**On the Creative-Critical: A Summit**

**Position Paper**

This is a ‘position paper’. Which is what exactly? What positioning does it do? Does it position us so that we’re all on the same ‘page’, talking about the same thing, or at least, agreeing on common ground, on common terms; so that our conversations can be productive and not lost in a positionless spacelessness? Or else, does it provide an initial position or ‘point’ for papers to derive or deviate or depart from, to dismantle or deride; a position to leap out of?

But to come up with an initial position, either a ‘point’ or a ‘page’, in relation to creative-critical writing — well, already we are at an impasse. We are in danger of over-positioning, of finding ourselves stuck in the very moment when we would want to remain mobile. For the creative-critical is, by name and by nature, something that moves *across* positions; something that is positioned on a hinge, or on a hyphen; or rather, something that refuses to be positioned, but claims a license to move freely between positions, skating back and forth across the surface of that hyphen. It is astride, transitional.

What position, then, can a creative-critical position paper take?

Perhaps we can start with our geographical position. We meet today at UEA, an institution which prides itself on bringing together the critical and the creative. The rise of creative writing in universities, and the need for it to justify itself as a form of ‘research’, is one of the ways in which the creative has been given cause to rub up against the critical in the past few decades. This in turn has led to a subsequent need for literary critics to do the opposite: to prove their creative worth, or to ask themselves how they might teach and practice criticism in a way that enriches and is enriched by creative practice.

But this is only one context, one position. Not all of us here are ‘institutionalised’ within university systems, nor is the creative-critical movement, or moment, a purely institutional one. Stephen Benson and Clare Connors identify four other streams leading into what they call the creative critical ‘turn’: the development of ‘post-theory’, of theoretical writing after the ‘high period’ of theory; the increasingly interesting dialogue between ‘art writing’ (including not just writing on the visual arts but music writing, dance writing, film writing and others) and literary-critical writing; the rise of the ‘poet-critic’, in figures like Susan Howe and Anne Carson, and their inclusion on ordinary critical reading lists; and the increasing connections, or increasingly blurred lines between, work done within universities and work done outside of them, including things like the rise of small presses and magazines, the renaissance of essay writing, and the emergence of ‘creative nonfiction’.

These, too, though, are only a partial picture, a partial positioning. We hope that the papers today will open up this position further and reveal new streams running into it, running out of it.

Perhaps, then, the only useful thing a position paper can do is pose questions, offer prompts for response and reflection. In which case, let’s offer a few.

First, one from T.S. Eliot, which has been a guiding question in putting together this day. Eliot asks, in ‘The Function of Criticism’: ‘If so large a part of creation is really criticism, is not a large part of what is called “critical writing” really creative?’. The last decade or so has seen a steady erosion of any sharp distinction between the ‘creative’ and the ‘critical’, and of the borders marked out by each of these not wholly satisfactory terms. That might lead us to ask questions such as: Can criticism itself aspire to being creative? Does creative writing have a critical force? Or should we dispense with these terms altogether?

Secondly, what is the aim of bringing the creative and the critical together in this way? Do we agree with Matthew Goulish, who claims that ‘if we can destabilise the boundaries between the creative and the critical, we may enrich them both, and discover a communal practice?’ If so, what might this communal practice look like? What might it (literally, specifically) involve?

Thirdly, does creative-criticism exist *alongside* traditional academic writing, as a complement to it, or *against* traditional academic writing, as a direct challenge to it? Is writing creative-critically necessarily anti-rigour? Or are we just seeking rigorousness in new places, new forms of rigour? If the creative critic sits alongside the traditional literary critic, how does this relate to Sedgwick’s idea of the critic positioning themselves ‘beside’ the artwork? Or to Robin Nelson’s term ‘complementary writing’ – writing that works alongside practice, rather than after it?

Finally, how, in different examples of what has been termed, or of what we are terming, ‘creative-critical writing’, do the creative and the critical position themselves against each other, or in relation to each other? How might we bring them closer together, or further apart?

That last question leads me to Katja Hilevaara and Emily Orley’s introduction to their new book *The Creative Critic,* in which they position the creative-critical writer as a ‘folder’ — as one who folds. Building on theories of ‘the fold’ by the likes of Deleuze and Michael Serra, they see the creative and the critical as two points on a handkerchief, which are brought together by folding and crumpling the handkerchief, or else brought further apart by tearing it. Books, they remind us, are made of folded paper: an initial act of folding that both enables linear, codified reading, yet simultaneously disrupts the continuity of that reading, allowing for the reader, flicking through the pages of the folded book, to skip bits, to read forwards, backwards, to reread and re-reread. And folding, they go on to say, is an act that continues after the book is read: the book is ‘folded into more work, different work, new work’. ‘Words are folded or unfolded into more words.’

And so, some more questions: What ideas would we like to unfold today? What ideas, conversely, would we like to fold over, cover up?

And so, finally, here is a position paper: fold it, unfold it, tear it, crumple it, make it into origami, throw it away.

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