. The danger of this timely recognition of a perhaps inescapable ethnocentrism is that it
could be turned easily enough into an excuse for inaction. This conscientious refusal to
speak for those whom the discourse of the Empire designates as other would become a
way of absolving oneself of the responsibility implicated in the history of colonization,
any intervention on behalf of the other, it could be argued, will be contaminated by that
history and therefore futile. The process of self-scrutiny would then translate itself into
consolation for the wrongs of the past and into paralysis in the present. (xiv)
Varadharajan is speaking specifically of the recent trend in academic work to reflect on the positioning of the subject (and object) in the critical text, rather than ficto-criticism. However, as Kamboureli’s text has shown us both are informed by underlying concerns about representation and colonisation. In this context, ficto-criticism is a strategy of critical writing that has developed in response to the complicity of normative objective writing with the brutality of history. Varadharajan’s warning that such consciousness around subject positionings may function as a means to enable inaction, could therefore, be useful to think through in relation to ficto-criticism. Whilst she is concerned with this self-consciousness by Western critics bringing about a critical paralysis (as demonstrated by Kamboureli’s critical impasse), Varadharajan’s analysis raises questions in relation to ficto-criticism. Some forms of ficto-criticism, particularly autobiographical forms, could be read as a means to open the text to the other, however, this is often a surface effect without any real interrogation of one’s privilege or risk of the self. This is why the meaning of ficto-critical texts alters so much depending on the identity of the writer/speaker. If ethnography was historically the first discipline to register a shift toward ficto-critical writing, and if it originally relied on the native informant to relay cultural information to the field researcher, could ficto-criticism be seen as a shift toward speaking from the position of the native informant? That is, could the ficto-critical move to focusing on the self, and writing from one’s own experiences, been seen as an appropriation of the position of the native informant? Is it merely another colonising gesture when carried out by a Western critic and employed to relieve their anxiety about the violence of representing the other? If one positions oneself nominally as other (on the margin, feminised), there may be less need to actively interrogate one’s own privilege, which in this dynamic has the potential to go largely unacknowledged. As Charmaine Perkins has written:

[The] appropriation of the discourses born out of oppression and struggle, by those who, in fact, possess power, is the strategy of choice for the traditionally privileged to assuage their own feelings of guilt and or complicity—achieved through active and passive participation in racist structures—by identifying with the oppressed. In fact, as
is usually quickly pointed out, they are *equally* oppressed in many ways. So although many such individuals feel genuine concern, very few, it seems, are prepared to do anything about it, least of all to give up any of the perks that come within traditional power structures. (251)

Some ficto-critical texts by Western academics and writers, therefore, could be seen as less about risking the self and more about risking the other. Yet, as I show in the subsequent section, racial, sexual, and gender identity have the power to shift the possible readings of ficto-criticism, that is, to make the ficto-critical text mean something radical under different conditions of production.

**Dany Laferrière’s non-fiction fiction**

To demonstrate the different readings evoked by ficto-critical texts by writers from different racial and cultural backgrounds, I would like to look at a text by a Canadian-Haitian writer, Dany Laferrière. Originally a journalist in Haiti, Laferrière went into exile in Canada in 1978, and became an almost instant celebrity after the publication of his first book, provocatively titled *How to Make Love to a Negro (Without Getting Tired)* (1987 in English). The text I am addressing here, however, is *Why Must a Black Writer Write About Sex?* (1994). Although a very different book from *How to Make Love to a Negro*, there is a continuum of themes since both focus on the intersection between sex and racial identity. Whilst very dissimilar to Kroetsch’s postmodern essay, Laferrière’s *Why Must a Black Writer Write About Sex?* sits in the ficto-critical space-between for being both creatively and critically engaged. It is a hybrid mix of prose, autobiography, as well as cultural and literary criticism.

Broken into short punchy chapters this book by Laferrière, like Kroetsch’s essay, it is written in first person. However, *Why Must a Black Writer Write About Sex?* is unlike Kroetsch’s essay as it is in the style of reportage, and not in the tradition of the essay. It is also a much longer work. Laferrière, in fact, describes the book as being composed of field notes and
begins (in what appears as a strongly postmodern gesture) by stating that it is not a novel, making reference to René Magritte’s famous painting of the (not) pipe. Described on the cover as being about North American culture and success, this book has also been (generically) identified as “non-fiction fiction.” Like Kroetsch, Laferrière plays on the division between fact and fiction, storytelling and the role of representation in creating reality. For example, in the chapter titled “I Am a Black Writer” he recounts a conversation between himself, the writer, and a girl who approaches him on the street. The girl asks him whether the story he tells is his story and if it is true? The narrator responds by saying:

‘I don’t know what to tell you . . . No one can tell a story exactly the way it happened. You fix it up. You try to find the key emotion. You fall into the trap of nostalgia. And there’s nothing further from the truth than nostalgia.’ (29)

The narrator goes on to ask the girl “Why is it so important to know if the story really happened to the author?” As one of many references to the author function throughout this book, this scene reinforces Laferrière’s focus on dramatising the production of his identity. Notably, references such as this work much more reflexively than Kroetsch’s reflective nostalgic autobiographical moments, since they overtly critically engage with autobiography as a rhetorical strategy. Laferrière thus interrogates not just the problem of representation, but self-representation. In fact, his whole text deals with the politics of his identity, in a very engaged and critical manner. Even the title speaks of his intention to problematise and dramatise the identity of the author. This is a major difference between Kroetsch’s text and Laferrière’s Why Must a Black Writer Write About Sex? Despite employing similar autobiographical strategies, Laferrière’s book is much more politically engaged than Kroetsch’s.

Notably, Laferrière’s writing is open to charges of sexism (something he addresses himself in this book). However, I believe that narrowly defining his writing in these terms is to misunderstand his project, and overlook his main point and a central strategy of his ficto-
critical work. That is, he deliberately mimics—to the point of mockery—the hyper-sexed identity of the Black man constructed by Western culture. Early on in *Why Must a Black Writer Write About Sex?* Laferrière discusses a conversation with a (white) magazine editor:

I got on the phone and informed the magazine’s editorial board that racial issues are very important to me.

‘In what way?’ the guy on the other end of the line asked.

‘From the sexual point of view.’

I don’t know a single white who doesn’t start salivating when the issue of interracial copulation is raised. As long as there’s at least one taker, I’ll have work in America.

‘Why choose that point of view?’

The hypocrite! (12)

Throughout this book he very deliberately pushes the racial stereotype of Black man wanting to have sex with the white woman, who is, preferably, blond. The erotics of miscegenation in Laferrière’s book thus takes on a very different meaning from Kroetsch’s, which, in contrast, is constructed as if a dirty little secret. His sexual encounter with the Métis woman is only just spoken, whilst Laferrière constantly revels in the desire for the other as a means to parody the white construction of the hyper-sexed Black man (and indeed their own desire for the other).

In other words, Laferrière emphasises desire as a productive force in his text, as a way to critically challenge the assumptions of his readers (Black and white). To focus on the misogyny of his parody keeps his text firmly planted within the same framework from which he is attempting to escape, and effectively stifles his act of mimicry. It is also worth noting that there are no descriptions of actual sexual encounters in his autobiographical text. For a Black man who is supposed to constantly have sex on his mind—according to the logic of dominant white culture—this seems odd, and reinforces my proposition that Laferrière’s strategy is a deliberate re-appropriation of a discourse constructed by the centre. This is what gives the text its political power; the resemblance of his position to the coloniser’s is what makes his book menacing.
Laferrière is thus constantly dramatising and questioning the process of subject positioning within a specific historical and cultural moment throughout his book. Whilst he relies on a relatively coherent speaking subject, such as Kroetsch, his use of mimicry changes the political dynamic, as does his racialised identity. Even if one is to overlook his reflexive strategies and reads his text as employing autobiographical or confessional rhetoric to construct a coherent self, the politics of doing so for him—as a Black man—takes on a very different meaning. Laferrière doesn’t need to identify his marginalised speaking position like Kroetsch; it has been violently forced on him. His marginalised position within dominant culture manifests itself in more than mere geographical terms, or in the image of the alienated sensitive writerly character. For example, the same magazine editor that prefers Laferrière not to write about race and sex in North America assumes that instead he will—of course—prefer to write about the Caribbean:

‘Since you come from the Caribbean, we thought that—’
‘The same old garbage! People are supposed to write about where they came from! I write about what’s going on around me, here and now, where I live.’ (13)

The specificities of production and the different speaking positions of Laferrière’s and Kroetsch’s texts, therefore, demonstrate that the politics of ficto-critical texts are not clear-cut. While ficto-criticism may be a strategy employed by writers from the margin, such as Laferrière, in many ways it reflects the identification of a problem for the centre rather than the margin. That is, those from the margin begin with a problematic relation to the speaking self, particularly within the context of academic and critical writing, which relies (when spoken) on a universal “I.” Ficto-criticism, as I have suggested, also has the potential—however well meaning Western writers may be—to alleviate anxiety around speaking for the other, by, on the surface, becoming other. By the same token, ficto-criticism, as a symptom of an increasing consciousness around subject positions in critical writing, may function as an excuse for political inaction as Varadharajan has stated. As Perkins reaffirms, racism is not so
much an act of ignorance but an effect of certain ways of knowing and ordering the world: “institutions such as education are [thus] deeply rooted in ideological practices of structural inequity” (252). This is something that few academics feel compelled to explore on a micro-political level. Do autobiographical forms of ficto-criticism—which are enacted as mild self-reflection—have the potential to ease the academic conscience, thereby allowing one to overlook the need to develop a critical praxis to address inequality? As Marlene Nourbese Philip has noted, the debate over censorship and the appropriation of others’ voices functions to distract from institutionalised racism, sexism, and classism (“The Disappearing Debate”). I am not suggesting, however, that ficto-criticism as a strategy must immediately be cast off, but rather it must—like any textual production—be critically interrogated. For example, many ficto-critical texts, like Kroetsch’s, are enacted from within the relative safety of the theoretical framework of postmodernism. Early autobiographical ficto-critical transgressions by feminist writers did not have the security of a sanctioned conceptual platform from which to speak. As a result, such early creative critical transgressions were acts that involved much more risk for the self.

Ficto-critical text’s that appear primarily as fiction (historiographic metafiction, for example) contain risks as well. They also have the potential to maintain the status quo, despite assertions by most critics to the contrary. According to Bob Hodge and Alec McHoul, however, in their paper on ficto-criticism “[t]he self-reflexive work of fiction is perhaps too readily accommodated within the texts colonized by Literature as an institution, so that it loses some of its capacity to disrupt the dominant disciplinary practices” (207). This perhaps explains why many critics who write about metafiction feel little need to question their own critical writing style. Despite arguing that an effect of metafiction, as a self-reflexive practice, is to breakdown of the divide between subject (critic) and object (fictional text), they continue to maintain this divide in their own critical writing and write in the mode of normative academic criticism. The context of the ficto-critical text, therefore, plays an important role in its identification. When it
is shorter in length and obviously generated from within a university setting its ficto-critical insurgency becomes more apparent. The politics are very different for each example as the first more obviously challenges generic convention. Longer texts that appear on the surface more like fiction, are very easily reappropriated (as Hodge and McHoul have noted) into the disciplinary generic structures of literature.

Conclusion
I began this chapter by asking several questions about ficto-criticism. Whether, for example, it really signalled the exhaustion of traditional critical conventions to the point where they no longer had any relevance, and whether the emergence of ficto-criticism as an identifiable form meant that we are reaching a state of post-criticism. The answers to these questions are, of course, a resounding no. Consistent with writing-between—read through the theories of Deleuze and Guattari—ficto-criticism can be seen as a deterritorialising practice. This practice is then brought back to some degree of territoriality through the forces of institutionalised power, which block the desiring process of ficto-criticism. One cannot, therefore, make sweeping statements in relation to this practice. Similarly, it will never be something that is necessarily highly politically charged as there are shifting intensities of transgression. This explains the need for case-by-case studies. The detailed examination of specific examples shows—as I have done—the complexity of writing-between and the inaccuracy of claiming any determinate radicality for ficto-criticism. The ficto-critical autobiographical expression of texts such as Scandalous Bodies, for example, reveal the problematic potential of some ficto-criticism, particularly when the transgressive moments are largely limited to the preface or introduction. The examination of the critic’s identity in relation to the critical argument and their privilege, does little to undermine the authority of the masterful critic when carried out rhetorically (merely as an aside). This may be true even with a sophisticated theoretical acknowledgment of one’s constructed subjectivity, as Kamboureli does. In the same way, critical writing that displays some degree of self-reflection, but lacks what Bernstein has
identified as self-reflexivity, can very easily be reappropriated. Texts, however, that more completely surrender their authority—embracing a loss of self and meaning through the autopoetic engagement with the other—are much less easily contained and brought back into the fold. Jeanne Randolph’s ficto-critical work, which prompted the development of the term as argued in Chapter Five, clearly illustrates this, since her work has been largely unrecognised and certainly in Australia completely overlooked in the “official” story of ficto-criticism. What we must be attentive to is how ficto-criticism functions—in certain contexts—with very different meanings. As Laférriere’s work shows, his racialised identity alters the possible reading of his text. While it may be easy to charge him with misogyny, this would overlook his strategic use of mimicry and play on racial stereotypes. Academics must also be mindful of the potential of ficto-criticism to work as a way to assuage the dominant critic’s guilt for their privileged lifestyle. A mere identification with the margin is not nearly enough. This is especially so when one considers that an academic’s comfortable and affluent existence is often the result of a career built on an oppositional perspective, and identification with the oppressed. Having mildly problematised their privilege, academics may then feel no need for a closer examination of the institutionalised practices which they are a part of and which function to dominate the other and control difference. If ficto-criticism is to function effectively as an antidote to the corrective powers of criticism, then it must take risks with the self.
This title was inspired by Susan Rubin Suleiman’s *Risking Who One Is: Encounters With Contemporary Art and Literature* (1994).

Originally published in French in 1993 by VLB Editeur, under the title *Cette grenade dans la main du jeune Nègre est-elle une arme ou un fruit?*

Kamboureli acknowledges her need to affirm her role within the humanities—to be accountable—in light of the backlash against the humanities and the “threats to Canadian post-secondary education in general” (2000: 3).

This contradiction is one of many presented by the questions ficto-criticism raises, as it highlights the fault lines of academic discourse. If theoretically it is no longer deemed necessary to find answers to society’s problems, what is really motivating Kamboureli’s anxious reappraisal of her critical practice?

What Paulo Friere has called in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1990) the “banking model of education.”

Kamboureli says: “The more I failed to see the salience of giving credibility to my critical discourse by locating myself in precise (and presumably authentic) terms, the more frustrated I felt because of the social and academic pressures to do so” (2000: 5).

This is, in fact, what she argues for in her personalised first chapter.

See *Scandalous Bodies* (2000: 25) where Kamboureli says: “Negative pedagogy thematizes not only the object of knowledge, but also the method of learning and unlearning truths. It is thus self-reflexive with regard to its methods as well as the positions of teacher and student. In fact, the purpose of its self-reflexiveness is to disturb the binary relation, and the accompanying hierarchical model.”

The work of bell hooks is an obvious example of where an alternative writing practice for cultural criticism is adopted (usually highly personal and subjective) and combined with an interest in alternative pedagogies. See, for example, her introduction to *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations* (1994: 1-7).

The last section of the last chapter in *Scandalous Bodies* is titled “Ending without Resolution.”

As I discussed in the Introduction, my thesis is open to similar charges to those I am applying to Kamboureli, and there in lies the irony of contradiction. How do you escape the violence of representation within the context of the academy and its history? Ultimately, there is no one clear answer. At the same time, it remains valid to query and critique such contradictions—which is exactly what this thesis is concerned with. That is, exploring the tensions between ficto-criticism and normative critical writing, and whether or not ficto-criticism can imagine a line of escape.

My reference to a “shift back” to speaking the “I” is in relation to earlier versions of the essay form, which were much more discontinuous, meandering and personal than the form taken up in contemporary academic work. For a brief history of the essay form see Réda Bensmaïa’s Appendix to her book *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text* (1987: 95-100). Bensmaïa’s description of the essay by writers like Montaigne makes them seem, significantly, much more like ficto-critical writing. She describes it as a contradictory genre that refuses to let itself be pinned down.

In “Mock Heroics and Personal Markings,” Sylvia Molloy discusses the effect of including personal detail in an academic paper on different audiences. A queer theorist, Molloy argues that it constitutes a “dangerous gesture” according to some. To others it is seen as an exceptional and even heroic gesture (1996: 1074).

Although Bernstein sets up this taxonomy, much like the different characteristics of ficto-criticism, these forms of confessional expression are neither mutually exclusive nor monolithic.

See, for example, Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s “La Migrant Life.” Here he discusses in an autobiographical ficto-critical piece the inappropriateness of confession for him. He says, “I have always found the ‘confessional’ tone a bit foreign. The spectacle of my own pain and (anti)heroism is strictly reserved for my loved ones. Why? I am not Protestant, nor do I come from an exhibitionist culture of public confession, like Anglo-America. I am an ex-Catholic pagan, and I only write or make art about myself when I am completely sure that the biographical paradigm intersects with larger social and cultural issues” (2000: 7).

Smaro Kamboureli quotes this same passage from Varadarajan in her introductory chapter to *Scandalous Bodies*. However, her use of and emphasis on Varadarajan is different from mine. Kamboureli uses this quote to explain her critical paralysis. She goes on to discuss how her position as diasporic critic is even more fraught (than the Western critic’s), due to the hybridity of her position (2000: 5). My focus is on how self-location through autobiographical ficto-critical expressions may function to alleviate the dominant critic’s guilt, and assuage them from taking direct political work or actively pushing the limits of their text.

See also Rey Chow’s introduction to *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (1993). Chow looks specifically at how academics may identify with the margin, erasing the specificities of their own cultural, racial, sexual and gendered positioning.
I am referring here to Bhabha’s concept of mimicry outlined in *The Location of Culture* (1994).

As Claire Harris has written, reinforcing the complex nature of the ‘I’ spoken by her as an African woman, which is neither unmediated nor essentialist: “Postmodernism asks: whose body, whose gaze, whose history, whose personality, etc. etc. The response embedded in my work is not the disembodied ‘I,’ nor is it everyone’s ‘I,’ both of which are rooted in faulty and debilitating versions of history, in notions of power and control over both persons and nature central to modern European culture, to its cult of individualism, and to the Americas. Nor is it the naïve ‘I’ of autobiography. Instead it is the ‘I’ of specific body, the African body, the female African body, as well as the ‘I’ of imagined, and selectively structured, narrative context” (Morrell, 1994: 31).
**General conclusion**

A growing international trend has seen authors increasingly writing between fact and fiction as a way to explore the stories and histories left out of the official narratives. Ficto-criticism, the term I have chosen to name these emerging writing practices in this thesis, strategically employs its generically transformative style to interrogate the binaries that inform systems of domination, such as patriarchy, colonisation and racism. In ficto-critical texts the form is not just the vehicle for the story; the form is part of the message. This ficto-critical shift can, therefore, be conceptualised in terms of a resistance to institutionalised knowledges and the genres that inform them.

The dominant literature on ficto-criticism, however, suggests that writing generically between fiction and non-fiction is a mere symptom of a postmodern discourse preoccupied with the transgression of boundaries, the destabilisation of truth and the death of master narratives. Certainly, while the debate around postmodernism may have lost some of its intellectual currency, its discursive power, nevertheless, continues to frame the official understanding of ficto-criticism. Indeed, postmodern theory may have facilitated the critics’ identification of ficto-criticism as a practice, making them sensitive to the transgressiveness of writing-between. Yet, this means neither that creative-critical writing emerged as a practice in the 1980s (at the height of the postmodern debate) nor that postmodernism was the only discourse informing ficto-criticism’s development.

Therefore, whilst ficto-criticism may in fact intersect with postmodernism, in its engagement with the collapse of critical distance as well as its overt dissatisfaction with nomenclature, in
Chapter Three I argued against what appears to be a particularly contradictory reductionism. In fact, postmodernism has ironically come to function as what Deleuze and Guattari would call an order-word, constraining the creative complexity at play in practices of hybrid writing. By the same token, the conceptualisation of ficto-criticism as “postmodern” not only overlooks the multiplicity inherent in the former’s development as a practice and discourse but also distracts from the subversive potential and subtle stylistic variability of individual ficto-critical texts. As a result of this reductionism a binary structure is invoked, which resembles debates circulated in recent years in relation to the opposition between modernism and postmodernism. In terms of this bifurcating vision, ficto-critical writing is either celebrated as the radical other of normative academic writing—that is, as new, exciting and revolutionary—or denigrated as a lightweight, narcissistic, and incoherent form that lacks intellectual rigor. Through this binary conceptualisation the practice of writing-between remains caught in the same system of thought it challenges by means of its hybridity and, as a result, ficto-criticism’s desire to imagine a new paradigm for thinking and writing criticism is crushed.

Nevertheless, it is perhaps the persistence of the debates and themes arising from ficto-criticism’s subversion and contamination of academic writing—the primary genre of legitimised knowledge—which signals that something very important is at stake. Thus, in order to uphold its transgressive potential ficto-criticism must constitute itself as becoming not only at the level of its practice but also its conceptualisation. As a result, through Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of minor literature, in Chapter Two I articulated a methodology with which to approach writing-between while remaining consistent with its multiple, open character. As a minor literature ficto-critical writing rejects the masterful and colonising practices of
normative academic writing. Rather than being measured against the rigid categories of traditional literary criticism that rely on interpretation, such as genre, style and type, ficto-criticism seeks to liberate itself. On the contrary, its identification as a practice with both leading figures and specific codes and conventions cannot but diffuse its radical political approach and, ultimately, its relevance. Releasing ficto-criticism from the traditional critical framework enables one to refocus on the political implications of this writing, which are often masked by binaries. By applying Deleuze and Guattari’s concept-tools I was able to identify a three-fold assemblage of ficto-critical expression: collage/montage, autobiography, and metafiction. Importantly, I pointed out that these differing expressions are not mutually exclusive and that, rather, all three often appear in a single ficto-critical text. In discussing a broad selection of Australian and Canadian ficto-critical texts, I demonstrated the way in which the writers endorse a notion of subjectivity as flow, as opposed to the Oedipalised subject of normative critical writing that controls the other through acts of interpretation.

For Deleuze and Guattari the individuated subject is a product of the imposition of the Oedipal complex as the hegemonic model of interpretation. In this repressive system desire is understood as lack and any expression outside the rules is defined as dysfunctional. In consequence, desire is reclaimed by Deleuze and Guattari as a productive, connective, and creative process that enables the subject to be imagined as a vital process of becoming, which constantly changes through its engagement with the other. By the same token, ficto-criticism—and the subject it generates—can also be seen positively as an equally productive, connective, and creative process. In this sense, ficto-criticism need not regret its transgressions nor vindicate its lack of observance of the conventions of academic writing. This is because as
a different critical paradigm, ficto-criticism vigorously looks for alternative links between self and other; and instead of inhibiting difference through the codes of normalised interpretation, it engages in a process that is both experimental and ethical. In fact, rejecting any sense of mastery over the other, the subject of ficto-critical writing reflexively recognises the former’s impact on the self, acknowledging in this way the contingent nature of all critical writing as well as the partiality of all knowledge.

Thus, the Deleuzian perspective inscribed in this dissertation’s methodology echoes the productive character of a practice that is always in defiance of binary structures. On the contrary, from a traditional academic stance there is a resistance to fully accept ficto-criticism’s multiple manifestations, perhaps due to a fear that it may become too broad and, eventually, nonsensical. However, in order for writing-between to reach its transgressive potential, it is fundamental that ficto-criticism is kept fully open to the otherness that mobilises both itself as a practice and the world from which it originates. As argued, ficto-criticism facilitates the envisioning of a new autopoetic subjectivity that challenges the normative relationship between self and other in academic writing. This, however, relies on an awareness of the hazards involved in the application of both binary systems and order-words to writing-between. This can be explained by the fact that the application of fixed structures of interpretation permanently mark the ficto-critical text with lack, killing off not only any productive connections but also the power garnered through being neither one nor the other. Both binaries and order-words are, in fact, antithetical to the project of ficto-criticism, which instead relies on its between character to carry out its critique of normative academic writing. In fact, binary structures that produce normalising terms, such as postmodernism, are the main
object of the critique of writing-between. Its aim is the disclosure of both the binary model’s failure to account for meaning’s heterogeneity and the inability of normative academic writing to do justice to the diversity of what is between. For this reason, I have argued for the need to examine ficto-critical texts on a case-by-case basis, especially in order to examine the extent to which particular works are as politically charged as these conceptualisations may suggest.

In consequence, what distinguished this thesis’ approach to ficto-criticism was its openness to what might constitute this writing practice as a form broadly located between fiction and non-fiction. In this sense, my discussion of Helen Garner’s *The First Stone* in Chapter One, was aimed at widening the category of ficto-criticism in order to question the intricacies of a form that gains its power through generic transgression. My analysis of Garner’s creatively-critical text suggested that writing-between constitutes a heterogenous domain where broad generalisations based on binary structures are not only contradictory but also potentially dangerous, as they tend to fix the deterritorialising workings of the ficto-critical text.

Even though the Canadian use of the term ficto-criticism refers to the work of a limited number of writers, particularly Aritha van Herk, in Australia the term has been used broadly to identify most creative-critical writing. Whilst this recognition tends to be limited to literature, cultural studies and the arts, it remains meaningful that the term ficto-criticism emerged in this country with some prevalence. The story of how this term rose to dominance in Australia, as discussed in Chapter Four, is significant, as it reveals something fundamental about ficto-criticism. In this context, my application of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept-tool of becoming helped in identifying some true lines of ficto-critical flight: those not incorporated into the
official history of Australian ficto-criticism. Not surprisingly, the texts one discovers on the margins of Australian ficto-critical discourse are those that embrace the movement of becoming. Thus, through my mapping of the history of the term’s use in Australia, I have explored a range of hybrid texts whose authors may, or may not, identify as ficto-critical. By inducing the reader to question meaning and meaning production through disrupting generic expectations, theses texts undermine fixed territories of knowledge that exclude difference: it is, in fact, the very inclusion of the other in academic writing that most prominently destabilises the authority of the academy. Yet, as the dominance of Stephen Muecke and Noel King in Australian ficto-criticism suggests, ficto-criticism risks manifesting as a false refuge—or escape—unless its movement at a micro political level actualises a line of flight. In fact, as I have argued in this thesis, rather than replicate the mastery of normative academic work, ficto-criticism must replicate the movement of becoming to maintain its revolutionary potential and relevance. For this, I illustrated the contradictions inherent in limiting the form through the identification and discovery of an Australian ficto-critical movement with key proponents, codes and conventions all bound together with (the construction of) an original document, namely, Muecke and King’s “On Ficto-Criticism”. Notably, I showed that this origin is antithetical to the political intent of ficto-criticism as is imbued with a narrative of mastery consistent with dominant modes of academic research and writing. By illustrating the less documented stories of Australian ficto-criticism by women, I linked their social and cultural position (as privileged other in Western culture) with their desire to write ficto-critically as a practice of becoming-woman. Consequently, I argued that by writing ficto-critically those at the margin can strategically undermine the power of academic writing—as the pinnacle of non-fiction (or “truth”)—which excludes and/or misrepresents them and their experience.
In Chapter Five I demonstrated, however, that the term ficto-criticism originated in Canada rather than Australia and that this was the direct result of a writer’s highly experimental work. Given her nomadic style the author of this ficto-critical practice, Canadian Jeanne Randolph, is both largely unknown in Canada and unheard of in the official discourse of Australian ficto-criticism. I have also shown the process through which her ficto-critical practice has been overlooked in Australia, despite her work being the impetus for the development of the term and the explanation for its arrival in Australia. Similarly, I have argued that whilst Randolph is (indirectly) responsible for the emergence of ficto-criticism as an identifiable Australian practice, she remains absent from this discourse paradoxically due to the highly deterritorialised character of her ficto-critical work. Randolph’s lack of presence in the discourse of ficto-criticism in Australia illustrates the incompatibility of becoming-woman and the academy, and mirrors the experience of many women Australian practitioners. In Canada, on the contrary, while her work also remains marginalised, it is beginning to attract some critical attention and this is largely due to an increasing interest in ficto-critical practice internationally.

After my examination of Randolph’s writing, I discussed the work of Canadian Aritha van Herk, arguing that her adoption of a ficto-critical practice was influenced by the work of the former. Finally, I examined a diverse selection of Canadian authors, writing both in English and French, who employ the tropes of ficto-criticism. Most importantly, I discussed the work of the Québécoise writer Nicole Brossard whose practice, I argued, has heavily influenced Canadian creative-critical writing. The decision to sample a wide range of Canadian texts was
a deliberate strategy intended to reflect the fact that ficto-criticism is both an open, labile
generic space between and a practice increasingly prolific in a growing range of contexts.
Furthermore, this analysis of varied examples underwrite the assertion that ficto-criticism is a
form wrought out of the conflict over difference and minoritarian politics. Both feminist
writers and writers of colour in Canada, I argued, employ ficto-criticism as a political tool, as
they are concerned with the critique of academic writing. This critical practice, in fact,
exposes the violence of representation that is normalised through the language, genre and style
of rational academic discourse.

A key notion guiding my analysis concerned the necessity to keep ficto-criticism open and
multiple. Not doing so would suggest a failure to comprehend the centrality of ficto-critical
experimentation as a means to imagine new ways of being in the world as a critical subject.
What I have shown is that what these diverse texts have in common is a focus on breaking
down the universality and neutrality of the supposedly objective genre of academic writing.
The works I have discussed demonstrate that, by bringing into play the other of academic
discourse while combining it with a critical/theoretical position, ficto-criticism problematises
the concepts of judgement, interpretation and representation. In addition, it mixes fact and
fiction, self-reflexively entertaining its own fictionality as a means to situate itself socially and
historically. In other words, ficto-criticism is a highly political discourse that demonstrates the
characteristics of a minor literature. Ficto-criticism as a process that enables an autopoetic
conceptualisation of the self destabilises the traditional subject of academic critical writing and
dissolves the mastery of official discourses. It also reveals the fiction of genre. Ficto-critical
forms make a connection between the style of writing and the content, asking both writers and
readers to examine at the level of form what structures of domination are in place in our own writing and reading practices. Many ficto-critical works thus function as models for a mode of critical writing that does not colonise the object of its analysis, but attempts a reading of and with the text/subject; an empathetic engagement that understands subjectivity as informed by and changing with context and event.

Therefore, the project of ficto-criticism—as I have chosen to read it in this thesis—is to unlearn one’s authority and privilege as the beginning of a process towards developing an ethical relationship with the other. This conceptualisation of ficto-criticism clearly has serious implications for those whose authority is already in question, that is, those already at the margin. However, the notion of ficto-criticism as a practice of becoming-woman and becoming-imperceptible implies a critical awareness of its potential to reproduce dominant structures, whilst claiming both a loss of authority and a distance from the centre. That is, ficto-criticism is a potentially problematic strategy when its political and ethical imperative is reduced to merely aesthetic play, which is masked by a claim to being minoritarian while failing to constitute a becoming. However, as my analysis of Randolph’s writings showed, truly disruptive works are those most likely to be overlooked. In the words of Caesar: “What is vital, raw, or disaffected never gets out because it’s not allowed to count for knowledge” (xii). Indeed, Randolph’s absolute lack of presence in Australia and her rather nominal profile in Canada, as argued, illustrates the incompatibility of writing practices engaged in becoming-woman and the academy’s reliance on authority, competency and intellectual rigour. As becoming-woman, Randolph’s ficto-criticism cuts across the molar unities of the nation state: significantly, Bruce Grenville describes the “palpable” effect of Randolph’s performative
presentations, which rather than intending “to put an audience at ease…cast a long shadow of doubt” by undermining the audience’s will to power and control (“Doubt” 7).

Thus, conceiving ficto-criticism as becoming requires more than mere insertions of autobiographical introductions or creative fragments to normative texts. Concurrently, however, there are no ficto-critical rules, as the context and utterance determines the intensity of the particular transgression. If one is serious about challenging the power and authority of the hegemonic critical paradigm it is then necessary to move beyond just arguing for multiplicity, transgression, and situatedness or simply reflecting on one’s relation to the other. As Deleuze and Parnet put it: “proclaiming ‘Long live the multiple’ is not yet doing it, one must do the multiple. And neither is it enough to say, ‘Down with genres;’ one must effectively write in such a way that there are no more ‘genres,’ etc.” (16-7). If ficto-criticism is more than the product of a writer’s discomfort with their potential complicity with structures of domination, then reflectively engage with one’s own position and voice may not be enough to produce any transformation of the status quo. Instead, the ficto-critic must actively and creatively engage with the other without clinging to origins, fixed meanings, or territories. In order to break both with consensus and the reliance on the control of difference and excess, it is imperative, therefore, that the ficto-critic risks the individuated and masterful self.
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