This paper explores the force of writing in architectural criticism, theory and history. Writing often plays the silent other to architecture, being continuously assumed rather than examined. Using the conceit of my library as an archive and repository for architectural and personal memory, this essay in part revisits a critical moment in the late 1980s: the literary turn in architectural theory. Interrogating later anthologies describing the transaction between writing, architecture and deconstruction (or post-structuralism), I note that the radical writing practices of the late 1980s have been largely excluded and marginalised in later collections of primary texts from the anthologised period. Curiously, when radical writing practice did appear in later anthologies it was conflated with feminist practice. A double marginalisation reduced the mainstream location of feminist theory and wayward writing to peripheral positions with seemingly little historical force or influence. This essay argues for attention to the business of writing as an act of theorisation. Work on and with the material of writing is a tactic and mode for producing change in the status quo of received histories and conventions of architectural criticism and writing.

"[A]ny text is a rewriting of the field or fields of its own emergence . . . It is in the business of transforming discursive material that, in its untransformed state, leaves a woman no place from which to speak, or nothing to say."

"[A] writing subject which has been produced in diverse encounters with other discourses, other modes of thought."

"For writers are often carried away, as though by drunkenness, into outbursts of emotion which are not relevant to the matter at hand, but are wholly personal, and hence tedious."

"[I]t (rhetoric) is at once a manual of recipes, inspired by a practice goal, and a code, a body of ethical prescriptions whose role is to supervise (i.e. to permit and limit) the ‘deviations’ of emotive language… Rhetoric is that privileged technique (since one must pay in order to acquire it) which permits the ruling classes to gain ownership of speech."

After buying a book I write my name, city (the site of collection) and date of acquisition into the front page. The reader’s autograph inscription is an everyday writing genre. Scratched into the book’s crisp, white paper; this second signature, posterior to the author’s, transforms the surface it impresses. Under the pressure of handwriting the text changes hands, moving from the general collection of bookshops or amazon.com into a personal collection, becoming property. Etched into the “front matter” before the text proper; the name of the reader meets, or even precedes the name of the author. In this furrowed space we find material traces of the practice of becoming a writer via reading. Book collections attest to the ways in which writing and knowledge formation issue partly from the library of already written texts. The writer’s personal library is a historical archive and metaphor for the network of interlocutors who shape writing.

This paper uses minor writing genres—lists, quotations, footnotes, a library inventory and autograph inscriptions—to begin to write a memoir of how I came to be a writer. Historians transform ephemeral, non-literary genres into archives. These transient, everyday genres are used to construct the singular, social biography of an author in accounting for influences upon a life; or they present material for cultural biographies in the data they leave about communities of reading, practices of reception and consumption in histories of the
The status and meaning of genre runs as a constant thread through the weave of this essay. Genre names the multiplicity of writing. Genres are hybrid, never pure, but the identification of a text as belonging to one genre rather than another is an important act of classification, assigning value and determining interpretation. In rewriting my collection as a library I give it the status of an archive. Importantly for this essay's focus on writing, genre collapses the form–content distinction because these two things are mutually entailed in genre conventions. For example, try writing a footnote without using standard notational forms. This is not to argue that genre is a stiff template that inhibits the flexibility of writing. However, as Meaghan Morris once observed, some genres are more insistently formalist, that is form-determined, than others. Morris made this remark in an essay on the constraints determining newspaper film reviews, as she attempted to make finer distinctions rather than read the genre as merely a poor, ideologically constrained media instance of criticism. This essay will consistently reclassify writing material from one genre to another in order to change and disable the conventions of interpretation that can create blind-spots in our vision. Books collected with autograph signatures belong to the “ex libris” genre but they are also an inventory of reading practice. Substituting familiar taxonomic labels with others shifts the shape and meaning of material under review. One of the insights generated by this practice is this essay’s uncovering of a feminist, post-structuralist, architectural writing practice.

Minor everyday writing genres are unlikely techniques for architectural criticism but their methods can be pirated to construe connections between material normally excluded, deemed irrelevant, dissonant or drunkenly personal (pace Longinus), a description which might double as the outline of a feminist project (The personal is political …). As Teresa de Lauretis observes, “Feminism has produced, at least for feminists, a political-personal consciousness of gender”. By displacing these genres and the methodologies of their archival interpretation from history to criticism, I use them as a tactic to focus on the practice of writing and the relations between writing and criticism.

The library is a space, but staging my scene of reading already places this essay in a distant, uninteresting back room because of its apparent failure to address disciplinary protocols. In not being addressed to the apparent subject of architectural criticism—building—the paper attends to writing, the silent subject of “architectural criticism”. This subject is silent in part because a shift in focus to writing runs the risk of having one’s work ruled out as irrelevant to the discipline of architecture’s tasks, an unbalancing of the architecture/writing couple. The “dramatic” coupling Architecture/Writing is itself a well-rehearsed statement disguising itself as a question: how does, how can one, write on architecture? It is a familiar question, both an opening and a closing, part of that corpus of statements that constructs what is knowable, allowable and sayable in an architectural discourse. Writing cannot perform in the same medium as architecture, and architecture and writing are of different media. Their differences of course do not have to be construed as oppositional, but they are boundaries and relations under constant negotiation.

Never a stable medium, writing is a material practice, emerging and assuming particular form in conditions of historical specificity.
How we write, and not merely what we write on, changes. A library is a useful place, both an archive and a metaphor for understanding the history of writing in the discipline of architecture. In this essay my “biography” becomes a meditation on current constructions of the late 1980s literary turn in architecture and the possibility that these events, and the status of architectural writing in particular, remain an unfinished project. My “library” becomes a site for analysing the dissemination and reception of feminist/post-structuralist texts in Melbourne, Australia through the differentiated geography of reception. Criticism is site specific, although the geographical contours of knowledge formation can be invisible in the circulation of writing far from its home and origin. History is full of latent possibilities rather than dead ends. My library is mobilised as a site to contest the closure that history making can bring. Issued from the borders of accounts of the architectural significance of post-structuralism, my working library is a place where the project was never closed, merely withdrawn from the spotlight. And the books still being there can be taken up and used anew.

Texts, signatures and libraries are places and emblems, signifying the labour undertaken by a critic who practises writing. This work is normally invisible although the working journals and notebooks of authors may be published later in their careers, after fame or the continual reproduction of their texts and citation of their proper name has been bestowed. This paper is a kind of writing of this process “from below”. It attempts, not necessarily systematically, to historicise the conditions of my own emergence as a writing subject. “Writing Subject” is an awkward phrase, ungainly in shape, demanding four syllables when two might do and ambivalent in its meaning. It complicates, for good reason, the noun we normally use: writer. But as your tongue or ear stumbles over this ugly formation you attend to it, if only in irritation. These dislocations of our everyday writing practice send up signals of an active language, working in the production of knowledge. The phrase “writing subject” is an audible disturbance, betraying not the muteness but the noise and new work of writing’s instruments. Directed towards the structure of writing, the reader is called to witness the inventive capacities of language: the art of transformation. Neologisms and rearrangements of familiar nouns and verbs are “work in the language material itself”.

Walter Benjamin mischievously described writers as people who write books “because they are dissatisfied with the books which they could buy but do not like”. Whingeing is one synonym for discontent, criticism another. Benjamin’s aphorism can be generalised as an aspiration for some writers: a double transformation of self and discipline. His phrasing might appear to be a classic restatement of the power of the author to inaugurate change, but the library is his stage for dramatising writers as malcontents. In acknowledging a certain degree of intertextuality Benjamin notes the ways in which the writer writes through and is written on by other texts. He observes of the book collector’s relationship to his objects, “Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them”. No author or book is an island. A desire to write emerges within an archipelago of culture. For those of us working in the academy, we swim in the currents of an institutionalised writing practice. Disciplinary protocols are visible in the choices of form and content, famously described as “institutionalised systems of interpretation”, and, similarly, codes of conduct govern other material
structures: apprenticeship, career management and patronage. The “author’s signature is always multiple”, a phrase that acknowledges one’s unknown selves, fellow interlocutors and the everyday political demands that shape labour.

To Begin

Writing/Architecture

If books are property so is speech.

The white page at the beginning of a book is an almost empty space, a temptation to write rather than a pristine space that cannot be violated. I read and make marks, drawings of curves, double lines, stars and under-lining. My graffiti are standard issue, I discover now, confounding my attachment to these physical traces as evidence of my earlier selves. On inspecting the architectural critic John Ruskin’s margin lines in his 1845 edition of Thomas Carlyle’s Past and Present, now in the British Museum and recently scrutinised by architectural historians, I discover short parallel tracks mapping the atlas of Ruskin’s voyaging. These margin lines were the mountaintops of Ruskin’s journey through the text, but they flummoxed a recent historian who believed that “central passages” were ignored. Ruskin read differently. His marginalia were records for posterity, signposting the historical nature of the transaction between a reader and a text. The tracks of our reading deposit archives for later histories.

If marking books is one sign of the material culture of reading, the residue of turned pages and creased spines is another. I collected and read and read and read until I dangerously dismembered a few treasured texts. My library does not bear the professional apparatus of public libraries with their files on borrowers and statistical rates of books attracting high use. Instead, wear and tear and the ruins of corporeal damage remain an indexical trace of use and influence. In turning to two texts I remember sharply as magnetic poles of attraction I discover that memory is supported by material evidence. My copies of Meaghan Morris’ The Pirate’s Fiancée (collected 1988) and Gayatri Spivak’s “Translator’s Introduction” to Derrida’s Of Grammatology (collected 1991) are ruinous. Their physical deterioration inversely records my own interior expansion as I moved amongst constellations of reading.

My uptight, inner archivist self diligently recorded the dates of accession of items to my library collection so that I am able to return to the shelves as a historian; tracing for example, patterns of reading practice such as the galaxy of feminist French theory books exploding around June to October 1992 in the feminist universe of my collection, or the solid bank of post-structuralist literary texts collected from 1989 to 1991. This memoir of my own reading practice is in turn a history of the reception of certain kinds of books at a given historical moment in architectural culture.

One reads particular books for numerous agendas. Trained in architectural history and theory in an art history department I came into Melbourne’s particular urban, architectural culture as an outsider and was perplexed by some of its customary arrangements, including the under-representation of women and a rudimentary public feminist discourse. At the same time I was increasingly aware that transformations within the discipline of architecture were being driven by new theory formations. My own identity formation would interlock with a sea change occurring in some
places within the discipline. This is the point of Roland Barthes’ designation of the writer as a scriptor not an author, transforming the writer from the site of origin and the repository of the meaning of a text, into an agent, a site where a number of writings mix. The word “writings” stands for many of the things I have outlined above, including disciplinary protocols and reading practices as well as desire.

In 1983 the semiotician, literary theorist and critic Anne Freadman remarked of George Sand’s writings, “[a]ny text is a rewriting of the field or fields of its own emergence . . . It is in the business of transforming discursive material that, in its untransformed state, leaves a woman no place from which to speak, or nothing to say”. Muteness describes a number of formations, including the endless repetition of familiar modes of writing—of well-worn genres and over-used fables that leave a woman literally speechless. It also denotes the place of a speaking subject whose speech may rain upon closed ears. Rhetoric, a code whose role is to supervise, permit and limit. Pace Barthes: “Rhetoric is that privileged technique (since one must pay in order to acquire it) which permits the ruling classes to gain ownership of speech”. Updating Barthes’ pronouncements on classical rhetoric we can see these comments as interrogations: what counts as speech, for whom and by whom, or to give it a resonant imagery: what becomes visible, what is audible? How does one find a way to speak if the instruments of speech seem maladapted and obstruct entry into the charmed circle of fluency?

In order to rewrite the field from which a writer emerges the writer must trace that field. How is a genealogy of critical writing constructed? Memory, inscriptions and anthologies are the various modes of history telling excavated by this essay because how we write now, what form our criticism takes, is inscribed by what we (the discipline) have already written. Rewriting the fields from which one’s own writing emerges may be a tactical response to closure; staring into a discourse or description and failing to find oneself there, but rewriting, even when it renews a rewriting of twenty years ago, is a synonym for change.

Reading Anthologies of Readings

"What am I participating in when I read?"
Barbara Johnson, A World of Difference, 1987

The transformation of the recent present into the recent past is a mode of delineating past from present and the field from which this paper emerges. Inventories and lists are amongst the earliest genres in the chronology converting today into yesterday. This paper writes in the margins of the contents page, itself a list, plotting the contents of a weighty book edited by Michael K. Hays, Architecture Theory since 1968 (published in 1998). Scanning Hays’ inventory of key documents and projects, comprising that field of “architectural theory”, my memory and his memorial intersect. I see an inventory of texts from the later 1980s which I can recognise, but one in which I cannot inscribe my own remembrance. Making tracks across the terrain of Hays’ writing I work like all readers work upon printed matter. I am inclined to scribble on and deface its surface with my own marginalia, to regionalise his history with my terrain, to testify to the difference of my own experience. Writing of, we write on.

When I first began reading and thinking for this paper, knowing I wanted to write about reading...
Meaghan Morris and others I worried that one of the numerous ways in which this piece of writing risked being ruled out as irrelevant was my interest in texts consigned at least a decade ago to the museum of 1980s historical artefacts. Hays’ text with its dates and overarching chronology (1968–1993) confirms the historical nature of these writings. Where does the contemporary begin and end? In memorialising the writings (and sometimes projects) of Derrida, Eisenman, Tschumi, Wigley and Bloomer, as documents of that event termed architectural deconstruction indexed to the late 1980s, his anthology possesses latent value. It is an instrument of canon formation. My present reception of his text is an interruption, an interference with the transmission from anthology into stable historical narrative and authorised canon.

Sylvia Lavin has described the rush of architectural anthologies at the turn of the millennium as performing a will to closure, although their prevalence may attest otherwise, creating a long genealogy of theory as the transformative force in post-war (American) architectural culture. Collections of primary texts keep very recent texts in circulation, so that these writings do not have to await the tunnelling activities of future historians on the treasure hunt for archival material. In the “post-theory” moment of the late 1990s, theory collections deposited the work in an accessible public domain. Anthologies of course have numerous uses and afterlives. They can perform the first strip mining operation, and it may take some time before later prospectors search for other primary artefacts from the “period”. Hard graft can result in discovering less visible or less canonical primary material but it demands intensive labour and usually entails detailed familiarity with journals, pamphlets, exhibition manifestoes and texts from the “period”. My memories of reading this material at the time of, or soon after publication provide another shorthand route into the archive.

Hays’ collection was by far the largest and perhaps the most prestigious of the three contemporary architectural theory anthologies issued in the period 1996–1998, a prestige enhanced by his status as founding editor of Assemblage and through the book’s MIT Press imprint. Hays’ book of transatlantic architectural theory since 1968 calibrates certain exchanges in the North American and western European tier one architectural academies. Of the 20 essays and projects representing the period 1984–1991 in Hays’ text, seven of the reprints engage with “Derridean” deconstruction, and four of these seven with the Eisenman/Derrida and in part Tschumi interchange. In Kate Nesbitt’s 1996 anthology Theorising a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965–1995 the “Poststructuralism and Deconstruction” section is heavy with Tschumi, an interview with Derrida, one Eisenman essay and another essay on Derrida. There is a separate “Feminism, Gender and the Problem of the Body” section with an essay each by Bernard Tschumi, Diana Agrest and Peter Eisenman. These anthologies allow us to reflect on the redistribution of post-1950s French essays outside France, a phenomenon generally but problematically described as post-structuralism.

Walter Benjamin, unpacking his library, sat amongst half-emptied crates and the packing boxes released the phantoms of memory. He remembered the many places of book collecting: the cities, dealers and bookstores, and the varied domiciles for his texts in a range of down-at-heel student lodgings. The Mitteleuropa circuit of his collecting and residences (Riga, Naples, Munich, Danzig,
etc.) mapped his voyages within a European cosmopolitan cartography. My books were acquired mostly in Melbourne but sometimes in New York, Princeton, Boston, Los Angeles and London, in the journeys of an academic career in the closing decade of the twentieth century. In contrast to a general history of ideas the regional uses of texts, names, ideas, marks the force of specific and localised organisations; the resistance and intervention of networks, institutions and events in rewriting texts. Place names can act as metonyms for geographies of distribution and reception.

United States/French Regional

A recent book-length analysis of the North American reception of Derrida’s texts traces the peculiar regional and discipline-specific nature of “deconstruction’s translations”. In contrast to the flattened geography of the architectural anthologies this text offers an understanding of situated reading. Derrida’s first public appearance in North America occurred at a symposium in 1966 at Johns Hopkins University but it was the later uptake of Derrida’s work by the Yale group (Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman and to a lesser extent Harold Bloom) which promulgated Derrida’s estate through the 1970s and early 1980s. As early as 1980 a literary theorist labelled the Yale club’s “use” of Derrida an appropriation, claiming that the clan’s earlier allegiance to “formalism” (not my term) merely continued unrevised. The Yale cartel was accused of de-politicisation (divesting Derrida of his interest in the institutionalised production of certain significations), although one might argue that this is precisely the site of the Yale group’s politics.

The slant of rewriting—the angle of the pen—is different in each reception. This difference in rewriting is not inherently problematic unless the new iteration/interpretation/difference is disguised and authority and legitimacy sought for the unstained translation. The critics of the Yale group charged the Yale men with an institutionalised absorption and eradication of fractious material, thus neutralising challenges to the discipline’s centre. North American deconstruction by this account was an ironic inversion of the strategic focus of Derrida’s work on institutions. As Derrida remarked in conversation with an architectural audience at Columbia University in 1992: “[d]econstruction was not primarily concerned with discourse, with text in the trivial, traditional sense but with institutions, that is with the solid, real, building of social constructs in which discourse, texts, teaching, culture, literature, are produced”. Disciplines are also institutions, as are the social and conversational networks that circulate and produce reading matter. I have been using “place” and regional location (Yale) as historical facts and metonyms for reception. Architectural readings of deconstruction in the 1980s concerned themselves with reception in one register: the disciplinary difference between architecture and philosophy. I will briefly explore this before turning to other modes of reception, in which feminism and genre conventions allow us to see the architecture/deconstruction interchange differently.

In North America the discipline of architecture, like the discipline of literature, found itself dealing with issues of translation. Although the lineage was shorter (Derrida was invited to Georgia Tech along with Bernard Tschumi in 1976 by Jennifer Bloomer), debates and remarks on the architectural “mistranslations” of Derrida emerged within a few short years of the intense formal interchange period in
architectural deconstruction (1984–1988). The scattered remarks on the peculiarly architectural nature of the translation were foot patrols on the borders of disciplinary difference, examining how architecture reconstituted French philosophical and literary writing as Architectural.18

At its boldest these readings claimed that architectural deconstruction was “non-Derridean”, directing attention to the disciplinary work of transforming and altering material into architectural matter.19 Mark Wigley notably rewrote architecture’s status as a supplement to outsider discourses such as deconstruction or psychoanalysis, where the given terms of the relationship normally construed architecture as the event after the “idea’s” emergence. Wigley tactically responded by locating an architecture anterior to the emergence. He traced the ways in which architectural metaphors were foundational to other disciplines such as psychoanalysis or deconstruction. His readings examined philosophy’s long-standing reliance on the metaphorical status of architecture as ground or foundation, and studied architecture’s formative role in the categories of the mirror phase or the fetish, key terms of psychoanalysis.20 Thus monuments to a one-way trade (from philosophy to architecture) were scribbled on to denote a two-way traffic and dependant relationship. But we await, still, the analysis of institutions, academic appointments, institutional politics and career making as the extra-philosophical investments in certain modes of post-structuralist theory. (Here lies the terrain of the semi-autobiographical.)

Since I began writing this essay a small revival of interest in “Derrida” and “deconstruction in architecture” has begun.21 My essay does not sit with this recent work but continues the dialogue of post-structuralism’s difference from itself within the discipline of architecture: the many things that taxonomic label might signify. The uneven and differing reception of French texts in the Anglophone world, and specifically the texts produced out of these translations in Australia, offer a different way of remembering and reviving that architectural moment and of critically reflecting on it. Let me supplement Wigley’s sharp observations on the interference of disciplines in the translation moments of deconstruction by examining other modes of reception and genre conventions, in order to think about the architecture/deconstruction relationship. It occurred differently in Australia and for myself (and others) in Melbourne.

An Australian Romance

Wigley discusses disciplines as potent translation frameworks, but genre is another mechanism shaping the invisible power in the architecture and philosophy coupling. Like Peter Eisenman I had a theory romance. Romance is a genre with conventions for specifying how differences between people can be conducted. Muse is a conventional, and now rather “old fashioned” allegory for the relation between source material and the labour of making. Muses, being divine, semi-divine and sometimes ordinary women, of course entail relationships between key protagonists. We might imagine Eisenman’s deconstruction as a romance governed by the familiar features of the genre. His was a public epistolary affair, shaped by the familiar features of the romance genre: a pair of star-crossed Stars, an American architect and French Philosopher, meet and despite numerous obstacles (different continents, different cultures, different disciplines and wives) fall for each other and find a way of being together. The courtship between Jack BURNS 250
and Pete was played out in a series of public texts. Like many celebrity marriages it ended in public tears, when Jack famously wrote Eisenman a “Dear Pete” letter. Derrida had been called into architecture to play Muse (inspiration for design) and ended up becoming a Harpy (an architectural critic). Philosophy had been asked to play the Other, in which theory is in fact a mirror of the same, and had then refused to play this game (“you believe in it, absence, too much”). To rewrite Derrida and Eisenman’s exchange as a romance allows us to investigate powerful writing/storytelling conventions operating outside and across disciplinary boundaries.

Genre conventions identify the determining, formal, working rules that accompany specific modes of storytelling. To talk about a powerful interlocutor or source may invoke the conventions of muse and the romance genre entailed in that relationship. Let me be clear: I am not insisting on a literal romance but pointing to the simple idea that writing involves stories, key characters and plots and that these basic demands govern even a mode of writing (theory) assuming a status outside stories, a point exemplified in Derrida’s own work on the inevitable force of writing in such a “rationalist”, non-literary discipline as philosophy. By re-classifying the architecture/deconstruction exchange as, in part, a romance, the identification of genre conventions provides a space for a feminist critique. It is a doubly tactical strategy. Writing never arrives as a useful, neutral instrument but comes coded with prior histories. Beyond the singular power of each author, both “high” and “low” genres corrupt the space of individual autonomy. We write in part according to what we already know. We are written on by social and cultural conventions, including those that seem to be extra-architectural.

My choice of genre (romance) and allegorical figure (muse) plays on the homosociality of this event, a wry feminist reading sparked by Jeffrey Kipnis’ 1991 essay on this affair which is a long defence of Eisenman against Derrida’s charge of Eisenman’s “misreading” of “deconstruction”. (Derrida’s “J’accuse” is included in the Hays anthology, although without the public “correspondence”, the 1990 Assemblage exchanges between Derrida and Eisenman occasioning Kipnis’ defence, and thus is somewhat devoid of its context and of Derrida’s voice.) In his 1991 rally to Eisenman’s side, Kipnis observes, “Lest we think his (Derrida’s) chase a matter of mere academic exercise, let us eavesdrop on one of the author’s private postcards, sent to a lover but destined for Eisenman.” Seeing these tangled affiliations, with their desire and disappointments as instances of the romance genre reclassifies the archives. They move from the room marked “history of ideas” to the feminist room where a scrupulous apparatus has been established for examining modes of identification between powerful men. Here the anger and hurt of betrayal puncture the patrician speaking voices of the interlocutors.

Jane Gallop has written most famously about the relations between pedagogy, eroticism, desire and the excitement of coming to knowledge. The perversity of the French post-structuralist critique of the status of the proper name and the North American, architectural consolidation of Derrida as the key figure of the proper name, cited and cited over again in architecture, might be explained in the erotic terms offered by Gallop and those to which I am about to confess: the desire in that theory transference. Keeping oneself close on the heel of the philosopher or feminist writer is also a recourse to a tactic most famously at work in Derrida’s writings and others working on Derrida: the careful,
prolonged inhabitation of a master (or mistress) text, so that one name would work on another name. In this way patterns of reading easily slip into patterns of writing. But the muse figure is also a sign of the desire operating in alignments with intellectual authority figures: inspiration, awe, affirmation and a creative jump start that propels our own work in startling and important new directions.

In contrast to Pete, I had more of a quiet stalker romance with Meaghan Morris or MM as I affectionately refer to her, in that disturbing intimacy fans project onto distant stars. My writer crush uncannily arose from my difficulties with the very conditions reproduced in the Jack/Peter/Jeff texts: how to find a way through the intense homosociality of architecture, one I encountered in the then Melbourne architectural community, but also one structuring the conditions of architectural discourse (what counts, who counts, who listens?). Contingency, circumstance and fate, as in most stories, each played a role. Entry to the writers I most needed to read to deal with this problem was solved by local conditions: the circulation of Morris and Elizabeth Grosz (in person and text) in the small magazine, art world and Melbourne University humanities departments in 1987, 1988 and onwards. The intersection of post-structuralism, feminism and architecture was by and large, in those early years in Melbourne, an affaire des femmes.25

The timing and sequence of reception produce different knowledge formations. Discovering Derrida first, in 1987/88, would have been a different frame for me, rather than finding traces of his project in the feminist texts I was reading at that time. My “discovery” of “post-structuralism” via feminism, at some distance removed from France and the Anglophone-North American architectural academy was liberating. I was busy trying to trace various writers in a discourse, reading both French writers and their Anglophone translators and commentators. Instead of the master name Derrida my library has a shelf of Derrida and his interlocutors (Gasché, Weber, Gallop, Clément, Cixous, Spivak, Kofman, Le Doeuff, De Man, Ulmer, Johnson, Kamuf, Culler; Benjamin). I did not have to invest in radical differences between particular philosophers as Singular Authors and somehow embodiments of Major Positions. My chronology was one of discovery and pursuit. I was intensely puzzled by the strange architectural chronology which would later monumentalise Deleuze as a Speaker after Derrida and by the spurious emergence of Deleuze as a corrective to Derrida’s errors. In contrast I read the careful plotting of different French writers, their works, relationships to each other and institutional context, in books such as Alice A. Jardine’s Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity (published in 1985 and collected by me in April 1992), or Vincent Descombes’ study of the post war philosophes (Modern French Philosophy, 1980).

Reading in Australia, I scoured footnotes to find other writers to read. Reading Morris first, she introduced me to writers who radically shaped my work, most notably Anne Friedeman, Michelle Le Doeuff and Catherine Clément through her citation and re-reading of their texts. Morris thoughtfully appended a bibliography of “women and post modernism” to her Pirate’s Fiancée introduction. And I combed my way through its lines, like a diligent doctoral candidate.

**Muse Material**

Morris was a traditional Muse in being much admired, but her alternately sharp, laconic and
pomposity-puncturing voice drew her away from the traditionally divine orbit of muses into the daily business of confronting disciplinary protocols and rusted-on habits of speaking. Her constant attention to writing strategies, her earthy detonation of apparent problems or crises, “the impossibility of thinking that” and her line-by-line examination of the business of constructing a speaking position, exposed the sweaty labour of trying to think differently. Moreover she consistently demonstrated a refusenik attitude to disciplinary institutionalisation, showing that writing work could issue from scrutinising expectations about how one should speak and write. And you find the faint fall-out from this here in my adoption of an irreverent tone towards Eisenman and my use of an unexpected and low literary genre (the romance) in my tactics of analysis. The terms conventionally associated with the transition moment from apprentice to writer (becoming authentic, original, critical, well-read) did not encompass the range of tactics she taught me: about the politics of how one speaks and where one speaks from.

Many of her techniques underlie the moves of this essay but let me focus on one mode: the constitution of a writer’s voice. Her range over tone and genre constructed a mobile relationship to the material she dealt with. In moving from close-reading, high-level academic citation, to anecdotal, idiomatic, funny and caustic modes, she actively constructed both content and form as the basis for the material practice of writing and the substance of criticism. It was an extremely well crafted production of a voice on the job.

She demonstrated that one could speak intelligently and critically in other guises more connected to the inflections of everyday speech. This semblance (for it is crafted) between the everyday world and the way of speaking is very important, particularly for feminist voices flowing against the current. Morris was insistently wicked, irreverent and somewhat disrespectful. She titled her interrogation/demolition job on Jean Baudrillard “Room 101 or a Few Worst Things in the World”. Puncturing piety marked a feminist rebellion against certain kinds of implicit mastery. Her tone might well have been a deliberate recoil against the reverential voices advertising the wares of French or continental theory but the use of everyday speech modes was a tactic for disinterring work from the history of ideas genre, from “schools of thought” and the saint-like status of certain thinkers whose prestige deflected critique. She shared her strategies of anecdote, allegory and energy with her French counterparts. For example Catherine Clément’s The Lives and Legends of Jacques Lacan (1981, translated 1983) was written in colloquial French and the title’s allusion to the genre of Christian hagiography declared its revisionist status. Her mobility over different genres, each entailing different speaking voices, was used to neutralise and transform dissonant or outsider or seemingly un-feminist material, to produce unexpected conjunctions and mark the intersection of criticism and political activism. The motive force of her criticism was transformation and feminist theory is a politics of change. Her repertoire of techniques marked out a larger spatial zone of operation, because her project was about the operative use of, dare I say it, Francophone theory in feminist and leftist zones in Sydney. The Academy’s borders were expanded “to include a whole range of activities shuttling between pedagogical institutions and the culture industries”: the range of places where we perform and revise and exchange what we know and say.
I can see now in Morris’ essays in The Pirate’s Fiancée what I did not see in 1988 but which I had unconsciously felt. She was struggling hard against pieties and rules about what could be said. Her enclosures were the orthodoxies promulgated by certain leftist political rhetoric and certain feminist declarations, what she called the impossibility of thinking that. And the sense of struggle, of finding a way out, marks the tone of Morris, Clément, Le Doeuff, Freadman, Cixous.

Writing Tactics

Through writing, through the hard work of getting the words down, of choosing certain words and refusing others, we address the discursive conventions that establish the limits of what counts as critical subject matter or methodology. A different shape to writing is one tactic for unsettling protocols. Revisions of writing strategies make both methodological and content innovations. One could write a history of writing in the discipline of architecture. One of the forces in that history would be the struggle between those claiming that writing is a communication tool and those understanding writing as a material force whose technology (inscriptive capacity) shapes “thought”. Writing is a powerful and dominant apparatus in architecture: noting, circulating, explaining, and attending to certain names and buildings. Although it can make a whipping post for polemic (“Despite the common wisdom of recent history and theory, architecture is a verbal, not textual discipline”, complained Robert Somol in 2004), “writing” is also a master metaphor for the structures that organise knowledge.26

Let me suggest provocatively that in the anthologisation of architecture and deconstruction the discipline may have missed one of the most important forces of that coupling: the prospect of writing. The unbending gaze of feminism and post-structuralism towards writing was not merely a focus on the métier of the theorist practitioners but, in Freadman’s remarks, a strategy for producing new speaking positions; in a discourse which “in its untransformed state, leaves a woman no place from which to speak, or nothing to say”. In the disciplines of philosophy and literature the philosophy/writing coupling examined the mutual dependency of the terms, exploring “the transgressive borders or margins of tolerance between philosophy and writing.”27 Derrida’s examination of the dependence of philosophic writing on metaphor despite the discipline’s claims to be an unmediated transmission of “ideas”, freed from the taint of poetic or figurative language, was a tour-de-force example and worth revisiting for architecture. The everyday career politics of patronage and preferment make it punitive to analyse the conditions of speaking: what counts as speech, for whom and by whom, what becomes visible, what is audible. The deconstructive literary turn in part traced the conditions and rules determining speaking even if it could not quite divulge the contemporary players and power politics of who speaks, who is attended to. It was at least an acknowledgement of this problem and a metaphor of its contemporary condition.

Writing strategies are considered interventions. In the 1980s some of the truly inventive writing modes developed in French post-structuralist texts leaked a little into architecture, including Derrida’s painfully bad puns. His piss take on the boosterist effects of so-called criticism, “Why Peter Eisenman Writes Such Good Books” does not quite come off.”28 (No comment from Jeff here, and this particular...
Derrida piece remains un-anthologised in the millennial collections of architectural theory, instead relegated to an architectural collection of "non-architectural" theorists writing about architecture and space. These tactics refused philosophic conventions, often defied the communication paradigm of language, busted rules of aesthetic grace, patrician politeness and norms of elegance or coherency. Of course Derrida's title also exposed the public relations/perfunctory purpose of much architectural project description and theory.

Much of the deliberate "folie" of the "post-structuralist" project dropped out of the Atlantic architectural translation. Although, not quite every piece of writing had its queerness straightened. Daniel Libeskind's lapidary script can be found in a characteristic piece published in AA Files (May 1984). Here Libeskind mixed quotations, script writing conventions, lists, questions, definitions, French and English, literature and philosophy as well as images of collectibles (transfer pottery and dry-goods tins). His bricolage piece offends any straightforward demand that writing communicate in clear English but it might stir even sympathetic readers to wonder if too much playful text might be tiresome. (Dear readers, you need to see the images.) Libeskind's brand of "fictocriticism" is not included in the Hays or Nesbitt anthologies and surfaces just a little in Charles Jencks' later, more eclectic and differently taxonomic collection (Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture) where Libeskind is described thus: "At times gnomic in his writing, Libeskind uses juxtaposition, oxymoron and paradox as heuristic devices to reach beyond the limits of the verbal."31

Jencks' description of Libeskind's writing tactics is usefully compared with a rare moment in Hays' anthology where the wayward writing tactics of "post-structuralism" achieve notice. In his introduction to Jennifer Bloomer's "Abodes of Theory and Flesh: Tabbles of Bower" essay, Hays opens his account by situating Bloomer's text at the intersection of feminism, architectural theory, deconstruction, psychoanalysis and literary theory in the 1980s. He begins successfully enough by noting that the "phallocentric codes of analysis and production ... posit the feminine as that condition which is always already repressed, misrepresented and violated in the very structure of architectural thought". Hays observes Bloomer's call for a minor architecture féminine following the model of l'écriture féminine. Let me contextualise Hays' remarks by offering a feminist reference work's definition of this central but contested term:

écriture féminine is experimental writing, initially French, whose impulse is to inscribe femininity. It writes that for which there is as yet (in phallocentric culture) no language, and which has been marginalized, silenced and repressed in the masculine symbolic order. Its context is the range of feminist moves to produce discursive spaces, in and from which feminine difference and desire may be creatively articulated ... aims to articulate embodied female/feminine subjectivity.32

So far Hays' account of Bloomer in received feminist terms is reasonably cohesive and is maintained when he proceeds to a more detailed analysis of her writing style:

Bloomer's characteristic excessive punning, etymological play, and oversupply of texts, and her deconstruction of boundaries between those texts and her architectural object ("theory and flesh")
refuse traditional modes of presentation and exegesis even at a stylistic level.\textsuperscript{33} His account is a fair description of Bloomer’s modes and one with which I cannot take issue. My problem is that Bloomer is the sole monument designating a mode of tactile writing, a mode that was resolutely central to deconstruction and to French feminism. In being the exception, and through standing in for a way of writing I know to be widespread, tactical and mainstream to deconstruction, the tactics of incendiary, innovative writing have become a woman’s sign of her otherness. Hays’ description of Bloomer’s techniques and subject matter is equally applicable to another essay included in Hays’ collection but not described in these terms: Robert Segrest’s 1984 “The Perimeter Projects: Notes for Design”. Some of these interventions might be traced to the typographic innovations produced by French post-structuralism. For example, Derrida’s own writing strategies in \textit{Glas} (1974, trans. 1986) and afterwards were remarkable.\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Glas} had four separate columns in differing font sizes on double-page spreads, with no notes, no chapter headings, no table of contents, and it appeared to finish in mid sentence. A number of architectural writers other than Bloomer, such as Libeskind, Segrest, and even occasional essays by Ann Bergren and Jeffrey Kipnis, produced collaged, lapidary texts characterised by disjunctive quotations, ruptures, headings, metaphors, allegories, literary material and traditionally non-architectural writing genres such as dialogue and lists.\textsuperscript{35} I remember this being fairly virulent and trying in architectural studio presentations; both in wall texts and oral presentations. My problem is not really with his description of Bloomer’s work but the sole position accorded to Bloomer here as an exponent of the “excessive” text. It is too easy for feminist work to play the Other, to be the minority. Bloomer’s piece is the only notable “feminist” text in the collection. “A certain metaphor of woman has produced (rather than merely illustrated) a discourse that we are obliged ‘historically’ to call the discourse of man”.\textsuperscript{36} Feminism and post-structuralist writing practice are conflated together in a kind of double marginality. Thus a discourse and tactics shared by a number of feminists (Irigaray, Cixous), post-structuralist philosophers such as Derrida, or collaborations between male and female writers, such as Cixous and Derrida’s joint work \textit{Veils} (1998), and a particular collaged mode of architectural writing (Bloomer, Segrest, Libeskind, Bergren, Kipnis), in its public, visible forms drops away.\textsuperscript{37} The fragmentary architectural writing of the later 1980s is comparable to Cixous’ famous “Sorties”\textsuperscript{38}. However, the architectural mode is much more discontinuous, a writing tactic which I think reflects architecture’s permeability to many disciplines and source material, and the problems of suturing the proper architectural canonical texts, and ideas referred to, with these others, including the autobiographical. In trying to explain Bloomer as a feminist deconstructionist Hays got a bit tangled up: “It should be noted that, despite the inscription of a specifically feminine discourse, the terms masculine/feminine do not correspond to men/women as strictly biologically conceived”.\textsuperscript{39} The methods invented by post-structuralist philosophers like Derrida to disrupt the phallocentrism of philosophy by controversially reading as a Woman or in attention to the metaphors of Woman could have been usefully mentioned.\textsuperscript{40} Hays’ confused remarks conflate the thorny problem of whether gender is culturally or biologically inscribed (or how one might imagine both together). Moreover he
combines the problem of origin (is woman a problem of biology or culture?) with the tactic of reading/speaking as the other (the feminine). This collapse will probably puzzle readers unfamiliar with the complex and heated feminist debates around essentialism and biology on the one hand and the deliberate tactics of writing and reading as a woman. These tactics of trying to read otherwise, against norms, are tactics that of course signify differently when they are attached in architecture to the name of Bloomer and not the name of Derrida. Bloomer not Libeskind nor Segrest nor Derrida here embodies the "excess" of French écriture. She is the Other.

The solitary remains of Bloomer in this anthology as the sign of feminism, wayward writing and architecture féminine point to a larger problem in the anthologies under interrogation. As one of the sensitive, acute reviewers of this paper observed, a double occlusion of "gender and genre" can be noted in these anthologies: "Not only were innovative textual practices from deconstruction excluded both through their absence and by being marked as feminine, but key feminist texts from architectural culture (both those that engaged with deconstruction and those that did not) were excluded". We might also describe this expulsion as the marginalisation of sexual and textual difference. Difference here marks the on-going work of active agency in the remaking of categories, taxonomies and nomenclature. But the point is well made. This occlusion is beyond the terrain of an already too large essay but it resonates with the basic polemic of the paper: feminist reading and innovation is all too easily marginalised in the rush to found mainstream innovation without negotiating continuing political pressures and self-introspection. How might we include, and not suppress, the ongoing claims of feminist tactics and politics? Moreover, how can the discipline deal with feminism's assertion that the place of women might be foundational to the discipline's capacity for interrogation? Feminism's status as a place of outsider vision exceeds the discipline's relegation of those claims to marginality. A marginal position arguably provides innovation and critique (remember the avant-garde?). To use the term outsider acknowledges that that which was once mainstream has been relegated and so the struggle over taxonomy and occupation of centrality begins again.

Writing Utopia

Hélène Cixous once declared of writing, "Everyone knows that a place exists which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obliged to reproduce the system. That is Writing". One plays with this possibility of invention and transformation against the sharp limits of discourses, disciplines and of writing as the ownership of speech. Or as Meaghan Morris once demonstrated, a piece of writing can be about the scouring effects of a Few of the Worst Things in The World. But disciplines move in their focus and sometimes against particular politics and strategies. For complex reasons beyond the scope of this essay, the deconstruction/architecture focus was lost and, with it, its attention to the disjunction of the materiality of writing.

Perhaps in disciplines outside literature, the first rush of anthologies of "historical" primary pieces must automatically pay attention to content rather than form (to revive an established and problematic distinction, collapsed by the very material I have been tracing). The Australian presence of cultural
studies theorists, geographers and philosophers and in particular Meaghan Morris and Elizabeth Grosz as important sources for architectural theory was later internationally memorialised in a 2000 anthology *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*. The particular force of writing was under-analysed in the anthology and it was unable to discuss the impact of Morris and Grosz et al. on local Australian architectural theory and history. (I leave a trail of a few sources here in the footnotes for future historians.) These inventive modes of writing and speaking do not have to be "revived", for this is to participate in the historical fiction that they have been lost.

There are many ways one can use, be engaged with, be moved by and interested in history. A conventional and important definition of specific historical knowledge is the history of a discipline. This existing knowledge is usefully read as we discover other people's research, insights and experiments. Amongst the many things that architecturally deconstructive writing and other feminist post-structuralist writing achieved was that it worked energetically with different genres (kinds) of texts. It recognised that conventions of speaker's tone, content, language use, word choice and presumed addressee were written into genre forms. The writing practices I have described in this essay were marked by intertextuality—sometimes physically present in the typographic arrangements or less obviously, but insistently, there in the multiple appropriation of genres and varied modes of speech. The conjunction of different genres staged the multiple voices of an author, performing the different impulses, demands and frictions troubling any unity of self presumed as a necessary prerequisite to demonstrating an authoritative speaking voice.

Demetri Porphyrios once argued that the reconstitution by the writer of the building as a consistent object projected the assumption of the Architect as Author, possessed of a deep individual coherency, possessor of a "unity of thought." Such unity can of course be modified and challenged by reconstructing the complexity of architectural process and production. But this is a large task and the resources necessary for such projects are often those of the historian (archives: textual, oral, drawn) rather than the critic who tends to write to the contemporary.

Another starting point for the critic is reception. Reception, and the contest or subtle differences over program, use of space and the meaning of an architectural project, provide important terrain for architectural historians. The shifting tilt of who owns, or defines, or reads an architectural project is much harder to capture for criticism, with its demand on contemporary response, more difficult access to reception, and with a less available or comprehensive "archive" of different voices. However, new formations are suggesting other ways to generate multiple proper names as readers and writers working on contemporary buildings, or still-occupied older buildings, whose meaning remains under negotiation and production.

A recently founded Melbourne journal *Post* writes on architecture in different ways. *Post* attempts to examine architecture post-inhabitation, post the moment of its box-fresh newness and with a number of voices involved. It seeks "multiple attitudes towards architecture" and is sold in a range of bookstores, presumably to elicit a wider audience beyond the confines of the architectural community. Its call for submissions ran as follows:
POST is an accessible student-initiated magazine. Architecture journals traditionally critique buildings just after completion, contributing to their portrayal as static and uncontaminated objects. POST sits outside this convention, revisiting spaces. It explores architecture as an ever-evolving process, acknowledging that the success of a space largely depends upon its relationship with the inhabitant. POST aims to represent multiple attitudes towards architecture from inhabitant through to practitioner; architect, developer, builder, artist, interior designer, writer, etc. We are calling for submissions based on the theme of the first issue—social/community housing. We welcome personal accounts, critique and articles.45

In its first issue—titled “(Anti) Social Housing”—Post included responses from inhabitants of the Atherton Garden Estate, a 1960s public housing project in inner city Melbourne. Responses were elicited by letterbox drops and on-the-spot interviews with the Man and Woman in the Street asking for their responses to the spaces. In part the magazine was stimulated by an editor’s participation in a contemporary undergraduate history class within an architecture department in which she was being trained. The course was explicitly directed towards the understanding of genre conventions as a constraint producing the content and forms of criticism.46

This magazine reinvents the genre of architectural criticism by mobilising a wider range of genres than those generally made available for architecture. Using questionnaires, letterboxing and interviews on the street, the journal challenges the formulaic building review. In so doing it draws on a general notion of writing, outside the oppositions of high and low, using a category that recognises interviews or questionnaires as writing. These “minor” writing forms are also governed by genre conventions.47 Post reworks the new work genre, not by ruling it out but by enlarging its boundaries, and suggesting that the category might be invaded by hybridity: more genres rather than fewer, a pirating of other techniques and domains. The role played by the Other in conventional architectural discourse, as Philosopher, Critic, Muse or Scapegoat (capitalism, property developers, suburbanite etc.) slips out of its generic costume. The inventive writing strategies of the late 1980s were part of a sustained attention to writing, and the questions remain alive: who speaks, in what name do they speak (on whose authority) and on behalf of whom or what do they speak? Deploying multiple voices, genres and tones was one way to address the unity of a singular voice that seems to cover the tracks of these questions. To introduce another example or topic now would break the conventions of an essay—which in part achieves its force through unity of material and structure—whereby a conclusion reunites all of the parts of the essay experienced. However, my old technology of the library or the multiple genres/voices of the deconstructivist essay might be read as a synonym of new social media forms such as blogs and posts.

Post

This paper has argued both polemically and conventionally that genre counts. Genre specifies, but does not demand, that writing conventions of plot, character choice, symbolic status of key figures, or relations between
characters, in part shape the subject matter at hand. Theory work, or criticism, or history work can be over-run by pre-existing genre conventions which it may choose not to recognise by operating in the more bland "history of ideas" arena. In the flattened, universal space of architecture’s reception of philosophy/theory depicted in later anthologies, other forces intervene: geographical reception, history (the timing of reception) and the sometimes invisible structures of writing as a pre-given story-telling relationship. Whilst history-making offers (temporary) closure it is never too late to re-write and re-adjust the margins.

The question of how to speak remains sharp for me: how to rewrite the academic or journalistic genres in which I practise, how to invent methods (usually pirated) in order to find a way of saying something different. How to run the risk of being ruled out of order; how to transform authors, autograph inscriptions and autobiography into something else. How to make a unity of the bits and pieces that comprise the everyday and not sequester them from the material business of writing. A library offers individual filings and provides a disparate but overall collection: a place for imagining and describing this movement towards a different memory.

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Notes


11. Barthes’ remarks are comparable to Michel Foucault’s on the difference between a history of ideas and the history of discourses and the importance of the statement for forming the latter: “what is said about something”. See Anne Freadman, “On Being Here


25. At the symposium that occasioned this essay, Julian Raxworthy observed that Peter Connolly, working in the Landscape Architecture Program at RMIT University was also engaging with post-structuralist work, but my recollection is that Peter Connolly arrived later than the 1987–92 period I am discussing. However, a longer, historical study would note the importance of the independent art, writing, architecture journal Pataphysics, founded 1988 and edited by two RMIT architecture students. The magazine linked local and international currents and a 1989 issue included an essay on deconstruction in architecture.


27. Elizabeth Grosz, “Derrida and the Limits of Philoso-


43. Other Sydney architectural writers to be added to this list would include Sue Best and Bronwyn Hanna. These formal notations of course do not give a sense of the events and conversations, the participation of architectural people in Grosz’s seminars, Morris lectures and the milieu of interest.


45. The editors of this founding issue were Jacqui Alexander, Connie Burgos, Kate Milligan, Tom Morgan and Daniel Salmon. Jacqui Alexander, Connie Burgos, Kate Milligan, Tom Morgan and Daniel Salmon, POST magazine, 1, 1 (2007).

46. Interview with Jacqui Alexander August 2009. In this course that I ran at RMIT buildings were visited every week, tutorials were held on site and students were asked to write in the genres of tour guides and new building reviews.

References

Alexander, Jacqui, Connie Burgos, Kate Milligan, Tom Morgan and Daniel Salmon. POST magazine, 1, 1 (2007).


