

Ficto/critical Strategies

Subverting Textual Practices of Meaning, Other, and Self-Formation

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Declaration / Erklärung

I hereby assert that I have autonomously wrought all parts of this thesis and have not availed myself of any means other than those stated.

Hiermit versichere ich, dass ich diese Arbeit in allen Teilen selbstständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Hilfsmittel benutzt habe.

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Kurzzusammenfassung

Diese Dissertation theoretisiert die sonderbare textliche Führung fikto/kritischen Schreibens, welches das Literarische mit dem Akademischen, sowie Ästhetik mit Poetik und Ethik zusammenfallen lässt.

Die Einleitung konzipiert das Fikto/kritische auf eine Weise neu, die sowohl dessen Impuls sich Genres zu widersetzen, als auch seiner weiteren diskursiven Zweckmäßigkeit gerecht wird. Der Schrägstrich signalisiert die Verbindung zwischen einer selbstreflexiv *fikto*-kritischen und einer fikto-*kritisch* motivierten Ausrichtung. Die zweifache Trope ist somit nicht mehr auf nur einen positionalen Zweck beschränkt, sondern kann überall dort eingesetzt werden, wo unsere textlichen Praktiken in weitergehenden diskursiven Formierungen impliziert sind, die kritisiert werden.

Der zweite Teil zeichnet den tropischen Verlauf von *fikto*-kritischem Vektor und Wendung anhand von Stephen Muecke's „The Fall“ nach. Er zeigt wie die ununterscheidbare Verschränkung von Ästhetik und Poetik die Perspektive eines generischen *dazwischen* auf textlicher Ebene auf die *meta*-generische Ebene unserer textlichen Praktiken verschiebt. Letztere geraten somit auf den Prüfstand während sie noch im Gange sind, und können dabei potentiell sogar verändert werden.

Der dritte Teil definiert zuerst fikto/kritische Strategien im Rückgriff solch frühere Theoretisierungen wie Michael Taussigs „The Corn-Wolf.“ Er qualifiziert die fikto/kritische Figur zugleich als *verräterisch* im Bezug auf das generische Feld aus der sie je hervorgeht und als *apotropäisch* im Bezug auf die diskursiven Mechanismen gegen die sie sich je richtet. Im Anschluss werden Aritha van Herks *Places Frau From Ellesmere* und John Hughes *Someone Else* herangezogen um eine Theorie des Fikto/kritischen als kunstvoll gedankenexperimentelles Schreiben zu formulieren.

Der vierte Teil zeichnet in Gail Jones' „Thaumatropes“ nach, wie die zweifach fikto/kritische Trope die unmittelbare Realisierung des *Fikto*-kritischen für kritische Impulse einspannt, die auf weitere diskursive Formationen gerichtet sind. Wo das *Fikto-kritische* so auch Ästhetik und Ethik ununterscheidbar zusammenfallen lässt, entwickelt es eine Schärfe, die unsere gegenwärtige textliche Führung – die ohnehin bereits auf dem *fikto*-kritischen Prüfstand steht während sie noch im Gange ist – im Gegenstand seiner Kritik impliziert. Die vollkommene zweifache Trope wird in Katrina Schlunkes exemplarisch fikto/kritischem Text *Bluff Rock* sodann noch einmal nachvollzogen.

Die Konklusion erwägt abschliessend die Möglichkeit einer generellen Fikto/kritik.

Abstract

This dissertation theorises the peculiar textual conduct of *ficto/critical* writing, which intersects the literary with the academic, and aesthetics with poetics *as well as* ethics.

The first part re-conceives of the *ficto/critical* in a way that captures both its genre-resisting impetus and its wider discursive purposefulness. The slash signals the conjunction between a self-reflexive *ficto-critical* and a motivated *ficto-critical* direction. This twofold trope is now no longer limited to only one positional purpose, but can be deployed wherever our textual practices are implied in the wider discursive formations under critique.

The second part retraces the tropical itineraries of the *ficto-critical* vector and twist in Stephen Muecke's "The Fall." It shows how the inextricable intersection of aesthetics and poetics shifts perspective from the generic *between* on the textual level onto the *meta-generic* level of our textual practices. The latter are thus simultaneously under way, under scrutiny, and potentially under revision.

The third part first defines *ficto/critical* strategies with recourse to earlier theorisations such as Michael Taussig's "The Corn-Wolf." It qualifies the *ficto/critical* trope both as *traitorous* towards the generic fields from within which it departs and as *apotropaic* towards the discursive mechanisms that it targets. Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* and John Hughes' *Someone Else* are enlisted to develop a theory of the *ficto/critical* in terms of artful thought experimental writing.

The fourth part first retraces in Gail Jones' "Thaumatrope" how the twofold *ficto/critical* trope harnesses the striking realisations of the *ficto-critical* for its critical impetus towards wider discursive formations. As the *ficto-critical* thus inextricably intersects aesthetics with ethics, it develops an edge that implies our textual conduct, which is already under scrutiny as it is presently under way, in its object of critique. The full two-step trope is then retraced in Katrina Schlunke's exemplary text *Bluff Rock*.

The conclusion then briefly entertains the possibility of a general *ficto/critique*.

*

Above all, this theorisation of the *ficto/critical* praises it as an ingenious cross between an aesthetic of deconstruction and an interventionist aesthetic. It does so in the reasoned hope precisely *not* to arrest its subversive potential with theory, but to the contrary, to endow its manifold unpredictable impetus with new momentum.

Introducing the Ficto/critical

Advance on the thesis: academic and literary writing intersect to form *literary* theories. The resulting textual form is distinguished by the simultaneity of academic non-fiction *and* fiction – or: criticism *and* literature, theory *and* fiction. This artificially wrought unity of allegedly separate and opposed textualities presents a curious syzygy. In a word: fictocriticism. Such has been the idea for some time now.

But then, sometimes, theoretical fictions of this kind incorporate conceptual frictions that make perceptible the stuff and processes from which they are wrought while at the same time giving enlightening and instructive direction to these performatively experiential insights. Now, *that* shall be the *theory* – outside of which, remains of primordial importance only the *practice* of reading and writing: ficto/critically, as it were. As always, the crux of the matter consists in its intersections: here, most significantly in the *between* that is *both* the textual relation *and* our wider discursive relating through it. So much, perhaps, up front, as an advance on the ficto/critical to come.

* * *

Antecedently, I will offer you here only a rather rough sketch of the fictocritical, to begin with. The name “fictocriticism” is often evoked to subsume motivated experimental writing practices that confound, and thereby problematise, the generic distinctions between fiction and criticism, between fiction and non-fiction, between philosophy and literature. Fictocritical texts are usually playful in tone and experimental in attitude. At the same time, fictocritical writing is often ethically motivated as well as heavily in/formed by, mostly poststructuralist, theory. Bringing fictional means into the realm of generic academic writing, for example, fictocriticism augments the conceptual relation of such – often anaemic – non-fictional texts with the more affective relation of a literary reading. But the literary aspects in fictocritical texts not only contribute an experience that is generically excluded from academic writing. In fact, their literary imagery often subtly acquires conceptual significance for the academic discourses thus addressed. Even more profoundly, in so doing, the fictocritical sometimes perceptibly stages the fictional premises of non-fictional writing. Arguably, fictocriticism thus

aspires to present a critique via form – which, as I later want to establish, is most effective where the per/form/ative aspects of textual form enter the equation self-reflexively.

Fictocriticism first emerged under this name in the 1990s at the fringes of the Canadian art-scene¹ and within – albeit at the (perceived) margins of – the Australian academy, where the introduction of postgraduate degrees combining units in creative writing and literary theory provided a productive institutional environment that has propelled such writing.² Since then, fictocritical textual practices have become increasingly prolific internationally – if not always under that name³ – and gained further institutional currency, especially in Australia. Importantly, in the university context, fictocritical writing has originated and proliferated in proximity to the fertile grounds of contemporary feminist, post/colonial, queer, and other marginal/ised discourses, which, at that historical moment, acutely experienced a lack of academic speaking positions available to them. One frequently offered narrative explains that a different kind of textual form was required in order to narrow the gap between the official academic voice and these respectively situated personal speaking positions. The rationale of this story was that writers with such personal motivational backgrounds and equipped with the theoretical wherewithal broke the generic textual structures in their respective academic subjects in an attempt also to break with the wider discursive structures that kept their respective speaking positions marginal/ised, not only at the academy.

Indeed, much fictocritical writing focuses on the intersecting discursive relations between the differentially structured linguistic, corporeal, social, and environmental fields, all of which, firstly, impact on an individual's formation of self in relation to the world and other and, secondly, are usually heavily mediated through text-discursive formations. Thus, I want to suggest, the nucleus of fictocritical writing practices can be marked as *a form of textual resistance* – in theory and practice – to common generic distinctions *in combination with an ethical motivation* against linguistic-discursive

¹ Helen Flavell, "Who Killed Jeanne Randolph? King, Muecke or 'Ficto-Criticism,'" in *Outskirts: Feminisms Along the Edge*, edited by Alison Bartlett, vol. 20, 2009: <<http://www.outskirts.arts.uwa.edu.au/volumes/volume-20/flavell>> (Apr. 24, 2012). [Hereafter: Flavell, "Randolph" (no pagination)]

² Anne Brewster, "Fictocriticism: Pedagogy and Practice," in *Crossing Lines: Formations of Australian Culture*, edited by Caroline Guerin et al., Adelaide: Association for the Study of Australian Literature, 1996, p. 89-90.

³ There is a plethora of applicable and related labels in use. To name but a few: creative non-fiction, fiction-theory, paracriticism, autobiographical non-fiction, critifiction, crypto-friction, writing-between, etc.

practices of marginalisation and domination. The point of interest here is that in conflating generically separated textual approaches, fictocritical writing performatively directs attention to our dominant textual practices and the particular functions they often serve within our wider discursive practices, such as differential identity formation in relation to the world and others. In many ways *the precise connection* between these two aspects of fictocriticism – between genre-subversion and marginal/ised speaking positions, between the text-discursive and the wider discursive, between the fictional and the ethical, theory and criticism – shall be the main subject of this thesis. In pursuit of this question the careful study of *marginal* fictocritical texts and writing practices shall yield significant insights into our textual practices *in general* if we dare to re-examine, on a *systemic* level, the mechanisms and constellations that fictocritical texts deploy differently.

*

Alternatively, a helpful introduction to fictocriticism can be assembled by quoting three influential passages that sketch an enticing little *history of the idea* via the practice, the concepts behind it, and the term hovering above it. This triad of references often features in introductory passages on the topic⁴ – a fact that has since itself become the object of some critical investigation.⁵

Firstly, as early as the mid-eighties, in her text “Poststructuralism and the Paraliterary,”⁶ Rosalind Krauss has perceptively observed the following development:

[S]tudents, having experienced the collapse of modernist literature, have turned to the literary products of postmodernism, among the most powerful examples of which are the paraliterary works of Barthes and Derrida. If one of the tenets of modernist literature had been the creation of a work that would force reflection on the conditions of its own construction, that would insist on reading as a much more consciously *critical* act, then it is not surprising that the medium of a *postmodernist* literature should be the critical text wrought in a paraliterary form. And what is clear is that Barthes and Derrida are the *writers*, not the critics, that students now read. (Krauss, “Paraliterary,” p. 292)

⁴ For example: Simon Robb, *Fictocritical Sentences*, Ph.D. thesis presented at the University of Adelaide, 2001, p. 5.

⁵ For example: Flavell, “Randolph.”

⁶ Rosalind E. Krauss, “Poststructuralism and the Paraliterary,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986, 291-5. [Hereafter: Krauss, “Paraliterary,” p. ...]

This pivotal shift in perspective, which recognises the literary value of critical and theoretical works and allows for a *reception* attitude of productive generic confusion, certainly functions as a precursor to fictocritical writing practices. Coming from a focus on theory and criticism, Krauss uses the term “paraliterary” to good effect, but, changing direction, “paracritical” or “paratheoretical” would have been just as apt. For the present study, two things are especially remarkable: firstly, how Krauss already senses a creative relation between (modernist) meta-reflections and (post/modernist) experimentation and, secondly, how she also references “*reading* as a much more consciously critical act [my re-emphasis],” for which the writerly and critical acts almost converge on the page – as the quote’s last sentence would suggest.

Secondly, in an interview with Derek Attridge for *Acts of Literature*,⁷ Jacques Derrida effectively corroborates Krauss’ assessment of the generic boundaries with this statement:

I don’t feel at ease either with a rigorous distinction between ‘literature’ and ‘literary criticism’ or with a confusion of the two. What would the rigorous limit between them be? [...] Yet I would not say that we can mix everything up and give up the distinctions between all these types of ‘literary’ or ‘critical’ production (for there is also a ‘critical’ instance at work ‘*in*’ what is called the literary work). So it is necessary to determine or delimit another space where we justify relevant distinctions between certain forms of literature and certain forms of ... I don’t know what name to give it, that’s the problem, we must invent one for those ‘critical’ inventions which belong to literature while deforming its limits. (Derrida, “Strange Institution,” p. 52)

On the one hand, there is palpable anticipation here to thoroughly deconstruct – theoretically and performatively – the dichotomy “between ‘literature’ and ‘literary criticism.’” The generically in-between space that Derrida envisions as the place from which to reflect and change fixed generic patterns also opens, on another level, the designated aporetic realm that would succeed such deconstructive processes. On the other hand, Derrida perhaps already sensed the *systemic* difficulty of putting a quasi-generic label to something “paraliterary” that could be so formally unpredictable and diverse – coming, as it would, with the same force and justification from both sides of a divide that it aims to put under erasure. Possibly then, he knowingly did not actually

⁷ Jacques Derrida, interview with Derek Attridge, “‘This Strange Institution Called Literature’: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 33-75. [Hereafter: Derrida, “Strange Institution,” p. ...]

provide the name he called for, granting these practices just a little longer in their quasi edenic state *avant la lettre*, because a name, any name, would hasten in, from an unexpected angle, the very forces of genre these practices aim to exorcise. In any case, each of these aspects will become relevant for the theory of the ficto/critical that the present study shall eventually advance.

Thirdly, Stephen Muecke has prominently referenced this Derridean challenge for a name in his exemplary fictocritical essay “The Fall.”⁸ which was first published under the more definitionally ambitious title “The Fall: Fictocritical Writing.”⁹

Once Jacques Derrida, the French Philosopher, asked us for a name [...].

The name we would have given him was ‘fictocriticism’, but he went on anyway to write, and perform, critically, and sometimes fictionally, for instance by telling stories while making his philosophical arguments.

(Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 18)

By thus cleverly indicating that the lack of a name has never harmed the practice, Muecke still appears to establish the ingenious term “fictocriticism” in direct response to Derrida, for what Krauss called a paraliterary criticism. Notably, Muecke here adapts the collective markers “us” and “we,” presumably speaking for the loose conglomerate of writers operating under the name fictocriticism at the time. However, this general gesture was soon to be offset by different more specific and more motivationally inflected perspectives that individual writers have since assumed together with the name.

In any case, this introductory triad of quotes, each of which contributes to a useful definition of fictocriticism, constructs only one – albeit powerful – narrative. It has the obvious advantage of delivering *a history of the idea* that is closely linked with the term: fictocriticism emerged at a point in time when the critical text was increasingly wrought in paraliterary form. In theory, it marks the consequential space where critical inventions that belong to literature *as well as* literary inventions that pertain to criticism become interventions as they proceed to deform the respective limits of their genres from an undefined space somewhere in-between. One ready way to figure fictocritical textual practice, in this sense, is the intersection, on the page, of storytelling with philosophical arguments – making the two indistinguishably reliant on each other. This figurative aspect, too, shall become centrally important for the refined model of the fictocritical that the present thesis proposes. However, although this second rough

⁸ Stephen Muecke, “The Fall,” in *Joe in the Andamans and Other Fictocritical Stories*, Sydney: Local Consumptions Publications, 2008, p. 18-25. [Hereafter: Muecke, “The Fall,” p. ...]

⁹ Stephen Muecke, “The Fall: Fictocritical Writing,” in *Parallax*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2002, p. 108-12.

sketch, again, captures central traits of the fictocritical fairly well, it may still not tell the whole story. There are certainly other legitimate and important narratives, which emphasise different aspects of the fictocritical that need to be taken into account.

*

Ambitiously, Helen Flavell has made the effort, in her study *Writing-Between: Australian and Canadian Ficto-Criticism*,¹⁰ to re-trace the *historical* itinerary of the neologism “fictocriticism,” via Frederic Jameson, to the Canadian artist and art critic Jeanne Randolph (Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. 191-250). Against this background, she could then critically respond to Muecke’s version of the naming narrative in the aforementioned “Who Killed Jeanne Randolph? King, Muecke or ‘Ficto-Criticism.’” Significantly, Flavell contextualises her historical research with reference to the genesis of fictocritical writing practices as a form of experimental *feminist* writing (Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. 140-90, esp. 158-70). Thus, on top of historical accuracy, Flavell also echoes the strategic move to claim fictocriticism not so much as a feminist thing (Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. 163-5), but, figuratively, as a feminine *space between* in writing. Such are the *origins* of the fictocritical that Flavell’s extensive research between Canada and Australia reveals. On this basis, however, it should already be noted here that her conception of (hyphenated) “ficto-criticism” emphasises its cross-cultural signature as a hybrid form of writing in equal measure – as is evident, for example, in her reading of Fred Wah’s *Diamond Grill*¹¹ (Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. 62-7).

Importantly, Flavell thus highlights *and* exemplifies something that is not as prevalent in Muecke’s “The Fall,” namely a positioned involvement, in terms of personal interest, that in/forms fictocriticism. In this sense, Flavell’s *academic* thesis also marks a feminist *intervention* in the perpetuation of narratives surrounding the fictocritical – and in this sense her academic work is *not* disinterested for very good reasons. Most importantly, from the perspective of the present study, Flavell thus recognises an *ethical* motivation as central in both her conceptualisation of the term and her theorisation of the writing practices. Furthermore, her approach does not merely mention this additionally, but rather makes it central to her theory of the ficto-critical.

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¹⁰ Helen Flavell, *Writing-Between: Australian and Canadian Ficto-Criticism*, Ph.D. thesis presented at Murdoch University, Perth, 2004. [Hereafter: Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. ...]

¹¹ Fred Wah, *Diamond Grill*, Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2006.

Arguably, while both of these narratives are valid – up to a point – and important, they also both have their weaknesses. While Muecke’s Derrida narrative suggests an evocative and almost explanatory scenario, which yet falls short of including the central motivational aspect of fictocritical writing, Flavell’s genealogical narrative emphasises an ethical dimension, yet tacitly participates in claiming a principally open writing practice for particular positioned backgrounds and traditions – first and foremost, feminism and hybrid identities. Somewhat paradoxically, such moves claim the special brand of fictocritical openness in a gesture with exclusive tendencies. In fairness, though, Muecke has much to say on ethical motivation for fictocritical writing elsewhere,¹² and Flavell’s theorisation – which is one of the best available – is much more inclusive than my short and necessarily reductive sketch would imply.

In contrast to the diachronic perspectives of Muecke’s short history of the idea and Flavell’s historical survey, I would now like to embark on developing a more synchronically inclined view in order to re-conceive of the fictocritical over the course of this thesis. The intersection of fiction and criticism as well as the theoretical and ethical dimensions of textual discourse, I want to argue, need to be made central to a *systemic* conceptualisation of fictocriticism that can hope to capture its various historical strands *as well as* possible forms to come without stifling its subversive potential. What is yet to be achieved, I want to suggest, is a theorisation of the fictocritical that captures its defining general pattern, which is at work in all of the different fictocritical strands and their various unpredictable textual formations.

¹² For example: Stephen Muecke, “A Chance to Hear a Nyigina Song,” in *Joe in the Andamans*, Sydney: LCP, 2008, p. 80-93. This is just one recent of many possible references that testify to Muecke’s sustained, ethically motivated, fictocritical engagement with inter-cultural and post/colonial concerns.

a) What's in a Name?

Ambivalently, both Muecke's and Flavell's narratives of the fictocritical focus centrally on the name, which is at least partly surprising because they both acknowledge the reservation frequently encountered among fictocritical writers that providing a name – and thus a quasi-generic label – for texts as genre-resistant and purposively slippery as those subsumed under the name “fictocriticism” risks turning these practices into just another genre.¹³ In the following section, however, I would like to refute such fears and instead outright celebrate the ingenuity of the name “fictocriticism,” by re-conceiving of it from the slightly tilted angle of a fresh approach. In other words, where both Muecke and Flavell anchored their approaches in the historical incident of the naming, while yet remaining ostensibly suspicious of its generic implications, I would now like to reverse direction. My synchronous and systemic re-conceptualisation of fictocriticism shall produce the virtues of the term in a manner that, firstly, prevents the perceived dangers of generic re-territorialisation and, secondly, accommodates both Muecke's and Flavell's different core emphases. Let us, therefore, dwell on this intriguing and telling name for just a little while longer.

The Performative Compound: Ficto-Criticism

Among all the diverse contenders for a name, I want to argue, “fictocriticism” presents a particularly fortunate composition because the term displays what the writing practices it designates do. Wrought from the two constituent parts fiction and criticism, “ficto-criticism” functions as a *performative compound* already illustrating typographically what it denotes. Anne Brewster has expressed this nominal and generic amalgamation in her essay “Fictocriticism: Undisciplined Writing”¹⁴ thus:

The portmanteau neologism invokes two oppositional constitutive terms, fiction and criticism. If there is a generic division or opposition which fictocriticism seeks to mediate, it is the demarcation inscribed in academic

¹³ Muecke tacitly concedes this in his response to Derrida quoted above (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 18), but Flavell more acutely focalises the problematic implications in her “General Introduction – Fix-criticism” (Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. 1-2).

¹⁴ Anne Brewster, “Fictocriticism: Undisciplined Writing,” in *Writing – Teaching, Teaching Writing*, edited by Jan Hutchinson et al., Sydney: UTS, 1996, p. 29-32. [Hereafter: Brewster, “Undisciplined Writing,” p. ...]

production of the genres of high art (fiction, poetry, drama) and the essayistic modes which purport to study them (commentary, criticism, analysis, theory). The opposition between these two genres is figured in the way we characterise criticism, for example, as neutral and disinterested and literature as expressive of a personalised subjectivity. Another figuring of this opposition is the notion that criticism trades in ideas; literature in states of emotion and feeling. (Brewster, “Undisciplined Writing,” p. 29)

Brewster’s point is that the institutionalised generic polarity of fiction and criticism, in all its multi-faceted aspects, is already figured as overcome by the term. But the terminologically incorporated combination of literary and non-fictional discourse can also be rephrased productively on various other levels. Consider, for example, how the term similarly evokes the following oppositions:

Fiction + Criticism
Fiction + Theory
Literature + *Philosophy*
Aesthetics + Poetics
Aesthetics + Ethics
Fiction + *Non-fiction*

The most fundamental distinction here is between fictional texts that purport *to constitute a world* in their own right (literature, fiction), and non-fictional texts that purport *to represent our world* which exists prior to their making reference to it (philosophy, science, theory, criticism). This distinction between *truth-constituting* and *truth-representing* discourses anticipates a central text-epistemological dimension in fictocriticism. Note that *in writing* these two kinds of discourse converge on the page, where they are *paradigmatically* indistinguishable. Fictocritical writing, as I am going to argue throughout this thesis, makes much of this discursively unsettling textual insight.

Before advancing too far too early, however, it is perhaps worthwhile rephrasing and expanding one insight from Brewster’s passage in particular. In the context of my own institutions – the *Institut für Englische Philologie* at *Freie Universität Berlin* and the English and Cultural Studies department at the University of Western Australia – a fictocritical text, thus understood, would blur the line between the kind of primary texts we read (literature, fiction) and the kind of secondary texts we are taught to write *on* them (criticism, theory, non-fiction). In particular, it would shift the institutionalised

generic practice from writing non-fiction *on* fiction to the fictocritical practice of writing *fiction* on fiction, *albeit endowed with non-fictional import*. In this sense, fictocritical texts are *fictional* contributions to *non-fictional* debates – sometimes even to non-fictional debates on fiction. Such fictocritical turns in perspective and practice cause the all-too familiar elements of everyday reading and writing to spin in an academically unheard-of manner.

These fictocritical effects, however, are not achieved by simply placing narration and argument side by side. They need to become indistinguishable, inextricably the same thing. Here is how Heather Kerr, in her essay “Sympathetic Topographies,”¹⁵ describes that strange polar unity which fictocriticism implies:

The academic’s assertion of meaning and the narrator’s performance are paired as opposites: ‘either you fail to be moved by the text (by asking what it means, you don’t let it work), or the text moves you (by not asking what it means, you let it work). The fictocritical effect is to combine the fantastic transformations of fiction with critical theory. (Kerr, “Topographies,” p. 113)

In this sense, such texts function like picture puzzles, in which both figures are simultaneously *on display* and *at work*. Juxtaposing their respective parameters and orientation the figures thus bring each other into a paradoxical relief that requires us to take a step back if we are to make sense of the bigger picture, rather than taking only one of their (generic) sides. From Kerr’s perspective the fictocritical effect and challenge thus lies in a mutually dependent generic “as well as” rather than a decidable “either/or.” She certainly prefers the insights of an *aporia* over both one-sided decisions.

As a consequence of this perception, fictocriticism not only intersects generic opposites but, in so doing, makes them excessive. For the seminal collection *The Space Between: Australian Women Writing Fictocriticism*¹⁶ Amanda Nettelbeck has expressed this pointedly in her “Notes towards an Introduction”¹⁷:

Fictocriticism might most usefully be defined as hybridized writing that moves between the poles of fiction (‘invention’/‘speculation’) and criticism (‘deduction’/‘explication’), of subjectivity (‘interiority’) and objectivity

¹⁵ Heather Kerr, “Sympathetic Topographies,” in *Parallax*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2001, p. 107-26. [Hereafter: Kerr, “Topographies,” p. ...]

¹⁶ *The Space Between: Australian Women Writing Fictocriticism*, edited by Heather Kerr and Amanda Nettelbeck, Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1998.

¹⁷ Amanda Nettelbeck, “Notes towards an Introduction,” in *The Space Between*, edited by Heather Kerr et al., Perth: UWA Press, 1998, p. 1-17. [Hereafter: Nettelbeck, “Introduction,” p. ...]

(‘exteriority’). It is writing that brings the ‘creative’ and the ‘critical’ together – not simply in the sense of placing them side by side, but in the sense of mutating both, of bringing a spotlight to bear upon the known forms in order to make them ‘say’ something else. (Nettelbeck, “Introduction,” p. 4)

Thus, fictocritical texts conflate elements of these genres and their characteristic aspects, in order to create “something else,” that is, in order not only to say something different but to say it differently as well. Fictocriticism, and this echoes Derrida’s point, thus creates something that can no longer be contained within the erstwhile generic structures on which it yet feeds – a *something* that, in fact, ultimately necessitates a reassessment of the entire generic field and its conditions of possibility.

Nettelbeck’s suggested understanding of fictocriticism as *hybrid* writing has even found typographical expression. Sometimes, as in Flavell’s spelling above, the performative term has been *hyphenated* to visually emphasise the generic hybridity of the form it designates:

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Especially against motivational background concerns that arise from hyphenated identities and their hybrid speaking positions, this textual performativity of the hyphenated nomination transports more than just the generically hybrid style of fictocritical writing practices.

It will be worthwhile, in any case, to keep reminding oneself which oppositions are at play in the fictocritical, and which are real oppositions. If fictocriticism situates itself *between* fiction and non-fiction, making the two indistinguishable, its value can hardly consist in either bringing the alleged virtue of one side into the realm of the other. Where fictocriticism has surplus value on offer, this must certainly lie in aspiring to *a different level entirely*.

Further Fictocritical Self-Perceptions

Apart from hybridity, an entire spectrum of self-perceptions is explicit in fictocritical literature, which can provide further introductory characterisation of fictocritical writing at this early stage. From the many self-stylising perceptions that can be found in different texts, I shall mention here only some that are frequently evidenced, have

proved influential, and will furthermore serve as reference points to anticipate first shifts in perspective that my approach will fully introduce later.

First of all, fictocriticism is often said to create *a marginal space between* dominant generic forms. The terminology of the “space between” and “the gap” has been influential for some time now – testament of which is the formative essay collection *The Space Between*. A decade on, the space between is still the trope most readily associated with fictocriticism. Its figurative potential has been put to good use on a number of levels, too, bringing together inter-cultural realities, inter-generic forms, and ascribing female form to writing. But while the notion of a space between generic centres naturalises the fictocritical at the margins, I want to maintain that this does not at all condemn it to only marginal relevance. Quite to the contrary, theorising these deviant writing practices may actually cast a different light on our writing practices in general. While fictocriticism takes its historical motivation from the academic margins and presents a generically marginal form, it may yet provide insights of central importance into our textual practices and textual culture in general. In this vein, I would like to re-interpret the terminology of “the gap” and “the space between” in such a way that its potential for marginal writing practices can be perceived at work on the constitutive level of our textual practices – not least, because such awareness among textual agents would greatly enhance the radical potential, momentum, and edge of the fictocritical.

At the same time, fictocriticism has been hailed as *genre-crossing*, *genre-subverting*, and *genre-defying* writing that is not itself a textual genre but a *writing practice*. It is thus not only about writing in the sense of the written, but about *writing* as a process, as a kind of textual performance. According to this view, fictocriticism is not a fixed textual form at all, but a performative writing practice, whose outcomes are therefore unpredictable on the textual level. Therein lies the genre-defying strength of fictocriticism, which has been characterised, in Deleuzian terms, as *de-territorialising* (Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. 42-3) because it breaks supposedly fixed structures, makes them move, and thus opens a realm of potential to re-structure known fields. This is a revolutionary impetus in fictocriticism that cannot easily be explained away in the dominant terms it ventures to critique. And yet, I want to maintain, there is also a sense in which it is problematic to call something as territorially rigid and fixed as an inscribed textual structure de-territorialising. If fictocritical *writing* is de-territorialising, the resulting fictocritical text as the trace of that process is, by contrast, a thoroughly territorial structure. Note that this is a constitutive feature of *the textual medium*. Hence, different, better, and even fictocritical writing cannot get around this fact. What we need

therefore is a complementary understanding of how fictocritical texts can elicit de-territorialising readings. Ultimately, our theorising of the fictocritical needs to, firstly, narrow perspective from a general genre-defying tendency to the paradigmatic acts that create this force, and thus, secondly, expand perspective from the inscribed structures of the textual work to include our textual acts of reading and writing.

Fictocritical writing is also frequently characterised as *self-reflexively* aware of the practices it engages. Importantly, fictocriticism not only includes some other forms of writing in the critique it mounts, but also *its own* writing. As a result, this kind of self-reflexivity is usually circumspectly aware of its own practices and their consequences when criticising others – which brings to mind my parent’s advice to always think twice before finger pointing because in the event three of my fingers would be pointing right back at me. Fictocriticism makes a virtue of this awareness as its kind of critique engages in finger pointing only through a self-reflexively inclusive gesture. Note that this circumspect kind of self-reflexivity is also just one example of a *post-critical* attitude ascribed to fictocriticism, which avoids the moral high ground of philosophy.¹⁸ By contrast, the post-critical aim is to not simply assume a privileged speaking position from which to judge, but to at least reflect this assumption in the act. Similarly, much fictocriticism avoids claims to generality and objectivity, proposing *partial and situated knowledges* instead. A non-transcendental tendency and prioritisation of the local can often be discerned as well. Not so much despite as in harmony with these perceptions, I shall later argue that there is also *a different kind of self-reflexivity* wrought by fictocritical texts that *does* give general import to their critique of our textual practices.

A broader *post-critical* attitude in fictocriticism also follows from the insight, often grounded in experiences at the margins, that even the assumed academic objectivity is not wholly disinterested. In fact, where the academic claim to objectivity has been experienced or perceived as a mechanism of domination, the fictocritical reaction has often been to acknowledge one’s own situated position while still critiquing the mechanisms one deploys, in order to avoid replicating them *as* mechanisms of domination. Thus, quite to the contrary, fictocriticism often follows a strong *emancipatory* impetus and agenda from the respective marginal positions that have engendered it. While there is a strong feminist strand of fictocritical writing for which the term will have specific connotations, there is also a broader *enlightenment* element in fictocritical emancipatory tendencies that goes hand in hand with a *non-colonising*

¹⁸ Stephen Muecke, “Introduction: There is No Heart,” in *Joe in the Andamans*, Sydney: LCP, 2008, p. 14. [Hereafter: Muecke, “No Heart,” p. ...]

and *empathetic* attitude towards its subject (Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. 296). Additionally, I want to argue, we need to understand such tendencies as *also* relating to the mediating agent who is at work on the fictocritical text – notably *both* reader and writer. Thus, there is an emancipatory impetus that pertains to the agent position of textual relating.

Another common perception of fictocriticism emphasises its saturation with theory. In this view, the fictocritical is a kind of writing that *feeds theoretical, and mostly poststructuralist, thought into literary practice* – as the previous quotations from Krauss and Derrida clearly suggest. Not only does theory feature *in* fictocritical texts, though, but fictocritical writing also puts these thoughts to practice, letting them in/form the writing on several levels. With regards to the self-reflexive disposition of fictocritical writing, therefore, special attention is commanded where its more theoretical passages relate to linguistic and textual practices. Ultimately, I want to suggest that these moments provoke a curious scenario of short-circuitry that is still under-theorised as a central fictocritical characteristic.

What is more, fictocriticism frequently deploys *post/modern literary means* in a manner that endows their supposed playfulness *with practical direction and ethical import*. The result is not a post/modern playfulness that would spiral out of control into irrelevant realms, but one that serves a self-reflexive movement that is ultimately *grounded* in our textual practices. At this crucial point, I want to suggest, fictocriticism's theoretical interest, performative experience and ethical motivation culminate in a fictocritical trope that is yet to be assessed and theorised properly. To provide just this theorisation shall be the main challenge of the present thesis. One central goal shall thus be *to think together* the surprising fictocritical short-circuitry between post/modern literary theory and practice with the resulting performatively self-reflexive awareness *and* a fictocritical ethical import.

Some Previous Theorisations

Additionally, it is worth noting that fictocriticism has previously been theorised either according to its respective underlying *ethical* motivations or with regards to its more *formal* features. Several possible strands of conceptualising the fictocritical have thus emerged. Yet none of them can claim to fully accommodate the other perspectives in a transcending model because either they have been formulated position-strategically, which makes them exclusive, or they neglect central fictocritical elements that other

strands have prioritised. Subsequently, the challenge for this thesis shall be to retain the possibility of all these salient features in an *embracing* model that still remains open to potential new forms not yet in evidence. As yet another introductory exercise it will be helpful to consider a few of these previous strands, while it will also be productive to point out both their virtues and shortcomings in preparation for a new model of the fictocritical.

Firstly, fictocriticism has often been theorised in terms of its marginal/ised provenances. The single most significant strand in this respect has conceived of it as a special form in the tradition of experimental feminist writing. In opposition to male-connoted and -dominated academic discourse, fictocriticism has been cast figuratively as the female form. Perhaps the best-known example in this vein is the aforementioned collection *The Space Between*, but a more recent volume of the online journal *Outskirts*¹⁹ has been dedicated to fictocriticism from a feminist perspective, too. Notably, in both of these concentrated publications an element of strategic essentialism is well-balanced by the texts' circumspect and self-aware positioning, which underscores the motivational aspect of writing female speaking positions differently, with fictocritical means, while simultaneously critiquing the marginal/ising discursive powers and male-writerly principles that be.

Similarly, it is possible to conceive of fictocriticism in terms of queer theory as a form of queering genre. In this sense fictocriticism presents a specific form of genre-crossing textual practices that not only align figuratively with, but also contribute practically to wider discursive gender- and boundary-crossing interests. Again, the motivational aspect here derives from specific speaking positions that aim to critique dominant discursive structures with a view to deconstructing the hierarchical dichotomy that keeps them marginal/ised.²⁰ Such a queer strand of understanding fictocriticism may be less in evidence than its prominent feminist counterpart, but the motivational parallels are striking. Of the primary texts in this study, for example, Katrina Schlunke carefully considers the connection between a queer identity and her fictocritical output in *Bluff Rock: Autobiography of a Massacre*.²¹ However, while Schlunke clearly perceives the logic behind queer speaking positions opting for writing fictocritically, she does not claim such practices as a predominantly queer *form*. Instead, other aspects

¹⁹ *Outskirts: Feminisms Along the Edge*, edited by Alison Bartlett, vol. 20: On Fictocriticism, May 2009: <<http://www.outskirts.arts.uwa.edu.au/1179626>> (Apr. 24, 2012).

²⁰ For example, Espeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings*, New York: Routledge, 1996.

²¹ Katrina M Schlunke, *Bluff Rock: Autobiography of a Massacre*, North Fremantle: Curtin University Books, 2005; esp. p. 199-208.

of fictocritical writing, such as its text-cultural and text-ideological implications with regards to history prove more centrally important to her project.

More frequently in evidence, again, is a post/colonial studies approach to conceiving of fictocriticism. This strand theorises fictocritical writing as the figuratively predisposed textual form to deal with cross- or inter-cultural hybridity. Again the motivational impetus here derives partly from marginal/ised speaking positions, which demand a textual form suitable to convey their hybrid identity defining experiences, and partly from the urge to mount a post/colonially inflected critique of continuing – even systemic – (text)discursive praxes of domination. This perspective is especially pertinent in the work of Fred Wah, for example, whose book *Faking It: Poetics & Hybridity – Critical Writing 1984-1999*²² presents a theory of the fictocritical along these lines in fictocritical form. From the many texts that lend themselves to such a post/colonial reading of fictocriticism, perhaps George Alexander's *Mortal Divide: The Autobiography of Yiorgos Alexandroglou / Γιώργος Αλεξανδρόγλου*²³ should also be mentioned here.

These respective motivational backgrounds that have engendered fictocritical writing, although genetically significant, are yet insufficient to conceptualise it as a quasi-genre. While each of them marks an occasion to which fictocritical writing can contribute considerable momentum, none of them can lay exclusive claim to providing the terms in and on which to understand the fictocritical. Hence, the challenge in re-conceiving of the fictocritical is to bundle its strands and weave a mutually incorporating thread from them, a model that can accommodate *both* the motivational logic behind the marginal/ised speaking positions that have turned fictocritical *and* the powerful figurations that have enabled the respective strands to lay claim to fictocriticism as a form. A new theory thus needs to capture the *common* motivational pattern behind writers from marginal/ised speaking positions to engage their issues and concerns fictocritically. It also needs to maintain and enhance the figurative potential that these different strands have mobilised for their models. Plus, such a theory also needs to account for the textual levers that fictocritical writers avail themselves of *differently* to advance their specific cases and causes.

Secondly, there are also more *formally* oriented ways of conceptualising fictocriticism that have pursued different routes. On the one hand, it is indeed plausible

²² Fred Wah, *Faking It: Poetics & Hybridity – Critical Writing 1984-1999*, Edmonton: NeWest, 2000.

²³ George Alexander, *Mortal Divide: The Autobiography of Yiorgos Alexandroglou / Γιώργος Αλεξανδρόγλου*, Rose Bay: Brandl & Schlesiger, 1997.

to think of academic textual genres that have turned fictocritical at a moment of great, mostly post/structuralist, theoretical influence. There is no shortage of examples to back this claim. Greg Dening has endowed the history essay with his own fictocritical flavour.²⁴ Michael Taussig has pioneered unheard-of, fictocritical ways of writing that deviate from generic ethnographic treatises,²⁵ and other anthropologists, like Kathleen Stewart,²⁶ have followed this general direction. Alphonso Lingis is one philosopher who has taken his subject on a fictocritical itinerary.²⁷ Likewise, Meaghan Morris or Katrina Schlunke have turned their cultural studies writing fictocritical,²⁸ while, arguably, Ann Game and Andrew Metcalfe's book *What is Passionate Sociology?*²⁹ makes the case for their discipline to follow suit. On the other hand, the reverse theorisation, which conceives of fictocriticism as a form of theory-driven literature, is equally legitimate. While certain works in the predominantly literary output of Aritha van Herk,³⁰ J.M. Coetzee³¹ and Gail Jones would convincingly make this case,³² it should still be noted that their entire oeuvre hardly fits the description. In any case, an encompassing theorisation of the fictocritical needs to find a model spacious enough to accommodate both of these possible perspectives.

Furthermore, the fact that in most fictocritical writing the speaking position is not disinterested but personally situated, located and involved – while often also cultivating a jocular attitude – has provoked comparisons to the tradition of New Journalism. However, while it may seem intuitively right to group *some* fictocritical writers – Michael Taussig comes to mind – and their output together with Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson or Joan Didion, the same cannot be maintained throughout (neither, of course, would it be helpful to reduce the tradition of New Journalism to these stellar names alone); not least, because there is usually a much greater degree of theoretical knowledgeability and self-reflexive writerly awareness at play in ambitious fictocritical

²⁴ For example: Greg Dening, *Performances*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

²⁵ For example: Michael Taussig, *The Magic of the State*, New York: Routledge, 1997; or: Michael Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

²⁶ For example: Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. [Hereafter: Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, p. ...]

²⁷ For example: Alphonso Lingis, *Trust*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004; or: Alphonso Lingis, *The First Person Singular*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

²⁸ For example: Meaghan Morris, *Identity Anecdotes: Translation and Media Culture*, London: SAGE Publications, 2006; and: Katrina Schlunke, "Ethnografts," in *Cultural Theory in Everyday Practice*, edited by Nicole Anderson et al., Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2008, p 248-58.

²⁹ Ann Game and Andrew Metcalfe, *Passionate Sociology*, London: SAGE Publications, 1996.

³⁰ Especially: Aritha von Herk, *Places Far From Ellesmere: a Geografictione – Excavations on Site*, Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1990.

³¹ Especially: J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, London: Vintage, 2004.

³² Especially: Gail Jones, *Fetish Lives*, Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1997.

writing. While there may be proximity and certain similarities between Fictocriticism and New Journalism, it should be clear that the defining moments of the fictocritical lie elsewhere – as has been the recurring point for all the self-perceptions and theorisations considered thus far.

The last strand that I would like to mention here in any detail takes its cue from much earlier than New Journalism. Fictocriticism, which has predominantly favoured essay length texts, has also been conceived of in terms of the French “*essai*,” meaning: attempt, trial or test. Whereas the essay form used to be precisely an *unfinished* attempt on a subject, in academia it has long since coagulated into fixed manners of dealing with certain subjects in certain ways. Aspiring academics are groomed to write a pre/scribed kind of essay, which is prerequisite to establishing oneself in one’s fields. In other words, to master a discipline one has to become the disciple of its textual form. By contrast, the fictocritical essay is still claimed as a consciously *experimental* and *provisional* writerly attempt as opposed to a finished treatise by an academic author/ity. This, of course, is the tradition of Michel de Montaigne,³³ but perhaps also the experimental Gertrude Stein³⁴ and perceptive Joan Didion³⁵ – both of whom have their own distinct fictocritical credentials – could be cited as later proponents in this vein.

If taken seriously, however, a problem arises for this perspective. Treating the essay as *essai* basically claims a fluidity and transience for the textual content that is *performatively contradicted* by its medial form. Just as the textual medium is in and of itself a territorial structure, so its inscriptions are, paradigmatically, neither fluid nor transcendental. This, of course, changes as soon as interactive and hypertextual means enter the equation with digital media, whose implications and possibilities Kathrine N. Hayles has examined in her *Writing Machines*.³⁶ Simon Robb, for example, has argued for³⁷ and engaged in³⁸ fictocritical hypertext – or “electric fictocriticism” (Robb, “Divination,” p. 100) as he calls it – for his fictocritical doctoral thesis. In the last instance, however, I would maintain that digital text provides such a wealth of means to

³³ For example: Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, London: Penguin, 2012.

³⁴ For example: Gertrude Stein, *Look at Me Now and Here I Am: Writings and Lectures 1911-1945*, London: Peter Owen, 2004.

³⁵ For example: Joan Didion, *The White Album*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990.

³⁶ Katherine N. Hayles, *Writing Machines*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.

³⁷ Simon Robb, “Academic Divination Is Not a Mysticism: Fictocriticism, Pedagogy and Hypertext,” in *Crossing Lines*, edited by Caroline Guerin et al., Adelaide: ASAL, 1996, p. 97-101. [Hereafter: Robb, “Divination,” p. ...]

³⁸ Simon Robb, “Alien Sick,” in *Fictocritical Sentences*, Ph.D. thesis presented at the University of Adelaide, 2001, p. 35-41; and: Simon Robb, “Greetings from Adelaide,” in *Fictocritical Sentences*, Ph.D. thesis presented at the University of Adelaide, 2001:

<<http://ensemble.va.com.au/tableau/simon>> (Dec. 17, 2010).

create fictocritical effects precisely because *paradigmatically* a textual structure, which we can meaningfully read or write, is a rigid and territorial affair. While fictocritical means often aim to partly disrupt the mechanics of our ingrained textual practices, I want to suggest, their critique usually relates very much to our paradigmatic understanding of these textual practices and their wider discursive and cultural implications.

In the same manner, the experimentally provisional and transitive attitude of much fictocriticism needs to be taken in conjunction with the critique of our textual practices it mounts. For example, the performative contradiction of writerly ideal and medial parameters sometimes creates a relief that actually propels the fictocritical theory and critique of our textual practices onto the meta-level. What is required in this light is a reassessment of *the conditions of the possibility of our textual practices* and the ways in which fictocritical writing conducts them differently. A new theory of the fictocritical, I want to argue, needs to make this self-reflexive turn onto the meta-level central. Thus, instead of following the above strands in burdening ever more *contextual* baggage onto the notion of the fictocritical – knowledge that these texts do not always contain or convey, but which they yet require the reader to bring to the encounter – the present approach shall closely examine *how exactly* fictocritical texts play their understanding of the *constitutive* medial and contextual parameters out against our ingrained generic approaches to text.

Ultimately, with regards to these different perspectives on fictocriticism, the challenge for a non-reductive and productive approach is thus to take the central aspects of all the above strands into account for a model that can also avoid their respective shortcomings. With this aim in sight, I shall now outline a number of consequential shifts in perspective.

The Objects of Study

As indicated, there is now a slight preference to refer to fictocritical *writing* rather than *fictocriticism*. This manner of speaking is, firstly, indicative of the non-generic credentials of the fictocritical, which would sit rather uneasily labelled as an “-ism.” Secondly, “writing” acknowledges a shift in textual ideology: from the author of singular, monolithic works towards the *writer* of productive *texts*. Thirdly, it implies a move away from textual form towards textual *practice* – emphasising writing as processual and performative: *writing*, rather than the written. Having said that, for the

present thesis the *objects* – quite literally – of study remain very much texts: fictocritical writing, precisely in the sense of the written. Yet, my approach takes the emphasis on textual *practices* seriously, indeed. Hence, the *subject* of study will be *writing* – just as much as *reading*. In this manner, the erstwhile author/itative textual work shall re-emerge, in a thoroughly decentred model, as comprised of writerly and readerly textual acts. While the *textual medium* thus remains central to the equation, it presents simply the anchor around which the textual work is paradigmatically decentred – split between the two linguistic-discursive agents.

Additionally, the focus on the textual objects is divided by the nature of this *matter* between: firstly, the manifestly inscribed textual structures on the page and, secondly, the discursive structures enshrined therein, which we access in *reading* but may perceive and interpret differently in our readings. In this sense, the following study examines the relationship between, firstly, *the manifest medial substrate of our writing and reading* and, secondly, *the mediations, or readings, they pre-structure*. Anticipating even further, we could formulate that the objects of study are manifestly inscribed ficto/critical textual constellations that, *qua media*, p/re/structure the realm of possible re/configurations for their enshrined discursive constellations in our readings and (re)writings. As a result, the text-*cultural* practices of reading and writing in a certain way – generic *or* deviant – enter the picture, turning formerly static *textual* analysis into a more performance oriented text-*cultural* analysis. Thus, as generic and fictocritical *reading* enter the picture – already cast as opposites – this study remains textually based, but its primary interest shifts towards our textual practices, especially towards our textual relations as practices of *relating* textually.

The main question shall no longer be what characterises fictocritical *texts*, but rather what *effect* fictocritical texts have on our textual acts – or better: what fictocritical effect some texts have on the linguistic-discursive agent. Hence, the point is not to collect the definitional textual characteristics of fictocriticism but to ask, firstly, how fictocritical texts deploy their means within the text-medial parameters differently and, secondly, what is so distinctly fictocritical about the effect this creates. Thus departing from the textual *objects* of study towards our text-cultural relations and mediations of *reading* and *writing* as the *subject* of study, effectively de-centres the literary work from a fixed textual notion – epitomised by the finished book – into the literary work that is comprised of the different textual acts that paradigmatically relate to the text: writerly production and readerly reception. For the thesis approach, proceeding in this manner implies a distinct *textual theory* that accounts for the complex encapsulated and

translational structures of textual inscription and discursive understanding in terms of the fictocritical as well as a broader *text-cultural analysis* – rather than just textual analyses – that allows for the wider discursive significance of our ingrained textual practices *as well as* for fictocritical ways of resisting them.

A Possible List of Fictocritical *Textual* Features

Although this study has good reason to emphasise fictocritical *strategies* and *effects* at the expense of (whichever) fixed *textual* features, it is, of course, still possible, legitimate, and even helpful to list some conspicuous textual features that are frequently evidenced across fictocriticism. Only, we need to keep in mind that there is little *definitional* value in such a list: while a set of quasi-generic textual markers can provide a good retrospective introduction to the existing field, it cannot serve as a guide to what makes texts fictocritical – and this point relates back to the above distinction between the objects of study and the subject of this study. Because fictocritical *effects* are produced *between* text and linguistic-discursive agent, different textual features will be more or less effective to fictocritically address different linguistic-discursive contexts, textual cultures and idiosyncratic backgrounds. Important is thus not which textual features there are, but what they can do *strategically* in conjunction with given textual agents and their respective contexts. At least this level of abstraction from textual features is required, I want to argue, if we want *to capture but not arrest* the subversive potential of the fictocritical, which unfolds only in the interplay between these ultimately variable parameters.

On the back of these cautionary remarks, however, I still want to offer *one possible* list of fictocritical textual features below – firstly, because at this introductory stage it will help to further fine-grain the picture of fictocriticism and, secondly, because it will serve as a good basis from which to then research the *patterns* according to which such textual means are deployed strategically to trigger *fictocritical effects* in the specific contexts of our textual practices. What follows are thus just some of the possible entries in such a list.

For example, fictocritical writing frequently opts for the *subjective perspective* of the *first person singular*, often paired with an *invested personal interest* in the subject matter of the text, yet circumspect in attitude. The reason behind this choice usually lies in a motivated critique of the allegedly withdrawn, depersonalised and objective voice

of the academic essay.³⁹ Far from being a mere formal preference, thus, this feature is, in fact, deployed *against* a certain generic textual conduct of which the texts are critical. Note, however, that some fictocritical texts also emphasise their subjective first person singular perspective *literarily* in order to play with the fictionalising distance between narrator and author,⁴⁰ rather than implying an almost journalistic intersection of the two. The result is often a degree of uncertainty regarding the epistemological status of the writing. Other fictocritical texts create similar effects by opting for the second⁴¹ or third⁴² person singular to present their involved perspective. As Kathleen Stewart explains:

I write not as a trusted guide carefully laying out the links between theoretical categories and the real world, but as a point of impact, curiosity and encounter. I call myself ‘she’ to mark the difference between this writerly identity and the kind of subject that arises as a daydream of simple presence. (Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, p. 5)

Others, again, shift freely between all three options.⁴³ In other words, there is just no formal unity on the textual level. Discernible are only different *strategies*, which could also take different routes, to create certain effects. As before, the point here is that suggesting a fixed fictocritical form in this respect would defy the fictocritical point of critiquing established textual forms and their concomitant discursive formations via form.

Another point is that fictocritical writing often features *only minimal characterisation and dialogue* because its narrative or fiction is not an end in itself but supports the theoretical argument. In this respect, fictocriticism has greater proximity to philosophical *thought experiments* than to the fully-fledged fictional worlds of literature.⁴⁴ At the same time, *formal experimentation* is a regular feature. Some fictocritical texts incorporate challenging neologisms and curious typographical contrivances. In this respect, Aritha van Herk’s use of the slash and curious word formations in *Places Far From Ellesmere* immediately come to mind. Others let content

³⁹ For instance, most of the essays in *The Space Between* are prime examples of this.

⁴⁰ For example, in *The Magic of the State* Michael Taussig fictionalises his non-fictional research and speaking position.

⁴¹ For example, Aritha van Herk deploys the shifter “you” to this fictocritical effect in *Places Far From Ellesmere*.

⁴² For example, Kathleen Stewart uses “she” to re/lay her experiences and affects to this effect in *Ordinary Affects*.

⁴³ For example: Lesley Stern, *The Smoking Book*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

⁴⁴ For example, Stephen Muecke’s essays in the collection *Joe in the Andamans* exemplify this characteristic.

determine form, as opposed to academic genres that dictate *one* proper form for all possible cases. For example when Stephen Muecke, in his famous fictocritical travelogue *No Road (Bitumen All The Way)*,⁴⁵ informs us at the beginning of a fragment, which would indeed fit on a postcard, that this is where he begins “the necessary digression which the fragmentary narrative of tourism demands, texts no bigger than postcards” (Muecke, *No Road*, p. 33).

Implicitly at stake here is also the difference between learning how to write a proper ethnography that can be applied to each and every culture you may encounter and letting the practices of the culture you study in/form your writing. This is frequently the case in Michael Taussig’s work, for example in *My Cocaine Museum*,⁴⁶ where he models the structure of his text on a Gold Museum whose counter-discourse he writes. Elsewhere, in his preface to *Walter Benjamin’s Grave*,⁴⁷ Taussig inimitably airs his guiding sentiment thus: “It is more like having the reality depicted turn back on the writing, rather than on the writer, and ask for a fair shake. ‘What have you learned?’ the reality asks of the writing” (Taussig, “Author’s Note,” p. viii). Note, in any case, that while *philosophical* thought experiments describe a scenario to ponder, the *formal* experimentation in fictocritical writing makes just such pre-scriptions central to the scenario. Thus, where the two connotations of experimentation meet, writing becomes the subject matter of the fictocritical in a twofold sense.

Furthermore, fictocritical texts tend towards the fragmentary.⁴⁸ The essayistic – read: *essai*-istic – style and format of much fictocritical writing certainly contributes to this impression. I would supplement the following qualification, though: fictocritical texts are often *fragmentary, albeit meticulously structured*. For instance, the seemingly random fragments in Kathleen Stewart’s *Ordinary Affects* still neatly link up to form a framework of theoretical considerations that keep approaching the same issue from different angles in order to illuminate their object more adequately. On the one hand there is a general fictocritical tendency against closure and whole-ness. Thus, Stewart writes “still lives” (Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, p. 18-9) as momentous snapshots of her experiences, rather than a definite memoir. On the other hand, text is favoured as

⁴⁵ Stephen Muecke, *No Road (Bitumen All the Way)*, Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1997. [Hereafter: Muecke, *No Road*, p. ...]

⁴⁶ Michael Taussig, *My Cocaine Museum*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

⁴⁷ Michael Taussig, “Author’s Note,” in *Walter Benjamin’s Grave*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. vii-xi. [Hereafter: Taussig, “Author’s Note,” p. ...]

⁴⁸ Examples abound; for instance: Anna Gibbs, “The Gift,” in *The Space Between*, edited by Heather Kerr et al., Perth: UWA Press, 1998, p. 33-44.

discontinued and open for the interpretive work of the reader, which the writing is nevertheless at pains to pre-structure fictocritically.

In this sense, the unfinished state of such texts in itself is a neatly rendered statement, which leads from the level of textual form not only onto the level of propositional content, but furthermore towards a meta-perspective on our textual practices of making sense of textual structures. Our readerly work is, after all, not fundamentally different between a flowing and a fragmentary text – only the latter makes our workings perceptible *en procès*. Figuratively, the fragmentary composition of a text thus illustrates the proposition that any textually enshrined discursive constellation always already puts to the reader. But then, far from every fictocritical text is fragmented, and hence there is *again* no formal unity here, only patterns of textual strategies that aim at fictocritical effects.

Also, *intertextual means* – such as not only referencing a text but suggestively evoking its context – are frequently put to good use in fictocriticism. On the one hand, there is a lot of textual grafting and quoting to be found, for instance to implicitly invoke other texts without a dominant interpretive gesture. In this manner, David Shields's *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*⁴⁹ is a collage of quotes. But there is also the technique to montage, onto the same page, a juxtaposition of two texts, in order to visualise the space between them as well as making perceptible the readerly act of setting them in relation to each other. In such cases, the inter-textual space becomes visible as the con/textual realm of the white page. A well-known fictocritical example of this can be found in Stephen Muecke's *Textual Spaces: Aboriginality and Cultural Studies*,⁵⁰ but an earlier influential text in this respect is Julia Kristeva's "Stabat Mater."⁵¹ Bricolage, which is both performed and conceptualised in the seminal collective effort *Reading the Country: An Introduction to Nomadology*,⁵² presents a further means of this kind. Krim Benterak's paintings in this publication are also a prime example of how *intermediality* features in some fictocritical texts – most frequently, however, in the form of photography.⁵³ On the other hand, fictocritical texts

⁴⁹ David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, London: Hamish Milton, 2010.

⁵⁰ Stephen Muecke, *Textual Spaces: Aboriginality and Cultural Studies*, Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1992, p. 101-18.

⁵¹ Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," in *The Kristeva Reader*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 160-86.

⁵² Krim Benterak, Stephen Muecke and Paddy Roe, *Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology*, Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1996; esp. Stephen Muecke's section: "Bricolage," p. 168-72.

⁵³ For example: W. G. Sebald, *Die Ringe des Saturn: Eine Englische Wallfahrt*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2007; Ross Gibson, *The Summer Exercises*, Perth: University of Western Australia Press,

are often protocols of reading, which conduct experimental re-readings and re-writings of other texts.⁵⁴ While in such latter cases the interpretive gesture is certainly part of the project, it is yet only applied in a manner already in/formed by the critique which is produced at the same time. Curiously, fictocritical writing thus comes to function as an *inter-textual medium*: reading a protocol of reading adds a sense of sequence to *our* textual experience. Altogether, there is again no fixed formal pattern here, because different strategies can achieve these desired effects.

Furthermore, *textual ambiguities* are a means favoured in much fictocritical writing. For example, consciously wrought *interpretive ambiguities* sometimes create *indeterminate referential status*, and at times *epistemic uncertainties* about the text's fictional or non-fictional relation to the world.⁵⁵ Likewise the clever *use of shifters* can create a slippery subjectivity, or even extradiegetic referential potential to address the reader and draw them into the intended scope of the text. A prime example of this feature will be the subject of analysis in my close reading of Muecke's "The Fall." An uncertain subjectivity of the text can also be evoked by *ambiguous speaking positions*, for example when Sally and Richard Price co-author a subjective text that features both of them in the third person perspective.⁵⁶ The sounding out of *multiple speaking positions*, by contrast, can be a fictocritical means that follows the literary exploration of different forms of subjectivity as an ethical virtue. For example, Steven Shaviro's *Doom Patrols: A Theoretical Fiction about Postmodernism* boasts such shifting perspectival exercises.⁵⁷ Another textual feature of this kind are *strange juxtapositions*, sometimes of textual types, sometimes of paradoxical statements that challenge the text-interpretive work. The effect of such juxtapositions is that they increase the amount of conceptual work required to accommodate these seeming contradictions, to understand the text and make sense of it. Textual ambiguities, too, aim to create *fictocritical* effects. They are not to be confused with fixed generic markers, but need to be recognised as text-strategic means to an end.

2008; Michael Taussig, "Walter Benjamin's Grave: A Profane Illumination," in *Walter Benjamin's Grave*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 1-31; Margaret Somerville, *Body/Landscape Journals*, Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1999; or George Alexander's *Mortal Divide*.

⁵⁴ My exemplary cases are Aritha van Herk's *Places Far from Ellesmere*, and: John Hughes, *Someone Else: Fictional Essays*, Artarmon: Giramondo, 2007. More radical examples are: Kathy Acker, *Great Expectations*, New York: Grove Press, 1982; and: Kathy Acker, *Don Quixote: Which Was a Dream*, New York: Grove Press, 1986.

⁵⁵ An exemplary case is: *My Winnipeg*, directed by Guy Maddin, produced by Everyday Pictures/Buffalo Gal Pictures, 80 minutes, 2007; plus the script book: Guy Maddin, *My Winnipeg*, Toronto: Coach House Books, 2009.

⁵⁶ Richard Price and Sally Price, *Enigma Variations*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

⁵⁷ Steven Shaviro, *Doom Patrols: A Theoretical Fiction about Postmodernism*, New York: Serpent's Tail, 2007.

Two more textual features, of which we shall hear much more, are the *self-reflexive turns* and *textual performativity* of fictocriticism. Firstly, in addition to a self-reflexively circumspect awareness of one's own speaking position, fictocritical texts often contain self-reflexive, at times meta-fictional, passages that have something to say about the textuality of the text and about our reading and writing – in particular as well as in general. In addition to Muecke's "The Fall," two other essay length texts of central importance for this study brilliantly exemplify this aspect – they are Michael Taussig's "The Corn-Wolf: Writing Apotropaic Texts"⁵⁸ and Gail Jones' "Thaumatropes."⁵⁹ Echoing the short-circuitous trope mentioned earlier, such meta-fictional fictocritical means sometimes raise the non-fictional question of fiction from within fiction. Apart from the more common content-related self-reflexivity, special attention is due to passages in which a textual self-reflexivity gains meta-significance for our textual practices.

Secondly, in passages of performative textuality fictocritical writing often aims to make the text exemplary of its own contention, to make it *perform* what it *constates*, similar to the performative compound. In this sense, fictocriticism avails itself of the means under critique – most broadly: our textual practices – in a manner that already implements insights of that critique. Again, Michael Taussig's "The Corn-Wolf" is exemplary in this respect as his text on counter-magic practices itself becomes an exercise of the apotropaic. Two other novel length texts of central importance for the present study exemplify this aspect brilliantly – they are Katrina Schlunke's *Bluff Rock* and Aritha van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere*. With a different kind of performativity fictocritical texts are also often composed to narrate the process of acquiring knowledge, rather than just presenting their gained knowledge as a given. Such a structuring works against the passive consumption of meaning – ultimately, *these texts work by making the reader work*. Apart from a plain *textual* performativity, then, special attention is due to passages in which the subject of the text and the readerly performance coincide and thus our relating textually enters the textually related scenario. At this point it suffices to realise that fictocriticism avails itself of different kinds of self-reflexivity and performativity to achieve different fictocritical effects.

Just to summarise then, none of these frequently instantiated textual characteristics are in evidence across the spectrum of fictocritical texts, which take a diverse range of

⁵⁸ Michael Taussig, "The Corn-Wolf: Writing Apotropaic Texts," in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2010, p. 26-33.

⁵⁹ Gail Jones, "Thaumatropes," in *The Space Between*, edited by Heather Kerr et al., Perth: UWA Press, 1998, p. 98-114.

experimental forms. While I hope that my list has served an introductory function, it is important to stress, again, that its entries are by no means to be mistaken as *generic* or *definitional* textual markers of the fictocritical. Instead they are indicative of textual *strategies* to create fictocritical *effects*. As a consequence, such lists can serve our definitional ambitions only *indirectly* if we are to avoid re-territorialising the fictocritical potential. In other words, advocating a *certain* fictocritical form is the opposite of advocating the fictocritical, because generic textual forms and practices are the constitutive target of the fictocritical. Instead, I want to suggest, the fictocritical can offer a twofold directed line of flight, which leads, firstly, towards a meta-awareness of our textual conduct and, secondly, indicates its implicit practical significance. What is fictocritical, thus, is the formally generated self-reflexive effect, not just the reflexive form; likewise, it is the performative insight into formal pre-structuring, not just the performative form. Such impetus, however, can only be achieved textually by continuously *breaking* with established forms, not by fixedly establishing other forms in their stead.

The Underdetermined Definition *Ex Negativo*

Acknowledging that lists of textual markers are yet insufficient to capture the *defining* fictocritical characteristics, of course, forces the question of *how* instead to venture on defining the fictocritical. Working towards an answer, it will be advisable to reconsider exactly *why* a list that determines fictocritical *form* just will not do. There is an important claim that the fictocritical aim of exploding the tools of dominating academic theory can only be advanced outside precisely this realm of academic discourse, of which definitions are an essential part. A good argument is thus required to justify the definition and theorisation of a non-genre whose power has been argued to reside in its resistance to precisely such theorisation. Once its shifts in perspective have been allowed to emerge fully, I want to suggest, the following approach can deliver just such an argument.

Notably, just when Amanda Nettelbeck reiterates that “[i]t is here at the intersection of literature and postmodernism, that fictocriticism appears as an increasingly familiar form,” she also warns us that “[t]o call it a ‘form’ is necessarily simplistic, since its interest lies in its capacity to adapt various literary forms” (Nettelbeck, “Introduction,” p. 4). Accordingly, exploiting the *interstitial* generic spaces *between*, fictocriticism thus comprises genre-subverting and genre-defying writing practices, yet remains itself non-

generic. Therefore, if we – somewhat paradoxically – consider this to be fictocriticism’s *quasi-generic* marker it still presents some kind of *anti-genre*.

Likewise, with reference to the genre evoking name, Anne Brewster has alerted us to a similar point by saying that “[t]he nomination ‘fictocriticism’ [...] necessarily represents a provisional naming; its narrowness and genre-specificity belie the dispersed emergence of the practice of fictocriticism and its generic diffuseness and indistinctiveness” (Brewster, “Undisciplined Writing,” p. 29). In fact, precisely *because* the common denominator of fictocritical practices is their resistance to genre-specificities, the formally unpredictable aspect of these writing practices should be their one unifying virtue. As a consequence, definitional lists of positively identifiable textual features always run the risk of arresting the resistant dynamics and subversive potential of the fictocritical. If we treat such a list as definitional, fictocritical *generic resistance* goes belly up, its textual practices cease to be genre-defying and instead turn into a generic form themselves.

And yet, surely, if we can identify texts as fictocritical, then it must also be possible to define what exactly makes *the specific ways* in which they deploy fiction and mount a critique fictocritical. So, again, how *can* we define it? Trying to answer this question I think it is necessary to introduce the notion of *strategy* into the equation. Fictocriticism is a critique via form, but its defining marker is *generic resistance* rather than a predictable textual form. It is thus defined by a *strategic* pattern of breaking with generic form *to fictocritical effect*. In other words, fictocriticism is a *strategic* form of *generic* resistance. The fictocritical can be directed against diverse sets of generic conventions and their functions. The target genre could be different, yet the *strategic pattern* would still be instantiated accordingly. All the particulars on the textual level could be different, but the same schematic *pattern* would still emerge. What we should be looking for is not a generic pattern but a *strategic* pattern of generic resistance.

Therefore, I want to argue, the fictocritical should, firstly, be defined *formally indirect – ex negativo* that is – since it strategically forms against certain dominant textual genres (which it critiques as genres of textual domination). Secondly, it should be defined *variably*, so that *both* its target genres *and* textual form are left *underdetermined* definitionally. Only at this level of abstraction can the fictocritical be defined as a strategic pattern of (quasi) generic resistance. In this manner, the aim should be to formulate a pattern whose internal relations adequately reflect the constitutive fictocritical mechanisms at play, while yet leaving the particular variables underdetermined so as not to prematurely delimit the field of *possible* fictocritical

textual forms. Ultimately, this will yield a *formula* with *variables* on the strategic level that, in turn, determine textual form.

Such an indirect formulaic definitional approach to understanding fictocriticism, I want to argue, firstly, no longer re-territorialises the fictocritical, while, secondly, still allowing us to subsume the very different fictocritical strands mentioned above. The virtue of this perspective is that it can indeed accommodate something so diffuse and unpredictable in a meaningful manner, because it allows for different textual means to be deployed strategically, fictocritically, against different generic target conventions and their respective mechanisms of domination. Furthermore, such an understanding shall eventually enhance, rather than limit, the fictocritical impact of texts by sensitising *us*, their otherwise generically expectant readers.

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Aiming for such an understanding of fictocritical *strategies*, whose means would then be in evidence as stylistic textual features, we are no longer concerned with positive regulatory rules of specific genres (which fictocriticism claims to subvert anyway). Rather, the focus of this approach shifts attention towards the more abstract constitutive rules and mechanisms within which such rules of genre can occur in the first place: the laws of the laws of genre.⁶⁰ The concern is really directed at the conditions of the possibility (and impossibility) of textual communication and representation.

Thus framed, fictocriticism is concerned with our linguistic-discursive, and especially textual practices of being in the world. Fictocriticism is critical of the current forms our textual practices take because of the practical effects they create and the functions they serve in our wider discursive practices of being in the world. Although the fictocritical scope is very much directed at the relation between self and world, its self-reflexive point of departure is the relation between self and text. Thus conceived, the possible forms fictocritical writing can take are only determined in relation to *actual* fields of writerly and readerly practices. The strategies enacted by fictocritical texts do not follow a rigidly pre-scribed generic order, but rather they circumscribe a fluid non-generic pattern when they flow experimentally in antagonistic relation to certain target-genres. Fictocritical strategies thus result from within the prescriptive generic patterns under critique, but they are designed to betray these genres by liquidising their

⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," in *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 221-52.

“fictional institution” (Derrida, “Strange Institution,” p. 37-40) in subversive textual acts.

Usually the underlying motivation for fictocritical writing derives from dissatisfaction with our – mostly academic – generic practices in wider contexts of relating to and treating the world and the other. Fictocritical strategies, by contrast, lead elsewhere generically as “traitorous” cases of fictive abduction. Yet their functional role is very much concerned with the contexts from within which they derive as well as with the contingent moments that give rise to them. In this way, the subversive fictocritical attitude towards the “hermeneutical gesture” and “the moral high ground” of traditional theory or criticism is bound up with its critique of the functional role that our linguistic-discursive practices of textual communication fulfil as a *cultural technique* that effects various perceived gaps, divides and the policies they enable. Fictocriticism opposes this generic form of *divide et impera*. Fictocritical strategies turn towards the generic divide between aesthetic and scientific, literary and philosophical, truth-constituting and truth-representing discourses because they have a different textual *and* text-practical ideology to offer when it comes to conceiving of our text-cultural techniques and the ways in which they in/form and p/re/structure our relations to the world.

The Subject of this Study

After these preliminary thoughts on how best to define fictocriticism without stifling its subversive potential in the process, I shall now proceed to outline the subject of this study in some more detail. A good way to announce the particular focus of my approach will be to unpack the thesis title, because it already reflects several underlying premises and anticipates central theoretical shifts while also indicating how the formulaically variable definitional approach characterises my project throughout. Ultimately, the title’s phrasing shall thus emerge as already displaying the structure of both the trope *of*, and my thesis *on* the (slashed) ficto/critical.

Main Thesis Title (I): Strategies

A first statement of intent, the thesis title focuses on the *strategic* side of generic resistance:

Fictocritical *Strategies*

Subverting Textual Practices of Meaning, Other, and Self-Formation

Fictocriticism, fictocritical texts, fictocritical writing are now under examination from the angle of strategic generic resistance, strategic deployment of textual means, and the strategic aims they pursue in so doing. In this manner the title marks that this study does not focus on anti-generic textual markers but on *textual strategies* that are directed against generic textual *forms* as well as our generic textual *practices*. The aim is to isolate a *strategic* pattern of breaking with genre and generic practices to fictocritical effect. As a result, my examination shall depart from a notion of the fictocritical effect and then work its way backwards from the readerly position that realises this effect to the writerly practice that pre-scribed it – ultimately to the wider discursive concerns that have led to this textual intervention.

Because there is a difference between *textual* performativity and the readerly performance of a textual pre-scription, the textual focus of the present approach is required to do justice to the performance and performativity of textual representation and communication that lies at the heart of fictocritical writing and reading. It is not the text itself, but its recalcitrance in relation to our generic expectations, conventions and laws (which is *experienced* by a reader in the textual performance of reading) that is fictocritical. What can be fictocritical about a text is the encounter with it – the textual performance that unfolds between the text and the individual self that encounters it. It is the textual relation performed by the self that renders a textual experience fictocritical. The textual relation to text can thus be twofold: the writer can *produce* text fictocritically, while the reader can *receive* text fictocritically. This shift in perspective regarding fictocritical effects needs to be grounded in a theory of our textual practices in general that allows for fictocritical strategies.

Accordingly, my use of the term “strategy” furthermore implies an underlying fictocritical background understanding of our textual practices *against which* certain textual means can then emerge as *strategically* deployed with the aim of resisting the textual practices of given target genres. Theorising the fictocritical as *strategy* allows us to leave its target genres underdetermined while yet accounting for the different levers it

sets to work. The aim is to account for the mechanisms involved in fictocritical writing and reading – ultimately, to deliver a strategic contraption that, depending on which actual (con)textual circumstances it is applied, takes a different textual form, each time. In this manner, the goal is to formulate a strategic trope whose internal relations adequately reflect the constitutive mechanisms at play in the fictocritical, while yet leaving the particular variables un(der)determined in order not to pre-structure the textual field of fictocritical possibilities.

Positives of a Negative Definition: Some *Strategically* Fictocritical Features

Accepting the route of a *negative* definition to appropriately theorise fictocriticism, we can now ask slightly more positively: What *are* these particular strategies? Which patterns do they instantiate, and what tropical figure do they cut in the process? Furthermore, what are their specifically fictocritical *effects* and *merits*? Now, on the back of this new perspective, our earlier list of *textual* features in evidence can be transformed into more positive formulations for a *strategic* definition *ex negativo*.

For example, some means such as a fragmentary structuring or otherwise experimental form, intertextual references, and interpretive ambiguities of all kinds serve to *foreground the textual acts we are engaged in with the text*. In this sense, fictocritical texts create interpretively ambiguous situations in order to foreground their self-consciously performative aspects – as texts, certainly, but also with regards to *writing* and *reading*. Other means, such as a subjective perspective and personal involvement as well as minimal characterisation and dialogue, serve to *sharpen the text's critical aspect*. These seem to be two main axes along which fictocritical writing deploys its generically deviant textual means strategically: firstly, there are *theoretical* and, secondly, *critical* implications directed at our textual practices. Notably, fictocritical texts link these axes in a *crucial* manner: the fictocritical is marked by a clear strategic tendency towards a meta-generic perspective onto our textual practices from which *both* its theoretical *and* critical concerns take their cue. Significantly, the resulting fictocritical pattern thus amounts to more than the sum of its two constituent parts.

By the same token, I want to argue, fictocriticism generally engages *genre-blurring* in order to highlight, firstly, the conditions of the possibility of our generic textual practices and, secondly, their wider discursive functions. The various textual features it deploys strategically serve either one of these fictocritical aims. In sum, this marks a

shift towards the *meta-level* of our generic textual practices, towards their *constitutive* level. By conflating truth-representing and truth-constituting discourses, fictocriticism problematises the *regulatory rules* of the academic genres and diverts attention to the *constitutive rules* of textual practices *per se*. Through this meta-perspective, I want to argue, the *self-reflexive* and *performative* aspects of the fictocritical gain new dimensions. Ultimately, at the centre of the *strategic* fictocritical pattern, there is a self-reflexive and performative focus on the very textual practices through which we are engaging with the text's further critical propositions. What is at stake on the meta-level is precisely our understanding of the paradigmatic situation of textual representation and communication *in its significance* for wider discursive formations.

Fictocritical texts usually contain (at least fragments of) a theory of reading and writing *and* are often themselves protocols of that kind of reading, or display it in some form. Yet when they offer us, from within, a theory of the kind of activity we are simultaneously performing in accessing them – suggesting a back-feeding movement in the reading performance that is simultaneously under scrutiny, under way and thus at stake – the performativity of this scenario extends to, always, *this* side of the page, namely the reader. Paired with a meta-perspective, this awareness leads the reader to a vantage point from which to realise an important fact: unlike other explanations, our understanding of what it is to read – and moreover what it involves to read correctly – directly affects the practice of reading, because the same entity that conceives of the practice is also guiding the practice on the basis of its conception. Here the textual subjects *at work* and *at stake* intersect. It is precisely this potential for a short-circuitous power cut within the linguistic-discursive agency at work that fictocritical texts aim to tap. Paradigmatically, this happens when fictocritical writing intersects a *poetics* of textual practice with a textual *aesthetic* at the same time as making the same *aesthetic* relevant for practically directed concerns, ultimately endowing the text's formal aspects with an *ethics*.

The first part of this claim is that fictocritical texts break with genre on the textual level in order to highlight the ingrained genres of our *writing* and *reading* practices. When they are intersecting a textual *aesthetic* (i.e. the literary) with a *poetics* of textual discourse (i.e. literary theory), they are aiming to highlight the conditions of the possibility of genre, firstly, by way of the self-reflexive direction of their theoretical insights and, secondly, by way of a performative awareness of reading and writing. Later in the thesis we shall come to understand this poetico-aesthetic aspect as a simultaneous highlighting of the proposed theoretical subject *in* the performance – as

making perceptible (*aisthesis*) the text-discursive workings (*poiesis*). This first understanding, which recognises the fictocritical aiming at its own conditions of im/possibility, effectively puts the fictocritical on track as *an aesthetic of deconstruction*.

The second part of the claim is that fictocritical texts consciously deploy their features strategically against a theoretical background understanding in order to indicate how our textual performance is implicated in generic textual practices *and their wider discursive effects*. Thus, when they are intersecting a textual *aesthetic* (i.e. the literary) with *an ethics* of textual discourse (i.e. literary criticism) they aim to endow their critical agenda with a peculiarly striking significance by way of an im/mediate interpellation of the reader as textual agent. We shall later in the thesis come to understand this ethico-aesthetic aspect as the edge with which both textual form and our textual practices emerge as ethically meaningful. This second understanding additionally puts the fictocritical on track as *an (im/mediately striking) interventionist aesthetic*.

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Across the range of fictocritical texts in evidence is thus discernible a theory of our textual practices, against the background of which fictocritical *strategies* instantiate a distinct constellation of self-reflexive theory, experiential awareness and critical positions. *Between* these heavily interrelated elements the fictocritical works its effects in a manner that, firstly, highlights *performatively* what it re-theorises *constatively* and, secondly, links this theoretical insight to the critical concerns it also raises in the text. In this fashion, I would like to suggest, the fictocritical departs from the vantage point of an exceptionally induced, meta-generic perspective on our textual practices simultaneously under way and under scrutiny. *Between* these theoretical and critical aspects their *hinge* emerges as the crucial fictocritical trope. This twofold fictocritical direction and impulse shall henceforth in/form my research project and re-conceptualisation of the (unmarked) fictocritical or (hyphenated) ficto-critical as (slashed) ficto/critical. In fact, the rest of the thesis will now be an exercise in examining, defining and refining this figure, and of spelling out some of its far-reaching implications.

Main Thesis Title (II): Ficto/criticism – The Performative Compound Revisited

Analogously, already my use of the slash in the thesis title – which illustrates *both* the separation *and* conjoining of the constituent parts and perspectives of ficto/criticism – reflects the twofold strategic direction indicated in the previous section:

Ficto/critical Strategies

Subverting Textual Practices of Meaning, Other, and Self-Formation

Re-conceiving of the performative compound “fictocriticism” or “ficto-criticism” in terms of strategy, my slash in “ficto/criticism” shall henceforth mark the combined perspectival emphases of the *ficto*-critical and the *ficto-critical*.

Firstly, the *ficto*-critical – with an italicised emphasis on the initial, “ficto-” part – marks the perspective that aims to self-reflexively, performatively and im/mediately highlight our textual acts while theorising them differently. For example, Part Two of this thesis shall be dedicated to defining, refining and elaborating this aspect in detail from a close reading of Muecke’s “The Fall.” To anticipate the gist of this reading here only briefly, the *ficto*-critical creates an im/mediate *and* theoretical awareness of one’s own textual practices under way. The first syllables, “ficto-,” are not emphasised on account of the means of fiction on the textual level, but rather because eventually the fictional mode shall emerge as primary to non-fiction in a systematic re-assessment of our textual practices. This insight, however, only stands at the end of a thorough deconstruction, along *ficto*-critical lines, of the generic hierarchy which all too readily assumes fictional language use to feed on its primordially non-fictional capabilities.

A first glimpse of the combined self-reflexive, performative and im/mediate *ficto*-critical trope can be found in a witticism by Alice Kaplan, which she formulates in *French Lessons: A Memoir*⁶¹ somewhere between the influence of Stéphane Mallarmé and her French teacher Ann Smock: “Literature lies and tells the truth about lying” (Kaplan, *French Lessons*, p. 75). In other words, where literature “lies” by virtue of the fictional mode, it may yet convey both experiential truths and theoretical insights into the nature and poetics of that mode which constitutes its fictional “lying.” The crucial point is that with their special brand of self-reflexivity and performativity *ficto*-critical texts generate *both* constative *theoretical* insights into our textual practices *and* im/mediately highlight *experientially* our textual practices under way. In combination

⁶¹ Alice Kaplan, *French Lessons: A Memoir*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993. [Hereafter: Kaplan, *French Lessons*, p. ...]

with their at times uncertain epistemological status, their *ficto*-critical aesthetics subtly suggests a deconstructed understanding of the triad fiction, theory and criticism – with fiction emerging as the primary term on the systemic level.

Secondly, the *ficto-critical* – with an italicised emphasis on the rear, “-critical” part – marks the perspective that aims to connect the above *ficto*-critical awareness and understanding with the issues and concerns that are also being raised *constatively* in the text. Rather than taking their marginal provenance or textual features as indicators, this shall produce a more insightful approach to different *ficto*/critical clusters, which is structured according to the constitutive mechanisms of our textual practices that they problematise and re-conceive of differently.

On the one hand, the stress on the latter syllables “-critical” thus resonates Muecke’s prompt answer to the self-posed question:

And what of the ‘criticism’ in fictocriticism? This is not about moral agendas, like, ‘I can do a *critique* of this or that because I am equipped with some kind of incisive intellectual tool’. Far from it, that kind of critic is *always right*, and we should steer clear of them for that reason. (Muecke, “No Heart,” p. 14-5)

With regards to this post-critical sentiment, the twofold *ficto*/critical perspective always already contains a self-reflexive gesture by rooting its wider discursive critique in our textual practices and simultaneously routing it through each linguistic-discursive agent’s co-present performance thereof. This self-reflexive turn in the critical gesture thus has the virtue of turning in on its own practices before turning them on others.

On the other hand, the stress on the *ficto-critical* also emphasises the fact that any such critique of our *wider discursive* practices is mounted first and foremost by way of a critique of our *text-discursive* practices – thus following the byway of the text’s *ficto*-critical aspects. In this manner, the ethical dimension of criticism is here coupled to the poetics of praxes that we are of necessity engaging when we encounter it in writing, in *reading*. Such, at least, is the dimension of meaning that I would like to invest in Muecke’s words which immediately follow on the above quote, namely that “when we couple criticism to fiction, to the imaginative, we seek rather to perform a kind of ethics” (Muecke, “No Heart,” p. 14-5). Precisely through an unheard-of pairing of self-reflexive, performative and im/mediate *ficto*-critical aspects, *ficto-critical* texts can develop surprising interpellatory forces that provide an equally unheard-of edge to their respective critiques.

Thus framed, the *ficto/critical* is concerned with our linguistic-discursive and, especially, textual practices of being in the world. It is critical of the current forms our text-cultural practices take because of the practical effects they create and the functions they serve in our wider discursive practices of relating to the world. Although a text's *ficto-critical* scope is thus very much directed at the relation between a linguistic-discursive self and the world, its *ficto-critical* point of departure is yet, reflexively, the relation between self and text.

Thesis Subtitle: Meaning, Other, and Self-Formation

Accruing a first layer, the twofold *ficto/critical* perspective is then unpacked in the subtitle:

Ficto/critical Strategies

Subverting Textual Practices of Meaning, Other, and Self-Formation

In fact, the twofold *ficto/critical* perspective examines precisely how our textual formations of *meaning* – this is the *ficto-critical* focus – are implicated in the wider discursive formations of *self*, *other* and *world* – which is the *ficto-critical* focus.

With regards to the *ficto-critical* aspect Heather Kerr, having first noticed that “[c]ross cultural work will frequently be at pains *not* to position the other as ‘text’ for commentary,” then establishes that “[l]aying bare the devices of its own production and reflecting on its deployment of disciplinary knowledges, the *fictocritical* effect in cultural studies writing practices is to aestheticize ethics as a self-conscious (formal) gesture” (Kerr, “Topographies,” p. 114). In this observation, Kerr recognises that what I have termed the *ficto-critical* kind of aestheticised ethical writing departs from the self-reflexive meta-turn of what I have called the *ficto-critical* kind of an aesthetic grounded in a poetics of writing. She lucidly envisages the complex interrelatedness of poetics, aesthetics and ethics in the *ficto/critical*, which, I want to argue, is most productively phrased in terms of meaning, other and self-formations.

Approaching the same complex from the *ficto-critical* side, Muecke then makes this case:

One might urge the interested writer not to feel that their practice has to conform to one of another model, but to have the confidence that the problem characterizing the situation before them will surprise them into

changing their practices. Like all literature, fictocriticism experiments with ways of being in the world, with forms of subjectivity if you like. (Muecke. “No Heart,” p. 15)

Although Muecke characteristically focuses on the writerly side of things here, his assessment is much to the point of the *ficto-critical*: the aim of the interpellatory aspects of the *ficto/critical* is to address – both constatively and performatively – our textual practices in their wider discursive function of in/forming the subjectivity of the textual agent in relation to the world by way of her relation to the text. In this sense, the self-reflexive *ficto-critical* stance towards our textual practices finds its *ficto-critical* end in the textually effected and affected formations of the self in relation to the other, as well as in relation to the world.

In both these senses, my phrasing of the subtitle addresses the *epistemological* implications of *meaning* formation from the *ficto-critical* perspective as well as the *ethical* implications this might have for *other*, and *self*-formation from the *ficto-critical* perspective. The subtitle thus addresses the processes of text-discursive meaning formation *in their relevance for* the wider discursive processes of other and self-formation and re/formation. Using only the elements foregrounded by the subtitle, there is also a formulaic way of spelling out the twofold *ficto/critical* directedness, which will distil the trope further. On the one hand, the text-epistemological and text-theoretical implications of *meaning* formation are concerned with the relation between the reading *self* and the *text*:

(self – text)

Using the hyphen here as a symbol for relation, or the process of *relating*, this is what I call the *ficto-critical* relation, the gist of which is that the text works *ficto-critically* by making the reader work – self-reflexively. That is, with its self-reflexive, performative and im/mediate direction the text works *ficto-critically* by making the reader experience and re-conceive of their work of *relating* to the text and making sense of its mediations.

On the other hand, the text-ethical implications of *other*, and *self*-formation are concerned with the relation between the (reading) *self* and the *world* or the *other*.

(self – other/world)

This is what I call the *ficto-critical* relation, which concerns the practical relevance of the insights that the *ficto-critical* relation can provide for certain issues and concerns. To

rephrase the foregone formulation accordingly, the text works *ficto-critically* by getting the reader to work on themselves in terms of their relation to the other and the world. That is, with its interpellatory force the *ficto-critical* text aims to rouse the reading textual agent into changing their ways of going about their textual activities, because they are implied in the wider subjects under critique. This is how the *ficto/critical* removes both the academic and medial distance of criticism and makes the issue under discussion personal for each and every receptive recipient.

Now, taken together *the twofold ficto/critical trope* takes this combined formula:

((self – text) – world/other)

Although the focus of the *ficto-critical* relation is very much directed at the identity defining relation between self and world/other, the self-reflexive, performative, and immediate point of departure is *of necessity* the *ficto-critical* relation between self and text. The *ficto/critical*, firstly, theoretically re/assess the fundamental conditions of the possibility of our (generic) textual practices and, secondly, points out how these constitutive mechanisms have been deployed generically to detrimental effect. This pattern is potentially valid for *all* the *differently* motivated *ficto/critical* concerns with certain discursive implications that our textual practices may have in processes of wider discursive formations.

At the same time, however, it should already be noted in these introductory remarks that not every *ficto/critical* text instantiates both of these aspects in equal measure. Most of the texts in evidence – even the primary texts of this thesis – exemplify perhaps one aspect to a greater extent than the other, or instantiate just a fragmentary picture of the *ficto/critical* pattern. Nevertheless, I am going to formulate this *ficto/critical* ideal here rather strongly in what follows, because I am convinced that it can propel our understanding of *ficto/critical* texts and inject new significance into our practices of writing and reading *ficto/critically*. Therefore I would like to take this pattern and its implications seriously even though not every worthwhile *ficto/critical* text instantiates it in full. If they have a fragment to contribute to the bigger picture of the twofold *ficto/critical* understanding or the concomitant *ficto/critical* background understanding of our textual practices in general, all *fictocritical* texts and their concerns, I hope, will only profit from my theorisation.

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Asymmetrically, then, the *ficto*-critical first brings to awareness the relation between self and text, which is the constitutive frame for any reading experience. As the reading process is thus frictioned by the textual structure, the framework of this *mediating relation* is performatively foregrounded from within. At the same time, however, this framing relation is also the subject of the *relational mediation* that constitutes the reading process – it is thus made the constative subject of the text. In this manner, a meta-commentary is provided *constatively* on the same kind of textual relation that is self-reflexively brought to experience *from within the performance*. Secondly, this constatively *and* performatively raised awareness of the relation and relating between self and text is often given practical direction by the text's other content and the issues it raises.

As textual work, *ficto/critical* reading and writing practices aim at creating an experience that simultaneously comprises an awareness and an understanding of one's own performative relation to the text and of the practical significance and function that this performative relation has within the wider discursive formations of meaning, self and other or world. In this manner, *ficto/critical* texts make perceptible the crucial twofold relation that always already constitutes our textual practices. *In reading*, the gap between self and text is constitutively bridged, the relation established. At the same time, this constitutive bridging always already relates the textual formation to the world through the reader and their idiocultural background. The text – whether fictional or non-fictional – is given worldly relevance only *through* the reader. While the reader works on the text, the text actually works on the reader. The *ficto/critical* point is, firstly, that these constitutive relations are usually being abstracted from in the way we are conditioned to read. And, secondly, that a self-reflexive awareness of these relations will suggest a different picture of *how* our textual formations and practices in/form and affect our wider discursive formations and practices.

b) The Thesis Project

Some central ingredients of what I shall present as a *re*-conceptualisation of (unmarked) fictocriticism, or (hyphenated) ficto-criticism, in terms of (slashed) ficto/criticism have been around for some time. I would argue, however, that neither has yet enough effort been made to thoroughly follow through their implications nor to think them together. Pursuing both these aims shall open up new and surprising perspectives, which, after all, has always been an important goal of ficto/critical practice.

For example, with regards to the ficto/critical trope Nettelbeck has clearly identified the self-reflexive direction of what I have now termed the *ficto*-critically theoretical aspect, especially in its relevance for *meaning* formation, when she notes that

the stress in fictocritical texts on the fragment or on the representational image or on the arbitrary connection might be read as signalling not so much a disappearance of value into a long, flat plain of relativity but rather a coming-to-grips with the contexts in which value is produced. (Nettelbeck, "Introduction," p. 8)

For Nettelbeck the ficto/critical goes beyond the notion of competing values, whether on the textual or generic levels, when it turns towards the constitutive level of value production via text, which the ficto/critical investigates and criticises at the same time as it puts it to practice. Firstly, there is the constitutive con/text, which presents the conditions of the possibility of textual value production. Secondly there is the wider discursive con/text, within which certain values are produced and maintained for certain reasons. To convey an awareness and understanding of the former is the focus of the *ficto*-critical, while the latter is the concern of the *ficto-critical*.

In a similar vein, when Kerr notes that in fictocriticism "[t]heory' is the 'sign' for 'reflexivity'" and that, as a result, "[t]he fictocritical story knows that what it is doing is suspect, but continues to do it anyway" (Kerr, "Topographies," p. 113) she lucidly captures *the special performative twist* that ficto/critical self-reflexivity entails because it is *paired with constative theoretical import*. In her terminology she concludes that "[f]ictocriticism is perverse" because "[i]n fictocriticism the project itself must be scrutinized at the same time as it is performed" (Kerr, "Topographies," p. 113). Kerr has thus earlier laid her finger precisely on the crucial *under-scrutiny-while-under-way* aspect, which I shall later qualify figuratively as the *ficto*-critical vector and twist. Although the new kinds of textually induced *self-reflexivity* and *performativity* at work

in the *ficto*-critical are already implied here, they have never been made central. They are yet to enter our thinking of the *ficto*/critical to an extent that does justice to their *systemic* importance. Just this potential I now want to tap for the purposes of this thesis.

The *ficto-critical* counterpart to these early *ficto*-critical observations has also been in evidence before. For example, Helen Flavell has identified precisely the connection between *ficto*-critical form and wider discursive formations when she writes that

[f]icto-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. (Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. 295-6)

A concomitant point is then to identify how dominant textual structures play a part in wider discursive structures of domination. Instead of simply acknowledging the fact that these structures are in place, the virtue of *ficto*/critical writing has always been to bend its own practices in such a manner that would *both* make perceptible the textual mechanisms in question *and* indicate the wider realms of critical concern. Thus, a certain symmetry between *ficto*/critical concerns and textual mechanisms is likely to emerge which could provide a catalogue of *systematic* *ficto*/critical clusters rather than – ultimately contiguous – strands of marginal/ised provenance as well as textual features to explain the emergence, motivation and patterns of *ficto*/critical writing.

Now, I would like to think these preliminary insights regarding the *ficto*/critical together with other key perspectival shifts in my approach. The aim is to assemble a *systemic* understanding of *ficto*/critical writing as an interventionist practice as well as an aesthetic of deconstruction within the paradigmatic parameters of our textual practices as *ficto*/critical writing makes them perceptible. One specific challenge shall be to maintain the attention on structures of discursive domination while yet shifting perspective from the textual level towards our textual practices.

Ficto/critical Shifts in Perspective

Some major shifts in perspective are already implicit in what I have outlined so far, the most important of which I would like to recapitulate more detailed in this section.

Firstly, I have anticipated a significant shift from the generic *between* towards the *meta-generic*. As a result of prioritising the prominent self-reflexive theoretical turns in *ficto*/critical writing, focus shifts from the interstitial realms between genres onto the meta-level of our textual practices. This perspectival shift happens somewhat, but by no

means entirely, at the expense of the suggestive analogy between marginal/ised speaking positions and the generically marginal. Taking the text-theoretical and text-epistemological aspects of *ficto/critical* writing seriously simply shifts attention from the level of our generic textual practices onto the level of the conditions of the im/possibility of our generic practices of textual representation and communication. In even more Derridean terms, focus shifts from the level of the laws of genre onto the level of the laws of the laws of genre. In this sense, the *ficto-critical* relation aims to reassess the field of our textual practices, not to entrench itself in its already pre-structured marginal interstices. Part Two, in particular, shall retrace how *ficto-critical* texts guide their readers towards this self-reflexive meta-perspective.

Secondly, and this coincides with the meta-generic shift, I have promised to take seriously the implications of the *ficto/critical* shift from texts towards our textual *practices*. Note that this is closely connected to the *ficto-critical* aspect of the twofold *ficto/critical* trope. Primary attention has moved from *the* textual work towards *our* textual acts in an attempt to come to terms with the non-generic patterns of the *ficto/critical*. It has departed from the one written textual work towards the combined writerly and readerly textual acts of *reading* and *writing* of which textual work comprises. This shift in perspective has effectively changed understanding from an essential and fixed model of the textual work towards something much more decentred and performative, from the parameters of textual form towards the parameters of the medially pre-structured communicative situation within which our textual acts combine to per/form the textual work.

A significant knock-on effect of this shift in perspective necessitates a third, almost methodological, shift from textual analysis to *text-cultural* analysis. Note that this practical dimension is closely connected to the *ficto-critical* aspect of the two-step *ficto/critical* trope. Connecting a *ficto-critical* theory of our textual formations with a *ficto-critical* assessment of their role in wider discursive formations, shifts focal attention towards our culture of textual practices. Arguably, there is an intermediary step to be acknowledged in the transition that actually moves along the scale from *textual analysis* towards *critical discourse analysis* and *cultural studies* towards something like *a ficto/critical discourse analysis*, which has the potential to develop great text-philosophical import with both a *theoretical* and a *practical* orientation. The overarching aim along this scale should be to comprehend the ideological function that our textual acts serve within wider discursive contexts. Part Three, in particular, shall

establish the polar distinction in textual cultures and between academic and ficto/critical text-practical *ideologies* and their concomitant *practices*.

A fourth shift in perspective on the ficto/critical that I have only briefly outlined so far shall then flow from the previous shifts. Eventually it will entail (re)drawing the ficto/critical field no longer according to provenance in terms of the writer's personal background or the text's formal features, but according to the respective connections between a constitutive textual mechanism and the wider discursive practices that a text highlights ficto/critically. The future prospect is thus to replace the notion of different strands in fictocritical writing (that are supposedly maintained by certain writers) with the notion of individual texts that cluster around the constitutive mechanisms of our textual practices in order to ficto/critically highlight and critique their wider discursive function from a positioned and involved perspective.

Fifthly, the perhaps most consequential – as well as previously most underrated – shift moves from the dominant textual and writerly perspectives towards a *readerly* perspective, albeit without neglecting these other two aspects. It ultimately amounts to the deconstruction of another hierarchical dichotomy, this time between the writerly and readerly positions in relation to the text. Systemic primacy shall henceforth be emphasised in the erstwhile minor – because allegedly passive and hence negligible – position of the reader. Especially my formulation of a de-centred and processual understanding of our textual practices shall thus shift focus onto the readerly side of the equation. Ultimately, I want to suggest that the readerly act paradigmatically performs the necessary de-territorialising movement that is so highly valued in ficto/criticism, whereas writing necessarily enacts its re-territorialising counterpart, leaving only the manifest territorial structure of the written.

In line with this point, it is of particular importance, firstly, that the *kind* of self-reflexivity at work in ficto/criticism expands from the textual and writerly levels to include the readerly act and, secondly, that the *kind* of performativity at work in ficto/critical texts expands from the textual and writerly levels to include the readerly performance. Thus, ficto/critical self-reflexivity shifts from the constative towards the performative *at the same time as* ficto/critical performativity shifts from the conceptual towards the experiential side of reading. It is particularly important for the ficto/critical to think these shifts *together*. Implicit here are these further changes in perspective: from a writerly self-reflexivity, via a textual self-reflexivity, towards a readerly self-reflexivity; from the transparent text, via the opaque text, towards always *this* im/mediate and readerly side of the textual work; from a one-way instrumental

understanding of language, via a notion of linguistic or textual self-centredness, towards the ficto/critical textual relation which is rooted in and routed through the reader. All these facets have their respective insights that need to be taken into account.

Note, furthermore, that the *im/mediate* effect of *ficto*-critical writing highlights these kinds of self-reflexivity and performativity *experientially* while under way, not constatively at a remove. In other words, the *ficto*-critical comprises texts that *experientially highlight the im/mediacy of reading*. In this manner, ficto/criticism makes its issues and concerns personal for the reader, too, by im/mediately implying their practices in the subject of critique. This latter shift from textual mediation to textual im/mediacy also provides the theoretical hinge of the *ficto*-critical vector, which roots the constative and performative in the im/mediate readerly present in order to highlight how the issues under critique are routed through the very practices under way *in reading*.

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Attuned to this, I would now also like to recapitulate very briefly the shift in approach to the (slashed) ficto/critical against the background of what I consider to be its best theorisation to date. When the opposition between non-fiction, as truth-representing discourse, and fiction, as truth-constituting discourse in its own right, is targeted in its function for institutionalised genres of knowledge production, two crucial questions must be asked. First, at what level is genre at stake here? And second, how does the ficto/critical intend to effect re/medial change to generically instituted praxes of linguistic-discursive domination? The following excerpt provides Flavell's answers to these questions:

[B]ringing 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. [...] 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. (Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. 295-6)

Flavell here lucidly identifies the crucial features of ficto-critical practice. Yet, although she puts Deleuzian thought to brilliant use in describing ficto-criticism as writing-between, in its essential resistance to being generically conceptualised, I want to suggest that she nonetheless remains on the level of the laws of genre in her overall description. Departing from this notion, I propose that the step towards the framing laws of the laws of genre has to be undertaken if ficto/criticism is to be adequately conceived of as a self-reflexive meta-commentary that addresses the movements, mechanisms and functions of our linguistic-discursive modes of constructing meaning, the other, the world, and a self. Thus, differently from Flavell's approach, I want to argue that ficto/criticism demands to be read as a writing practice that steers attention towards the constitutive structures of – and their perpetual reproduction in – the intentional structures at work in textual encounters. Here I shall diagnose a different kind of reflexivity as informing these texts – one that is concerned with the laws of the laws of genre rather than the spaces between genres.

I want to propose a reading of ficto/criticism that takes the framing laws of the laws of genre into account as our fundamental practical modes with which we constitutively set ourselves in relation to the world, the text, and the other. Again, I believe that Flavell is lucidly pointing in exactly the right direction when she identifies ficto-criticism's concern with "the concepts of judgement, interpretation and representation" (Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. 295). Yet, departing from her approach, I want to suggest that the ficto/critical post-generically addresses these concepts as the constitutive tropological movements of our linguistic-discursive interaction with the world, the text, and the other, which have hitherto been conceptualised for textual practices as the basic genres of *criticism*, *theory*, and *fiction*.

"Subjecting" Ficto/criticism: The Methods of Approach

Asserting a theory of the ficto/critical over the course of this thesis I shall make recourse to a number of primary ficto/critical sources. It is important to note, however, that not only will I use these ficto/critical texts as examples to prove my point, but also as primary sources for their background theory of our textual practices, against which their textual conduct can then emerge as *strategically* deployed. Note that there is no flawed circularity in doing so. Even outside of theoretical passages that are explicitly

dealing our textual practices, ficto/critical texts are usually saturated with ideologically differing perceptions of the constitutive mechanisms and generic forces of our reading and writing practices. After all, these perceptions strategically bring them in formation to begin with. On these grounds, I want to take directions for a theoretical re-assessment of our textual practices directly from those ficto/critical texts whose resistance to generic textual practices it already in/forms.

The point is to theorise ficto/criticism on its own terms. With regards to the ingrained hesitance among many primary writers towards theorising the ficto/critical, I would like to offer the following angle. Because it is in any case possible to theorise ficto/criticism, I think it were better for it to be done from a benevolent stance that is in/formed by primary ficto/critical texts, rather than with a theory that is plucked from somewhere else and then thrown at the ficto/critical. Rather than subjecting ficto/criticism to a theoretical regime that is alien to its own, I want to subject it to only the combined theoretical implications that emerge from the primary ficto/critical texts in this study. Hence, the task is to induce a theory on the basis of the texts already in evidence, albeit in a non-reductive manner, which leaves unpredictable the realm of ficto/critical forms to come, while still providing a firm grasp of the concept of ficto/critical *strategies*. Thus, readers and writers can be sensitised towards the ficto/critical, which, I believe, will enhance it as a broader project. To achieve this goal, I shall conduct the following primary readings, in pursuit of the steps outlined below, towards a systemic re-conceptualisation of the ficto/critical.

Firstly, I shall examine, define and refine the primorial *ficto*-critical turn of the ficto/critical trope. Special attention needs to be paid to its peculiar composition of *both* an experiential awareness of the textual performance under way in reading – which I refer to as realising the *ficto*-critical vector – *and* a simultaneous self-reflexive theoretical account of our textual practices that we thus find in writing. This *ficto*-critical relation, that short-circuits the performative side of *reading* and the constative side of the written, produces a *ficto*-critical twist that I shall re-trace in Stephen Muecke’s essay “The Fall.” At times, I may have to read Muecke’s text against the explicit authorial voice in order to realise its full textual potential. In other words, almost despite himself, while yet adhering to a different concept of the (unmarked) fictocritical, which the text aims to define, Muecke has here wrought a textual structure that epitomises what I call the *ficto*-critical turn of the (slashed) ficto/critical trope. In a pre/post/erous way, I would thus like to read Muecke’s splendid text into its (slashed) ficto/critical self. In this manner, the second part called “Realising the *Ficto*-critical

Vector and Twist: Friction/ing Conceptual Work and its Im/mediate Significance” shall lead into this primary turn of the ficto/critical trope.

Secondly, I shall re-deploy the terminology of previous theorisations of the ficto/critical in order, firstly, to characterise the trope of ficto/critical strategies, secondly, to ideologically refine the spatio-temporal background understanding of reading and writing and, thirdly, to formulate a theory of the ficto/critical. In particular, I shall aim to sharpen my ficto/critical perspective in terms of previous theorisations with a view to supplementing and infusing their often witty and ingenious terminology with the insights of my study. In this respect, Michael Taussig’s “The Corn-Wolf: Writing Apotropaic Texts” and Heather Kerr’s “Perverse Writing – Maternity and Monarchy: Fictocriticism and Exorbitant, Plural Bodies”⁶² provide exceptionally fertile grounds. At the same time, revisiting previous conceptualisations of fictocriticism, or ficto-criticism, shall provide an opportunity to further refine the ficto/critical background theory and re/configure our understanding of the constellations that mark the ficto/critical accordingly. Both Aritha van Herk’s *Places Far From Ellesmere: A Geografictione* and John Hughes’ *Someone Else: Fictional Essays* are particularly rewarding texts for these purposes, which will help to refine the encapsulated spatial and translational temporal logic of our textual practices. One aim is to refine a theory of ficto/critical strategies in light of these readings, simply because the theoretical background understanding of our textual practices plays such an in/formative role for them.

Fourthly, I shall examine the secondary aspect of the *ficto-critical* turn in the ficto/critical trope on the back of a primary reading. The exemplary text to help define the notion of *ficto-critical* edge will be Gail Jones’ essay “Thaumatropes,” which makes this tropical turn perceptible in admirable fashion. Following on this, a reading of Katrina Schlunke’s *Bluff Rock: Autobiography of a Massacre* will qualify her novel-length book as another complete ficto/critical text in the sense of my theory.

Just to briefly recapitulate the methods of this study then, Part Two and Part Four shall engage in detailed close readings to establish the twofold turns of the ficto/critical trope. In both cases the point in focussing on ficto/critical *strategies* lies in relating a more general ficto/critique to the individual text’s functioning, its locatedness, and its depictions. In between, Part Three shall then formulate a new theory of the ficto/critical by way of re/deploying the formulations of previous theorisations on the meta-level.

⁶² Heather B. Kerr, “Perverse Writing – Maternity and Monarchy: Fictocriticism and Exorbitant, Plural Bodies,” in *Gender Reconstructions; Pornography and Perversions in Literature and Culture*, edited by Susan Bernardo et al., Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002, p. 148-66.

Ideally, this approach would allow for a bi/directional in/formation between the formulation of the background theory and the theory of ficto/critical strategies as they are grounded in the textual evidence. As my readings shall move from one primary text to the next, my theorising would ideally move back and forth between these three interrelated levels that, between them, in/form my theses and thesis.

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All in all, my selection of *central* primary texts should establish a representative ficto/critical field. The idea is to reflect the different parameters in evidence across ficto/critical writing, yet without prioritising or excluding any one of them. For this reason, my selection of central primary texts includes a roughly equal number of essay-length and novel-length texts. More importantly, perhaps, both genders are just about equally represented. Time-wise, all primary texts have been published from 1990 onwards. Notably, an emphasis on Australian writing results from the productive place that ficto/critical writing has been accorded at Universities there since the mid-90s.

Carving out a field like this is necessarily arbitrary, but with regards to the ficto/critical this is precisely the point. Texts that have been published as minor essays, such as Muecke's "The Fall" and Jones' "Thaumatrope" are on the same textual footing as publications of more decidedly academic or literary aspiration, such as Schlunke's *Bluff Rock* and van Herk's *Places Far From Ellesmere* respectively, while texts such as Kerr's "Perverse Writing," Taussig's "The Corn-Wolf" and Hughes' *Someone Else* make the distinction between secondary and primary texts untenable. My selection thus hopes to strike the right balance to accord a theory of the ficto/critical with general intent that is yet rooted in these very particular texts with all their different formal and positional idiosyncrasies.

Location, Scope, and Limits of the Study

Ahead of engaging in these analyses, a few more introductory words are in order with regards to the general situation of the present Ph.D. project. Institutionally, this thesis is the result of a joint award Ph.D. program between FU Berlin and UWA Perth, where it is located in the *Institut für Englische Philologie* and the English and Cultural Studies department respectively. My project is therefore located firmly in the realm of literary studies, as an exercise of literary theory. As such, the study follows its subject matter,

the ficto/critical, in factoring in the overlap between the theoretical and the literary, the academic and sometimes even the experimental.

Academically, however, the present thesis is situated somewhere in-between literary studies, philosophy, textual analysis, critical discourse analysis, and cultural studies. It incorporates elements from all of these disciplines, but sometimes interprets them differently, with an inflection that is, again, in/formed by the subject of study. The ostensible aim of this study is to *theorise* and *critique* fictocriticism from a literary studies perspective. In order to do so *in terms of* the subject matter, however, the study also develops a theory of our textual practices from a more philosophical perspective that is yet in/formed by the ficto/critical texts. Furthermore, on account of the tropical hinge that is the ficto/critical, this study examines generic as well as ficto/critical texts and textual practices *and* their wider discursive or cultural implications. The goal is to show how the primary texts contain, firstly, *ficto*-critically deployed textual means, secondly, (at least) fragments of a ficto/critical theory of our textual practices and, thirdly, a strategic pattern that connects the mechanisms of textual representation and communication to such wider discursive practices as worlding or othering. Accordingly, the methodology of this thesis veers between close readings, philosophical theorising, and assessing our text-discursive formations in their relevance for our cultural formations.

While partially engaging in all these disciplines, it is vital to recognise them as also the primary subject of the broader ficto/critique thus taking shape. While I believe that a *general theory* of our textual practices is possible, if only we took their medial conditions of (im)possibility as our starting point, the virtue of any *specific* kind of *critique* that emerges from such a re-assessment ought to be to turn in on itself, on our own textual practices of literary theory and criticism or philosophy, before turning elsewhere, against other practices from which it is allegedly removed. The primary subject of critique thus lies not elsewhere but is precisely the entire realm of our text-cultural practices – *especially* where they are of *systemic* relevance for wider discursive formations simultaneously under critique. The idea, ultimately, is precisely to re-theorise our *textual* practices of theorising the world, and critique our *textual* practices of critiquing other practices; furthermore, to do so in the uneasy knowledge that *qua textual* practices such theorisations and critiques participate in the text-cultural formations that really ought to be under critique. It is very much to the problematic point of the ficto/critical that all this must be achieved in yet an/other text. Ficto/critical strategies, I believe, are most productively understood along these lines.

Consequentially, reading and writing practices that do live up to these aims will indeed qualify as *textual activism* proper, because they effectively *remove the gap* between explanatory critique and interventionist performance for *both* writer and reader.

Objectives of the Study

Appropriately, the *literary studies* perspective in this thesis will be most prevalent in the primary close readings. Note, however, that many of these are predominantly concerned with the relations between fiction, criticism and theory and the respective texts' re-assessment thereof. Hence, while my thesis employs a literary studies methodology its outcomes are likely to affect our notions of literary theory and literary criticism in their relation to literature. At the same time, my study further politicises the textual culture of literary studies through a perspective that recognises not only literary *criticism* as (ethico-)political but also the very textual practices which constitute the entire discipline just as much as its objects of study. The aim in this respect is to raise awareness among literary scholars of the *systemic* implications that their practices share with their objects of study – not only in the *theoretical* sense that deconstructing the perceived hierarchy between theory/criticism and fiction would yield an *aporia* which must challenge the discipline, but also in the *practical* sense that participating in the established generic order systemically perpetuates the very discursive formations that ought to be under critique *together with* the respective subject matter.

The *philosophical* aspects of this study are concentrated in two perspectives, both of which concern the philosophy of language. Firstly, the self-reflexive, performative and im/mediate mode of the *ficto-critical* addresses a deficiency of the allegedly objective, uninvolved, and removed perspective of philosophy and philosophical language use. In this regard, the *ficto-critical* experience actually contradicts the alleged passivity of our textual practices that much philosophy of language simply *assumes*. This is the perspective on the *ficto-critical* as an aesthetic of deconstruction that has, above all, something to say about our guiding *notions* of reading and writing. Secondly, the interventionist, activist aesthetic of the *ficto-critical* addresses an ethico-political dimension that is still rarely at the centre of attention in much philosophy of language, simply because the distanced and objective model would suggest otherwise. In this combined sense, the *ficto/critical* avails itself of the *practical* relevance of the core *theoretical* philosophy discipline that is the philosophy of language. For the present

thesis the goal in this respect is to capture the different philosophical assessments of our textual work that frame the emergence of ficto/critical strategies.

There is an important element of Critical Discourse Analysis at work in this study – albeit without its associated clear-cut method⁶³ – that retraces how exactly ficto/critical texts examine and critique the ways in which generic text-discursive formations serve to effect and affect wider discursive formations. Note that the core ficto/critical trope

((self – text) – world)

also captures the main interests of Critical Discourse Analysis. In any case, given the peculiar nature of ficto/critical textual form/ations and their modes of conduct, we should perhaps distinguish this characteristically experimental approach as one of *ficto/critical discourse analysis*. This, at least, is what the following study hopes to bring into relief when it defines the characteristic performative, self-reflexive and im/mediate turns of the ficto/critical, all of which set it apart from more traditional critical discourse analyses that remain academically aloof from their subject matter through an objective form of writing *even* where their critical motivation is personal.

Finally, to complete the picture, the *cultural studies* aspect of this study is directed firmly at *both* the text-cultural practices that ficto/critical strategies resist *as well as* those they develop to this end. Textual practices are here treated precisely as cultural practices. Paradigmatic in this respect is anthropological writing, which purports to study cultures, yet in so doing produces *both* a distinct kind of textual culture itself, which always already ties into broader cultural practices. Notably, the practical dimension of this interest relates not only to these text-cultural formations but also to the ways in which such text-cultural practices are of almost foundational importance for some of our cultures in a more general sense. Our textual practices thus command the cultural studies attention of my thesis in this twofold and interrelated sense. Firstly, there are particular textual practices that have been cultivated to the point at which they have become text-cultural practices. Secondly, textual practices *per se* often play an almost constitutive role for certain aspects of our cultures more generally. Hence, genres of textual form *and* practice are of ficto/critical interest precisely in their function for wider cultural practices that are facilitated or advanced through such textual practices. Such, at least, is the cultural studies insight that my thesis aims to highlight. Herein all of the above aspects come together.

⁶³ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, London: Longman, 1995; esp. p. 23-83.

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Axiomatically, the ficto/critical trope also splits the scope of my study into two major directions. Firstly, there are *text-epistemological* consequences, which, if thoroughly followed through, could unfold considerable potential for our textual practices. Although this study aims to re-conceptualise ficto/criticism, which understands itself as only a *marginal* writing practice, it yet lets these ficto/critical texts in/form a theory of our textual practices, which is *of general significance*. Underlying here is the thesis that the marginal textual phenomenon makes perceptible mechanisms which are always already at work in all our textual acts, yet never appear in the process as such, because we constitutively abstract from them. Textually wrought ficto/critical frictions, however, make these mechanisms perceptible again. Ficto/critical writing and readings can thus ultimately provide text-theoretical insights which are not only of particular relevance for the kind of academic writing against which the ficto/critical has predominantly been motivated, but which furthermore imply *all* our textual practices on the constitutive level. Ultimately, in its most aspiring philosophical proportions, my study aims to envisage *a small metaphysics of our practices of textual representation and communication*.

Secondly, the *text-ethical* consequences of this study are potentially uncomfortable, because ficto/criticism foregrounds the ethical dimension of our textual actions in such a way that *its* own textual practices of reading and writing, as well as *our* ingrained textual practices of reception are implied as the target of the critique it mounts. Such a ficto/critical perspective thus turns in on *and* against especially the supposedly objective academic perspective and its textual practices, which implies a re-conceptualisation of our academic speaking positions and textual practices. From this ethical perspective, too, the ficto/critical trope has wider discursive consequences for *all* our textual practices – but especially for generically academic ones. To put it pointedly, from a ficto/critical perspective *there is nothing innocent about our allegedly disinterested and objective academic textual practices*.

While the primary goal of my thesis project is to deliver a (slashed) ficto/critical trope, the scope of this project goes well beyond the interests in an allegedly marginal writing practice. In fact, the general *text-epistemological* and *text-ethical* scope of the ficto/critical aim to unhinge the erstwhile field within which ficto/criticism emerged as marginal. And precisely therein lies the ultimate virtue of the ficto/critical – as the opening Derridean quote would suggest.

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Adjunct to this late introductory stage, I would now like to make an important point about the limits of the following study. *Because* I will define the ficto/critical as a post-critical and post-generic form of critique, which is directed at wider discursive issues and concerns *through* a *ficto*-critical stance towards our textual practices and thus reflects its own textual acts in the *ficto-critique* it mounts, there arise two limiting consequences to my approach.

Firstly, texts that do not fully instantiate this rather sophisticated connection in a recognisable manner will, for now, fall outside of this particular definition of the ficto/critical. Certainly, not every text currently regarded as fictocritical will qualify according to this model. In fact, some texts that qualify as (unmarked) fictocritical or (hyphenated) *ficto*-critical may not qualify as (slashed) ficto/critical. Or, to turn this around, not every form of critique that mixes fiction and non-fiction will qualify as ficto/critical according to this model. Note, however, that my theory of the ficto/critical shall be devised to be productive for the philosophical implications of literary theory, *not* in order to dismiss certain texts that fall short of its ideal/ising definition. Much to the contrary, in keeping with the shift in perspective away from the essentialised textual work towards decentring textual acts, ultimately, the ficto/critical must be understood to reside with the textual agent who brings it to the encounter and invests it in the text – any text, in the last instance. In this sense, the ficto/critical, ultimately, emerges as a *stance*. Thus, while my definition may appear to unnecessarily limit the field of ficto/critical texts in evidence, actually, its aim is to fertilise and extend this textual field by spreading the seed of ficto/critical text-ideology among recipients.

Secondly, even entirely within the textual realm, however, the present theory also makes no pretence to include texts that deploy allegedly fictocritical means and address purportedly fictocritical issues, yet fail to endow their respective critiques with the *ficto-critical* edge of a related *ficto*-critical vector and twist in the manner that my theory defines as ficto/critical.

The Subjectivity of this Study

At the end of the day, there is, of course, also a considerable personal factor at play in my work. Although much of this will probably remain hidden from me in the writerly blind spot of a vain subjectivity – and probably so much for the better – I would still

like to outline at least *some* personal aspects that have impacted upon the present thesis, for better or worse.

Most controversially, perhaps, I would suggest that my *academic* background probably informs this study more than a direct, personal and positional involvement in the debates that have originally engendered ficto/critical writing. Whereas this could be construed as almost counter-revolutionary to a particular cause – depending on your point of view – I would maintain that it need not be counter-productive for the ficto/critical. In fact, I want to argue that quite the opposite is the case. My academic background is in English Literature and Philosophy, and more precisely in literary theory and philosophy of language, where the focus of my *Magister Artium* studies has lain. At least theoretically, this should be a good position from which to reconceptualise a kind of writing that wilfully exploits the grey area between the two. Via the FUB and UWA literature institutions I now bring all this to bear in the context of peculiar writing practices that originally emerged on the post/colonial academic margins in Canada and Australia. If anything, I want to argue that this grafted perspective gains the chance to approach the field from a different angle and hopefully circumvent some of the more entrenched positions that exist even in ficto/criticism – even if that may risk alienating some proponents of fictocritical discourse whose work has greatly inspired me.

After all, I am not interested in theorising the ficto/critical in a reductive manner at the expense of its respective causes, but precisely on behalf of them, with a view to enhance the effectiveness of their ficto/critical strategies by sensitising their readership towards them. In this sense, this academic part of the study, which has been written for the further personal hope of obtaining a Ph.D., aims to advance *the ficto/critical* as a cause, which is not necessarily the same as partially advancing the respective causes that have engendered it, yet still entirely compatible with such a stance. In any case, my overriding aim is to improve our understanding of the ficto/critical so as to empower a greater number of textual agents to realise, engage and develop ficto/critical practices, irrespective from whence and which angle they are coming at it.

In this sense, too, my study hopes not to pose a threat to fictocriticism, or ficto-criticism, although it has sometimes had good reasons to resist such previous attempts of theorisation. In fact my approach is partly motivated by the insight that fictocriticism *qua* its territorialising textual medium is always already arrested and open to theorisation of any kind, and that it would hence be preferable for this to be done in a benevolent, even advancing, manner that serves and encourages its de-territorialising impetus and can legitimately hope to propel the ficto/critical forward into as yet

unknown realms. Note that it is only in this vein when my approach is at times pre/post/erous enough to read its primary texts against their explicit self-perceptions. In those moments my textual conduct already avails itself of the insights its analyses yield, thus letting my own work be in/formed by the theory it proposes.

I guess my ultimate subjective objective here is not to re-territorialise the ficto/critical impetus, but rather to advance ficto/critical strategies as a general project – *to write it on* (not to write it up) while yet writing on it – simply because I enjoy reading and writing ficto/criticism and cherish its revolutionary potential. Now, *that* I would like to keep going – even if it were only by presenting a legitimate target for the ficto/critical to come should I fail.

Brief Recapitulation

After this comprehensive introductory advance on my theory, I would now like to briefly recapitulate the working definition of the ficto/critical that shall be developed, attested and refined over the course of the following thesis.

According to what has been established so far, ficto/critical texts sometimes intersect a detached explanatory understanding (i.e. a poetics) of our textual practices with a subjective, captivating narrative or an enticing literary description (i.e. with an aesthetic). In terms of a strict academic division such practices hence intersect truth-representing discourses (e.g. philosophy) and truth-constituting discourses (e.g. literature), which may introduce some degree of epistemological uncertainty, prompting questions like these: What is the truth value of what I have just read? What is the exact *epistemological* status of this representation that has been successfully communicated? How am *I* to relate to it? How am I to relate *it* to the world and my idiocultural reality? Is this reliable information, trustworthy outside its own immediate con/text, or is the reverse the case and it is “only” a good read? Can this distinction even be sustained? And finally: What is the text’s point of posing these questions, and – in the process – of exposing me to them?

For example, such performative experiences of epistemological uncertainty in the *ficto*-critical encounter, while textual communication, albeit frictioned, is yet left intact and fully functioning, aim to re-direct the individual reader’s attention towards *their own* agency in the processes thus simultaneously under way (performatively) and under scrutiny (constatively). In a reflexive movement, this curious realisation makes perceptible to the reader their own performance as reading self, while still establishing

the constative significance of the text. This trope – which I shall refer to as *ficto-critical* vector and twist – makes perceptible (aisthesis), from within, one’s own agency in making a text work (poiesis) and endowing its meaning with sense. What becomes palpable, then, is how the “truth-relation” a reader assigns to a given text is dependent on the generic relation the reader establishes, or is allowed to establish, towards that text. *Ficto-critical* strategies indeed often friction this first sense of textual relating: to relate to a text meaningfully.

In this sense, *ficto-criticism* conflates the *regulatory* rules of academic disciplines and fictional discourses on the textual level *in order to* pinpoint the epistemological uncertainties that constitutively underlie textual representation and communication *per se*. Thereby, attention is placed on the *constitutive* rules of the more basic generic distinction between truth-representing discourses (e.g. philosophy, the sciences) and truth-constituting discourses (e.g. literature) and their mutually constitutive interdependence. In other words, *ficto-criticism* highlights how the constitutive level of our textual practices – which I shall later formulate in terms of the *post-generic* tropes of fiction, theory and criticism – harbours a fictional kernel at the heart of truthful representation *just as much as* fictional discourse of necessity carries real life representational relevance. Such perspectives render *ficto-critical* commentary on our textual practices “meta-.”

Where texts *intersect* their aesthetic side with a poetics of reading to *ficto-critical* effect, they present the experience of a problematic and self-reflexive reading performance that furthermore ties into those concerns that are simultaneously being raised constatively. This may put at stake the reader’s understanding of the construction of *meaning* from a text (epistemology) in its practical significance for the wider discursive constructions of the *self* and the *other* (ethics). Such *ficto-critical* texts present a problematic experience of the act of *reading* whose practical significance for issues such as identity formation, worlding and othering is given direction by their narrative concerns. In this way, textual strategies, which are motivated by experiences in specific con/texts, might engage post/modern formal means to serve a general *ficto/critical* agenda against particular forms of representational domination. The uniting *ficto/critical* aim would be to inscribe such textual structures that could lead the reader towards realising their own *ficto/critical* discourse analysis from their positioned point of view, and from within the textual practices under critique. Thus, in conjunction with highlighting the readerly agency at work a sense of potential, if not moral responsibility,

to transform existing practices is conveyed. Ficto-*critical* strategies thus in fact probematise this second sense of textual relating: to relate to something else textually.

In light of the above, the aim of the dissertation shall be to formulate a theoretical description of the textual forms and practices of ficto/criticism that emphasises central elements of an underlying understanding of textual representation and communication. This underlying understanding shall help to relate the texts' subversion of generic forms to the embedded functions that these linguistic-discursive practices serve within wider social and cultural practices of discursive identity formation, othering and worlding. In this sense, ficto/criticism not only describes the mechanisms, or structural relations, at work in our practices of meaning, other, and self-formation when encountering a text, but also engenders an *experience* of these mechanisms and thus indicates our complicit role in them when it disrupts our smooth agency in the reproduction of dominant generic modes. Because it addresses this connection *constatively as well as performatively*, reading ficto/critical texts can generate a more im/mediately unsettling impact than conceptual description alone could provide. Foregrounding the in/formation of our generic textual practices in their function as formal blueprints for meaning and self-formation as well as worlding and othering in textual encounters, the ficto/critical intends to engender *both* a new understanding and an immediate awareness among its readers of their own reading performance – ultimately, however, to engender *ficto/critical reading practices*.

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Against the background of this advance, I would thus like to propose this working definition:

The name ficto/criticism gathers genre-conflating, and therefore genre-defying, yet themselves non-generic, reading and writing practices that are conducive to yielding a self-reflexive meta-commentary on our constitutive as well as generic practices of textual representation and communication.

As textual work, these reading and writing practices aim at generating an awareness that simultaneously comprises, firstly, an im/mediate experience and, secondly, a theoretical understanding of the linguistic-discursive agent's performative relating to the text, as well as, thirdly, an ethico-political sense of this performative relation's practical significance within the wider discursive formations of meaning, other and self.

Additionally, I would like to just briefly mention that ideally – and beyond the scope of this thesis – the ensuing model of the (slashed) ficto/critical should eventually be exported and re/traced in other texts and approaches that instantiate its characteristic patterns. For example, although only a hunch at this stage, it could be productive to re/think the relationship between the generally post/modern and certainly *ficto*-critical approach of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets⁶⁴ and their comparatively marginal/ised, yet decidedly more *ficto-critically* conscious and aware, follow-up movement New Narrative.⁶⁵ It would seem quite possible that the shift in emphasis between the two groups instantiates precisely the motivated additional step from the core textual relation (self – text) of the *ficto*-critical to the wider discursive relation ((self – text) – world) of the *ficto-critical*.⁶⁶

In any case, pursuing this thrust to locate the relevance of the ficto/critical in texts and approaches not previously subsumed under this name would thus supplement my *internally* directed consideration of previous theorisations of the fictocritical with its *outwardly* directed counterpart. In so doing we would not only tap the realm of future potential that is opened by the (slashed) ficto/critical, but also begin to treat the concept as *our readerly stance* towards text – which would *practically* underwrite the *theoretical* ambitions of this thesis.

⁶⁴ For instance: *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, edited by Bruce Andrews and Charles Bernstein, Southern Illinois University Press, 1984.

⁶⁵ For example: Dodie Bellamy, *Academonia*, San Francisco: Krupskaya, 2006; or Dodie Bellamy, *Pink Steam*, San Francisco: Suspect Thoughts Press, 2004.

⁶⁶ Robert Glück, “Long Note on New Narrative” in *Narrativity: A Critical Journal of Innovative Narrative*, edited by Mary Burger et al.,
<http://www.sfsu.edu/~poetry/narrativity/issue_one/gluck.html> (Aug. 02, 2013).

Realising the *Ficto-critical* Vector and Twist

Frictioning Conceptual Work and Its Im/mediate Significance

A *ficto-critical* close reading of an exemplary fictocritical text is now in order, which shall precipitate some of the shifts and re-conceptualisations anticipated in the Introduction. In this respect, Stephen Muecke's seminal essay "The Fall,"⁶⁷ which was first published as "The Fall: Fictocritical Writing,"⁶⁸ presents an especially powerful textual structure. Reading "The Fall" can provide a prime example of how *ficto-critical* textual strategies aim to exceed the realm of the purely textual when they *highlight* our practice of relating that constitutes an act of textual representation and communication. Firstly, between the text's explicit self-perception, on the one hand, and my deviating reading, on the other, the focal shifts prefigured in Part One shall be retraced as much as followed through. Secondly, my reading shall extract central theoretical tropes for a wider theory of *ficto/critical* strategies, to be developed over the course of the thesis. In any case it should be noted that my approach to "The Fall" is in many respects already in/formed by the theory it will advance.

The goal of the following reading is to re/trace the connected tropes of the *ficto-critical vector* and *twist*. As we shall see very shortly, the performatively experiential nature of these tropes must remain elusive to reproduction in writing here on the page, as their point emerges only in the act of reading. The initial task is to capture and explain *in writing* an experience that even though induced by its space of representation yet exceeds the written page from which it departs *in reading*. For the considerable experiential remainder such description leaves there is no substitute but to read an original text of this kind.

In the following, my close reading shall establish new concepts and re/deploy familiar ones in order to provide a frame of awareness that will let the combined experiential trope of the *ficto-critical vector* and *twist* emerge to better performative effect in future readings. More specifically, I shall consider the text's own question "what has the reader felt, and then also, what has the reader learned" (Muecke, "The Fall," p. 23) from a somewhat unexpected angle. Controversially, perhaps, my reading

⁶⁷ Stephen Muecke, "The Fall," in *Joe in the Andamans and Other Fictocritical Stories*, Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 2008, p. 18-25. [Hereafter: Muecke, "The Fall," p. ...]

⁶⁸ Stephen Muecke, "The Fall: Fictocritical Writing," in *Parallax*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2002, p. 108-12.

thus proposes a different understanding of “The Fall” *as* fictocritical than the text’s explicit self-perception suggests. Above all, my aim in so doing is to enhance the practice of *ficto-critical readings*.

a) Performing “The Fall” in Reading

“The Fall” consists of six fragments. Between them these well-wrought and skilfully interwoven – fragmented, yet neatly structured – sections present the simple overarching narrative of the narrator, Monsieur Mouche,⁶⁹ falling in love while comparing the experience, amongst other things, to reading. Importantly, as is signalled by the earlier title “The Fall: Fictocritical Writing,” the text simultaneously presents a definitional attempt of its own kind of writing practice. An enticing bit of self-reflexive textual theory is thus engaged by way of the narrative of falling in love. The text already performs its understanding of the fictocritical as an inextricable mixture of fiction and theory or criticism, as *literarily argumentative*.

At this point, it is worthwhile to briefly remember the textual structure of “The Fall.” After the first very short fragment sets the minimal stage for the framing narrative of falling in love (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 18), the second section wastes no time to introduce fictocriticism as the leading topic of the text (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 18-19). After this, the third fragment then establishes, through conversation, the newfound lovers’ link to writing (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 20-1), and the fourth passage contributes the further perspective of falling for deception (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 21-2). Next in line, the fifth section draws attention back to texts and textual encounters (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 22-3), before the whole textual structure then culminates in the multilayered analogy of the pitcher plant in the sixth and final section (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 23-5) which carries the complex explanatory burden of its preceding subsections lightly, in a literarily aesthetic manner. To the reader, this dazzling as well as puzzling finale poses the question whether it all adds up on the narrative as well as theoretical levels – and, eventually, whether there is not perhaps a subtle point that exceeds the text’s constative definition of fictocritical writing.

While the minimal narrative thread of falling in love is not the main point of “The Fall,” the text’s first accumulative, then culminating explanatory structure still rests on its storyline. Throughout, the narrative strikes the right balance between the description of subjective experiential occasions and the more theoretical branches of thought into which these lead. The fictocritical point of “The Fall” is then provided by the imagery of the pitcher plant, whose densely painted literary analogy ventures to explain the

⁶⁹ To avoid naïve identification with the author Stephen Muecke, I will refer to the narrator as “Monsieur Mouche,” as he humorously suggests in the text (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 18).

different theoretical threads that have wrought the structural build-up of “The Fall” as well as of its main *topos* of falling.

The final passage of “The Fall” skilfully re/lays a picture of falling that pertains to the following layers: falling in love (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 18; 20-1), falling for deception (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 21-2; 23-5), falling into the loss of representation (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 22), falling for an explanatory account (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 24), falling into the immersing drum of a pitcher plant (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 24), falling into the immersion of narrative (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 24-5), and the impact of the experience, the memory, as well as the representation and communication of falling from a horse (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 24). These widely varying layers all come to bear on the condensed metaphoric imagery that is at once an integral part of the narrative and an explanatory account of reading.

As a result, the textual structure of “The Fall” could also be described as constellational in the sense that a number of theoretical scenarios are shooting off from the narrative thread, around which they then revolve as interrelated elements. Their complex interrelatedness is then presented in the explanatory metaphor of the pitcher plant in the final passage. Thus, the narrative elements charge the imagery of the pitcher plant theoretically, but the big picture at the end does not fall into place smoothly. Neither is it elaborated in the text, nor can it easily be followed through consistently – both of which only enhances the text’s enigmatic aura. And yet, I want to argue, the greatest asset of “The Fall” may in fact be the potential it creates as a skilfully “broken text,” which goes well beyond its mere fragmentary form. In this sense, its *ficto*-critical potential derives precisely from a textual structure that does not add up smoothly without remainder in the textual equation it proposes.

While the preceding fragments thus contribute perspectives on the poetics of reading in terms of immersion, corporeality, and epistemology, the final metaphor of the pitcher plant becomes a most challenging and complex phenomenon in its own right, despite its deceptively simple textual appearance. Despite its perhaps ultimately incongruous analogy, it is precisely this textual strategy of a *simultaneously* narrative aesthetic and explanatory poetic account *thereof* that emerges as the text’s great achievement of *ficto*-critical quality – albeit from a slightly different perspective than the text itself would have us believe.

“The Fall,” I want to argue, paradigmatically exemplifies a textual structure that steers its reader towards realising a *ficto*-critical relation to the text. My suggestion is that there is a productive focus on the recipient’s side in “The Fall” that aims to

highlight experientially, for each reader, their *readerly performance* that re/constitutes the textual relation as a *singular relating* between self and text in Derek Attridge's sense.⁷⁰ Yet, while "The Fall" rightly demands the question of what a text does and can do *qua* text (Muecke, "The Fall," p. 23), it remains mired in an earlier understanding of what makes writing fictocritical despite the fact that its textual structure carries the potential to momentarily surpass this notion *experientially* (perception) and eventually overcome it theoretically (conception). Contrary to my *readerly* focussed approach, however, the text's self-perception as fictocritical remains centred around the *writing* agency. And yet, almost despite itself, *the textual structure* of "The Fall" can be used to precipitate the new perspective of the *ficto-critical*.

On the one hand, there are the text's *constative* propositions for fictocritical texts that it meets, *performatively*. On the other hand, there is its readerly potential for fictocritical textual *performances*. In a way, the task is to liberate the text's implicit potential from its explicit definition – to salvage its subtle, *ficto-critical* experiential potential from the text's outgoing attempt to explicitly contain the fictocritical form it displays. While the text's structure thus intimates a *ficto-critical* potential in the sense of this study, its attempt at performing, on the textual level, its more explicit definition yet falls back behind this structural awareness. Therefore, two conceptions of textual performativity shall frame my reading of "The Fall." Firstly, *the performative text* which already enacts what it proposes and, secondly, *the textual performance by a reader* who enacts the text's pre-scription. It is crucial to acknowledge that while "The Fall" *constatively* presents itself as a *performative* text, its potential for a specific kind of experientially self-reflexive performativity, which exceeds the purely textual realm, needs to be realised in reading.

Note how the thin overarching narrative thread of Monsieur Mouche's experience of falling in love is paralleled by the text's striking final imagery and account of the fly that falls for, falls into, and finally gets fatally immersed in the pitcher plant. This is the text's central literary *imagery* that is furthermore presented in such a way that it *simultaneously* delivers a *poetics* of reading. Significantly, the *metaphor* of the pitcher plant thus yields a *structural* understanding of the epistemological mode in which it presents this understanding.

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⁷⁰ Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 63-4.

In deploying, firstly, *explanatory* considerations on reading, with, secondly, a *narrative* of falling in love, and, thirdly, a *structural metaphor* that lets these explanatory and narrative strands intersect in the same imagery, “The Fall” provides at the same time, firstly, a distanced account, secondly, an immersing narrative, and, thirdly, a simultaneously beautiful as well as explanatory description. All of this opens up a significantly new perspective on a text’s otherwise generic referential status as either fiction or non-fiction. As *poetics* and *aesthetics* are thus brought to coincide, the generic conflation referenced in the beginning of “The Fall” as characteristic of fictocritical texts (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 18) is inextricably exemplified by the text itself. However, if the deeper implications of the deployed trope of the structural metaphor are sounded out, there will emerge a degree of self-contradiction in the understanding of fictocritical texts by the particular fictocritical text “The Fall.” At that point my current approach shall aim at bringing the implicit textual potential of “The Fall” into its own by revising some of its more explicit understandings.

In order to achieve this pre/post/erous aim, I shall first follow the text into the *explicitly* suggested conception of its fictocritical self before then casting a different light onto the same scene from the blind spot of its performative textual potential that would beg to differ. Just to be clear, there are two central explanatory accounts in “The Fall.” On the one hand, the text accounts for fictocritical writing practices, which it predominantly addresses as a matter of speaking positions, generic conflation, and the performative text. But, on the other hand, it also delivers an im/mediately striking account of our reading practices in general. This is the point of the *structural metaphor* of the pitcher plant which, in due time, shall lead us to the central tropes of the *fictocritical vector* and *twist*.

A reading of “The Fall” should seek to bridge the gap between these two accounts. The perhaps counter-intuitive move of my approach will be to give primacy to the far-reaching implications that flow from the *readerly* account of our (fictocritical) textual practices. Yet the task is also to avoid a mere privileging of the “new” *readerly* over the “old” *writerly* focus. This shall be achieved by re-conceiving of the apparent dichotomy on the level of the conditions of the im/possibility of the textual work – conditions, as we shall see shortly, that do not usually emerge as such from the all too familiar *writerly* perspective that is mediated via a text.

Firstly, however, the self-perception and definition of the text shall be extrapolated. Secondly, the shift in perspective, which this study suggests, needs to be introduced and corroborated by a close reading. Thirdly, the implications of this paradigm shift shall

then be elaborated and the central fictocritical tropes of the vector and twist refined further.

“The Fall” as Textually Performative

“The Fall” is definitely a performative text in the traditional sense that it already conforms to its propositions *in* proposing them. In other words, it already enacts (performative) what it describes (constative). After the minimal stage setting of the first section (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 18), the second fragment provides a definitional introduction to fictocritical writing practices (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 18-9). These definitional characteristics are clearly met by “The Fall” itself, whose textual form thus *performatively* displays what its propositional content *constates*. This first kind of performativity at work in “The Fall” presents a *static* kind of *textual* performativity.

As captured by these qualifications, however, there is something inherently paradoxical about such a performative text, because the processual notion of performance is evoked for something as static, even rigid, as an inscribed text – which, on its own, does very little. From an unproblematic angle, of course, this is the same kind of performativity displayed by the word “**Green**,” which lets its announcement of the colour coincide with the display of the same colour in its textual form; or the performativity constituted by the sentence “This sentence consists of six words.” While these examples can be said to “display” or “constitute” a *static* kind of performativity, it seems slightly more problematic to say that they “enact” or “perform” in the *processual* sense of performance.

From this latter angle – which is to the point of this chapter – the kind of *static textual performativity* misses, even obstructs, the kind of *processual readerly performativity* in the textual relation, that is thus really a textual relating. To further anticipate this second sense of performativity at the heart of “The Fall” we could say that processual readerly performativity consists in the recipient’s *enacting* of the textual *pre*-scription. This understanding would thus restore the temporal performance aspect to our considerations of *textual* performativity. And precisely this kind of processual readerly performativity is epitomised by “The Fall,” whose central trope of falling is, after all, a figurative approach to the readerly act.

For the purposes of this chapter, however, it will still be advisable to start with the *static textual performativity* of “The Fall,” which is expressed in its self-reflexively definitional second section. After carefully examining the text’s perception of itself as a

performative fictocritical text in this sense we shall then have to return to the above distinction of textual performativities in order to follow its the less explicit textual potential. Because “The Fall” actually engages both kinds of performativity, this enigmatic text, like no other, can bring into contrastive relief the perspectival shift this thesis aims for. Hence, against the text’s *explicit* conception of itself as fictocritical (unmarked), its more *figuratively* achieved *ficto*-critical potential shall come into focus in the subsequent reading.

What then, in more detail, is the understanding of fictocritical writing proposed in the second fragment? In order to illustrate the skilfully wrought textual performativity of “The Fall” we shall, firstly, consider its proposed quest for *non-universalising speaking positions* that, on the one hand, allow for the particular writerly position to emerge in the text and, on the other hand, allow the reader to re/trace the way that leads up to these propositions. Secondly, we shall turn towards the more dominant self-reflexively definitional focus of “The Fall” that lies on the *generic conflation* of fiction with criticism and theory, of literature with philosophy, of truth-constituting with truth-referencing discourses. Thirdly, we shall have to examine, in particular, how “The Fall” formulates this conflation of generic principles in the Deleuzian terms of *concept and percept*.

Speaking Positions

First of all, “The Fall” not only proposes to collapse the detached subject into the text, but has already accomplished this feat. Where story and argument become indistinguishable a new kind of generic ground *between* is opened. The intersection of literary and philosophical discourses, for example, allows for such otherwise generically precluded textual practices as the experimentation with textual speaking positions. Such explorations have, traditionally, been especially dear to fictocritical writing of feminist provenance. But more generally the appearance of literary subjectivity in the generic (con)text of critically distanced arguments can be produced to sometimes unsettling effect.

As the second fragment of “The Fall” maintains, fictocriticism takes issue with presenting a certain view from a withdrawn speaking position that assumes the authority of a generic form to vouch for its content. By contrast, the fictocritical text also contains the positioning and experiences on which the presented view rests. Muecke reflects this as follows:

One common effect of [the fictocritical] was the collapsing of the ‘detached’ and all-knowing subject *into* the text, so that his (or your) performance as a writer includes dealing with a problem all contemporary writers must face: *how the hell did I get here?* (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 18)

What distinguishes fictocritical writing, thus understood, is the *writerly* subjectivity that enters the text and rids it of a generically assumed, distanced – almost withdrawing – speaking position.

Relating to the same point, Muecke also makes the following further suggestion:

Faced with masses of ways of knowing things coming from all points of the compass, the contemporary writer asks what now can legitimate his or her point of view, and then tends not to just *add to* existing views of the world, but traces a path (which the reader will follow, avidly of course) showing how we got to this position, and what is at stake. (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 19)

Thus including a *subjective narrative* of attaining the knowledge presented in the fictocritical text not only allows to circumspectly mark the author’s own positioning, which is preferable over a distanced and – allegedly – *objective critical stance*, but it also requires *the reader* to follow *and judge* the textual lead. With regards to speaking positions a twofold (fictocritical) strategy thus emerges: firstly, to circumspectly mark the speaking position from which the text is composed; secondly, to create a composition, a benevolent pre-scripture, that invites the reader round to attain the insights of this point of view herself in reading.

Firstly, on one level this collapsing of the critical subject into the text is wrought from the appearance of Monsieur Mouche as the narrator, whose name is a mildly ridiculing cognate of the writer’s name. Yet, paradoxically, this also serves as a distancing strategy. At the same time subjective experience and positioning are admitted into the text while this admission yet allows for a subtle break between writer and narrator. Above all, marking the subjective speaking position in the text has the *post-critical impetus* to remove the writerly positionality from its unassailable high ground of claiming general pro/positions. To collapse the subject into the text, and thereby admit subjectivity into the equation, may leave the account more vulnerable and less author/itative, but in turn it becomes more engaging and co/operative as well. The project of justifying a certain position is thus enlarged from the aspiration of an unassailable account to a subjectively appealing and circumspectly exposed positioning

of the presentation. The fictocritical writer hopes to invite her reader along a continuing path, rather than ordering her from a final state of insight.

Thus, part of the idea to conflate the generic division between the critical or theoretical treatise and a more literarily inspired, fictionalised account, is to bring subjectivity into play, not only as a subjective account but as a circumspectly marked and acknowledged subjectivity that comes from a certain perspective, positioning and outlook *all of which are grounded in experience*. In this sense, a fictocritical text would aim to also deliver a narrative of *how the narrator got round to the knowledge* that is the subject of the text.

Secondly, however, the problem is as much of a *readerly* as it is of a *writerly* nature. To be able to retrace the path to knowledge, to follow the path of a laid out thought experiment to attain a certain understanding, not only gives the text a less dominating attitude, but opens the subjectivity of the experience in the direction of the recipient. It thus shifts emphasis from the presentation of a theoretical construction to its engagement and exercise *on the reader's side*. The fictocritical writer thus pre-scribes a subjective reading experience to the reader, who is encouraged to take the argument, which she also receives in the process, on that basis. Once the desire for an omniscient critical subject withdrawing in the textual account is removed, the motivation for a certain perspective or subjective examples of experience can be admitted into the picture, whose textual frame can now present its motivational objective together with its propositional subject matter. While such strategies collapse the critical distance of the speaking position, they open to adjudication not only *whether* one accepts the knowledge presented, but also *how* that view was obtained.

This strategy ensures that a fictocritical textual rendition becomes less of a manifesto that hits its reader over the head with general pro/positions – much like the General of which Deleuze and Guattari warn.⁷¹ Instead fictocritical writing invites the reader to critically assess what she encounters in light of the particular positioning from within which it was motivated. The readerly faculty of positional empathy is thus exercised while a *particular* – subjective and narrative – as well as a *general* – objective and argumentative – statement is considered. New entry points for the revision of ingrained views may thus be engaged by a fictocritical text's narrative lure *as well as* by its critical reasoning. Precisely such a path, I want to suggest, is laid out for the reader of "The Fall" by its fragmentary textual structure, which is winding its entertaining way

⁷¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 17-8, 25.

between the minimal but universally accessible narrative of falling in love and the various theoretical considerations into which it branches off, accumulating considerable explanatory burden along the way which is yet playfully met by the cumulative final passage and the readerly *experience* it pre/scribes.

Thus conforming to the framework established in the text's second fragment, "The Fall" indeed presents a speaking position that avoids the generality of the detached, all-knowing subject and marks its own speaking position as the subject to certain experiences that have led to the insights presented in the text. Furthermore, these experiences and musings are now laid out in the textual composition for the reader to retrace. In this sense "The Fall" *both* makes its speaking positioning visible *and* pre/scribes a performative reading experience that pertains to its self-reflexive propositional insights.

Generic Conflation

Importantly, "The Fall" is also textually performative with regards to generic conflation. The text itself qualifies as one of "those 'critical' inventions which belong to literature while deforming its limits" (Muecke, "The Fall," p. 18), as Muecke cites Derrida. Its combined framing *narrative* – fictionalised, yet rich in subjective experiential passages – branches off left and right into *theoretical* musings, all of which culminates in the final, figuratively expository *image* of the pitcher plant. Already instantiating its own understanding of the fictocritical, the generic ingredients of "The Fall" thus mutually undercut each other. The text's fictional aspects are endowed with counterintuitive relevance for its theoretical argument, while its philosophical dimensions are rendered in a surprisingly literary manner.

The theme of generic distance and its collapse in fictocriticism thus not only pertains to speaking positions, as the following passage concisely establishes.

When criticism is well-written, and fiction has more ideas than usual, the distinction between the two starts to break down. It is a little crisis because criticism can't be relied upon 'to keep its distance', and fiction can't be relied upon to stay in its imaginary and sometimes politically irrelevant worlds. (Muecke, "The Fall," p. 19)

While in this bi-directional process of generic pollution both genres take on the characteristic traits of their other, their generic function becomes less clear even though the texts remain fully functional *as texts* – only not in a generically predictable way.

This unruly effect of the fictocritical leads into the much heralded grey area of the *generic in-between*, a realm where it has long been argued unforeseen lines of flight can emerge in writing experiments. Hence, just as the distanced critical subject and the insulation of fictional worlds serve certain functions, so too are their deliberate erosion and collapse motivated practices.

Closer to home for this current thesis in literary criticism, “The Fall” further specifies the generic divide that fictocritical practices purposively disregard as follows.

The whole artifice of literary criticism was built up to do one thing really: to unmask the secrets of art. And the fiction was always there re-enchanting the world by putting on the beautiful masks again and again. (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 19)

In other words, literary criticism doubles the point of the literary text when it accounts for the actual significance of experienced immersion and encountered fictional worlds. Paradoxically, literary criticism thus writes non-fiction on fiction, while literary fictions have non-fictional effects in our actual world.

While the truth-referencing faculty of criticism thus invades the realm of fiction and the truth-constituting faculty of fiction invades the realm of the real world by re/presenting its concepts and facticity fictitiously, fictocriticism aims to do both at the same time: to render a fictionalised account in such a way that its conceptual structure regains real life relevance. “The Fall” achieves this when the narrative and aesthetic metaphor of the pitcher plant is harnessed *to exercise and explain* the kind of attraction and immersion texts can provide in reading. And thus – just like his approving assessment of Derrida has it – Muecke himself is “telling stories while making his philosophical arguments” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 18). It is what they both do best in their respective inimitable ways. “The Fall” epitomises this by making its literary and explanatory sides indistinguishable when it presents, *in writing*, an aesthetically pleasing description of the pitcher plant that serves the narrative thread of falling in love as much as it functions as an explanatory account of, simultaneously, the pitcher plant, falling in love, and *reading*.

This *formal* intersection in the final passage of “The Fall,” which exemplifies its earlier definition of fictocriticism, thus powerfully displays a *static textual performativity*. This initial claim to textual performativity consists in the manner in which “The Fall” illustrates the trope of falling, because it conforms to the text’s explicit understanding of fictocritical writing. Yet this static account leaves a considerable remainder in the experience that *reading* “The Fall” also has in store for

the perceptive recipient. As we shall see shortly, “The Fall” not only illustrates but operates the trope of falling so that its readers enact a kind of *falling* in reading – wherein lies a second claim to textual performativity, because the constative textual object here is the readerly performance under way.

Percept & Concept

In the following passage, “The Fall” moves from generic conflation in terms of referential status into a slightly more tricky philosophical distinction that it yet aligns to the broader fault lines of the generic divide.

Criticism uses concepts and fiction percepts. Philosophy, according to Deleuze, is about the invention of new concepts which have the abstraction and flexibility to be taken up and used by others. Art on the other hand, invents percepts, monumental perceptions if you like, which are just *there*, either they work or they don't. They can stand alone. You can use someone else's percept, but it will be an imitation. And percepts and concepts chase each other around successively masking and unmasking. (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 19)

Not only are concepts and percepts here introduced as generic markers, but *as such* they furthermore enact the equally generic principles of masking and unmasking. With regards to the generic conflation at the heart of fictocritical writing “The Fall” thus, firstly, suggests conceptual insights by way of generating percepts as well as, secondly, simultaneously unmasking and masking textual movements with regards to its subject matter. In terms of textual performativity, of course, this appears to be precisely what “The Fall” ultimately attempts in the (post/modern) analogy – or structural metaphor – of the pitcher plant, which intersects a *conceptual* understanding of the reading process with the aesthetically capturing trope of a fly falling into a pitcher plant as its *percept*. The text's – if not monumental then certainly perceptive and momentous – percept thus carries the conceptual power to explain readerly attraction to text. While the aesthetic description of the pitcher plant (re)enchants the textual object, it yet unmasks the reading process under way, which it makes its textual object.

Before we reach the final stage of the structural metaphor, however, the text rides the dichotomy between percept and concept some more – to sometimes puzzling effect. Going by the above quote, the percept is, on the one hand, characterised as independent from almost all substrate including the writer, text, and reader, but on the other hand it

does seem to have its roots in *someone's* “monumental perceptions.” Furthermore, a percept is somehow retained independently from the original perception on which it is based. Yet while it thus gains an autonomous life of its own, it still remains endlessly fascinating *for* individuals.

Was the focus so far geared towards the relation between percepts and concepts in different kinds of texts, their role in direct real life encounters is then also referenced – making the equation of the analogy confusingly complex.

The smile is a percept, it is not *in* you or *at* me. Nobody invented the smile, we are the bodies in whose relationship the smile, as an idea and affect, can manifest itself. Can I leave it at that? No, [...] I want to know what your smile meant, by which I mean, what concept can I attach to it? (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 20)

As before, the independence and im/mediacy of the percept in perception is emphasised, yet its conceptualisation is not as im/mediately available in the real life encounter. Thus, an experiential quality, an affective impact *precedes* the desire for conceptual recognition of the percept's instantiation. But this is very different from textual encounters, where precisely the reverse is the case. In textual encounters the affective impact is *triggered* through a conceptual understanding of the text.

The magic of “The Fall” is thus grounded in the fact that texts necessarily deal in concepts *before* they can deal in percepts, that any percept they carry is already presented via concepts. Its sleigh of hand is to pass over the different order of succession of concept and percepts in im/mediate real life encounters and mediating textual encounters. While Monsieur Mouche tells his attractive student that “[y]our succession of masks outstrips my unmasking, so that by the next day I have understood nothing and you have become a fantasy” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 20), the same order *can* indeed be outstripped, in turn, by a kind of writing that lets the same concepts that *constitute* a percept explain the operation *of* that percept.

Breaking with a Broken Text

The affective attraction of falling in love at first sight in a real life encounter thus presents a very different epistemological and communicative situation from the textual encounter and its potential for affective attraction. While textual affect is conceptually mediated experience, the attraction of a flirting lover is experientially im/mediate. The primary experience of the flirtatiously immersing real life encounter needs to be

conceptualised after the event, but the textual experience thereof may already be delivered in the very concepts that comprise its immersing percept/ions. While it does present a real task to conceptualise the love at first sight encounter after the event, the textual encounter always already consists in accessing concepts that make up its experience. Textual perception always already comes via the epistemological mode of “knowing that.” The same situation does not emerge for both kinds of encounter, and as a result the analogy of “The Fall” is slightly incongruous.

When Muecke returns to the question of concept and percept in the post/modern allegory of the pitcher plant, he suggests that both Monsieur Mouche falling in love and the fly falling for the plant is different from reading a text “[b]ecause [in writing] we can attach a concept to a percept” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 24). But this implies that we could in principle write a percept without attaching it to concepts, when the conceptual side of writing is in fact the condition of the possibility of its affective impact. Hence, this kind of intersection can hardly serve as a distinguishing feature of *fictocritical* texts. Here, I want to suggest, the text breaks because the logic of its argument is no longer in tune with the logic of its structural metaphor, whose striking quality is not wrought from this static kind of textual performativity.

Also, Muecke’s understanding of the interplay between percept and concept commits him to an unnecessarily strong theory of textual affect, which his ingenious textual architecture does not really require to perform its magic. Any affective impact conveyed *in writing* will be triggered by its concepts. When Muecke asks, “So what kind of capture does the literary text perform, when it is nothing much more than black tracks?” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 22), he lays his finger on the issue precisely. It is not the im/mediate perception of the text as a structure of black marks that causes its main affective impact but the conceptual structure that the text mediates. A text’s affective side is conveyed through the needle’s eye of its presentation of concepts. Writing creates affect through the presentation of concepts, not im/mediately.

As a result of this misrecognition of two kinds of affective encounters the text breaks. Firstly, in the negative sense, the text *breaks down*, or falls apart, because there is a theoretical flaw to its conceptual side. On the one hand, its conceptual side does not add up with regards to a theory of textual affects that it presupposes without mention. On the other hand, and as a consequence of this flaw, the idea of “The Fall” as a performative text with regards to its theory of concept and percept does not take off. The analogy between falling in love, the pitcher plant and reading fails to identify *the specific kind* of intersection that makes *itself* fictocritical because the analogy draws on

situations that are different in precisely the respect that is at stake: the im/mediacy of their affective impact.

At the same time as the grand finale presents the textual form that would conform to the text's own ideas of the fictocritical – the intersection of fiction and non-fiction, of aesthetics and poetics, of the *concept/ual* and *percept/ive* – the central significance of the medium in the act of mediation emerges. In the event of encountering a percept different communicative parameters apply for textual and vis-à-vis encounters. Especially that we can repeatedly fall for percept/ive immersion, that “in writing [...] we can do it over and over” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 24), is indebted to the constitutively distancing medium. In fact, the *medial* condition of the possibility of our textual practices pre/structures the reading situation in a way that constitutes the experiential difference between immersed perception and textual percept.

The medial *parameters* underwrite the communicative situation of textual representation in such a way that, firstly, a percept emerges here only ever in conceptual terms to begin with and that, secondly, repetition (in (experiential) difference) is a constitutive possibility. Note, however, that within these parameters “The Fall” still manages to liberate the textual potential for intersections of concept and percept from further *generic* pre/scriptions. Its only mistake is to conceive of this achievement as specifically fictocritical when, really, it cleverly exploits a constitutive medial characteristic of textual representation and communication.

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Having phrased this criticism in perhaps unjustly stark terms, it is now time to retrace a bit and re/member the text's considerable remaining potential. What makes Muecke's “The Fall” so special as a *ficto*-critical text, I want to argue, is something else. In a *static performative* sense, the imagery of the pitcher plant would attach conceptual significance to the percept of its aesthetic description. In fact, however, it achieves this with the notable extra twist that in textually accessing the conceptual explanatory side *by way of* accessing its aesthetic textual rendition the reader simultaneously *performs* the subject of the account. And this presents *a second kind of textual performativity* in the sense that the text pre/scribes both a *reading* performance and experience.

Therefore we shall have to re/trace the reading experience, as it is pre/scribed by this text, very carefully in order to re/formulate the explicit definitions in “The Fall” from a slightly shifted angle. Muecke rightly claims special status for “The Fall” because it manages to intersect a certain conceptualisation with the main percept of his text. Yet,

what is so special about this aspect of his text is better expressed in terms of the unusual self-reflexivity of this intersection: “The Fall” renders a conceptualisation of the *readerly* act in terms of the concepts by which it simultaneously presents its percept. It conveys a poetics of the immersion of reading by means of the same terms that immerse its reader. In making the performance of the individual subject accessing text its textual object, “The Fall” attaches a self-reflexive conceptual significance to the rendition of its percept. All of which also changes *the kind* of performativity from a static textual performativity to the processual and experiential textual performance of the reader.

Secondly, then, there is also a much more positive sense in which the misrecognition of two kinds of affective encounters *breaks open* a different perspective onto the text’s striking performativity. In the following, while all the fragments of this purposively broken text are still up in the air and may just fall into place, I shall thus attempt to re/configure the elements of Muecke’s textual constellation anew. As the textual structure itself seems to imply, I would like to re/conceive of “The Fall” and its *ficto*-critical practice with a stronger *medial* focus. This understanding shall exceed the text’s fictocritical self-perception in terms of speaking positions, generic conflation and the intersection of concept and percept, and re/locate these key ideas in terms of a readerly emphasis, a meta-generic perspective, and the im/mediacy of textual immersion. In the following, I shall thus attempt to account for “The Fall”’s im/mediately striking side while re/deploying its own terminology with a perspectival shift towards the significance of the textual medium at the heart of fictocritical practices.

The Fragmentary Spin of a Parable Flight

Now that the text is broken, its elements are still up in the air. They are fragments that drift like so many things on a parable flight just before the fall. At this point, my current reading has reached the crucial phase in between gravitational fields during which the text’s discursive *constellation* may find itself *re/configured*. While the elements of “The Fall” are suspended in midair, midway on the parable flight of my reading, chances are they will gravitate in new directions by themselves and start to spin. In the following, I will try to pick up some of these directions and follow their spin until a perspectival shift occurs that can not only account for this textually structured fall, but reasonably hope to propel its idiosyncratic momentum forwards.

The text itself steers its reader onto this path by attaching the percept of the pitcher plant to the concept of falling into the immersion of textual representation and communication. The conceptually unmasking aspect of the text is thus inextricably linked to the literarily masking percept of the fall, which finally carries the explanatory weight of all previous subsections. But reading “The Fall” we are rapidly taken to dizzying conceptual heights on the grounds of very enjoyable, yet also very little textual basis. Entering the final passage in free flight this inert explanatory burden is playfully propelled into the image of the pitcher plant. In the final section the text changes gear while still carrying all the momentum of its earlier velocity. But although the incongruent analogy between an im/mediate and a textual encounter breaks the text’s explicit self-conception, we need not feel left high and dry. As things begin to spin, the task lies with the reader, to pick up the pieces in midair and thus cushion the fall from the pre/scribed parable – to re/configure the constellation and change perspective. Yet before re/conceiving of the text’s constellational arrangement anew, we first need to register the different directions in which the fragments themselves gravitate mid-flight.

Firstly, a potential *shift towards a readerly focus* lies dormant in the text’s concern with writerly speaking positions. As the issue is introduced with only a bracketed wink to the readerly act, focal attention is clearly on the writer who “traces a path (which the reader will follow, avidly of course)” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 19). Likewise, the fictocritically collapsed speaking position is introduced first and foremost as a writerly concept (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 18). However, the textual structure of “The Fall” also warrants a strong readerly focus with regards to the distancing devices that texts engage not only generically but *constitutively* – and that is especially: *medially*. In this respect “The Fall” pre-scribes an itinerary that leads elsewhere than the text openly suggests. This line of flight may take counterintuitive turns and run against the official course, but it does carry some insights into collapsing the *readerly* distance of textual practices. Hence, in this respect, I shall propose *a readerly as well as medial focus* in my re/configuration of “The Fall” as *ficto-critical*.

Secondly, the text’s concern with conflating textual practices *between* genres actually harbours the potential for a perspectival *shift onto the meta-generic level* – and, specifically, onto the *medial* conditions of the im/possibility of genres. “The Fall” bestows focal attention on our text-*medial* practices in order to explain our text-*generic* practices. In this sense, what is *im/mediately* striking about the imagery of the pitcher plant is not that it makes explanatory and aesthetic discourses indistinguishable but that it makes our textual practices under way the subject of this literary exposition. In terms

of the generically aligned principles of masking and unmasking, the *ficto*-critically rendered form of the pitcher plant aims for a textual mask that effects an unmasking of *its own* masquerading. From the readerly point of view, this introduces an *im/mediately self-reflexive* aspect into the textual equation under way – the conception of which changes considerably as a consequence. “The Fall” intimates this shift when Monsieur Mouche asks, “what kind of capture does the literary text perform, when it is nothing much more than black tracks?” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 22). But unfortunately it does not pursue the crucial *medial* aspect, which can bring into relief the difference of im/mediate perceptual and mediated readerly immersion. Hence, my re-reading shall suggest a *text-medial meta-perspective* onto our reading and writing practices, rather than a focus on the generic between on the textual level.

Thirdly, the idea of intersecting concept and percept harbours the potential to produce, in singular fashion, a *shift towards the im/mediate aspects of textually mediated experience*. Despite the breaking point of its *static* textual performativity mentioned above, the final passage of the pitcher plant still creates a special affect for its readers in the process of their textual performance. As we have seen, “The Fall” capitalised on mapping the foregrounded generic difference between percept and concept onto the difference between im/mediacy and mediation. *In writing* the necessarily conceptual presentation of the percept “pitcher plant” can be composed in such a way that it simultaneously conceptualises the constitutive mode of accessing it *in reading*. The focus of the text’s content thus shifts to the textual performance that brings it to life. In this manner, “The Fall” reverses direction and produces *im/mediate referential awareness* of the readerly act necessarily under way. It indicates to the linguistic-discursive agent at work the im/mediate side to textual mediation. Hence, my reading shall retrace how “The Fall” performatively illumines, from within, the im/mediate conditions of the possibility of textually mediated experience.

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Taken together, these three structurally implicit aspects break open the textual level to include each particular readerly performance of “The Fall” in its textual object. They mark a shift from understanding a textual structure as *inherently* fictocritical by virtue of its in-between *form*, to understanding a textual structure as *strategically* deployed to trigger *ficto*-critical *effects*. These effects would then suggest re/locating the crucial between-ness of the fictocritical on the *constitutive* level of performing the text-medial relation, rather than *essentially* within the generically hybrid text. “The Fall” deploys its

structural metaphor precisely to illumine and illuminate this shift. The passage of the pitcher plant is a textual structure that not only *presents* an *understanding* of the readerly act in the textual work under way, but one that can at the same time *induce* an *experiential awareness* of this readerly performance – to make its constative side hit home, as it were.

Along these textual lines of flight “The Fall” lets its reader *perform* the trope of falling. The pre/scribed journey of this final textual passage manages to collapse the performative distance between *reader* and text (in addition to the critical distance between writer and text). *In reading* about the fly falling into the pitcher plant, the reader falls for the immersing aspects of a text that yet explains this very process. By self-reflexively short-circuiting the expository and enchanting aspects of the textual relation, “The Fall” thus activates an im/mediate experience of readerly performance. Such is the great *ficto-critical* potential of “The Fall”’s textual structure which my reading shall bring into its own by activating its readerly, experiential remainder in the text-interpretive equation.

Take-Off: A Readerly Line of Flight

Whereas “The Fall” draws explicit attention to how fictocriticism collapses the *writerly* speaking position into the text (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 18), its textual structure is designed to collapse the *readerly* distance in the act of textual mediation. This implicit readerly focus, I want to argue, endows “The Fall” with the im/mediately striking characteristic that distinguishes it as an exemplary *ficto-critical* text. As the reader follows (avidly, of course) the pre/scription of “The Fall,” the self-reflexive experience of that reading performance identifies – even interpellates – her *as* textual agent in an unmediated manner. The text’s structural metaphor makes the process of readerly immersion its subject matter, which the reader thus cannot but encounter from within. The structural trick is that in accessing the text’s constative account of readerly immersion, the reader is always already performatively undergoing the experience.

In this manner, “The Fall” both *illuminates* the readerly act by depicting it in terms of the fly and the pitcher plant and *illumines* it by performatively highlighting the im/mediate side of textual mediation under way. Firstly, the conceptual insights yielded by the reading process are here concerned with their own condition of possibility: the readerly act. Secondly, to realise this *in actu* performs a somewhat counterintuitive trope, which I would like to introduce as the *ficto-critical vector*. To realise the

relevance of what is textually mediated for the readerly act of mediation under way creates a kind of im/mediately striking short-circuitry that in fact reverses the direction of referentiality. Instead of leading into the conceptual realm of the text's proposition, the im/mediacy of such special reading occasions refers right back to the reader, and thus into the extra-textual present of the singular and processual reading frame/work always currently under way.

This reversal of referential direction by the *ficto*-critical vector means that the text's unique potential for im/mediate affective impact is not grounded in readerly identification, empathy or immersion in the intradiegetic goings-on. All of these may indeed occur, but its fragmentary nature and minimal characterisation do not especially favour "The Fall" in this respect – other texts are much more suitably composed to mediate these kinds of affect. What makes "The Fall" so special is thus not the way in which it describes its intradiegetic events, but the way in which it *pre*-scribes the event of reading to curl back in on itself. Its striking affective side is not grounded in the experience of mediated events so much as in the im/mediate experience of the act of textual *mediating*. This distinguishes "The Fall" as *ficto*-critical in the sense of this study.

The intradiegetic theory of textual affect, which Muecke suggests by saying that "[a text's] mode of capture is multiple and sensational" (Muecke, "The Fall," p. 23), thus falls back behind the crucial medial point implied by his earlier question "So what kind of capture does the literary text perform, when it is nothing much more than black tracks?" (Muecke, "The Fall," p. 22). By the same token, Muecke formulates that "[t]he pitcher, like the line of text, is a one-way zone" (Muecke, "The Fall," p. 24), which leads into the immersion of text and plant respectively. While Muecke identifies the *medial* condition of the im/possibility of immersing textual mediation, his explicit assertion of "multiple and sensational" textual capture yet prioritises what is mediated in the process. Note, however, that a text's capture is indeed "multiple" in the sense that *performative immersion in the readerly act* is the condition of the (im)possibility of "sensational" immersion in the text's affective propositional content. Ingenuously, the textual structure of "The Fall" steers its reader towards this realisation.

There is a concomitant interpretation of the sentence "[w]e fall for the one who resembles a flower" (Muecke, "The Fall," p. 25) that has no parallel scenarios for the fly and the lover. As we fall for the flowers of rhetoric and their metaphoric movements, we have always already fallen for the textual medium and the movements of *its* constitutive metaphoricity. In light of this, Muecke's conclusion that "to know the

structure of the plant (or the text) as a concept, is to be able, incredibly, to climb out again” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 25) seems slightly misguided. The possibility “to climb out again” comes with the constitutive conceptual distance of mediation, rather than the writerly ability to “attach a concept to a percept” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 24). Likewise, rather than the ability for their combination and conjunction, *the different modes of access* to the percepts and concepts involved create the difference between the *existential* immersion of fly and lover and the reader’s immersion in mediation.

So, when the text asks, “How are the insects snared by this carnivorous plant?” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 23), to which it provides the answer that “[t]hey are attracted, visually no doubt” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 23), then this creates a remarkable contrast with the earlier question “So what kind of capture does the literary text perform, when it is nothing much more than black tracks?” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 23). Almost against the highly curious visual importance in reading, this contradiction sets up the difference between experiential immersion and the immersion of mediation. Of course, it is precisely *not visually* that we are *attracted* by texts. The deception of the plant is markedly different from that of the text, which does not even attempt to pass for the real thing – as perhaps a naïve view of painting could argue. At the same time, however, we are visually immersed in the act of reading. Any affection triggered by a text has to go through this needle’s eye of the linguistic-discursive before it can rouse feelings in response, such as empathy, excitement or attraction.

Thus highlighting the performative frame/work of textual immersion, a strong *readerly and medial focus* lies at the heart of what makes “the Fall” *ficto-critical* in the sense of an im/mediately striking read that collapses the distance of mediation in the textual act by bringing the mediated textual subject matter to coincide with the readerly act that is thus always already presently under way. This preposterous attempt at readerly short-circuitry is the im/mediately striking *ficto-critical* vector of “The Fall.”

Dizzying Heights: A Meta-Generic Vista

Whereas “The Fall” proposes the grey area *between* genres as the productive space of fictocritical writing, its pre-scribed itinerary departs from this generic locus between towards *a meta-perspective on our textual practices*. In fact, generic conflation is specifically *ficto-critical* if it facilitates this perspectival shift onto the meta-level. The point of the intersected literary and theoretical directions in the imagery of the pitcher plant is not only its hybrid nature but that this simultaneously masking and unmasking

textual form is self-reflexively concerned with our textual practices. By way of the pitcher plant the final passage is an immersing read that conveys an understanding of textual immersion. Its textual percept carries conceptual significance for a *structural* understanding of how it works. This *self-reflexive meta-commentary* indeed turns the pitcher plant into a *structural metaphor*. Its aesthetic harbours a poetics of its aesthetics.

Thus intersecting *literary* and *theoretical* discourses in the same *imagery* the perspective does not remain *between* two generic textual spheres, but can elevate the reader onto the vantage point of a *meta-generic* perspective. The *ficto-critical* point is not to enliven a generically dry text with metaphoric language use or an enticing little anecdote. Much rather, the *ficto-critical* point is to performatively illumine and aesthetically as well as conceptually illuminate, at the same time, a poetics of our textual practices. The trope of structural metaphor, which engages its aesthetics to explain their poetics, presents one textual strategy to achieve this *ficto-critical* effect. Because the textual operations of “The Fall” constitute both the act of its masking as well as the object of its unmasking, the text manages to turn the alleged generic chasm between the two into a constitutive chiasm on the *meta-level* of our textual practices.

Consider at this point, again, the enigmatic definitional witticism which Alice Kaplan, in her book *French Lessons: A Memoir*,⁷² remembers from Ann Smock’s teaching on Mallarmé: “Literature lies but tells the truth about lying” (Kaplan, *French Lessons*, p. 75). Initially, we are puzzled by the apparent paradox of simultaneously lying and telling the truth. Yet, what is even more remarkable, as we figure it out, is the way in which the reflexivity of the statement leads onto the meta-level. If we conceive of the fictitious aspects of literature as a generic kind of lying, it may still be the case that they convey the truth about this kind of lying. We may not only learn about it by undergoing the *experience* of a fictitious text but we may also encounter a poetics of literature’s lying that is rendered in precisely this mode. The (fictional) world-*constituting* discourse of literature may engage a (real) world-*referencing* aspect when it exposes a poetics of itself in the form of whatever else it presents.

By the same token, an important non-fictional side to *ficto-critical* writing may be the meta-understanding of our textual practices it contains – rendered fictionally – within its textual structure. Figuratively, this trademark *ficto-critical* sleight of hand creates a picture puzzle in which one hand pulls a screen up while another hand projected onto the screen thus revealed pulls down a third screen that is yet,

⁷² Alice Kaplan, *French Lessons: A Memoir*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993. [Hereafter: Kaplan, *French Lessons*, p. ...]

paradoxically, exposed as the initial screen on which the first hand was located. In this dazzling manner “The Fall” not only puts the masquerading of art back into the “artifice of literary criticism,” which “was built up to do one thing really: to unmask the secrets of art” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 19), but addresses the conditions of the possibility of both generic kinds of writing on the meta-level of all our textual practices. Thus, structural metaphor and the *ficto*-critical vector make *purposive* sense of much – and regrettably much maligned – post/modern playfulness in *ficto*/criticism.

An Elevated Fall: Immersion *En Abyme*

Whereas “The Fall” hails the attachment of a concept to a percept *in writing* (Muecke, “The Fall”; p. 24), on the constitutive level, a textually rendered percept is always already pervaded by concepts – we cannot not do it. What makes “The Fall” a *ficto*-critical textual structure is the fact that it textually renders the percept of the pitcher plant in terms that conceptualise textual immersion. The *ficto*-critical point is that the conceptual insights of the pitcher plant pertain to the *im/mediate* act of textual mediation by which the reader accesses the imagery to begin with. When the passage of the pitcher plant draws the reader into a state of immersed reading, this textual act is simultaneously under way and scrutiny. Ultimately, what strikes us in reading “The Fall” is the self-reflexive disruption of immersion *from within*. The *challenging conceptual work* that the reader encounters at the same time as she is drawn into the text acquires *im/mediate significance* because it presently refers her back to her own processual frame/work under way, the immersing readerly act of textual *mediating*.

By subjecting the experience of textual immersion to the simultaneously immersed reader’s scrutiny “The Fall” effects a *ficto*-critical intervention. It harnesses immersing textual mediations to create an *im/mediate* experiential awareness *and* conceptual understanding of the poetics of textual immersion. In fact, the *im/mediacy* that “The Fall” highlights goes against the grain of immersion *even though* premised on it. “The Fall” thus harnesses its textual magic to effect some counter-magic – what Michael Taussig would call “apotropaic”⁷³ magic. The *ficto*-critical point of this textual strategy is to deploy the spell of readerly immersion to apotropaic effect. *Im/mediately* striking, its itinerary – from within, onto the meta-level, in a traitorous and self-reflexive spin – is just the kind of pre/post/erous short-circuitry of the *ficto*-critical vector.

⁷³ Michael Taussig, “The Corn-Wolf: Writing Apotropaic Texts,” in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2010, p. 26-33.

Yielding to the attraction of the flower, the fly is “suddenly transformed from free flight into a tumbling cadence,” (Muecke, “The Fall, p. 24) and something similar could be said of Monsieur Mouche. While *performing* the *pre*-scribed itinerary, the reader, too, begins to fall – but she also begins to self-reflexively spin around her own axis as the text equips her, from within, with the means to re-conceive of the textual act she currently engages. The im/mediate relevance of the conceptual insight that the post/modern allegory of the pitcher plant equips the reader with, in fact, counters the immersion from within which it was wrought. Or, to turn it around, the im/mediate conceptual relevance of the pitcher plant turns the readerly agent on the very immersion from within which it was accessed.

As the short-circuitry of the *ficto*-critical vector hits home, the dazzled reader emerges at the end of the passage where of the immersing performance remains only “knowledge that”:

But to know the structure of the plant (or the text) as a concept, is to be able, incredibly, to climb out again, wet, dripping, exhausted, on the lip of the world again. Now you *know*: that was *some* kind of trick. (Muecke, “The Fall” p. 25)

Only, the ability to “climb out again” is not connected to knowledge of the structure, but to the respectively *different kinds of encounters* that the fly, Monsieur Mouche and their reader are involved in. By the same logic it is also not true that “in writing [...] we can do it over and over again [...] [b]ecause we can attach a concept to a percept” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 24). In fact, the medial characteristics underlying all *textual* encounters constitute the possibility of this repetition (in difference).

Hence, a juxtaposition of im/mediate experience and mediated “knowledge that,” both of which are wrought from the skilfully pre-scribed immersion in “The Fall,” is more insightful. Let me suggestively re-emphasise the above statement in this respect.

Now you *know: that* was *some* kind of trick. You look at the horizon, now, a little more shrewdly, more critically. But the *fall!* And you glance back with a delicious shudder. [My additional emphasis] (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 25)

While the im/mediacy of textual mediation is self-reflexively and performatively highlighted by an apotropaic engagement of the mechanisms of textual immersion, conceptual knowledge of how the text immerses us is gained at the expense of the percept’s mediated experience. The performative perception of the percept ceases, yet the conceptual knowledge is retained from the experience. The self-reflexive experiential highlighting of the textual performance short-circuits the textual act it

concerns, yet yields an understanding that may change future performances of the readerly act. Such is the future potential of the *ficto*-critical vector.

Performing “The Fall”

Its structural readerly focus in particular opens the possibility to re/conceive of “The Fall” as performative. Apart from static textual performativity the *readerly performance* of the textual work also plays a major role in *ficto*/criticism. What distinguishes “The Fall” as a *ficto*-critical in/scription is the way in which it pre/scribes the itinerary of the readerly work to turn in on itself. Engaging “The Fall,” following its textual course, draws you in, like the pitcher does with the fly. The important kind of performativity is no longer *contained* by the text, but *enacted* in relation to it, by *relating* to it – while the textual content thus accessed yields an explanatory account of just that activity. Static writerly pre/scription here concerns the processual readerly act both *constatively* and *performatively*.

Furthermore, the textual structure of “The Fall” pre/scribes an *im/mediate* experience. This im/mediacy is indeed possible because the experience is of the act of textual *relating* in which the reader is *necessarily* engaged. Although the readerly performance of “The Fall” exceeds it *as a text*, it is yet induced by this textual basis. Because the readerly act of textual mediation is necessarily in place in *reading*, it becomes a sure-fire reference. Im/mediately, it is of a different order from any other reference that a text could make, because it reverses the referential direction. Whatever con/textual knowledge a reader brings to the textual encounter, *in reading*, there can be little doubt of the readerly act. “The Fall” skilfully capitalises on this fact when it makes the readerly act its subject matter. It leads the reader to realise from within an immersing read the constitutive frame(ing)work that facilitates textual immersion. Despite luring the reader deeper *into* immersion “The Fall” harbours the potential for an im/mediate reverse dive, a surprising *ficto*-critical pirouette *out of* immersion.

What makes “The Fall” such a striking read is the kind of textual performativity that self-reflexively identifies the *readerly* performance while it is under way, and thus creates an im/mediate experiential awareness of the readerly act as part of the textual work. The textual structure of “The Fall” engages a *processual* kind of performativity that concerns the act of textual *relating* that we undergo in reading. Figuratively, “The Fall” conceives of this event as falling – firstly, *for* textual attraction and, secondly, *into* narrative immersion. In order to understand how exactly “The Fall” pre/scribes the

realisation of the *ficto*-critical vector, the following close reading shall re/trace the textual means that structure this readerly itinerary.

An Extradiegetic Turn of Events

The last fragment of “The Fall” ties a knot from the interrelated threads it has accumulated during the course of its earlier five sections. It presents the imagery of how a fly, firstly, *falls for* the deception of the pitcher plant by following its attractive lure until it, secondly, *falls into* the flower’s drum where it is immersed by a dissolving liquid. The manner in which this imagery is presented endows it with analogical relevance for both the narrative of falling in love and the poetics of reading. The mechanisms and structures presented in the aesthetically appealing descriptive account have threefold relevance as, firstly, an aesthetic description, secondly, a capturing narrative and, thirdly, an explanatory account. While we may focus on only one of these aspects at a time, in their *ficto*/critical textual composition they cannot be disentangled.

The first fragment of “The Fall” sets the minimal stage for the fictional/ised narrative of Monsieur Mouche falling in love. Two words of utmost importance for my reading initialise the text: “you” and “immediately.” To begin with, the text thus introduces the *shifter* of direct address and the notion of *im/mediacy*:

You have invited me for lunch, because you want to pick my brains. [...]

This is our first meeting and I *immediately* find you attractive. [My emphases] (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 18)

Over the course of the essay, “you” is skilfully deployed as a shifter. From initially addressing the student it later shifts to address the reader. In this double function the shifter “you” marks the twofold perspective of the *ficto*/critical vector, which, while leading into the text’s content and immersion, yet also interpellates the reader *as* the *im/mediate* subject of textual immersion – thus short-circuiting the experience from within. By means of the *deictic* shifter “you” the text creates the possibility for a perspectival shift from within the *intradiegetic, mediated* events of the narrative to the *im/mediate, extra-textual* address of each reader *as the (always) currently reading textual agent*.

The referential use of “you” shifts from an intradiegetic address as the first word of the text and its use throughout the narrative,⁷⁴ to a rapidly changing development in the final section. There it functions no longer as Monsieur Mouche’s address to the student, but rather as an address to the reader. First, there is the inclusive, yet indeterminate, generality as well as consent seeking acknowledgement that “[y]ou fall into them” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 23) – which also riffs on the pun of Monsieur Mouche as a fly. But then it fully turns around in the im/mediate and extra-textual address of its reader as “[y]ou my critical friends” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 24). This direct interpellation sets the reader on course to realise the *ficto*-critical vector, which is the im/mediately experiential and self-reflexive realisation of the readerly performance *in actu*. Such is the *first* important aspect of Muecke’s strategic deployment of deictic shifters to *ficto*-critical effect.

Im/mediately Twisted Awareness

A *second* important *ficto*-critical effect is also wrought from the same deictic shifter. After the initial “[y]ou fall into them” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 23) – which unites the analogical threads of, firstly, falling in love, secondly, falling into the pitcher and, thirdly, falling into textual immersion – the text veers between removing and implying the readerly perspective. “How are the insects snared by the carnivorous plant?” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 23) the text asks from a distance, before providing an answer that yet includes the extra-textual reader together with the intradiegetic narrator and fly as “[w]e the victims” and “us” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 24). The same multi-directionally inclusive “we” also re/unites the analogical threads in “[w]e fall for the one who resembles a flower” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 25). But then, the direct readerly address introduces a significant difference into the analogy:

You, my critical friends, have now learned the difference between the true flower and the deceptive carnivorous trap. This is something which the insects [...] are destined, perhaps, never to learn. [...] For each insect victim it happens only once. But in writing [...] we can do it over and over again.
(Muecke, The Fall,” p. 24)

⁷⁴ “*You* smile at me [...]”; “*You* refer me to a website [...]”; “*Your* succession of masks outstrips my unmasking [...]”; “I invite *you* to the cinema, but *you* say *you* cannot come” [My emphases] (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 20-1).

Here, the *medially* constituted critical distance of readerly immersion is put in relief against the existential immediacy of falling into the drum of the pitcher plant.

Against this background, the direct readerly address works its reversal of direction from intradiegetic reference to an extra-textual interpellation. The latter abounds at the end of the last paragraph in conjunction with the further deictic shifter “now.” “Now you *know*” (Muecke, “The Fall,” p. 25), the text directly reaches out to its recipient, for example. At this point the significance of “you” has clearly moved from the intradiegetic present and addressee to the im/mediate present of always the current reception and recipient. In this manner, too, “The Fall” aims at an im/mediate affective registering of the *mediating* that is always currently under way rather than of anything it would mediate in the process. Such is the *ficto*-critically experiential awareness that the text’s shifters spark for the reader, whom they bring to self-reflexively and im/mediately realise their own textual performance under way. Muecke’s deployment of shifters thus pre/figures the trope of the *ficto*-critical vector.

By itself, the reversed referential direction of a readerly address is perhaps remarkable, but not yet revolutionary. However, such a direct address rarely comes in the midst of an explanatory account of the very act that the reader is performing in accessing the address to begin with. As things begin to spin in “The Fall,” the constitutive level of our textual practices becomes its subject matter from a readerly perspective that is characterised by a self-reflexively im/mediate *experiential awareness*. In light of these insights, the processual and performative melee *between reading self and text* emerges as the paramount *ficto*-critical locus. The *ficto*-critical vector directs our focus towards this constitutive realm of processual textual frame/work as perspective turns from the generic between onto the meta-generic.

b) Refining the Fictocritical Tropes

In order to get a more general grasp of the trope of the *ficto*-critical vector that I would like to retain and elaborate from my above reading of Stephen Muecke's "The Fall," the following sub-sections shall in some more detail first consider aspects of the vector's tropical movement in isolation and then examine the additional turn of the *ficto*-critical *twist*.

The Striking Turns of the *Ficto*-critical Vector

It may be useful here to propose a compact definition of the *ficto*-critical vector, before then refining its characteristically interrelated elements in the sub-sections following below.

From within the reading performance, *ficto*/critical texts make im/mediately perceptible a *ficto*-critical vector that self-reflexively turns in on aspects of the textual frame/work currently under way. It thus points out to the reader her textual act as a constitutive part of the textual work.

Figuratively, the trope can be described as an intentional vector that departs from the reader's eye and, in excess of being productively met by the textual structure and its inscribed content, is also thrown back into the readers face. The reader's vector of focal attention turns *ficto*-critical in a self-reflexive move that bends back from the page, to poke her in the eye from whence it originated. The *ficto*-critical vector describes a curious reading movement that, while facilitating access to something enshrined *in* the text, also performatively highlights the constitutively *framing* mechanisms set to *work* in so doing. In this sense, the *ficto*-critical vector illumines, from within, parameters of textual *mediating* which are conditions of the possibility of what is thus textually mediated.

For example, some *ficto*-critical textual strategies *friction* the conceptual work of reading. Such texts are wrought to *rub* against readerly habits and expectations that, ultimately, form a sort of generic approach. *Ficto*-critical writing of this kind aims to create internal friction in the reading process by disregarding generic regulatory rules and conventions that make certain texts *and* their recipients work in a certain way. The

goal is to interpellate the reader *as* the linguistic-discursive agent at work. Ultimately, the *frictioning* generic resistance of the textual structure highlights the equally generic readerly relating under way and thus suggests a shift to the meta-generic perspective with a distinct medial focus.

In the following sub-sections the interrelated defining characteristics of the *ficto-critical* vector – its readerly focus, self-reflexivity, performativity, im/mediacy and experiential character – shall be carefully de- and refined; where necessary in distinction from competing understandings of these terms.

A Readerly Focus

The self-reflexive trope of the *ficto-critical* vector is realised *by the reader* as the result of textually pre-scribed frictions that emerge *from within the reading performance*. Ficto/critical resistance on the textual level causes frictions in the reading process, which yet does not break down. The point is precisely that it *does* continue to make sense, only in an unusual direction. The textually pre/scribed structures cause internal frictions in reading that make perceptible the constitutive frame of mechanisms at work in our textual relating. Whereas the focus in reading is usually directed at the textual object it mediates, the structure of a *ficto-critical* text frictions the *readerly* performance of mediating this textual object, whereby such writing re(flexively)directs attention at the readerly act in the textual work.

The *ficto-critical* text that successfully brings its reader to realise the *ficto-critical* vector thus, firstly, taps into the im/mediate present of (always) *this* reader's place within the textual relation and, secondly, highlights (always) *this* reader's performative agency in the textual relating under way. By this surprising, im/mediate textual interpellation in the act of textual mediation, the *ficto-critical* vector makes perceptible for the reader the *only* concrete real life experiential level to our textual encounters that is *our* encountering text. It highlights for the reader at work on the text, the *readerly* agency in the textual work. Ultimately, the referential direction of the *fictocritical* vector reverses the anticipated referential direction of textual mediation. It does not point at a transcendental textual object enshrined in the concrete textual structure so much as it points back at the im/mediate agency and act of textual mediating under way between reader and text. In this manner the *ficto-critical* vector interpellates the reader *as* reader *in actu*.

If successfully realised, the trope of the *ficto*-critical vector performatively *illuminates* the readerly act under way to the particular reader conducting the reading. The readerly turn of the trope thus already describes the particular kind of *self-reflexivity* that is characteristically activated by the *ficto*-critical vector.

Self-Reflexivity

The *kind* of self-reflexivity at work in the *ficto*-critical vector goes beyond both the self-reflexive act of inscription and a self-reflexive text. Just as a self-reflexive *writerly* speaking position is necessarily contained by the text, so too the self-reflexive text – wittily pointing at its own constructed nature *qua* text – remains self-contained. But *the self-reflexivity of the readerly act*, which is generated by a *friction*-ing textual structure that highlights the textual *relating* under way, exceeds both the textually mediated as well as purely textual modes of self-reflexivity. This third kind of textual self-reflexivity is thus not concerned with the reflexivity of a narrator or text pointing back at themselves, but with the reflexivity of the readerly *relating between text and self* being brought to feed back in on itself, which creates a textual potential for im/mediate experiential interventions.

The kind of self-reflexivity experienced as the *ficto*-critical vector is triggered from within the textual structure but exceeds it because it pertains to the im/mediate readerly frame/work under way. This modal shift in textual self-reflexivity reverses the direction of readerly awareness from the mediated textual work to the im/mediate frame/work of *mediating*. The tropological turn of the *ficto*-critical vector changes the *direction* of reference. It no longer *only* leads into the representational realm but *at the same time* towards the agency conducting this pre/scribed passage. In this manner, the *ficto*-critical vector illuminates a picture that contains its own frame, that im/mediately references its own condition of possibility, which is the frame(ing)work through which it is accessed to begin with.

Importantly, the particular reflexive bend of the *ficto*-critical vector experientially highlights to the reader precisely those aspects *of their textual work* from which they usually – even constitutively – abstract *in the act*. The self-reflexivity of the *ficto*-critical vector thus also has a fundamentally *performative* dimension to it.

Performativity

The particular *kind* of textual performativity that the *ficto*-critical vector highlights is distinct from that of a performative text. Its *mode* is not the *static* textual performativity of a textual structure that already conforms to what it constates, but the *processual* performativity of a *textual act under way*. The *ficto*-critical vector exceeds a textually contained performativity when it brings the readerly performance of the pre/scribed textual structure into the picture. Its tropical turn is thus characterised by a *performative self-reflexivity* because the *readerly act* is highlighted *by* and *in* as much as *during* the textual work.

In other words, the *ficto*-critical vector illumines the readerly textual frame/work *in actu*. It makes perceptible how the readerly act completes the textual work which a writerly act pre/scribed to begin with. In this sense, the specific kind of performativity that characterises the *ficto*-critical vector clearly re-emphasises the fundamental shift in perspective which lies at the heart of this study: focal attention is no longer exclusively directed at the textual level, with an eye to the *between* of generic hybridity, but simultaneously at the constitutive medial level of textual relating, where *meta*-generic insights may emerge from the vantage point of a text-practical perspective.

Significantly, the performative self-reflexivity of the *ficto*-critical vector also entails that it registers in an *un-mediated* manner. The impact of performatively realising the *ficto*-critical vector therefore experientially exceeds understanding this here constative expository account of it – because the *ficto*-critical vector *im/mediately* illumines what these present mediations can only hope to illuminate from a distance.

Im/mediacy

The un-mediated kind of recognition of the *ficto*-critical vector removes the distance of the textual mediation by *presently* foregrounding the always *current* act of *mediating*. Underlying here is the distinction between the im/mediate side of the textual relation, that is the *act* of *mediating* and the mediated side of the textual relation, that is the content *mediated* in the process. While the reader constitutively remains at a distance from anything propositionally mediated *in* the textual relation, no such distance exists with regards to the readerly act *of* textual relating – except, perhaps, the gap *between* reader and text that, however, is always already bridged *by* the readerly act of textual *mediating*.

While much (unmarked) fictocritical and (hyphenated) ficto-critical debate centres around the question of how to break down the generic *critical distance* between an academic text and its object, or the *affective distance* between writer, reader and what the text mediates, the ingenuity of (slashed) *ficto-critical* practices is to short-circuit the *im/mediately* underlying frame/work that is the condition of the possibility of such generic mediations. If you like, both generic scholarly and constitutive readerly distance evaporate in the heat generated by im/mediately engaging textual frictions that can spark the *ficto-critical* vector.

The im/mediacy of the *ficto-critical* vector collapses the distancing effects of the textual relation not only in terms of the circumspect writer who carefully relates her involved speaking position and affective motivation *in* the text, but it furthermore collapses even the constitutive *perceptive distance of* the textual relation. Such is the *experiential* significance of the im/mediately striking *ficto-critical* vector.

Experiential Knowledge

Another characteristic that distinguishes the event of realising the *ficto-critical* vector is the experiential character of the readerly awareness it generates. A *ficto-critical* text not only mediates conceptual “knowledge that,” but its textual structure works to create *experiential knowledge* of the im/mediate readerly frame/work under way. The *ficto-critical* vector thus constitutes a distinct *kind* of textual experience that is different, firstly, from propositionally mediated experiences in a text and, secondly, from immersed readerly affects triggered by such constatively mediated content. Two *kinds* of textual affect are thus put in relief: one is the affective readerly response to the mediated textual work, the other is the im/mediate experiential registering of the *mediating* readerly frame/work. This latter affective impact of the *ficto-critical* vector thus interpellates the reading individual *as* the textual agent at work, rather than facilitating an immersed kind of affective identification on the level of content.

Realising a *ficto-critical* vector can thus have a more im/mediately unsettling affective impact than a merely constative description could provide – albeit only ever in relation to aspects of the textual performance presently under way.

The Pre/post/erous Short-Circuitry of the *Ficto-critical Twist*

As a consequence of the five aforementioned intricately interrelated aspects of the *ficto-critical* vector, *ficto-critical* texts reverse not only the *direction* of contribution to the “debate” between fiction and criticism when they let the fictional, aesthetic and subjective side of literature actively contribute to theory, but they also change the *kind* of contribution to such debates from *constative* “knowledge that” to *experiential* knowledge of the reader’s *performative* “know how.” In so doing, *ficto-critical* writing goes against the grain of not only generic textual structures but of our equally generic textual practices. Against the ingrained generic order of discourses according to which theory and criticism feed on literature, and fictions can at best be illustrative or the object of philosophical arguments, *ficto-critical* writing sometimes brings literary discourse to mount theoretical or critical arguments, as well as fiction to enter the philosophical debate as an im/mediately striking means.

Ficto/critical texts are often saturated with – mostly post/structuralist – theory. But *the way in which* they are thus in/formed allows them to *simultaneously* contribute to theoretical debates in kind *and* to generate the counterintuitive experiential dimension of the *ficto-critical* vector. By way of *aesthetic* means that are deployed *to simultaneously illumine and illuminate* a *poetics* of our textual practices, *ficto-criticism* revolutionises an otherwise one-directional debate that is generically keen to maintain a scholarly distance between the object of knowledge and the knowing subject’s agency. The trope of the *ficto-critical* twist, which departs with and from the *ficto-critical* vector, intersects the propositional and experiential, the constative and performative, the expository and the im/mediate, as well as the referential and the self-reflexive sides of the textual relation to *short-circuit* this traditional scenario.

Structural Metaphor

The theoretical trope that I refer to as structural metaphor – which is sometimes also known as “post/modern allegory” (Kerr, “Perverse Writing,” p. 156) – already encapsulates the basic elements that also define the *ficto-critical* twist. Henceforth I shall take the term “structural metaphor” to imply an image that can explain the constitutive movements and workings of metaphoricity in language. The paradigmatic

structural metaphor can be found in Derrida's seminal text "White Mythology,"⁷⁵ but also in the follow-up "The Retrait of Metaphor,"⁷⁶ which provide metaphors that explain the workings of metaphors, yet ultimately the metaphoricity of language in general – prime among them the coin (Derrida, "White Mythology," p. 207-19), the sun (Derrida, "White Mythology," p. 230-45) and the heliotrope (Derrida, "White Mythology," p. 245-57). However, I would like to use the term structural metaphor here in a perhaps wider sense for metaphoric depictions that provide a poetics of their own mode of depiction in conjunction with whatever they simultaneously depict thus.

Similarly, I shall here take post/modern allegory to imply aesthetic imagery that has an expository function with regards to constitutive linguistic-discursive mechanisms on which it is premised. Hence, whenever a text beautifully renders its tropes at work, so that they *both* explain the underlying textual relation *as well as* serve the literary aesthetic or narrative logic of the text, we are dealing with post/modern allegory or structural metaphor. In this sense, I want to suggest, *ficto*-critical texts often centre around a carefully constructed (hyphenated) *ficto*-critical node which condenses its aesthetic and theoretical – or even its (fictional) world-constituting and (real) world-referencing – aspects into the *expository imagery* of a structural metaphor or post/modern allegory.

For example, the structural metaphor of the pitcher plant effects the *ficto*-critical twist of "The Fall" because it *serves up* an explanatory poetics of narrative attraction and readerly immersion in the same stroke that *it serves* the text's narrative attraction and readerly immersion. In this manner, the *ficto*-critical twist short-circuits the structurally incompatible perspectives of a distancing theoretical overview and an internally involved outlook. The text thus restores to the textual relation a perceptible dimension that is usually abstracted from. Critical distance and literary immersion may be experienced simultaneously on *both* an im/mediately affective *and* mediated epistemological level. As it engages the reader in the subject under discussion, the pitcher plant is thus effective as both literary bait and its exposure. Departing from the structural metaphor of the pitcher plant in "The Fall," the *ficto*-critical vector performatively illumines (aisthesis) the readerly frame/work (poiesis) of textual immersion, while the simultaneous tropical turn of the *ficto*-critical twist constatively illuminates these textual poetics by way of a textual aesthetic.

⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology," in *Margins of Philosophy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 207-71. [Hereafter: Derrida, "White Mythology," p. ...]

⁷⁶ Jacques Derrida, "The Retrait of Metaphor," in *The Derrida Reader: Writing Performances*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1998, p. 102-28.

The structural metaphor thus does not simply bridge the gap *between* the generically distanced overview of theory or criticism and the generically immersed outlook of literature and fiction. Instead, its tropical turn of the *ficto*-critical twist leads the reader to a meta-generic vantage point, from whence the act of textual *mediating* emerges as the condition of the (im)possibility of either reservedly distanced or affectively immersing textual mediations.

The Tropical Intersection of the Fictocritical Twist

Ficto-critical textual practices aim at creating an im/mediate textual experience for the reader in which they simultaneously realise, firstly, an *experiential* awareness by way of the *ficto*-critical vector and, secondly, an explanatory *understanding* of their own *performative* relation to the text – taking their textual *relating* under scrutiny (constatively) while it is under way (performatively). As textual *object* and *performance* are thus intersected, an explanatory textual relation is short-circuited with the im/mediate experience of its *relating*. What the *ficto*-critical vector illumines is furthermore illuminated in the texts. The performative self-reflexivity of im/mediately experiencing the *ficto*-critical vector is supplemented by a constatively self-reflexive, text-practical meta-commentary in the *ficto*-critical twist.

The combined trope of the *ficto*-critical vector and twist strikingly short-circuits the textual relation when it im/mediately highlights *from within* what it constatively examines *from a distance*. But its aspirations do not stop there. The explanatory direction of the constative meta-commentary may even give further text-practical significance or *spin* to the self-reflexive *bend* of the fictocritical vector. Ideally, the understanding thus communicated could aim to im/mediately back-feed into the same understanding that guides the agency currently at work. Momentum of the realisation could even hope to propel the explanatory *direction* of the meta-commentary into a performative *directing*. Theoretically, this is indeed possible because we conduct our reading under way on the guiding authority of the same internalised “fictive institution” (Derrida, “Strange Institution,” p. 36) – to slightly abduct another Derridean term – that here comes under scrutiny and potentially revision. After all, our ideal of what it means “to read the right way” guides our *reading* performance. But if the ideal is transformed *en procès* the relation becomes theoretically short-circuitous.

Eventually, the combined tropical turns of the *ficto*-critical vector and twist effect a short-circuitry of the readerly textual work thus simultaneously, firstly, *under scrutiny*

or even *under critique*, secondly, *under way*, and thus, thirdly, *at stake* or potentially even *under revision*. In this manner, I want to suggest, *ficto*-critical texts aim to pull the plug on our ingrained textual practices for reasons that are provided by their respective *ficto-critical* aspects. For now though, such pre/post/erous short-circuitry epitomises the *ficto*-critical aspect of *ficto*/critical textual strategies.

A fully-fledged *ficto*-critical textual relation is realised where the self-reflexive, performative and im/mediate *ficto*-critical vector is given further text-practical direction by the *ficto*-critical twist. Figuratively, perhaps, a moment of oscillating textual brilliance would turn the stunned reader's point of view, but it might feel very different.

Concluding Notes

In drawing this chapter to a close, I shall now re/state the peculiar significance of the *ficto*-critical vector and twist by way of extracting and re/conceiving of an image from another early precursor to the *fictocritical*, Michel Leiris' *Manhood: A Journey from Childhood into the Fierce Order of Virility*.⁷⁷ In particular, the scenario evoked in the sub-section "Infinity" (Leiris, *Manhood*, p. 11) shall help me re(con)figure the *ficto*-critical significance of vector and twist as the reverse direction of a *mis en abyme* structure. For Leiris the significance of the following situation is his "first actual contact with infinity" (Leiris, *Manhood*, p. 11). At one point he was holding – let us assume in his left hand – a tin of Dutch cocoa which "was decorated with an image of a farm girl in a lace cap, holding in her left hand an identical tin, decorated with the same image of the smiling, pink girl" (Leiris, *Manhood*, p. 11), and so on to infinity. Leiris furthermore admits to still getting "dizzy imagining this infinite series of an identical image endlessly reproducing the same" (Leiris, *Manhood*, p. 11). This, of course, is the quintessential trope of representation *mis en abyme*.

Yet from a *ficto*-critical perspective, I want to suggest, the crucial point is not the endlessly fascinating vanishing point somewhere in the depth of this representational trick, but the easily neglected fact that the ultimate frame always includes the person currently holding the tin. The ultimate frame is not that of the first picture on the tin, but the additional fact that he himself is holding the tin in a similar pose to the Dutch girl. Realising this external frame, which is mirrored within, as the starting point of the abysmal representational chain, makes the viewer perceptible as its condition of

⁷⁷ Michel Leiris, *Manhood: A Journey from Childhood into the Fierce Order of Virility*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. [Hereafter: Leiris, *Manhood*, p. ...]

possibility. The *mis en abyme* aesthetic of this representation makes perceptible (aisthesis) its frame/work of perception.

Likewise, where the reader realises the *ficto*-critical vector and twist, she re/focuses the reverse direction of whither the *mis en abyme* structure seems to be pointing – the abysmal depth of the representational scenario leads her back to the recipient *as* its recipient condition of possibility. The reflexive turn of readerly attention is thus not leading further into the maelstrom of representation, but out of it, towards its *non-transcendental* conditions of possibility: the communicative situation of textual representation, and the readerly performance within its paradigmatic setting. In other words, the encountered fall into the loss of representation lets the recipient frame/work enter the picture – which is precisely what Muecke’s exemplary pre/scription in “The Fall” epitomises.

From Leiris’ admission that for him “the hallucinatory and actually ineffable character of the Dutch girl, infinitely repeated the way licentious poses can be indefinitely multiplied by means of the reflection in a cleverly manipulated boudoir mirror” (Leiris, *Manhood*, p. 11), let me here only elaborate its structural kernel. Consider the quintessential *mis en abyme* structure of two mirrors facing each other. Taking a glimpse from the side, all you can see is their endlessly multiplied frame bending along a line of flight into the bottomless abyss of their mutually self-reflexive re/presentation. Positioning yourself between these two mirrors, however, the abyss is equally obstructed *by yourself*. All you can now see is yourself purportedly staring into the loss of representation, yet curiously finding *yourself* endlessly framed. What you thus see, are two conditions of the possibility of mirror representation. The example figures how not only the frame but also the recipient enters the picture. Ultimately, the loss of representation does not lead into a bottomless abyss, but out of the representative realm and towards the recipient frame/work as its conditions of possibility.

The same holds true for the combined tropes of *ficto*-critical vector and twist. They bring into the picture – both constatively and performatively as well as experientially im/mediate – their textual and recipient conditions of possibility. Their reversal of referential direction points not deeper into the transcendental realm of representation, but towards its non-transcendental frame/work of reception; towards the systemically determined, and yet still underdetermined, position from which alone one is able to contemplate this representational abyss. Similar to the mirror’s invading external frame and the internally obstructing eye, what enters the picture of the *ficto*-critical text, therefore, is the reader’s *agency* in reading as well as the *frame* that she brings to the

textual encounter. In other words, by reversing the suggestive direction of the *mis en abyme* towards the recipient, the *ficto*-critical vector and twist extend the interpretive equation to the recipient's side. As a result, this text-interpretive equation needs to be re/conceived of as a formula with paradigmatically underdetermined variables. It is no longer an equation that lets either correct or wrong results (re)emerge.

Note, furthermore, that in both cases the set-up is guaranteed to fire, because before the representational structures can strike us in their respective ways, their conditions of possibility are always already in place. We can only see the encapsulated abysmal structure of textual acts *in reading*. Since reading is the only means of access, the textual activity that is the subject matter under scrutiny is necessarily in place on the reader's side, and the chainlike structure of representation can thus hit home as a *ficto*-critical vector. A *ficto*-critical strategy thus engages a counterintuitive kind of real-life referentiality and significance when it im/mediately – that is, without representational deflection – addresses a state of affairs of which it can be absolutely certain: namely, that the reader is currently reading this text and conforms to the constitutive requirements and mechanisms of the practice of reading. The special achievement of the *ficto*-critical text is thus to render the representational structure on display such, that it not only contains a description of the necessary readerly position to access its representation, but furthermore, to point at always *this* particular reader's occupying of the readerly position in the equation; thus filling its variable with her respective particularity. The im/mediate and singular interpellation of the *ficto*-critical textual strategy thus collapses the critical distance between recipient and subject in a move that threatens short-circuitry, because what is at work is simultaneously under way and scrutiny.

Most importantly, the *ficto*-critical text thus manages to point out *paradigmatic* aspects of textual representation and communication *per se*, by way of a particular kind of referentiality that, if realised, cannot be wrong because it im/mediately points to its own conditions of possibility *as* they are currently enacted by the reader. Ironically, thus, it is where we suspect the most uncontrollably diverse side of the interpretive equation, namely in the outcome of readerly reception, that *ficto*/critical writing identifies the most important *general* parameters of said equation, the textual work. In this manner, the scope of *ficto*-critical insights into our textual practices is general, even where the writing is deliberately marginal, because the *ficto*-critical vector and twist in their inimitable ways address *the conditions of the im/possibility* of textual representation and communication.

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The *ficto*-critical vector and twist, as I have defined and refined them here on the back of Muecke's exemplary text "The Fall," are very much idealised tropes. I have formulated them pointedly in order to render them productive for a literary theory of the *ficto*/critical. The claim is not that every *ficto*/critical text exemplifies them as brilliantly as "The Fall," but that often textual structures – even where we least expect them – can be set to work in their direction – only we have to look for this potential and realise it in our *ficto*-critical readings. In this sense, these defining tropes of the *ficto*-critical are a readerly stance as much as a text-structural potential. And this readerly dimension is precisely the thrust that my theorising aims to propel forward, when it formulates a rather complex and strong definition of what it takes to be the central aspects of a *ficto*-critical stance at its very best. The fragmentary nature of much *ficto*/critical writing as well as its predilection for essay length text means that often only aspects of these tropes are apparent from different pre/scriptions.

In any case, *knowing* about the counterintuitive movements of the *ficto*-critical vector and twist can provide a more alert readerly frame of reference in our encounters with (not only *ficto*/critical) texts, because *ficto*-critical practices are just as much a readerly stance as they are based on a certain writerly and text-structural conduct. And in precisely this sense I hope that my protocol of reading "The Fall" can help to fertilise our future reception of *ficto*/critical writing – as much as of other writing in a *ficto*-critical manner. The claim is not that every *ficto*critical text exemplifies the same potential for the *ficto*-critical to the same degree, but that *we* *ficto*/critical recipients are required to produce it in relation to these texts.

Not to forget, the *ficto*-critical is also only the first part of the two-step trope of the *ficto*/critical. In light of this, too, it would be counter-productive to dismiss texts that do not exemplify all aspects in equal measure, when a benevolently applied readerly stance – akin to the principle of charity – can actually propel the *ficto*/critical stance forward. *You* can always take it from there.

* * *

At this stage it is reasonable to ask what the merits are of starting a poetics of our textual practices of representation and communication *on the reader's side of the equation*. Why structure such an explanatory account from the act of *text reception* rather than the act of *text production*, or, even earlier, the ideas and perceptions that

give rise to the act of inscription? In other words, what can justify the *post/erior* act of reading to be taken as the starting point when conceiving of the textual work, rather than the necessarily primary and *pre/structuring* act of writing? The answer is because the *ficto/critical* outlook onto the paradigmatic situation of reading and writing is *pre/post/erous*.

As this chapter has argued, the *ficto-critical* readerly focus has the advantage that it can make perceptible a number of fundamental parameters *at work*, which are all too often effaced and abstracted from in our pre-theoretical conception of the interpretive equation *of* the textual work. As a consequence, our textual work may thus be ill named as an equation because of its constitutive asymmetry that only the readerly focus can bring into sharp focus. Ultimately, I want to suggest, we may have to re/theorise the textual work as an interpretive equation, which firstly is not one but two, and secondly not equal. This as yet under-theorised perspective can contribute something new to the conception of our textual practices. Hitherto our understanding has been strongly in/formed from a writerly perspective and has all too often mistaken the question of the recipient's side for a matter of empirical research. The firm readerly focus of my study aims to redress both these points. Not least, because it is precisely on the recipient's side that certain *paradigmatic* mechanisms become perceptible that are always already at work in all our textual practices.

Ficto/critical Strategy & *Ficto*-critical Ideology: A Theory of the Ficto/critical

a) Mischievous Ficto/critical Textual Strategies

The goal of the next few sections is to qualify the strategic pattern instantiated by the ficto/critical. On the one hand, I shall indicate how much perceived playfulness in ficto/critical writing, while presenting its perhaps most appealing side, is also strategically purposive in a twofold and connected sense. On the other hand, I shall examine how the theoretical insights of the *ficto*-critical vector and twist are not only given practical direction but are furthermore endowed with *ficto-critical* edge by the concerns that these texts address.

Firstly, the ficto/critical strategy of generic *resistance* shall be addressed with regards to its inward-directed *ficto*-critical purposes. We have previously seen in Part Two how the *ficto*-critical vector and twist, which are effects of artistic generic resistance, emerge for the recipient in *reading* from a specific kind of (post/modern) playfulness that causes *ficto*-critical frictioning. There is, however, also a *strategic* pattern to be identified, whose purpose it is to defy generic order. In a first step, this initial element of the strategically twofold ficto/critical pattern shall be qualified as a *traitorous* kind of unruly writing.

Secondly, the strategy of textual *intervention* shall be addressed with regards to its outward-directed *ficto-critical* purposes. Ficto/critical textual practices do not only resist the traditional and academic generic order playfully but they also do so for good reasons. Its specific kind of (post/modern) playfulness enables ficto/critical writing to develop a *ficto-critical* interventionist edge. It is thus not only to *resist* a generic style that ficto/critical texts turn playful, but also to *intervene* in the generic effects that other textual practices maintain, re-inscribe, and exacerbate.

On the one hand, there is an additional strategic element to be identified in ficto/critical textual practices whose purpose it is to address, counter, and remedy some wider discursive effects of our generic textual practices. In this sense, the *theoretical* *ficto*-critical twist is given a *practical* purpose and some *ficto-critical* edge when its

im/mediate, self-reflexive and performative insights are constatively connected to wider discursive issues, interests and ethico-political motivations. In a second step, this additional element of the strategically twofold ficto/critical pattern shall be qualified, in Michael Taussig's terms, as an *apotropaic* kind of nervous system writing. Eventually, Part Four shall provide a systematic overview of some wider discursive concerns in evidence across the ficto/critical spectrum.

On the other hand, such strategic textual interventions are based on ficto/critical *theories* that conceive of our textual practices – their parameters, mechanisms, and performances – *differently* from the traditional, academic genres they target. Ficto/critical strategies are thus guided by a different text-practical ideology. At the centre of Part Three two interventionist paradigms of this theoretical understanding shall be re/traced in exemplary texts and then juxtaposed to the conservative models they counter.

To begin with, however, I shall now focus on how ficto/critical textual practices resist our traditional and academic generic practices *traitorously*, and then compliment this by a focus on how they also aim to intervene in the wider discursive effects of certain, traditional and academic, generic orders *apotropaically*. Taken together, these two strategic elements form the characteristic two-step pattern of ficto/critical *strategies*.

(i) Traitorous Writing – *Ficto-critical Generic Resistance*

The characteristic playfulness of *ficto-critical* writing is *purposive* because it serves a strategy of generic resistance. The artistically experimental nature of *ficto-critical* texts is directed against certain generic textual praxes. In the following, I shall examine the underlying *strategic* pattern of this playful, yet directed, generic resistance. In particular, I shall identify the simultaneous potential and danger of generic resistance in such a manner that the virtue of understanding *ficto/critical* writing as strategic textual practices, rather than as a non-generic form, emerges clearly. In so doing, I shall also reconceive of the notorious terminology of “the gap” and “the space between” in terms of the core ambiguity of *generic resistance*.

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As we have seen, it is possible to conceive of the *fictocritical between* in terms of the compound “*fictocriticism*” which displays the generic hybridity that the writing practices it subsumes perform. Thus, *fictocriticism* aims for the hybrid *space between* genres, for the generic *gap*, as an experimentally productive grey area, in order to undermine an existing generic order and its function. The term thus highlights the essentially anti-essential hybridity of such writing. Yet, how to grasp *ficto/criticism* in such paradoxical terms? Is its generic hybridity non-generic, anti-generic or quasi-generic? Is there such a thing as a non-generic genre or an anti-generic quasi-genre? The underlying problem I am trying to pinpoint here is that if *fictocriticism* is by definition genre-defying, it is also already halfway towards a generic order itself. While *ficto/criticism* is a self-stylised, experimental non-genre, whose defining feature is a resistance to traditional and academic generic patterns, it yet permanently runs the paradoxical risk of forming a genre in aiming to overcome genre.

This paradoxical complex thus poses the question of *generic resistance* precisely. The ambiguous expression “generic resistance” aptly encapsulates the problem because it can be taken to indicate both a resistance to genres and a genre of resistance. It spans the polar opposites of texts that aim to resist genre and texts that resist generically. In this ambiguous manner the term identifies the inherent danger for both *ficto/critical* practices and attempts to define them. The danger is that resistance to generic patterns itself forms a generic pattern. In both our practical and theoretical attempts we thus have to tread carefully not to produce a genre of resistance to textual genres. The question is

how to theorise the ficto/critical while sidestepping the self-undermining danger of casting it as another genre.

In order to provide an answer it will be productive to consider two previous suggestions that are already aware of the inherent danger of generic resistance. The first can be found in Anne Brewster's essay "Fictocriticism: Undisciplined Writing,"⁷⁸ in which she maintains that "[t]he indeterminacy of the term [fictocriticism] is partly due to the fact that it precisely cannot be characterised by a particular set of stylistic features" (Brewster, "Undisciplined Writing," p. 29). Her conception ties in with my earlier concern that a list of characteristic textual features can never suffice to define ficto/critical textual practices. Brewster's statement highlights that ficto/critical textual *practice* goes against the grain of *textual* genres.

A little later in the same text Brewster adds that "in defamiliarising genre, fictocriticism interrogates the way in which academic knowledges are constructed. [...] It foregrounds and problematises in very productive ways the conventions – especially those relating to closure – of the genres it invokes" (Brewster, "Undisciplined Writing," p. 31). Part One has already examined in great detail how *ficto*-critical texts performatively highlight these conventions, but Brewster here furthermore anticipates the wider practical, *ficto-critical* significance of these insights. In terms of the present study, she identifies the nexus between *ficto*-critical, text-epistemological insights and *ficto-critical* text-practical significance. She thus effectively anticipates a definition in terms of ficto/critical *strategies* – which is the express aim of this part – as opposed to listing definitional textual features.

Before jumping too far ahead, however, I would like to dwell on the title of Brewster's essay for a moment. In order to rephrase the paradox of generic resistance we could take "undisciplined writing" to mean that defying generic discipline can lead elsewhere than into another pre-scribed textual form. The generic gap, as the locus of undiscipline, would contain the fluid potential of experimental hybridity. Turning into disciples of undisciplined writing, however, would present the danger of coagulating this fluid realm of potential into a dry niche. Such is the core problematic of our paradox. To rephrase the question of generic resistance in this light, we need to ask whether it is indeed meaningfully possible to be a disciple of undiscipline. And furthermore, should ficto/critical texts be called generically undisciplined even though they are identifiable as *a certain kind* of undisciplined writing?

⁷⁸ Anne Brewster, "Fictocriticism: Undisciplined Writing," in *Writing – Teaching, Teaching Writing*, edited by Jan Hutchinson et al., Sydney: UTS, 1996, p. 29-32. [Hereafter: Brewster, "Undisciplined Writing," p. ...]

The crucial point here is that just what constitutes the generic gap as a place of anti-generic writing also constitutes the risk of re-turning it into generic boundaries. Figuratively speaking, the fluid potential of the generically hybrid gap is in constant danger of coagulating its formal resistance into a genre itself. The same marginal gap that has been identified as the de-territorialising, creative space *between* genres is constantly threatening to re-territorialise as the niche of a marginal generic centre. The same gap within which emerged the *grey* area of generic hybridity as a realm of experimental potential is constitutively in danger of being re-regimented into a new genre, a return to black and white. Just like “generic resistance,” Brewster’s notion of “undisciplined writing” thus finely captures the potential and danger inherent to ficto/critical practices.

Until recently, what was probably my favourite Kreuzberg graffiti evidenced a somewhat less academic awareness of the same complex. On the back of a boarded up hut at the entrance of station Görlitzer Bahnhof, spray-painted in an odd light metallic blue, it said:

Punk’s not rock!

This riffs on the old battle cry “Punks Not Dead” by The Exploited,⁷⁹ and in so doing wittily comments on the contradiction in terms of “punk rock.” The question “What is punk?” must have been discussed *ad nauseam* since its earliest beginnings sometime back in the late seventies, not least because the early “anything goes” was radical to the point of not being anything at all. Paradoxically, however, this idea has since “found” its form and produced a surprisingly fixed pattern of music, look, and attitude – all of which certainly have their kicks on offer. And yet, punk was supposed to be *anti* rock, not an entrenched *anti-rock* genre. The sloganic graffiti throws this self-contradiction in relief. Likewise, consider the idea of Jazz as “free form” and the many subgenres that have since established themselves as generic clusters within which you can again be central or marginal.

The second characterisation of ficto/criticism that captures the problem of generic resistance in fictocriticism can be found in the following passage of Amanda Nettelbeck’s seminal “Notes towards an Introduction”⁸⁰ for *The Space Between*.

⁷⁹ The Exploited, *Punks Not Dead*, Secret Records, 1981.

⁸⁰ Amanda Nettelbeck, “Notes towards an Introduction,” in *The Space Between*, edited by Heather Kerr et al., Perth: UWA Press, 1998, p. 1-17. [Hereafter: Nettelbeck, “Introduction,” p. ...]

These [foregoing] notes [by Juliet Mitchell] have gestured towards some notions of fictocriticism as unruly writing. We [the editors] hope that, taken together, these writings [in *The Space Between*] will be read not so much as a boundary-setting collection but rather as a series of investigative writings connected by their agonistic relation to the interpretive gesture. (Nettelbeck, “Introduction,” p. 13)

As her cautionary remark against possible “boundary-setting” tendencies indicates, Nettelbeck is aware of the dilemma that a collection of ficto/critical writing can be taken as not only exemplary but *definitionally prescriptive* of something *unruly*. Starting with this paradox potential, I would like to dwell on Nettelbeck’s notion of “unruly writing” a little in order to introduce a useful distinction between two strategic patterns of generic resistance.

Once we conceive of ficto/criticism as “unruly writing,” the question with regards to which rules such writing is unruly becomes highly significant on the back of the distinction between *regulative* and *constitutive* rules. On the one hand, if ficto/critical writing were to primarily target the regulative rules of the genres it engages, then this *regulative unruliness* could become a factor to change *the course* of the particular genres in question. On the other hand, if ficto/criticism were to primarily target the constitutive rules of the genres it engages, then this *constitutive unruliness* could become a factor to change *the nature* of the genre in question. Therefore, as far as the language games of genres (and their wider discursive implications) are concerned, the former strategy would aim to effect *positional* changes *in* the game, whereas the latter would aim to initiate a *game change*, that is, a change *of* the game.

Before moving on we should note that both the regulatory and constitutive rules addressed at this stage are still on the level of *the laws of genre*. Different sets of *regulatory* rules make different fictional genres identifiable, but there is also a set of *constitutive* rules that makes their language use fictional – and *vice versa* for non-fiction. Both of these rules present the laws of genre. Breaking these sets of rules is indeed possible because they are not yet the constitutive rules of our textual practices which present the condition of the possibility of textual representation and communication. These constitutive rules of our textual practices present *the laws of the laws of genre* – and they are where my argument is ultimately headed.

It is in relating to the conditions of the possibility of genre, in re-conceiving of them differently, that ficto/critical practices may change the genre game whose systemic order – as well as whose wider discursive order – they critique. In addressing the

constitutive rules of our reading and writing practices ficto/critical writing may change the genre game and bring its recipients to realise the full scope of potential that our textual practices open up. For now the point is to distinguish between the laws of genre, which comprise both the regulative and constitutive rules of – fictional as well as non-fictional – genres, and the laws of the laws of genre, which present the conditions of the possibility of our textual practices *per se*.

In light of the telling ambiguity of both Brewster's and Nettelbeck's terminology, two strategic patterns of undiscipline or unruliness emerge in relief – only one of which, however, captures the aim of ficto/critical resistance. In the context of border crossing and rule breaking, Manuel Ramos Martínez reminds us in his “Betrayed Borders: Double Agents and the Crisscrossing of Conflicts”⁸¹ that “Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet introduce in their *Dialogues*⁸² a significant distinction between two figures: the traitor and the trickster” (Martínez, “Betrayed Borders, p. 261). They make a subtle, but significant, distinction between the rule bending or breaking patterns of the trickster and the traitor, which may seem deceptively close, yet have significantly different strategic implications.

A traitor to the world of dominant significations, and the established order. This is quite different from the trickster: for the trickster claims to take possession of fixed properties, or to conquer a territory, or even to introduce a new order. The trickster has plenty of future, but no becoming whatsoever. The priest, the soothsayer, is a trickster, but the experimenter is a traitor. The statesman or the courtier is a trickster, but the man of war (not a marshal or a general) is a traitor. (Deleuze & Parnet, *Dialogues*, p. 40-1)

Clearly their distinction cuts along the line between the gap as a realm of fluid potential and the niche as a re/regimented space between. Trickster and traitor thus emerge as the agent figures strategically pursuing either of these possibilities respectively.

Building on this, Martínez sharpens the opposed patterns of the distinction further.

The schema of the traitor does not correspond to a plan defining an outcome in advance, but to an experimental plan that restlessly dismantles its interpretive bases. These traitors do not own the time to come. The trickster, however, is an ‘orderly man ordering his future’. Tricksters claim [...] ‘to

⁸¹ Manuel Ramos Martínez, “Betrayed Borders: Double Agents and the Crisscrossing of Conflicts,” in *Sarai Reader 2007: Frontiers*, New Delhi: Impress, 2007, p. 256-63. [Hereafter: Martínez, “Betrayed Borders,” p. ...]

⁸² Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. [Hereafter: Deleuze & Parnet, *Dialogues*, p. ...]

introduce a new order'. They adopt a course of action to reach a goal.

(Martínez, "Betrayed Borders," p. 261)

On the one hand, the trickster aims to exempt himself from the rules and gain an advantage for his position. He tricks the *traditional* order in a certain context, to improve his own position within a given system and hierarchy. In doing this, the trickster takes a *calculable* risk. The traitor, on the other hand, is traitorous to the very context from within which he departs. He betrays the *systemic* order, even though the new situation this entails may be to his own disadvantage. In so doing, the traitor takes *unpredictable* risks.

Schematically, the trickster wants to come out better positioned while yet perpetuating the system that he exempts himself from, whereas the traitor leads out of the system by propelling *it* elsewhere, potentially not even to his own greater advantage. And *this*, I want to suggest, is part of the crucial risk of ficto/critical strategies. In other words, the trickster bends the regulative rules *with/in* the system and thereby tricks the existing order – he follows a position changing strategy as he cheats within the system. By contrast, the traitor bends the rules constitutive *of* the system and thereby betrays the systemic order – he follows a game-changing strategy as he cheats the system. Along the lines of this distinction I would like to suggest conceiving of the generic recalcitrance of ficto/criticism – of its un/ruliness and un/discipline – in terms of *traitorous* strategies.

A good example of this opposition can be found in Mark Davis' *Gangland Cultural Elites and the New Generationalism*⁸³ where he juxtaposes two kinds of feminism: firstly, what he calls "equity" feminism and, secondly, a more systemically directed feminism that some equity feminists have derided as "victim" feminism. As Davis defines it, equity feminism "lacks a theoretical apparatus capable of analysing deeper sexism. It seeks to make women equal, but only within the existing social system, which it seeks to validate" (Davis, *Gangland*, p. 91). Its strategy is to distribute positions more justly within the same systemic order but not to touch the unjust ordering system.

By contrast, a new generation of feminists have identified precisely *systemic* injustice as the root of female disadvantage and discrimination.

They point out that 'equity' feminism not only aspires to a middle-class version of white masculine citizenship, but tends to be espoused by white

⁸³ Mark Davis, *Gangland Cultural Elites and the New Generationalism*, St. Leonard: Allen & Unwin, 1997. [Hereafter: Davis, *Gangland*, p. ...]

middle-class feminists who can afford to take their ‘individualist’ privileges for granted. What ‘equity’ feminists tend to laud as the freedom of equality and freedom from ideology, more recent feminisms see as the logic of the status quo. They argue that to aspire to this kind of equity is to buy into a whole new set of (patriarchal) ideologies, even if no-one speaks of them as such. (Davis, *Gangland*, p. 91)

Thus, while “equity” feminists criticise a defeatist lack of individual initiative in what they polemically refer to as “victim” feminism, proponents of this latter perspective in turn criticise that attitude and ideology of “equity” feminism are a privilege of those already systemically advantaged. They are dissatisfied with the pyrrhic victory of having some women in some driving seats perpetuating a still patriarchal system.

With regards to a set of prominent Australian equity feminists Davis analyses that “[h]aving championed at every turn a gender system that accepts them as ‘equals’, they are allowed popular forums in which to police its boundaries, gatekeeping [...] what henceforth is and isn’t acceptable feminism” (Davis, *Gangland*, p. 94). Their resistance to patriarchy has turned patriarchal itself. The initially *emancipatory* impetus of feminist resistance has turned its fluid potential into a regimented marginal centre, a niche with its own rules and borders. In other words, Davis criticises “equity” feminism to follow a trickster strategy in re-structuring the order within the system, when a traitorous strategy could re-structure the systemic order. He thus addresses for feminist resistance in general the principles that are also relevant for strategies of – not only – feminist fictocritical writing. The question is what kind of (generic) resistance is fictocritical? Is the aim to occupy the marginal space of a generic *between*, or to challenge the systemically marginalising centrality of generic practices? Ficto/criticism (slashed) worthy of the name, I want to suggest, is systemically traitorous, strategic writing of the latter orientation.

Especially the traitorously *ficto-critical* direction in some strategies of *ficto-critical* generic resistance is an important element of ficto/critical textual practices. For example, instances of post/modern playfulness can either yield playfulness for its own sake, or a purposive playfulness that serves a certain function. In fictocritical writing this marks the difference between a merely genre-conflating text and a text that conflates genres with a wider aim, an agenda even. In her Ph.D. thesis,⁸⁴ Helen Flavell has identified the stakes thus:

⁸⁴ Helen Flavell, *Writing-Between: Australian and Canadian Ficto-Criticism*, Ph.D. thesis presented at Murdoch University, Perth, 2004. [Hereafter: Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. ...]

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. (Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. 135-6)

If post/modernist means in ficto/critical texts are misrecognised either as aimless playfulness or as challenges against everything, this leaves no room to register the different *ficto-critical* purposes to which ficto/critical strategies employ post/modernist means *ficto-critically*.

There is, indeed, another way to understand post/modern playfulness, which can accommodate the self-reflexive meta-perspective of the *ficto-critical*. As Niall Lucy insists in *PoMo Oz: Fear and Loathing Down Under*,⁸⁵ “[p]ostmodernism represents a continuation (by other means) of a critical project associated with the Enlightenment” (Lucy, *PoMo Oz*, p. 59). This project is “a critical scepticism towards received, official, orthodox, traditional, absolute or objective forms of truth and authority” (Lucy, *PoMo Oz*, p. 59). In this sense, the post/modern means of the *ficto-critical* follow an enlightenment impetus because “it is ‘postmodern’ to ask after the conditions under which the meaning of a text might be said to occur” (Lucy, *PoMo Oz*, p. 60). What enters the picture here is the idea of a self-reflexive meta-commentary to which we are guided by precisely the post/modern playfulness of such texts. It is often the purpose of post/modern playfulness in ficto/critical texts to drive our attention towards not only the limits but also the conditions of the im/possibility of our generic practices. This, after all, is the thrust of the *ficto-critical* vector and twist.

Additionally, however, we should productively read Flavell’s reasoning that “ficto-criticism is a highly political discourse” (Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. 95) along the lines of this enlightenment understanding of post/modern textual means as well.

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

⁸⁵ Niall Lucy, *PoMo Oz: Fear and Loathing Down Under*, Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2010. [Hereafter: Lucy, *PoMo Oz*, p. ...]

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. (Flavell, *Writing-Between*, p. 295-6)

Thus, by im/mediately addressing the textual performance that we are involved in at the same time, the *ficto*-critical vector and twist make *ficto*/critical writing *systemically emancipatory* towards its reader even before it *ficto-critically* champions a particular *cause* of emancipation.

For example – and this shall return our focus to the distinction between gap and niche, between traitor and trickster – *ficto*/criticism understood as *positional feminist writing* targets primarily the hierarchical male/female dichotomy, whereas *ficto*/criticism understood as *emancipatory textual practice* primarily targets the hierarchical perception of our *textual* relations and practices. In other words, *emancipatory* *ficto*/critical strategies go beyond *positional feminist* strategies because they target the hierarchical order of the male/female dichotomy in a manner that *both* produces a self-reflexive meta-commentary on the hierarchy between writer, text and reader *and* its role in maintaining the gendered hierarchy of speaking positions in academic writing.

We could thus apply the two earlier juxtapositions of trickster and traitor as well as gap and niche in order to separate the feminist impetus to claim a female form of writing from a more individual emancipatory impetus in *ficto*/critical writing. From this perspective, the primarily feminist principle prioritises targeting how generic academic writing re-inscribes the male/female dichotomy as significantly hierarchical. The strategy it adopts in its *ficto*-critical (hyphenated) practices aims to realign generic discipline so as to include a textual space for female speaking positions. By contrast, the primarily emancipatory principle prioritises targeting the hierarchical perceptions of our textual relations and practices. The strategy it adopts in its *ficto*-critical practices aims to realign the direction of textual disciplining on the level constitutive of genre. And it is precisely in this latter sense that the purposive post/modern playfulness in *ficto*/critical writing indicates how the hierarchical dichotomy between writer, text and reader features heavily in perpetuating the hierarchical dichotomy between male and female speaking positions in academic writing.

On the one hand, a *positional feminist* focus follows the strategic impetus of the trickster in establishing a female textual form, even genre. *Historically* this is a highly significant factor in the genesis of *fictocritical* writing. On the other hand, however, the

systemically emancipatory focus exemplifies a traitorous pattern by instigating idiosyncratic reading and writing that are motivated by unpredictable particulars. Furthermore, I want to suggest that only a *systematic* analysis of this *systemic* enlightenment impetus in ficto/critical writing has the appropriate theoretical scope to unite all the ficto/critical strands in evidence.

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Ficto/criticism is an empty gap full of fluid potential. Its definitional outlines need to be theorised variably, so as not to turn the space between into an ossified niche.

For the same reasons that punk is not rock, and jazz not always free form, ficto/critical textual practices are traitorous.

Bridging the gap short-circuitously, the ficto/critical keeps its bridges gaping perceivably.

Ficto/critical writing may be genetically feminist, but it is systemically emancipatory towards each individually engaged reading-writing agent.

Tabling a just turn *ficto/critically* far exceeds just turning the tables.

(ii) Apotropaic Writing – Ficto-critical Textual Interventions

Having engaged a notion of ficto/criticism as experimental feminist writing to sharpen the profile of *ficto*-critical textual strategies in the previous section, I shall in the current section engage the notion that different academic genres can turn ficto/critical to sharpen the profile of *ficto-critical* textual strategies. Having detected the *traitorous ficto*-critical tendency to create a line of flight from a generic system by re-aligning its systemic lines, this shall now be supplemented with the *ficto-critical* tendency to counter the wider discursive effects of the generic textual practices on which such writing feeds. The most appropriate terminology for this strategic pattern can be found in Michael Taussig's "The Corn-Wolf: Writing Apotropaic Texts,"⁸⁶ but the principle he so finely captures reverberates across the amorphous ficto/critical field: *apotropaic writing* as counter-generic textual intervention.

Writing in anthropology, Taussig has long gained a reputation, beyond his discipline, for his idiosyncratic style. Writing his studies on (other) human cultures, he is well aware that his discipline simultaneously produces its own culture in writing. This is a culture of writing in a generic academic manner that produces specific kinds of knowledge and effects. Reacting to this, Taussig has written ficto/critical ethnographies – such as *The Magic of The State*⁸⁷ – with the aim to expose and counter, at least not be silently complicit with, some wider discursive effects of this generically disciplined writing. His short essay "The Corn-Wolf" presents an enigmatic theoretical reflection on the merits of writing ficto/critically in his field, which specifically captures the interventionist and text-practical dimension of *ficto-critical* writing.

To begin with, Taussig reminds us that anthropology cultivates a practice that converts a field under investigation into a piece of writing. This movement from "fieldwork to writingwork" (Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. 26), involves at least a double translation: first from subjective *experiences* in the field to subjective *notes* on paper, then from the *subjective* fieldwork notebooks to an *objective* ethnographic treatise – a fixed textual genre. As he puts it, "fieldwork involves participant observation with people and events, being inside and outside, while writingwork involves magical projections through words into people and events" (Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. 26). The

⁸⁶ Michael Taussig, "The Corn-Wolf: Writing Apotropaic Texts," in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2010, p. 26-33. [Hereafter: Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. ...]

⁸⁷ Michael Taussig, *The Magic of the State*, New York: Routledge, 1997.

transition goes from im/mediate experiences in the field to textually mediated experiences that are re-projected into the encounter via writing. This instituted practice of textual mediation can have real consequences because it can pre-structure future encounters with a culture thus written up.

Interestingly, a generic field of writingwork is thus being cultivated by anthropological fieldwork that investigates other cultures. On the back of this realisation, Wittgenstein's idea that "[a] whole mythology is deposited in our language" (Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. 28) becomes hugely inspirational for Taussig. In particular, it endows him with an "awareness about the magic in language, meaning the familiar moves it makes" (Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. 27). Being thus sensitised towards *mythological* and *magical* patterns at work in the academic language which anthropology produces to demystify other culture's mythologies, Taussig turns his writingwork ficto/critical. Examining, in turn, how anthropology examines folk mythologies such as the corn-wolf, he suggests that generic ethnographic writingwork is the correlate of agribusiness practices in the field – it is a culture that displaces our cultural receptivity to mythologies such as the corn-wolf. He pursues the hidden mythology and magic at the heart of anthropology that enables *this one* cultural practice to dispel the mythologies and magic of other cultures.

Taussig thus detects a *magic-defying counter-magic* at work in anthropological writing. Because he is keenly aware of how anthropological textual culture implies one in its project, he begins to connive with the mythology in our language and the magic of our writing *against* their deployment to dispel other cultures' mythologies. In order not to be complicit with the wider generic effects of anthropological writing, in fact, to *expose* and *counter* them, Taussig aims to replicate, to different effect, the magic of anthropology *on* anthropology. His writing follows an *apotropaic* strategy that works to *counter* the *magic-defying* magic of generic anthropological writingwork. His ficto/critical ethnographic writing thus hopes to re-enchant, not de-mystify, the object of his fieldwork.

The cultural practice of anthropological writing *translates* the magical practices of other cultures into the known order of Western culture. Just like magical healing in some non-Western cultures, it is thus a practice that serves to re-establish the *known* cultural order. When ethnographic writing comes to terms with the mythologies and magic of other cultures by reducing the unknown and strange to the known and familiar, its promise is that "[a]s if by magic the disorder of the world will be straightened out" (Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. 30). Anthropological writing itself thus serves a *magical*

purpose, but this is rendered invisible by its culture's claim to generality. With regards to other cultures, Taussig analyses that "[w]hat we have generally done in anthropology is [...] piggybacking on their magic and on their conjuring—their tricks—so as come up with explanations that seem nonmagical and free of trickery" (Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. 30). A consequence of its "using magic to seem as if having none" (Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. 30) is that anthropology "knows no wonder that [...] is really a wonder" (Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. 29). By contrast, he implicitly outlines his *apotropaic* approach as writing that conveys "the sense of chaos moving not to order but to another form of chaos" (Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. 30).

Taussig's anthropological writing turns this *magic defying magic* around by turning it on itself: such *apotropaic* writing estranges the purportedly known of anthropological culture. His point is that generic anthropological writingwork "assumes explanation when what is at issue is why is one required. What is an explanation and how do you do one, and how weird is that?" (Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. 29). What needs explanation in Taussig's eyes is the all too familiar practice of explanatory writing. While generic ethnography re-establishes the order of Western culture and discourse in writing, Taussig's *apotropaic* writing subjects this anthropological ordering system to a dose of its own de-mystifying scrutiny – however, not without simultaneously re-mystifying his own ficto/critical writing and discourse. With regards to mythologies deposited in our language, Taussig's *apotropaic* project thus aims at "becoming aware of that presence in our lives, in our writing, and institutions, so as to neither expose nor erase but conspire with it, as does the wolf" (Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. 28). Conniving with the mythology and magic of our language, Taussig thus works some counter magic himself to defy the magic defying magic of anthropological textual practices.

There are thus two kinds of counter-magic at work. Anthropological writing counters the magic of other cultures, but Taussig's *apotropaic* writing seeks to counter this magic-defying kind of writing. Turning ficto/critical, his writing furthermore re-enchants anthropology at the same time as it hopes to recant some of its wider discursive effects. The *apotropaic* magic of his ficto/critical writing aims to counter the magic-defying magic of generic anthropological writing *and* reveal it as only one (textual) culture among many – albeit a very powerful one. Taussig engages the mythology deposited in our language in order to cast a self-reflexive spell that can dispel the unmarked mythology of anthropological writing. His point is to work *counter-magic* in writing that paradoxically exposes the magic of writingwork by harnessing its magic. Such ficto/critical writing *apotropaically* re-directs received

generic powers not without empowering its recipient with regards to the writingwork they encounter. It thus traitorously breaks the magic circle to let it unpredictably spiral – possibly out of control.

Rather than just being *ficto-critically traitorous* to the hierarchies and epistemologies of the genres from within which they depart, *ficto-critical* texts thus also re-direct the power that a given *form* can provide for a *cause*. In this regard it can be productive to consider Kwame Anthony Appiah's famous text "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?"⁸⁸ In the following, I shall first retrace the logic that Appiah sees in two successive phases of post/colonial African writing and then speculate on the logical next step in this development. The post/colonial potential of *ficto-critical* strategies shall be my main focus in all this.

In the first generation of post/colonial African novels Appiah finds a conservative strategy that pairs its realist (and/or modernist) form with a nationalist post/colonial agenda. Novels that Appiah has in mind are, for example, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir* (Appiah, "Posts," p. 348), or Ahmadou Kourouma's *Suns of Independence* (Appiah, "Posts," p. 353). Typically, such texts would aim to provide the newly post/colonial nation with an epic narrative. In this sense, "these early novels seem to belong to the world of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary nationalism; they are theorized as the imaginative reaction of a common cultural past that is crafted into a shared tradition by the writer" (Appiah, "Posts," p. 349). They transplant the realist literary means and strategies of a European nationalist politics – which has contributed to colonialism – into the post/colonial context.

For Appiah, as for the second wave of African novels responding to these texts, however, the problem is that "[t]he novels of this first stage are thus realist legitimations of nationalism" (Appiah, "Posts," p. 349). Immediately after the revolutionary change, the strategy is again to preserve *both* the (new) politically *and* (old) generically dominant powers, as well as their orders. The critique of power in the first wave is thus not systemic, but distributive. It follows a clear trickster strategy. Not the marginalising logic is under critique but the fact that the newly stipulated post/colonial *we* is located at those margins. The aim is to cut the ties to the colonial centre in order to create a marginal centre, while yet perpetuating the same kind of nation and nationalism.

In a second stage of African novels, as prime examples of which he names Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Yambo Ouologuem's *Le Devoir de violence*

⁸⁸ Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is The Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1991, p. 336-57. [Hereafter: Appiah, "Posts," p. ...]

(Appiah, "Posts," p. 349), Appiah detects a more revolutionary approach. These texts present a kind of anti-epic narrative that problematises the concept of a post/colonial nation. Dwelling on Ouologuem's work, Appiah finds that in this text "he rejects, indeed assaults, the conventions of realism [...] because what it sought to naturalize was a nationalism that, by 1968, had plainly failed" (Appiah, "Posts," p. 249). The novels of the second stage thus mark the combined generic resistance of textual form and post/colonial politics. They "reject not only the Western *imperium* but also the nationalist project of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie" (Appiah, "Posts," p. 353) and mount "a challenge to the novels of the first stage" because they have identified "the realist novel as part of the tactic of nationalist legitimation" (Appiah, "Posts," p. 349). The trickster strategy of the first stage is thus replaced with a more traitorous strategy. The second wave is post-nativist *and* post-realist. It no longer aims to emancipate – or rather: put in power – a native group within the existing nationalist order, but to mount a *systemic* emancipation from this ordering principle.

For *Le Devoir de violence* Appiah observes that it "is a novel that seeks to delegitimize not only the form of realism but the content of nationalism" (Appiah, "Posts," p. 352). But he cautions that this twofold delegitimation in novels of the second wave may "seem to us, misleadingly, postmodern: misleadingly, because what we have here is not postmodernism but postmodernisation; not an aesthetic but a politics" (Appiah, "Posts," p. 352-3). Akin to Flavell before, Appiah sees the need to defend a post/modern textual form as not aimlessly playful but purposively directed. Yet he maintains that "the basis for that project of delegitimation cannot be the postmodernist one: rather, it is grounded in an appeal to an ethical universal" (Appiah, "Posts," p. 353). Based on our findings so far, however, there *is* now reason to believe that a *ficto/critical* application of post/modernist means *can* highlight the connection between the form of a text and the politics it espouses because it identifies *the textual performance* under way as the operative link between the two. The *ficto/critical* kind of purposive playfulness, I want to suggest, has thus found the way to make post/modernist textual means ethically significant, even politically viable.

The systemically emancipatory aspect that *ficto/criticism* has brought to feminist writing, it can also contribute to the line of post/colonial writing that Appiah so famously discusses. While *ficto-critical* strategies can highlight our generic textual practices to us, *ficto-critical* strategies can give ethically motivated, practical direction to our performances of these practices. In other words, post/colonial texts turn *ficto/critical* when they harness the critique of self-reflexive literary theory to their

politically post/colonial agenda – one which is generically no longer *neo-* but finally *non-* if not *anti-*colonial. The underlying realisation is that the textual form does indeed matter, but only in its connection to our textual practices. The aim is to lead out of the dominating generic system just as much as out of the dominating political system, to lead, unpredictably, elsewhere. In this respect, the challenge of ficto/critical texts would thus be *systemically* post/colonial. Ultimately, they would highlight the potential inherent in our decentred textual work to *change direction* on the practical level of meaning, other, and self-formation. They would tap the ficto/critical to work some traitorously apotropaic magic by deploying textual means in order to expose the power of such means while simultaneously harnessing this power in a new direction.

Notably, Taussig has an enigmatic term to capture the potential in our writing practices for both a generic regime with certain effects and its subversion. On the general level, he calls such constitutively ambiguous complexes a “Nervous System” – to examples of which he dedicates an entire book by the same title⁸⁹ – but he also specifically refers to our textual practices within them as “Nervous System writing” (Taussig, “Corn-Wolf,” p. 32). Taussig furthermore maintains that “[i]f it is true that there is a mythology deposited in our language, NS [i.e. Nervous System] writing aims not at exposing that mythology but at conniving with it” (Taussig, “Corn-Wolf,” p. 32). Importantly, there is good reason to distinguish between two fundamentally different thrusts, strategies, and principles of Nervous System writing.

On the one hand there is writing that sustains the order of a centralised nervous system. For example, Taussig characterises generic anthropological writing as “agribusiness” with regards to the field it investigates as much as with regards to the academic field it draws up, because it cultivates a magic-dispelling practice in writing that becomes culturally dominant, even hegemonic, and thus displaces the magic of other practices in both fields:

Agribusiness writing is a mode of production (see Marx) that conceals the means of production, assuming writing as information to be set aside from writing that has poetry, humor, luck, sarcasm, leg pulling, the art of the storyteller, and subject becoming object. It assumes writing to be a communicative means, not a source of experience for reader and writer alike. (Taussig, “Corn-Wolf,” p. 29)

⁸⁹ Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System*, New York: Routledge, 1992; esp. “Why the Nervous System?” p. 1-10.

With this concept, Taussig aligns the monocultures of the agrarian and academic sectors, both of which dominate at the expense of a multiplicity of other cultures and practices. Where the corn-wolf mythologises, the rational narrative of agribusiness cuts mythology out of the equation, reaping profits at the cost of a poorer field-working culture. Likewise, figuratively speaking, “[a]gribusiness writing wants to drain the wetlands. Swamps, they used to be called, dank places where bugs multiply” (Taussig, “Corn-Wolf,” p. 30).

On the other hand, there is *apotropaic* Nervous System writing, which re-injects the system with a dose of nervousness. For example, where the generic rules of literary criticism decree that “[y]ou can write about James Joyce, but not like James Joyce,” (Taussig, “The Corn-Wolf,” p. 29) this is precisely where Taussig’s ficto/critical turn takes his writing. Equally, and this takes us back to the central paradox of generic resistance, whereas “[a]gribusiness writing wants mastery, not the mastery of nonmastery” (Taussig, “The Corn-Wolf,” p. 29), precisely the latter becomes the unpredictable goal of the ficto/critical. Most importantly for the perspective of the current section, however, it becomes the *ficto-critical* task of Taussig’s very own anthropology to find an antidote to the effects of agribusiness writing, in order to pursue a *re/medially apotropaic* strategy.

Ultimately, Taussig’s twofold terminology of Nervous System writing highlights that *both* agribusiness *and* apotropaic writing are strategies that depart from the same field whose means and mechanisms they apply to very different effect. Agribusiness writing presents a Nervous System in this twofold sense: firstly, it imposes an order, a system, onto the practices of fieldwork; secondly, it trembles with nervousness at the prospect of being thrown back into chaos by the preceding mythological spells it dispelled. To return these spells is the object of apotropaic writing, which thus retrieves the nervousness in the nerve endings of the system. It is interventionist writing that targets the detrimental effects of a dominant monoculture from within, and thus hopes to give its power not only a different but a *re/medial* direction. Yet, apotropaic writing is no less nervous (system) writing: firstly, it is jumpy writing that injects systemic nervousness into a generic order; secondly, it highlights and re-deploys the nervous system of our textual practices for its *re/medial* purposes.

For example, John Kinsella sometimes writes apotropaic pastorals. One of his poetry collections is called *Counter-Pastoral*,⁹⁰ but there is a whole range of

⁹⁰ John Kinsella, *Counter-Pastoral*, Sydney: Vagabond Press, 1999.

publications such as *The Silo: A Pastoral Symphony*,⁹¹ *The Hierarchy of Sheep*,⁹² or *The New Arcadia*⁹³ that testify to his sustained and apotropaic interest in the pastoral tradition. In his autobiographic text *Auto*⁹⁴ Kinsella reflects on this writing strategy as follows: “I try to write a poetry that undoes the poetry I enjoy reading. To work an illusion is to tell alternative ‘truths’” (Kinsella, *Auto*, p. 61). His poetry not only counters a certain kind of poetry on which it feeds but it is also concerned with the alternative “truths” that it conjures up in the process. Perhaps it is thus closer to *artful experimentation* than the *artistically experimental*. His statement, in any case, comes in a chapter entitled “The Magic Circle” (Kinsella, *Auto*, p. 60-3). When his father initiates him to a circle of part-time magicians, the young Kinsella soon begins copying the magic he encounters as well as making up his own magic in response.

On the one hand he learns tricks to participate in the circle, to have something up his sleeve, and to counter the tricks of the others. His incantation is “[t]o beat an illusion make an illusion” (Kinsella, *Auto*, p. 62). And this little wisdom is still pertinent when it comes to the idea of creating truths and alternative truths through poetry. To beat pastoral poetry, its generic effects and the wider discursive function it serves, write pastoral poetry, only make it apotropaic: counter-pastoral. On the other hand, Kinsella also learns of another kind of magic that emerges from his literally marginal writing: “I collated books of tricks and made notes in the margins about the history of a particular illusion. Lacunae and diagrams, marginalia and annotations grew and made their own linguistic tricks. Poetry came out of the magic books” (Kinsella, *Auto*, p. 61). His marginal meta-comments thus provided a way to work the magic of these texts for his purposes, but they also wrought a poetic magic entirely their own.

Furthermore, after getting his kicks from listening in on conversations that were never intended for him, he finds this experience to be “[t]he same thing as magic, an intrusion into one’s perceptions. That’s when the author died for me – my poetry had nothing to do with tricking the reader – the tricks were made by the reader him/herself. They did all the believing or non-believing” (Kinsella, *Auto*, p. 63). As Kinsella realises how the agency of magic in writing shifts to the recipient, he thus intimates apotropaic strategies of textual subversion – ultimately, an apotropaic theory of textual practices along the lines of Taussig’s corn-wolf. And so, the magic circle returns as Kinsella’s

⁹¹ John Kinsella, *The Silo: A Pastoral Symphony*, Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1995.

⁹² John Kinsella, *The Hierarchy of Sheep*, Highgreen: Bloodaxe Books, 2000.

⁹³ John Kinsella, *The New Arcadia*, Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2005.

⁹⁴ John Kinsella, *Auto*, Applecross: Salt Publishing, 2001. [Hereafter: Kinsella, *Auto*, p. ...]

counter-pastoral writing draws something close to traitorous crop circles in the field of pastoral poetry.

Moreover, for Taussig the futurity of ficto/critical apotropaic writing is central, it is concerned with its posterity. In his terminology such textual acts always intervene by taking “this one chance, the one permanently before the last” (Taussig, “Corn-Wolf,” p. 32). This interventionist temporality of ficto/critical writing is *pre/post/erous* indeed. For example, it is one of Taussig’s ficto-*critical* concerns that writing about violence can perversely feed into its discursive reign of terror against one’s intention. In the “Preface to the Thirtieth Anniversary Edition” of *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*⁹⁵ he reflects this:

I struggled to better understand the violence of the atrocities of the rubber boom in the Putumayo region of the Upper Amazon around 1900, and that understanding made me focus increasingly on the talking and writing of terror, coupled with mounting sensitivity as to how most writing on violence makes it worse. (Taussig, *Devil*, p. xii)

He realises that his work of addressing the violence is in danger of perpetuating the discursive system that serves its terror. In a sinister way, thus, even his efforts to expose and condemn the violence still risk backfeeding into the discursive logic that underwrites the violence.

Partly, Taussig’s musings on the magic of the corn-wolf and the need for counter-magic are motivated from the practical concern not to fuel the self-perpetuating system of violence and stories about it, because “[w]orse still, [by writing about violence] you so easily make it worse” (Taussig, “Corn-Wolf,” p. 28). Many other examples of this back-feeding complex can also be found throughout Taussig’s work:

Or else I am writing about liposuction and cosmetic surgery as I hear ever wilder stories about these procedures in Colombia among poor young women [...], but what stands out most is the fairy-tale resonance of this endeavor ending in disaster, same as the stories of the devil contracts that I heard in the Colombian sugarcane fields almost forty years ago. (Taussig, “Corn-Wolf,” p. 28)

Again, Taussig is concerned not to re-inscribe the discourse that perversely feeds into the mythologies that perpetuate liposuction. His strategy to counter the magic of such

⁹⁵ Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. [Hereafter: Taussig, *Devil*, p. ...]

discourses warrants counter-magic that exposes their poetics while harnessing its powers elsewhere.

The same holds true for Taussig's approach to the blood rushing, power-crazed discourses that surround gold, cocaine, or oil and his practical concern for their wider discursive effects:

Or else I am thinking of the desperate need for cocaine, the mythologies this rests upon and creates, cocaine that has now made Colombia into a drug colony instead of what it was for four hundred years, a gold colony, and if you don't know or can't feel the mythic power of gold and the fairy tales it has spawned circling around God and the devil, then there is no hope for you. (Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. 28)

In other words, these *ficto-critical* concerns are at the heart of Taussig's *ficto-critical* take on the corn-wolfing practices of his reading and writing. His re/medial hope is based on the text-practical ideology of what he calls "penultimaticity", writing as the one permanently before the last" (Taussig, *Devil*, p. xiii). Taussig elaborates this scenario as follows.

The writer looks the history in the face at the receiving end of a chain of storytellers and has for a brief moment this one chance, the one permanently before the last, to make this intervention in the state of emergency, before the writer's story is swallowed up by the response it causes. (Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. 32)

The re/medial hope of apotropaic writing in/formed by this penultimaticity is that "the tension of this interval between your displacing story and the next story that will displace it can create a force field in which the violence can be transmuted into healing" (Taussig, *Devil*, p. xiii).

Against the background of this text-practical ideology Taussig is *strategically* motivated to *ficto-critically* highlight the mechanisms and means at work in such discourses in general and in his writing in particular. Simultaneously his writing implies *our* reading practices that are no less involved in the self-perpetuation of such discursive systems. The *ficto-critical* aspects of his work are these wider discursive concerns that have sparked the development of *ficto-critical* strategies in writing. "Nervous System writing" is pre/post/erous because it "aims at being one jump ahead of the rules of rulelessness" (Taussig, "Corn-Wolf," p. 32). Only agribusiness writing cannot admit this, while apotropaic writing both explains and exploits this p/re/structuring potential. Apotropaic *ficto/critical* writing thus hopes to traitorously lead elsewhere when its

counter-strategy aims to enlighten and empower the text's recipient about the kind of magic that Nervous System writing works. Ficto/critical textual strategies of this kind are thus *traitorous* towards their generic origin, *apotropaic* towards the magic they counter *and* continue, as well as *pre/post/erous* in that they aim to pre/structure our shared discursive post/erity to re/medial effect.

Brief Recapitulation

Over the course of this section two defining characteristics of ficto/critical strategies have been qualified. Firstly, *ficto*-critical textual strategies are marked by *traitorous resistance* to the generic order from which they emerge because they aim to lead unpredictably elsewhere, that is, to a different non-generic reordering, rather than into a marginal order between, that could potentially re-turn generic. Secondly, *ficto-critical* textual strategies are marked by *apotropaic interventions* into the generic effects they target. They harness the constitutive power and means of generic textual practices to re/mediate their effects by way of counter-continuation to re/medial effect. Furthermore, both these aspects of the ficto/critical aim to re/lay the understanding of our textual practices that create such power to begin with. Their mutual goal is to theoretically enlighten and practically empower each individual recipient with regards to the textual acts they are necessarily engaged in at the same time.

A ficto/critically in/formed understanding of our reading and writing practices, in fact, provides the central hinge of the twofold ficto/critical trope, between the realisation of the *ficto*-critical vector and twist and the development of *ficto-critical* edge. Re-theorising our textual acts endows the ficto/critical with im/mediate practical relevance. It is how the ficto/critical manages not to perpetuate the generic practices it criticises. Such ficto/critical theories aim to capture aspects of *the Nervous System of our textual practices* that in/forms the ideologies of *both* ficto/critical *and* generic writing practices. As ficto/critical theories re-configure the constitutive constellational textual frame/work anew, it makes sense to re-conceive of the ficto/critical on the meta-generic level – by re-locating the notorious terminology of the “gap” and the “in-between” from the level of the laws of genre onto the level of the laws of the laws of genre. In the following section two central such ideals shall first be re/traced in primary ficto/critical texts and then be juxtaposed each with a more traditional and conservative understanding.

b) Pre/post/erous *Ficto-critical* Text-Practical Ideologies

At this point in the thesis I shall address the theoretical understanding on the basis of which ficto/critical practices mount textual interventions *strategically*. In order to conceive of ficto/critical writing I shall re/trace the ficto/critical ideology of textual practices in general. To understand the parameters, mechanisms and means by which ficto/critical texts perform and perpetuate interventionist textual acts, I shall refocus the paradigmatic situation of our textual practices from a ficto/critical perspective. In particular, I shall focus on the constitutive mechanisms that the ficto/critical sets to work differently from the generic academic practices it resists. In this manner, the current section shall re/trace the theoretical frame/work and text-practical ideology that lets ficto/critical writing counter our generic textual practices and their text-practical ideology. As before, the underlying thesis is that our *understanding* of reading and writing practices indeed guides our *performance* of such textual work. The point is to clarify how ficto/critical practices capitalise on re-conceiving – on the meta-generic level – of the gaps and between at the spatio-temporal heart of reading and writing.

On the one hand, this section aims to identify the crucial theoretical and ideological break that in/forms ficto/critical writing. A first subsection shall re-focus the *temporally* decentred understanding of the textual work that spans two agents and their twofold singular textual acts. A second subsection then re-focuses the *spatially* decentred understanding of the text that spans both the fixedly inscribed constellation of the manifest object text and the ephemerally recurring re/configurations of the transcendental textual object. On the other hand, this section aims to provide the parameters of the communicative situation of textual representation from which flow the possible *nexi* for harnessing the *ficto-critical* vector and twist to generate *ficto-critical* edge.

To begin with, however, the first part now focuses on the temporal re-conception of our cultural practices of textual communication as an *abductive* kind of *translation*, before the second part then shifts the focus onto the spatial conception of our cultural practices of textual representation as a maternally *perverse* kind of *encapsulation*. Between them, these two *ficto-critical* theories come to present the core of text-practical ideology which in/forms the strategic pattern of the ficto/critical trope – both its traitorous generic resistance and apotropaic interventionist ambition.

(i) Abductive Writing

Commentary and translation are to text as style and mimesis to nature: the same phenomenon viewed in different ways. On the tree of the sacred text they are both mere ever-rustling leaves; on the tree of the profane text, fruit falling at the right time.

(Benjamin, "One-Way Street," p. 52)⁹⁶

This subsection shall examine how ficto/critical textual intervention is at least partly based on a theoretical understanding of textual *communication* as constitutively *translational*. The specific focus here shall be on how the *constitutive* mechanisms of the *temporal* dimension of the textual work can be conceived of differently, with a view to developing *ficto-critical* edge. I shall indicate how the interventionist ambition of some ficto/critical writing practices capitalises on the *theoretical* insight that the textual work consists of a series of textual acts spread over the realms of con/textual influence of two linguistic-discursive agents. According to this text-practical ideology, each singular textual act facilitates *an abductive translational movement between* – a phase transition between both con/texts and states of matter – that constitutively re/configures a given textual or discursive constellation. My thesis is that ficto/critical writing sets this re/constitutive re/lay chain of relational mediation within mediating relations to work *abductively* for its wider discursive *ficto-critical* concerns.

Arctic Flowers of Rhetoric

Aritha van Herk's fourth novel length publication *Places Far From Ellesmere*⁹⁷ creates the potential to simultaneously unsettle her reader's ideas of place and of reading. Specifically, her text mounts a *feminist* counter-strategy to tackle male inscriptions of womanhood, which she couples with a focus on the mutually influential relation between self and place. Notably, van Herk unites all these interests in an idiosyncratic notion of reading. Her principle interest lies in the reading and writing relations between self and text *as well as* between self and place *and* their mutual interference. In other

⁹⁶ Walter Benjamin, "One-Way Street," in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, London: Penguin, 2009. [Hereafter: Benjamin, "One-Way Street," p. ...]

⁹⁷ Aritha von Herk, *Places Far From Ellesmere: a Geografictione – Excavations on Site*, Red Deer: Red Deer College Press, 1990. [Hereafter: Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. ...]

words, *Places Far From Ellesmere* harbours a theory of how our conceptions of self and place are always already mediated by our textual acts as bi-directionally impacting events. After her narrator's reflection on her formative years in three south Canadian cities, van Herk lets the development of this theory into strategies of counter-continuation culminate in a journey north, far north, to Ellesmere Island.

The book consists of four chapters, in the first three of which the narrator re-encounters the central places of her life: Edmonton, Edberg and Calgary. The fourth chapter then consists of her re-encounter with an influential novel in a markedly different place: Ellesmere. These two different kinds of re-encounter roughly divide the book in half. The first half retraces how the narrator has been (in)formed as a woman and academic reader by her socio-topological as well as discursive habitats. The narrator is herself a product of these three places (far from Ellesmere), but she also reproduces these places in writing for us (on Ellesmere). There, she shifts their formations to the textual realm, where *she* is now the agent of inscription. Having been formed by these places she, in turn, finds a textual form to re/mediate them. The second half of the book – the fourth chapter “Ellesmere, woman as island” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 77-143) – then presents a re/medial approach to reading pre-scribed discursive structures in an enabling con/text and environment. Here, van Herk intersects the narrator's encounter with the otherworldly elsewhere of Ellesmere and her re-reading of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

The book thus presents the reader with the narrator's protocols of reading throughout – firstly, her re-reading of the formative places (far from Ellesmere), secondly, her “un/reading” (van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 91) of the formative text (on Ellesmere). Geographic and discursive formations intersect on a number of levels. Most importantly, Ellesmere is indexed to an understanding of reading of which the fourth chapter, which presents this theory, is already a protocol. The place is endowed with an emancipating discursive potential for female reading (and writing) positions. It empowers van Herk's narrator to liberate her/self from received formations – topological as well as discursive – that have become formative. In this sense, Ellesmere is the locus of re/formative reading.

*

Van Herk's narrator abducts *Anna Karenina*, as an exemplary case, from the con/text within which this book would otherwise affect her into a con/text that is most suitable to a feminist re-reading of it. On Ellesmere she begins “to read this disconnected corpulent

Russian novel that pretended for so long to read the essential psyche of the passionate woman succumbing to extreme and impossible passions, infecting all around her” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 91). Her interest is directed at the poetics of negative influence that *Anna Karenina* has exerted, in our readings, on the notion of womanhood. Her goal is to counter-continue the discursive spell Tolstoy’s work casts, and to dispel its wider effects on the formation of a female readerly self. On *Ellesmere* van Herk’s narrator comes to realise that “[y]ou are free to un/read yourself, home, Anna, the rest of Canada, all possible text” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 91). Her con/textual *abduction* of self and book thus coincides with an *un*-reading of this canonical text, its main character, Anna Karenina, who is Tolstoy’s depiction of womanhood in general, *and* their combined effect on the (female) reader’s sense of (a readerly) self.

The strategy of un/reading that develops on *Ellesmere* is closely connected to the place because a female reader is “[f]ree here of the graspings of most of ()man’s impositions, his history or fiction or implacable des/scribement, (wo)men either real or invented” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 113). In the absence of *pre*-scribed male structures on the island, the narrator is able to conceive of their textual poetics differently and assume agency. On *Ellesmere*, she is able to re/work such male pre-scriptions by p/re/scribing them, in turn, on the level of text. Her motivation is rooted in “a dazzling dislike for the good intentions of [Tolstoy’s] novel, the way they insinuate themselves into a perfectly miserable life and try to cure it, the way they maneuver your reading” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 104). If reading properly entails *this* for women, then surely it were better to read p/re/post/erously – in a way that p/re/structures these inscriptions for post/erity – in order to prevent the text’s wider discursive effects.

Van Herk’s narrator is looking for an apotropaic strategy that acknowledges the mutually bi-directional mechanisms of influence between self and text. In light of this, she reminds herself – as much as her reader – of the empowering insight that *the only way out is through*:

You have read farther than there are pages, travelled farther than there are fictions. You are seduced, a lost woman, reading from within the fiction of all lost/damned/condemned/free women. Knowing that this story, all that is written can be un/read, un/inscribed. (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 113)

Thus she begins to devise a counter-continuing strategy of discursive resistance by means of reading and writing: *un-read* Tolstoy’s *pre-scription* of womanhood, protocol this *un*-reading for post/erity to *re-read* the formative text; aim thus to p/re/scribe and re/form the text’s wider discursive effects.

Addressing the poetics of male pre-scriptions with a view to redressing their wider effects, her strategies of reading and writing become preposterous. For example, she purposively omits some of the text's passages and characters from her reading; most notably, perhaps:

Levin, whom you want to avoid, will a/void. He is not here on Ellesmere, although he is in the book. You will not let him out, you cannot stand his fulminating, his pseudo-philosophizing. When you get to him, you snap the book shut, wrap a thick elastic band around it [...]. (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 103)

Or, she abducts characters, like Princes Myagky, from the pages to her con/text on Ellesmere (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 102-3). By creatively engaging the gaps and interstitial spaces of the novel's fictional world, she even brings its heroine to comment meta-fictionally (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 112). All in all, she *abducts* the text from its rigidly established con/text to Ellesmere, where a different, a *con/textually abductive* reading is possible. Exploiting the constitutive mechanisms of textual communication, van Herk's narrator abducts the discursive structures of Tolstoy's novel. With good reason and a purpose, she de- and re/con/textualises its pre-scribed formations in singular acts of reading and writing.

Van Herk's narrator abducts the fictional character Anna Karenina from the context of the fixedly inscribed text *Anna Karenina* in order to dispel the spell that it holds over our reading as long as we conceive of it as a finished textual work. Much to the contrary, she re/conceives of *the reader's* textual work as the task to engage with Anna Karenina as the consequential epitome of a male pre-scribed woman reader. Because, throughout, Anna has been "[c]reated by a man, written by a man, read by men, revised by men," van Herk's narrator tells herself that "now, here on Ellesmere, you dare to set her free from the darkness of pages" (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 122). And in this fashion, the text and its characters are deliberately un/read – partly not read, and partly re-read to re/medial effect. The text, which purports to *write up* the essence of womanhood, is thus *written on* in a significantly different direction. Van Herk thus deploys the constitutive mechanisms of textual communication in pre/post/erous fashion for her feminist concerns.

Because Tolstoy mis/read women and inscribed a powerful discursive formation whose effects now haunt our notions of womanhood, van Herk's narrator assumes *readerly agency* on behalf of Anna Karenina, to whom it is denied in the text, in order to mis/read *Anna Karenina*, in turn. Her mis/readings, in fact, amount to apotropaic

un/readings. On Ellesmere a shift of textual agency becomes possible – from the almost holy, pre-structuring text to a profane, if not heretic, p/re/structuring act of reading that re/configures the text-discursive constellations with an emancipatory interest at heart. With the concern for female speaking positions in a male dominated and pre-scribed field, van Herk develops a structural metaphor by juxtaposing the wild poppies of the north to the domesticated flowers from the south.

The yellow Arctic poppies so much less proper than the wifely blue harebells. Their slender, hairy stems bend to the ink inside their yellow cups, bright against the grey-green ground. Small wells of ink inside their stems, their cups, as if they are flowers of writing, writing themselves strewn over Ellesmere. (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 106)

These poppies are the flowers of pre/post/erous readings that van Herk has in mind. Their agency in this respect stands in the way of their being proper. As a structural metaphor they illustrate the writing that protocols the emancipating readings on Ellesmere.

Crucially, these ficto/critical flowers of writing differ from the closed form of the novel. The poppies' textual agency suggests the principle of *writing on*, which stands in opposition to the (f)rigidity of a finished form that reproduces only the same sealed-off fictional world. By contrast, there is “[a] bed of Arctic poppies on Ellesmere, and a lover to read their ink” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 107). The arctic poppies thus become an icon of a female *and* ficto/critical *agency of receptive dissemination*. Furthermore, as “those flowers pressed against your skin will stain it with their Arctic ink” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 107) they (p)re/structure the reading self as female by writing back at those male pre-structuring formations. The structural metaphor of the Arctic poppies centrally inscribes these ficto/critical notions of interventionist reading and writing on Ellesmere which thus becomes the place of “reading-writing” – the locus of deconstruction even – where writing protocols re/medial readings.

Against this backdrop, van Herk takes particular exception to the fact that Tolstoy seems to punish Anna Karenina for engaging in reading and writing herself. She realises that “Anna makes herself well read in an attempt to unread her earlier passivity” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 137). Viewed from Ellesmere, “Anna’s reading is her act of educating herself, reading herself into an unreading of how she has been read. More notable: Anna writes” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 137). Fleshing out his fiction in terms of her theory, “it is clear that what Anna is doing when Tolstoy is not looking is writing herself, and the Anna who reads is a front for the Anna writing her own passionate

involvement with her own story” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 137). Moreover, the two are inextricably entwined – on Ellesmere there is only reading-writing. Because “Anna needs a friend, a woman friend, a reader” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 112), the narrator assumes this agency of reading and writing – for which Tolstoy condemns Anna – on her behalf. Her apotropaic reading-writing permits Anna Karenina to be salvaged, on behalf of women, from *Anna Karenina*. Finally, it is also on behalf of all readers that she “invented the necessity to read her yourself. Despite Tolstoy” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 81).

Ultimately, the effeminate notion of the reader, too, needs to be salvaged from Tolstoy’s cursing approach. Here van Herk’s positional feminist and systemic emancipatory ambitions fall into one. She demands “[n]o preconditioned reading” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 122). The point is that the spell of pre-scripture can be broken by reception as p/re/scripture. For her narrator, only through this strategy “[t]he real novel (about Anna reading) begins,” which is “about you reading Anna, [...] about all Annas and their readings of themselves” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 132). Ultimately, this ficto/critical ideology of the textual work demands an ethically in/formed pre/post/erous engagement with text-discursive structures. In pursuit of this, it is indispensable that we de-familiarise and re-conceive of our text-practical ideologies – we need to visit to Ellesmere before we can get there.

Translational Reading-Writing

In the following I shall use the expression “reading-writing” not only for the combined acts of reading *and* writing – as in protocols of reading, for example – but also as shorthand for the constituent links of relational mediation that form the re/lay chain of textual communication. In this latter respect, the term “reading-writing” refers to the coinciding *movements* of de- and re-con/textualisation that constitute our textual acts of reading *or* writing. I deploy this notion, therefore, as a *translational* trope of re/configuration to explain the communication of discursive constellations via textual structures. In particular, “reading-writing” marks the fact that *simultaneous induction and deduction* are constitutively at work in *both* the idealising movements of reading *and* the manifesting movements of writing. My thesis is that every textual act consists in these coinciding inductive and deductive processes that, between them, work an *abductive translational movement* of relational mediation – a phase transition from one

con/text and state of matter into the next, according to their respectively framing mediating relations.

Qua medium, the text constitutively bridges the communicative divide, which it introduces just as much as our textual practices exercise it. But the text is hardly the only mediating agent in the equation. Rather, the communicative agency is split between writer and reader across the con/textual divide. Because the text-medial interpolation bridges the communicative gap it introduces only at the cost of creating two new such gaps – between text and writer, and text and reader – this bridge is left gaping. The paradigmatic con/textual and representational de- and re-location of a discursive constellation in textual communication is thus effectively *doubled*: firstly, from the writerly (idiocultural) con/text into a textual form, secondly, from that textual basis into the readerly (idiocultural) con/text. The crucial point is that whereas *every* such text-communicative act instantiates the trope of reading-writing, *ficto/critical ideology* embraces these constitutive mechanics, by virtue of which a discursive constellation is relayed only as it is re-laid, and thus re/configured, in an *abductive translational* movement between. By contrast, *academic* textual practices usually follow a *conservatively translational* ideal of reading-writing – which text-ideologically prevents their interventionist potential.

Passages of Abduction

John Hughes' collection *Someone Else: Fictional Essays*⁹⁸ highlights the constitutive trope of reading-writing to *ficto-critical* effect when it makes a virtue of the abductive principle. The book comprises a diverse range of unusually composed, yet neatly structured, *fictional essays* or *theoretical fictions* – many of which examine the poetics of reading and writing in terms of reading-writing. These experimental texts involve authors, artists, musicians and philosophers *as well as* their works, themes, characters and lives. Hughes' imagination and writing thus lets the discursive structures that constitute an author – as Michel Foucault has famously argued in “What is an Author?”⁹⁹ – mingle *on the same level* with the discursive structures that constitute their work. He furthermore lets these epistemic entities mingle *on a par* with his own personal experience and imagination. His essays incorporate a wealth of *inter-textual*,

⁹⁸ John Hughes, *Someone Else: Fictional Essays*, Artarmon: Giramondo, 2007. [Hereafter: Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. ...]

⁹⁹ Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, New York: Pantheon, 1984, p. 101-120.

but also some *intra*-textual references, all of which suggests *textual grafting* as an overriding principle of Hughes' approach to reading and writing.

For example, we find this abductive approach expressed *and* performed by the following passage, which is tellingly re-deployed *both* in the "Preface" (which already takes the form of a fictional essay) *and* as the blurb on the back cover (which functions much like a preface):

It was as if I had created a novel in my head, [he said,] the characters would not be still, they rose up from the pages of their different books and argued and fought and merged and grew inside me, but with an autonomy that made them as real to me as you are, sitting here now. I was not alone in this ... but [...] I was, perhaps, a little more extreme, a little more possessed. I wanted to be haunted. (Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. xv & back cover [Note: my brackets mark two points of minimal divergence])

In the prefatory essay the passage is uttered by a character taken from Max Brod's diary, yet on the dust jacket it introduces Hughes' own method of writing the essays of the collection – including the "Preface." Statically performative, his formal re/location of this particular passage thus already instantiates the kind of character abduction it outlines. It epitomises the underlying principle of abducting textual passages or discursive constellations, which, once re/con/textualised or re/configured, may have different functions and effects.

Throughout his book Hughes abducts manifest textual structures no less than textually conceived epistemic entities or discursive formations, such as fictional or authorial characters. In so doing, he highlights a *transformative* poetics of quotation, grafting, and translation at the heart of our textual acts – one that is favoured by the constitutive mechanisms of con/textual withdrawal and textual re/situation. In terms of text-practical ideology, he conceives of the translational trope of reading-writing as the *abductive* principle of all our reading and writing. Furthermore, he lets the shifter "you" swing between prefatory essay and back cover, from intradiegetic reference to extra-textual interpellation of the reader. This extends the text's index finger, if you like, in the form of the *ficto*-critical vector. It aims to illumine always *this* textual encounter as real while illuminating its slightly surreal method of writing. Most importantly, however, Hughes' method of transposing passages, characters, authors as well as his experiences onto the level playing fields of *both* his literary imagination *and* the page, capitalises on his *abductive* understanding of textual communication. In the context of this section, two aspects of this *ficto*-critical ideology deserve special emphasis.

Firstly, Hughes indicates how reading a fiction is still a non-fictional act with real effects. He identifies the border between these two realms as itself an instituted – and hence very real – fiction. This self-reflexive realisation raises epistemological questions for the reader who, in turn, encounters his musings on the page and brings them to life with her imagination. As the back cover informs us “the stories are fictions. Or are they? Hughes tells us the stories of the figures who live in his mind by making them tell his stories – and doing so engages in an art of literary ventriloquism” (Hughes, *Someone Else*, back cover). He effectively eschews the dividing line between fictional and non-fictional encounters as he re/lays them in *textual* encounters. Hughes acquires someone else’s discursive constructs – fictional or non-fictional – and slightly re-lays them to relay his own experiences, thoughts and ideas. Such is what his main character in the “Preface” calls his “imaginative identification” (Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. xv) that, as he explains, is “the way I viewed myself and the world around me almost entirely through these works” (Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. xv). This bi-directional relation thus also in/forms *Someone Else*’s fictional and non-fictional, worldly and textual encounters.

But Hughes’ collection not only pays homage to those “who had a formative influence on his imagination” (Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. 208 / back cover). The apotropaic strategy of *Someone Else* is much rather *to write back at* the effects of reading oneself and the world *through* the works of others. Such is the *ficto-critical* potential of Hughes abductive approach: what happens in his imagination affects his life and idiocultural context – and *vice versa*. In the “Preface” he lets Max Brod analyse the other main character thus: “The only way he could tell the stories of the figures in his head was by making them tell his stories; to create again what was already there by creating something new” (Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. xvi). Yet, as the fictional and the non-fictional thus intersect, this attempt to “transform taking into a gift” follows not only the circularity of “a vampire, drinking his own blood” (Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. xvi), but also the spiralling of a re/lay chain that constitutively re-lays what it relays. This is how Hughes, the vampire, abducts and incorporates discursive constellations, which he fleshes out and re/configures differently, to make them work for his purposes in writing.

In writing, the con/textually translational principle of reading-writing re-constitutes the textual basis on the grounds of which we generate the textual object to begin with, in reading. Seizing this constitutive potential of textual communication, Hughes (counter-)continues the lives of the discursive entities his essays incorporate. Significantly, this

marks an ideological shift from the notion that facts and ideas are to be *written up* and that texts are to be *read up*, both of which effectively terminate further textual engagement. The ficto/critical ideals that replace them are *reading on* and *writing on*, which suggest potentially indefinitely on-going processes of reading-writing – singular textual acts that continually re/lay the textual work by (trans-)posing it, to begin with, anew. Abducting someone else’s epistemic entities – fictional or non-fictional – from the pages that have given rise to them, Hughes takes them elsewhere by not only writing *on* them, but by writing *them on*.

Secondly, Hughes’ approach indicates that *both* the imagination *and* the page are level playing fields for discursive structures, irrespective of their erstwhile fictional or non-fictional, worldly or textual provenance. Quite the ventriloquist, he emphasises this kind of boundary crossing in the “Preface” by having the young man who met Brod say that “I could write about these figures who inhabit my imagination as surely as you inhabit my field of vision now ...” (Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. xv). Thus re/laying his experiences via someone else’s fictions also changes their mode of existence twice. It takes them from a *manifest* textual structure into the *ideal* realm of his “imaginary identification” with all its possibilities, and back again into a *manifest* textual form. It subjects the discursive constellations at the heart of this equation – which is also an equating – to a twofold re/configuring phase transition, from textual to imaginary states of matter and back again.

Likewise, Hughes perpetrates *twofold* textual abductions. As he notes, this practice highlights “the almost febrile world of the works themselves” (Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. xv), the ephemerally recurring transcendental mode of the textual object as opposed to its manifest basis in the object text. He marks two alternating stages of textual communication: the rigidly inscribed page and the fluidly transforming imagination. It also marks out the regular gaps in-between these stages as realms of potential. Someone else’s fluid imagination first lets a fictional world with epistemic things rise from the rigid textual basis and then lets it float with seeming autonomy in their idiocultural con/text. Importantly, these realms of potential unfold along the *mediating relations* of our textual practices, within the respective con/textual gaps between object text and textual agent. Their potential is then exercised in singular acts of *relational mediation* that interpret the constitutive trope of reading-writing either conservatively or abductively.

In this respect, Hughes addresses, firstly, how we construct an imaginary world from the page, secondly, how this world takes on a life of its own within the context of

the reading imagination and, thirdly, how that imaginative faculty is at the same time operational in (re)directing the reading self in a worldly con/text. Mindful of this bi-directional relation at the intersection of linguistic-discursive and wider discursive practices, Hughes' narrator of the "Preface" summarises his abductive take on textual and worldly encounters as follows:

For my part, I can only say these [diary] accounts of [Max Brod's] conversations with the young man in the café have penetrated me like an actual life, and they are now so enigmatic and familiar to me that it seems they have been mental possessions of mine from the moment when I first began to accommodate human beings entirely in my mind, in order to arrive, time and again, at a fresh understanding of them. (Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. xviii)

Likewise, Hughes abducts characters and other epistemic entities from their respective (con)texts into his idiocultural con/text to make them (part of) *Someone Else* and have real effects *elsewhere*. In ficto/critically pre/post/erous manner, he seizes the constitutive *ceteris paribus* mechanism which encompasses the entire problem of de- and re-semanticisation in textual communication from one linguistic-discursive agent, via text, to the next.

It is an architectural hallmark of Hughes' essays that he, firstly, re/lays and mixes textual or discursive constellations from primary works with textual or discursive constellations from secondary literature – which may deal *either* with an author *or* their work – and, secondly, lets his idiocultural con/text and personal experiences guide this imaginative relocation. His *ficto*-critical point is that all these discursive formations mingle in the realm of fluid potential that is his readerly imagination before they are fixedly re/arranged, in turn, as a textual structure on the equally level playing field that are the pages of his essays. Hughes identifies in these movements of the imagination and these intervals of textual stasis the constitutive mechanics of reading-writing – the phase transitions between rigid and fluid states of discursive matter according to the tact of these acts – *and* he interprets them *abductively*. His textual strategy highlights these insights *ficto*-critically, exploits them *ficto-critically*, and re/lays them to likewise empower his readers.

Conservative vs. Abductive Translation

The *translational* condition of the im/possibility of textual *communication* has here been presented in terms of two different text-practical ideologies. On the one hand there is the academic ideal that emphasises the *possibility* of *essential* translation in order to *conserve* the textually inscribed discursive constellation across the equation. This model stresses that the medium effectively bridges the con/textual divide to form a textual juncture. On the other hand there is the ficto/critical ideal that emphasises the *impossibility* of *essential* translation in favour of the *abductive necessity* to re/configure the discursive constellation in each textual act, and the *abductive potential* to re/mediate to re/medial effect. This model stresses that the medium bridges the communicative divide only by way of a gaping bridge. While this is a crucial ideological difference in the kind of *relational mediation* that our textual work should aspire to, both theories depart from the same given parameters of the framing *mediating relations* that present the non-transcendental condition of the im/possibility of textual communication.

No doubt, our default approach in everyday reading and writing is to aim for the essential perpetuation of discursive constellations, but ficto/critical strategies sometimes turn the *im*-possibility of essential translation into a virtue for their wider discursive concerns, by turning their reading and writing abductive. The *ficto*-critical theory of translational reading-writing promotes a motivated shift from the conservative and faithful to the abductive and traitorous, which creates considerable interventionist potential for *ficto-critical* concerns. Abandoning the conservative ideal of fidelity, which lets a pre-scribed discursive structure reign supreme over the individual's textual act, ficto/critical strategies pursue the traitorous ideal of abduction from discursively concerned positions. Because this theoretical re-assessment of the first principles of textual communication creates a practically empowering perspective, it amounts to an enlightening text-practical ideology. Ficto/critical theories re-conceive of the constitutive gap in each *mediating relation* as an opportunity to build a communicative bridge elsewhere by way of *relational mediation*.

Ultimately, the juxtaposition here is between the textually arresting principle of *reading-writing up* and the discursively liberating principle of *reading-writing on*, which Benjamin's epigraph to this section so finely anticipates. The ficto/critical insight is that the constitutive translational re/lay chain of textual communication relays only as it re-lays – a notion that is then both highlighted *ficto*-critically and exploited *ficto-critically*. In this sense, ficto/critical strategies of textual communication keep their

bridges gaping with an enlightening as well as empowering ambition in mind and a practical concern at heart.

(ii) Perverse Writing

Anyone seeing the sun come up in front of him while awake, dressed – out walking, say – will retain throughout the day above all else a sense of the sovereignty of an invisibly crowned king, and anyone having the day break over him at work will feel, around noon, as if he had crowned himself.

(Benjamin, “One-Way Street,” p. 82)

Like ultraviolet radiation memory shows all of us, in the Book of Life, writing that invisibly, prophetically, accompanies the text as a gloss.

(Benjamin, “One-Way Street,” p. 108)

This subsection shall examine how ficto/critical textual intervention is at least partly based on a theoretical understanding of textual *representation* as constitutively *encapsulated*. The specific focus here shall be on how the *constitutive* mechanisms of the *spatial* dimension of the textual work can be conceived of differently, with a view to developing ficto-*critical* edge. I shall indicate how the interventionist ambition of some ficto/critical writing practices capitalises on the *theoretical* insight that the textual object is continually re-constituted in the readerly act of generative textual triangulation on the basis of the given object text. According to this text-practical ideology, each singular textual act effects a *perverse encapsulated projection* – a phase transition between both states of matter and con/texts – that constitutively re/configures a given textual or discursive constellation. Ultimately, my thesis is that ficto/critical writing sets this p/re/structuring re/lay chain of relational mediation within mediating relations to *perversely* re/work any p/receding structures for its wider discursive ficto-*critical* concerns.

Lightful De-Icing on the Lake

On top of the arctic poppies, Aritha van Herk deploys at least two more structural metaphors in *Places Far From Ellesmere* that combine to parallel the poetics of her un-reading. For a start, she juxtaposes the light and darkness of different places in terms of reading practices. Building on this, she also allegorises the phase transitions of Lake Hazen into a *poetics of textual encapsulation*. In the following, my reading shall elaborate the theoretical significance of these imageries for the *spatial* dimension in a ficto/critical theory of textual *representation*.

Firstly, van Herk opposes the endlessly persistent natural light during the northern summer, which her narrator encounters on Ellesmere, to the darkness of the south Canadian winter, which she associates with her formative years in Edberg, Edmonton and Calgary. She also connects the aligned north/south and light/dark divides to principles of engaging with text. On Ellesmere the narrator finds “[r]eading in this clear green light an act different from reading south under the sanctimonious permission of fluorescent and incandescent fixtures” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 123). She realises that her “[r]eading changed by the quality of light it partakes of” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 123). In addition to its barren geographical formation – un-inscribed compared to the places far from Ellesmere – the favourable light on Ellesmere, too, advantages the readerly mechanism of situational abstraction differently. Ultimately, she thus contrasts her formative experiences of male discursive heteronomy, or writerly pre-scription, in the south, with her re/formative anticipation of female discursive autonomy, or readerly p/re/scription, in the north.

The imagery lets Anna’s reading appear in a different light, too: “She is understandably fascinated by her own story, but her reading in the darkness is Tolstoy’s representation” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 135). His text lets Anna read, but he also pre-scribes the course and consequences of her reading – just like he aims to pre-scribe our reading, too. The way out of this double bind, which van Herk’s narrator entertains for Anna as much as her reader, is that “[s]he reads her way toward Ellesmere, where you will read her, where she has never been read before, you are willing to wager that uniqueness, where in perpetual daylight you un/read Tolstoy’s reading of her reading” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 135-6). On bright Ellesmere the encapsulated contrast becomes the readerly solution: “Anna cannot escape darkness. You cannot escape light. She reads. You read” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 136). Anna’s reading may be heteronomously pre-structured, but van Herk, her narrator, and future readers do have the autonomy to p/re/structure this discursive formation in reading-writing. Such is her antidote to Tolstoy’s detrimental inscription of reading women.

With regards to Anna, whom the narrator wants to salvage from Tolstoy’s pre-scription as a signifier of womanhood, she ponders: “And if you were a character in the implacable mote of a reader’s eye, then would you live within white nights? Or dark pages? Which would be preferable, the cage of book, the open glare of the sun?” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 80). In light of Ellesmere’s principles of reading, of course, no text is ever fully *written up*, no fictional world ever entirely sealed off. Instead, they are opened in unimpeded readings, facilitated by the excellent light that makes it possible to

read on and on; and then *write on*, too, so as to manifest elsewhere what one encounters differently in thus reading. Whereas, “Edmonton,” to her is “still the darkness of winter and buildings, of enclosed cold” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 52), she derives warmth from the northern summer light that facilitates her re/configuration of textually enshrined discursive formations. While the places in the south are, to her, enveloped in the darkness of closed books, Ellesmere is the locus of resisting, if not re/medial, reading.

The apotropaic magic of Ellesmere’s northern light is that it can help to break up pre-structuring formations in reading and allows to p/re/structure them in turn. The light on Ellesmere thus harbours emancipating reading potential, an escape route from detrimental discursive orders. This is very different from the artificial reading light the narrator associates with the south Canadian wintery darkness, which further limits the options in an already heavily pre-scribed discursive environment. In this sense, the island’s distance from her formative environment in Alberta matches the difference that reading a map can make to being lost. By way of her *tropical* depiction of arctic Ellesmere Island van Herk aims to instigate the poetics of readerly intervention in her readers.

Secondly, van Herk leads the analogy of readerly light into another structural metaphor. “Warming,” under the influence of the sun, her narrator realises how “the puzzle-ice in the lake begins to melt itself into open patches, push itself around” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 93). And this imagery of phase transition between de- and re-frozen states of matter is recurring:

In the distance Lake Hazen ruffles through every version of blue. The first day it is no more than a textured conglomeration of white, knobbled ice butting against itself. Slow cracks, the blue between creep imperceptibly every day wider, a stretching of the lazy water, azure. The puzzle pieces are scattered farther, stirred apart on the blue board of the lake by a huge finger of sun, still caught in its implacable rotation, only slanting low between three and ten before it describes an arc upwards again. Lake Hazen a carelessly broken jigsaw abandoned after a lazy Sunday dinner. There are huge sheets of ice left, almost square, and hundreds of tiny pieces orbiting in endless float. (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 111)

The light defreezes the lake, which breaks into so many elements, shifts its constellation slightly, only to eventually freeze over again, albeit newly re/configured. The narrator calls it “[s]ummer on Ellesmere. Thaw, a pure reading” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 93). Importantly, these de- and re-territorialising processes closely parallel the modal

itinerary of a discursive constellation in reading-writing – especially the narrator’s un/reading of *Anna Karenina*.

The trope of Lake Hazen thus presents a partly fluid phase between two solid formations, which represents the potential for re-configuration and re-inscription. “This ice picture” is furthermore characterised as “enigmatic, fascinating, a portrait of Anna herself” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 111). The re/formations of the ice under the summer sun thus parallel those of Tolstoy’s text in the narrator’s reading on Ellesmere, in which “[t]he words are stirred, mixed, like pieces of a jigsaw, broken up into their separate shapes and the whole picture lost, left to be reconstructed by another, a different hand” (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 113). Her agency as a reader re/configures the discursive constellation enshrined in *Anna Karenina* to begin with, but she further opts to re/lay her actively benevolent re/configuration in a protocol of reading, which is her writing in *Places Far From Ellesmere*. In so doing, her reading effects a warm spell not only on *Anna Karenina* but also on the discursive order that has given rise to her. As we have seen, the narrator disrupts the text, omits passages and characters, writes new scenes and so on – yet she thereby not only re/configures the order of the textual basis, but furthermore re/adjusts the (wider) discursive order it has come to represent.

This scenario of melting formations and floating fragments has already been anticipated *en route* to Ellesmere. As she realises on her flight, the north Canadian islands appear from above – or on a map – as a loose conglomerate, broken off from the solid southern landmass:

The ocean here, Cornwallis Channel, one huge jigsaw. The ice pieces laid out on a giant board waiting for winter to put them together again. Puzzle-ice. Mesmerizing, its slow wash and float, its conundrum melting and reappearance. The chunks themselves islands and the arctic ocean between a liquid light. (Van Herk, *Ellesmere*, p. 87-8)

Again, place and light, topology and lines of flight intersect to form – or in this case anticipate – the trope of reading-writing that becomes one with the local geography on Ellesmere. Even the flight north is already suggestive of a transcendental movement of situational abstraction underneath which rigid formations fragment, float and re/arrange much like shelves of ice – or, in fact, as if on a parable flight. In this con/text, a textual constellation only ever functions as an iconic map of the differently re/configured discursive constellations we actually read from it. Accordingly, text’s indexical relation to our readings ought to be conceptualised as one of *discursive iconicity*.

In any case, the combined structural metaphor of northern summer light and the ice on Lake Hazen captures the *constitutive* processes of de- and re-territorialisation in reading and writing which the ficto/critical credits with a pre/post/erous potential to counter detrimental discursive pre-scriptions. The de-icing and re-freezing lake, in particular, illustrates a poetics of reading-writing that is p/re/structuring textually encapsulated representations. It undergoes re/configuration just like a textually structured discursive constellation that is re/constitutively p/re/structured in protocolled acts of reading-writing-*before* – always the one before the last. In this manner, van Herk inscribes the discursively re/medial potential of reading and writing ficto/critically on Ellesmere by way of locally in/formed structural metaphors. If you like, the lightful de-icing on the lake is also the delightful icing on the cake of her ficto/critical theory.

Perverse Reading-Writing-Before

Building on my earlier terminology, I shall henceforth deploy the somewhat contrived expression “reading-writing-*before*” as shorthand for the necessity in our textual acts to constitutively re/configure the discursive constellation across the representational divide. In this respect, the term “reading-writing-*before*” refers to the perpetual modal transformation between rigidly (re)inscribed textual structures and our more fluid understanding of discursive structures. I deploy this notion, therefore, as an *encapsulating* trope of re/configuration to explain the representation of discursive constellations via textual structures. In particular, “reading-writing-*before*” marks the fact that each phase transition, *spatially* separating the manifest object text and its transcendental textual object, also *temporally* separates these states of matter by way of the translational trope of reading-writing – to perpetually begin with again. Hence, to avoid an anachronistic perspective, the *spatial between* of encapsulated textual representation is best captured by the *temporal before* of our textual work. The thesis is that such textual acts consist in either enshrining or decrypting processes that follow the *logic of encapsulation* in their framing mediating relations – from one state of matter and con/text into the next, according to their respectively directed work of relational mediation.

Qua medium, the text constitutively bridges the representational divide that it introduces as much as our textual practices exercise it. Thus, the text is hardly the only mediating agent here. Rather, the agency is split across the representational divide between the text and the idiocultural con/text that encounters it. Because this text-

medial interpolation bridges the representational gap it introduces only at the expense of creating a new gap in turn – between this *re*-configured constellation and *its* recipient – this bridge keeps gaping. The paradigmatic medial, transcendental and con/textual de- and re-location of a discursive structure in textual representation is thus effectively *generative*: between a textual basis and the readerly (idiocultural) con/text a textual object is created just as, *vice versa*, textual form is created between a writerly object and the medium. The crucial point is that whereas *every* such text-representational act instantiates the trope of reading-writing-*before*, only *ficto/critical ideology* embraces these constitutive mechanics as potentially *re*-generative. By contrast, *academic* textual practices usually follow a *conservatively encapsulating* ideal of reading-writing-*before* – which text-ideologically prevents their interventionist potential.

*

At this point, Heather Kerr's instructive essay "Perverse Writing – Maternity and Monarchy: Fictocriticism and Exorbitant, Plural Bodies"¹⁰⁰ presents a *ficto/critical* understanding of the text's twofold spatial positioning across the representational divide. Following her example, I shall first qualify the *constitutive* encapsulating principle of reading-writing-*before* as perverse on account of its plural corporeality, and then juxtapose a transcendental and a material ideal of this model in terms of the monarch and the mother. With these polar archetypes Kerr finely captures the modal *aporia* of textual representation: the *spatial* condition of the im/possibility that academic and *ficto/critical* principles emphasise differently.

Kerr sets out "to explore the possibility that fictocritical writing in the academic context is an instance of the perverse" (Kerr, "Perverse Writing," p. 148). In particular – and this includes her own piece – she aims at "a feminist engagement with the essay as a potentially 'perverse space'" (Kerr, "Perverse Writing," p. 148). Kerr uses the terminology of perversion for instances of a twofold corporeality, two examples of which draw her particular attention. On the one hand, "[i]n the case of kingship the so-called 'body natural' (the finite, material body) incorporates the 'body politic' (understood as a perpetual ideality)" (Kerr, "Perverse Writing," p. 148). On the other hand, "[i]n the case of the maternal body in patriarchal culture, her plurality is by contrast the mark of a (doubly) inescapable materiality (as woman and as mother),

¹⁰⁰ Heather B. Kerr, "Perverse Writing – Maternity and Monarchy: Fictocriticism and Exorbitant, Plural Bodies," in *Gender Reconstructions; Pornography and Perversions in Literature and Culture*, edited by Susan Bernardo et al., Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002, p. 148-66. [Hereafter: Kerr, "Perverse Writing," p. ...]

birthing an unavoidable scene of grotesque abjection” (Kerr, “Perverse Writing,” p. 149). While the monarchic principle incorporates a transcendental body *within* the material body, the maternal principle generates a material body *from* a material body.

Notably, Kerr’s feminist “interests in this essay have less to do with the phenomenology of ‘lived experience’ of maternity and more to do with its poetics” (Kerr, “Perverse Writing,” p. 149). In this respect, the (f)rigid *poetics* of monarchic corporeal doubling extend in a transcendental dimension, while the re/productive *poetics* of maternal corporeal doubling extend in a material dimension. Furthermore, Kerr knows that, when it comes to writing, “we are still in need of ways of understanding the ‘spaces’ and ‘gaps’” (Kerr, “Perverse Writing,” p. 151), not least on the constitutive level of textual representation. Her goal is thus “to trace the contours of a writing practice that would do justice to [...] the grotesque literalism of plural embodiment” (Kerr, “Perverse Writing,” p. 150), one that would re/constitute the transcendental textual object from the manifest object text. Her strategy to achieve this is to “deploy the maternal as a monster proper to the monarch” (Kerr, “Perverse Writing,” p. 150), to juxtapose the transcendental and material principles of reading-writing-*before*.

Kerr investigates “the conjunction of the monarch and the mother via a structure that [Ernst] Kantorovicz regards as a literalizing of the King’s two bodies: the late medieval double tomb” (Kerr, “Perverse Writing,” p. 156). She develops this imagery into a structural metaphor – or “postmodern allegory” (Kerr, “Perverse Writing,” p. 156), as she prefers to call it – for textual representation. The point is that “[t]ypically the prince is ‘buried in a tomb showing the body in corruption below the effigy in glory’” (Kerr, “Perverse Writing,” p. 156). According to the tomb “[t]he sublime body politic literally depends upon the abject body natural, figured as the cadaver, death itself” (Kerr, “Perverse Writing,” p. 156). The royal body’s significance is here thrown in relief from its base, which yet embodies it. And likewise for text: the significance *enshrined* in a text corpus needs to be *decrypted* from its manifest inscription. Not only Kerr’s imagery is thus spot on, but also its semantic realm – which Maud Ellmann has brilliantly developed at length with regards to writing in *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment*.¹⁰¹

By following the transcendental principle, “[t]he tyrant mistakes his monstrosity for an ideal, self-generated unity” (Kerr, “Perverse Writing,” p. 162), whereas the mother

¹⁰¹ Maud Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists: Starving, Writing, and Imprisonment*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993; esp. the Chapter “Encryption,” p. 91-113.

capitalises on the monstrous perversity of her body: leaking into and out of, giving birth, she ultimately transfigures part of her body into another corpus. The monarch's (f)rigid corporeal doubling follows a golden ideal of autocratic rule. But the mother's unfaithful corporeal doubling, or re/production, anticipates a purple patch of fluidly productive, emancipating reception. The monarchic trope thus emphasises the constitutive mechanism of reading-writing-*before* as *transcendentally* directed, the maternal trope as *materially* directed. For Kerr, reading-writing ficto/critically "would be to consider the body as a point of departure for a desiring movement in 'the spaces between', a queer allegory" (Kerr, "Perverse Writing," p. 162). On the level of our textual practice the ficto/critical point is that there is not a transcendental object to match the corpus. The *movements* of relational mediation in *the spaces between* mediating relations instead generate multiple such objects. These, however, register manifestly only as further corpora.

Against this backdrop, Kerr formulates two insights that have in/formed my approach. Firstly, when she warns that "we must not fetishize the aesthetic surface of our writing: it cannot guarantee ethical effects" (Kerr, "Perverse Writing," p. 164), she is aware of the dangers of *generic resistance*. She already knows that the ficto/critical is a *strategy*, not a form. Secondly, Kerr effectively re/locates the fictocritical "gap" or "the space between" on the constitutive level of our textual practices. She already knows that *ficto-critical* strategies flow from the *constitutive* parameters of reading and writing. In the *spatial* dimension of textual representation Kerr re/locates the significance of the text's twofold situatedness across the representational divide in its potential to re/configure an enshrined discursive constellation across the communicative divide. Ultimately, she thus turns the tables on the (f)rigid *spatial* dimension of textual *representation* by circumventing its monarchic regime via the fluidly receptive and unfaithfully re/productive *temporal* axis of textual *communication* – as is the gist of maternal reading-writing-*before*.

It is important to remember that these two principle interpretations of perversely twofold corporeality are text-ideologically polar aspects of a constitutive complex. Towards the end of her essay, Kerr carefully re-emphasises the *aporia* of her juxtaposition in terms of genre.

If we deploy these elements to model perverse (academic) writing we must notice that what is perverse in terms of organic life is precisely that which is rewarded in academic life. Clean and proper writing, the essayist's equivalent of the (imaginary) closed, classical (in fact masculine) body,

cannot face its monstrous other in the embarrassingly open, messy, and grotesque practice of ‘pregnant’ cyborg, fictocritical writing. Similarly, perverse fictocritical writing must not turn away from the fact of its being hinged to an anorexic other. (Kerr, “Perverse Writing,” p. 163)

The *aporia* between these principles of textual encapsulation thus needs to be acknowledged and *strategically* balanced in motivated singular acts of reading-writing-before. Although Kerr ascribes the transcendental doubling of the text to academic writing, and its material doubling to the ficto/critical, both are *constitutive* principles of all our textual encounters – albeit only the maternal ideal harbours text-interventionist potential for ficto/criticism.

Ash, Smoke & Shadows

John Hughes focalises a structural metaphor, in his piece “Translations” (Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. 183-9), that he finds expressed in Paul Celan’s writing, starting with this epigraph:

In a late Notebook entry, Paul Ancel (formerly Celan) attempted the following translation. He had come to view translation as a shadow that was also, somehow, the light that threw it; a fire that leaves, like ash in the new language, a trace of the original ... (Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. 183)

The terminology of fire, shadow and ash deployed here to describe Celan’s surprising ideal of translation harbours an important insight into the *indexicality* of our textual encounters. More precisely, I would like to suggest that Hughes’ focus on this terminology provides a structural metaphor that explains the indexical division between the object text and the textual object across our textual acts that comprise the textual work.

It is worth noting that, in typical fashion, Hughes has already (re)deployed this abducted terminology in the “Preface,” where the curious character we encountered before is “obsessed with Paul Celan who, he claimed, spend his whole life trying to translate his poetry from German to German” (Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. xii). This scenario thus depicts a man “translating all the time, but without a change of language” (Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. xi). In a trademark intra-textual reference Hughes lets the man write the following observation:

A good translation is a fire that leaves, like ash in the new language, a trace of the original. It creates a kind of language, a style, that has not existed

until that moment and could not be created ab novum by a writer. Every word in a good translation is like an echo, a shadow that is also, somehow, the light that throws it. (Hughes, *Someone Else*, p. xi)

For the purposes of this section, the two relevant points of this analogy are, firstly, its counter-intuitive perspectival shift and, secondly, the indexicality it suggests for the textual work.

Firstly, how to understand translation as both a shadow and the light that throws it? Before properly translating a text, one needs to understand it. But if the *constitutive* trope of reading-writing is translational, so is this first understanding. Hence, even the original work appears to us, *to begin with*, only in the guise of an original translation. This original de- and re-con/textualisation is the *sine qua non* of perceiving the textual object. Ultimately, this is where re-semanticisation and radical interpretation intersect in reading. *Understanding* a text, the reader has always already translated its textual structure into her discursive idiocultural con/text. *Translating* a text then transposes this discursive structure, again, into the linguistic con/text of the target language. A translation that changes linguistic code is thus dependent on a prior translation that does not, yet both transpose an encapsulated discursive structure from con/text to con/text. Paradoxically, we can properly translate only on the basis of this primary translation. Translation proper is thus cast as a shadow only in light of this initial translation.

Secondly, because it is expressed in terms of ash and smoke, this scenario has significant implications for the indexicality of the textual work, which I would pinpoint as follows. From the writerly perspective, the *co-presence* of the textual object and the object text is like fire and the smoke it emanates. The indexical relation of simultaneity between them makes the object text a *signal* of the textual object. Paradigmatically, we *write* texts as smoke (text-as-signal) because for the writer they are co-present to the idea that gives rise to them. From the readerly perspective, however, the initial *absence* of the textual object from the object text renders it ash, perhaps ember, from which to rekindle a fire. The indexical relation between them makes the object text a *trace* of its textual object. Paradigmatically, we thus *read* texts as ash (text-as-trace) because for the reader they are not the fire that is *absent* but what is *present* to rekindle it. The indexicality between the object text and its textual object is *constitutively* routed through the respective agents at work on the text. Importantly, thus, not the truth relation of the text establishes meaning, but the subject relation of the textual work.

Paradigmatically, we *write* text as *signal* but we *read* text as *trace* and the indexical mechanics of these constitutive perspectives work very differently. Especially for the

readerly position the concrete presence of the object text does not coincide with an equally manifest co-presence of its textual object that, after all, is only the result of *generative* textual triangulation by way of twofold con/textual withdrawals. The structural metaphors of ash, smoke and shadows that Hughes identifies in Celan's writing capture not only these constitutive mechanics but also connect what we could now call his *ficto-critical* insight with his main *ficto-critical* concern. The crucial point is that part con/textual loss is the constitutive violence of our text-cultural practices, nowhere more so than when it comes to the reaction, in writing, to violent and traumatic events.

Importantly, their different background concerns can explain that while van Herk aims to set the abductive re/lay chain of textual relations to work for her discursive agenda, Celan highlights the danger of con/textual loss that is a constituent part of this otherwise enabling mechanism. Although they highlight complementary – if not opposed – perspectives onto the same constitutive mechanism, both do so to develop *ficto-critical* edge. While there may be too little abductive re/configuration in our readings of the canonical discursive constellations that affect our conceptions of womanhood, there may be too much of the kind when it comes to collective memory and its discursive treatment of traumatic loss. Because some constitutive mechanisms are variably deployed in our textual practices to serve certain functions, different *ficto-critical* and *ficto-critical* strategies are required to highlight detrimental practices and counter-continue their complicity in the wider discursive formations that are still ongoing.

Monarchically vs. Maternally Perverse Encapsulation

The *encapsulating* condition of the im/possibility of textual *representation* has here been presented according to two different text-practical ideologies. The academic ideal emphasises the *possibility* of *essential* encapsulation (*text-as-signal*) in order to *conserve* the textually inscribed discursive constellation. This model stresses that the medium bridges the representational divide to form a juncture of receptive *re*-production. The maternal *ficto/critical* ideal emphasises the *impossibility* of *essential* encapsulation on account of the *constitutively perverse* twofold corporeality of text (*text-as-trace*), and the *perverse potential* for productive reception. This model stresses that the medium bridges the communicative divide only by way of a gaping bridge. While this illustrates a crucial ideological difference in the assumed frame/work of

mediating relations, both theories yet agree that acts of *relational mediation* present the communicative condition of the im/possibility of our practices of textual representation.

In everyday reading and writing, of course, we operate on the academic assumption of text-as-signal, but *ficto/critical* strategies often turn the *im*-possibility of this monarchic perversion into a virtue for their wider discursive concerns, by turning their work of reading and writing maternally perverse. The *ficto-critical* theory of perverse reading-writing-*before* promotes a motivated shift from a sacredly celibate perversion to the perversion of unfaithful fertility, which creates considerable interventionist potential for *ficto-critical* concerns. Thus abandoning the conservative ideal of fidelity, which lets the pre-scribed discursive structure reign autocratically over recipient re-production, *ficto/critical* strategies pursue the traitorous emancipatory ideal of productive reception from concerned positions. Because the theoretical re-assessment of this first principle of textual re/presentation creates a practically empowering perspective, it amounts to an enlightening text-practical ideology. *Ficto-critical* theories re-conceive of the constitutive gaps in the frame/work of our *mediating relations* as an opportunity to build representational bridges elsewhere by way of *relational mediation*.

Ultimately, the juxtaposition is between the textually arresting principle of *reading-writing up* and the discursively liberating principle of *reading-writing on*. The *ficto/critical* insight is that the constitutive encapsulation of textual representation turns transcendental circular reproduction into materialist spin-off productivity – an understanding that is both highlighted *ficto-critically* and exploited *ficto-critically*. In this sense, *ficto/critical* strategies of textual representation keep their bridges gaping with an enlightening as well as empowering ambition in mind and a practical concern at heart.

Brief Recapitulation

The underlying theoretical move in this section has been to re-conceive of the *ficto/critical* as theoretically in/formed text-practical ideology. The *ficto/critical* and its academic other conceive of constitutive features in our textual practices to contrary effect. Whereas we traditionally take these mechanisms as conditions of the *possibility* of textual representation and communication, *ficto-critical* theory harnesses them as conditions of their *impossibility*. Thus, the translational aspect of textual communication is utilised not as faithful but *abductive* reading-writing. Likewise, the encapsulating aspect of textual representation is utilised not as monarchically but maternally perverse

reading-writing-*before*. While the former emphases favour a conservative, the latter promote an interventionist stance in reading and writing. Due to their practical relevance these differing *theoretical* perspectives amount to two sets of text-practical *ideology*, one conservatively academic, the other radically ficto/critical in outlook. Moreover, whereas the traditional ideal of our textual practices serves the *wider* discursive structures that be, the ficto/critical ideal promotes variably positionally deployed generic resistance and textual intervention against such systemic effects.

These sections have now illustrated how ficto/critical text-practical *ideology* emphasises these *constitutive* parameters and mechanisms according to an interventionist principle that in/forms ficto/critical writing as *strategically* traitorous and apotropaic. This combined and refined ficto/critical theory now finally presents the nexus between the realisation of the *ficto-critical* vector and twist and the development of *ficto-critical* edge.

c) Artful Thought Experimental Writing

Artistic and artful experimentation often converge in ficto/critical textual strategies. Based on this observation, I shall now venture to re/formulate my theory of the ficto/critical. Specifically, I shall re/conceive of the ficto/critical in terms of *experimental* writing. Firstly, the *ficto*-critical side of traitorous generic resistance shall be re/formulated in terms of *artistically playful experimentation*. Secondly, the *ficto-critical* side of apotropaic textual intervention shall be re/formulated in terms of *artfully pre/scribed thought experimentation*. Both of these aspects furthermore share the epistemic curiosity of *scientific experimentation*, albeit from a ficto/critically motivated perspective. I shall thus avail myself of the terminology of experimentation in a threefold sense, in order to capture the complexities of the strategic two-step pattern in my theory of the ficto/critical. Without pretending to investigate these dimensions exhaustively I shall briefly re/trace the central features and epistemology of scientifically exploratory experimentation, the avant-garde artistically experimental, and philosophic thought experiments.

Firstly, scientific experimentation classically creates controlled and repeatable scenarios in order to gain information to either refine and improve or falsify and replace a given theory. The environment and setting of such experiments is heavily pre-scribed. In turn, the results are *written up* for a scientific community that shares the same discourses and interests. Apart from discovering new facts about the world, such actual experiments have a further layer of non-fictional significance by way of the theories and discourses they put to the test. Their results require intermediation between induction and deduction, between a theory and its observable basis in fact. Although their hermetic and controlled setting makes them rather low risk exercises, scientific experiments transgress what is securely established so as to generate and order what is not yet. Their epistemological significance can thus be tremendous.

Secondly, the artistically experimental, by contrast, implies more risky and unpredictable exercises, that are often characterised by an anything goes attitude. Such singular acts often puzzle and confuse our set ways of approaching art in order to generate a new outlook. The artistically experimental thus either forces modifications onto the framework with which we approach it as art, or forces us to reject it. The experimental in art presents transgressions of what is acceptable, recognisable and ordered in a certain way. Its epistemological significance lies in its purposive

unpredictability that challenges existing artistic theories and practices. Just like scientific experiments, the artistically experimental can be *written up* retrospectively. Notably, however, the artistically experimental consists in unpredictable events and performances whose *experiential* point can only be captured by writing that turns *textually* experimental – such *writing on* would make our textual performances of *reading* and *writing* the main event.

Thirdly, and much less clear-cut, there are thought experiments of scientific, philosophic, or literary provenance. Scientific thought experiments stipulate impracticable experimental settings and then deduce, if not calculate, their outcome from this set of hypothetical givens. Philosophic thought experiments consider hypothetical or counterfactual scenarios that aim to precipitate revision of targeted background theories, axioms and theorems. Literary thought experimentation is surprisingly different again because the same textually prescribed scenario can be received to very different effect in singular reading performances, which may or may not lead to significant revisions of certain notions, attitudes, or even worldviews.

All thought experiments are speculative and rhetorical exercises. Written out – sometimes artistically, sometimes artfully – they conduct the reader to conduct the thought experiment: they lead the reader along a line of thought into considering the non-fictional implications of a fictional scenario. They often present a curious type of text between argumentative relevance and narrative lure. They are rhetorical devices of ultimately epistemological, sometimes even ideological, significance. Textually conducted thought experiments are generally pre/scribed, socially shared, yet singularly conducted. They are textual exercises that aim to re/arrange our theoretical understanding in a certain direction. In all of these aspects, textually conducted thought experiments are, in fact, not entirely unlike ficto/critical writing.

Ultimately, I would like to suggest that ficto/critical writing participates in the three main directions of (thought) experimentation to a degree. Taking the non-fictional significance of fictional textual practices seriously, they pursue the epistemological exploratory curiosity of scientific experiments. Deploying literary means in pursuit of theoretical considerations, they also couple the artistically experimental with the artfully thought experimental. The ficto/critical is experimental writing in an artistically avant-garde sense, but it is also thought experimental pre/scription in a sense that is *both* literary *and* philosophically rhetorical. Based on this layered constellar understanding, the following two readings shall contribute further to qualifying the ficto/critical as *artfully thought experimental textual practice*.

Brief Recapitulation

My theory of the *ficto/critical* in terms of experimentation highlights how the *ficto-critical* vector and twist are rooted in the artistically experimental side of such textual practices, and how *ficto-critical* edge is developed by their artfully pre/scribed thought experimental side – both of which in combination gain the significance of exploratory non-fictional experiments. The layered notion of the experimental can capture the simultaneously playful and purposive aspects of *ficto/critical* textual practices. But its nodal structure is also entirely suitable to formulate the nexus point on which the two-step trope of the *ficto/critical* hinges, and at which our text-practical ideals matter. A text is *ficto-critical* if its artistic experiments make our generic frame/work of approaching texts perceptible (*ficto-critical* vector) and if it simultaneously experiments with framing this work differently (*ficto-critical* twist). A text is furthermore *ficto-critical* if it connects its wider discursive concerns to such *ficto-critical* insights to endow its textual thought experiment with im/mediately non-fictional significance (*ficto-critical* edge) for our textual frame/*working* practices.

Ultimately, a text derives *ficto-critical edge* by interpellating the reading agent who is at work in the textual practices under critique, which the text also illumines and illuminates via the *ficto-critical vector* and *twist*.

Developing Ficto-critical Edge

Issues and Practices of Ficto/critical Concern

Abutting on Part Two, which has established what qualifies texts as *ficto-critical*, Part Four shall now ask, firstly, what qualifies such texts as also *ficto-critical*. My overall thesis is that where ficto/critical practices realise the *ficto-critical* vector and twist they sometimes give additional practical direction to these im/mediate textual experiences by way of the wider con/textual concerns they also feature. In this manner, the im/mediate textual experience of the *ficto-critical* vector and the realisation of the *ficto-critical* twist – with their performatively immersed and explanatorily distanced aspects – gain broader *practical* significance, which is directed by the text's constatively raised concerns. Of ficto/critical interest are those thematic complexes in which a text's *ficto-critical* concerns relate to – as much as they flow from – its *ficto-critical* insights. The point of the two-step trope is to indicate that constitutive mechanisms of our textual practices are implicated in the wider discursive issues under critique. The ficto/critical pattern illumines and illuminates them via *ficto-critical* vector and twist and links them to a critique of wider discursive issues. A text's concerns are *ficto-critical* in so far as they have a *ficto-critical* point of origin. Ficto/critical texts connect their *im/mediate* and theoretical insights into our textual practices to the wider discursive concerns they *mediate* – which is how they develop *ficto-critical edge*. In the following, I shall first re/trace the main ficto/critical nexus in an exemplary *ficto-critical* text in order to explicate, illustrate, and define the crucial tropical pattern further.

a) Ficto/critically Turning “Thaumatropes”

A worthy *ficto-critical* counterpart to Stephen Muecke’s *ficto-critically* exemplary “The Fall” is Gail Jones’ “Thaumatropes.”¹⁰² Similar to Muecke’s piece, I want to argue, Jones’ essay presents a fine instance of a text that condenses into structural metaphors the central representational and communicative mechanism of concern in and to her writing. Although her structural metaphors are filmic its crucial insights extend to writing *qua* post-auratic medium. Jones’ effort, however, further compliments the performative, self-reflexive and im/mediate interpellation of her reader and the poetic explications of her imagery with a practical concern over the function such post-auratic projections serve within wider discursive formations. She thus endows her text’s potential for the *ficto-critical vector* and *twist* with *ficto-critical edge* by further relating them to her concerns with cross-cultural (ethnographic) projection.

Jones’ essay is divided into seven sections of very roughly similar length, and there is a structural element to the composition of these fragments that is worth considering in the light of the theoretical suggestions it presents. While the first fragment describes a remembered experience, written up after the event, this picture then becomes the subject of the following six sections that work theoretically to shift perspective not only on the initial scene presented, but also on its *kind* of textual presentation. Reading the essay is, thus, to engage with Jones’ self-reflexive meta-commentary *on* her writing at the same time as relating this to the opening scene, which we encounter mediated *by* her writing. Hence, Jones’ carefully structured text consists of writing that aims to partly (re)contextualise itself.

A Cinematic Textual Turn (the *ficto-critical vector*)

It is worth considering Jones’ two opening sentences, because they indicate her *ficto-critical* strategy, anticipate her structural metaphors, and establish her main *ficto-critical* concern:

Picture this: a single white woman sits embraced within a community of Aboriginal people – of the tribe Bardi – to watch a movie projected outside

¹⁰² Gail Jones, “Thaumatropes,” in *The Space Between*, edited by Heather Kerr et al., Perth: UWA Press, 1998, p. 98-114. [Hereafter: Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. ...]

on the whitewashed wall of the school. It is a windy night and the audience is bound together by a breeze from the sea that circulates between them and brushes, phantom-like, at their hair and their faces. (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 98)

Firstly, the framing demand to “picture this” creates a *ficto*-critically striking encapsulation of the intradiegetic scene and our textual access to it. Secondly, the wind enters the scene as an all-pervasive force around whose metaphoric potential Jones will structure the narration of her *ficto*-critical argument on ethnographic projection. Thirdly, the Aboriginals’ embrace of the observing narrator presents a *communal* counterpoise to the *general* embrace of the wind. Building on this early metaphorical constellation, Jones then proceeds to endow her cross-cultural concern with *ficto-critical* edge.

Before scrutinising these three aspects in greater detail it is helpful to cast a glance at Jones’ reasons for her theoretical reflections and concomitant shift in perspective. On second reading she scrutinises the speaking position and interpretive gesture of her own writing.

The tonal authority achieved by the third-person narration is [...] purely fraudulent: the collapse of cultural certainty at the end of the story allegorizes the position non-indigenous scholars frequently enact in cross-cultural encounters. (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 100)

Her proximity to dominant academic perceptions and depictions of self and other across cultures in writing is thus of central concern to Jones’ writing.

Because her critique is concerned with the dangers and potential of our textual practices, and because she does not want to replicate any detrimental structures, Jones wonders, “What position might I take to comment on my own experience [...]?” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 99). In classic *ficto*-critical style she then brings the personal into academic discourse by pondering, “To what extent is my difficulty in finding a speaking position an elaboration of this childhood confusion of the bodily and the social and the wish to recover, in any case, a utopian possibility of alterity?” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 108). She thus marks the fact that her quest for an appropriate speaking position originates from dissatisfaction with available models *as well as* her recognition of the significance of singular personal experiences. These motivated concerns underwrite her subsequent self-reflective meta-commentary on the opening scene. Her writing thus presents a protocol of re-reading the initial fragment at the same time as it is already a *ficto*/critical exercise of its self-reflected counter-continuation.

“Thaumatropes” also aims at a performatively self-reflexive realisation among its readers. Jones creates the potential for a *ficto*-critical vector from the recoiling structure of her re-reading. Right from the outset her text establishes a connection between the filmic medium it investigates and its underlying textual medium. “Picture this” is the initial call to the reader, followed by a three paragraph descriptive passage infused with metaphorical potential on which the theoretical development of the entire essay feeds. Jones launches her text as an exercise in pre-scripted, a thought experiment, a program to be run on the reader just as much as a program for the reader to run through. By identifying *our* reading performance in filmic terms she cleverly frames the story of an Aboriginal tribe’s cross-cultural filmic reception. She figuratively encapsulates these two kinds of medial projection.

Pushing this idea a little, I want to suggest that Jones’ text – *qua* thought experiment – even amounts to a motion picture, in its own right, on our mental screens. Her initial address to the reader presents a cinematic textual description of a scene containing the movie picture at its heart. The *interpellatory* address sets the stage for her medial considerations to follow just as much as the *descriptive* fragment then sets the scene of the example to be investigated. From the very beginning, “Thaumatropes” introduces an internally (re)coiling movement that prepares the way for its considerations of the filmic medium to hit home in relation to its own textual basis. The opening phrase establishes a link to the central medium of the scene, which is depicted in a way that allows its theoretical commentary to feed back into an understanding of the medium text. The figurative medial intersection at the beginning of the text demands a reconsideration of its text-medial basis in light of the assessment of the filmic medium and our representational and communicative *relating* to it. Figuratively apt, it brings the reader into the picture and thus possibly sparks an im/mediate realisation of the *ficto*-critical vector.

Additionally, Jones’ focus on the Aboriginal community’s reception of *The Shootist*¹⁰³ enhances the self-reflexive challenge of her meta-commentary for the readerly performance. On the one hand, the medial “image that appears on the wall has the firmest of boundaries. It is an immutable box, a stiff rectangle. And within it the visions are sharp and windscreened: this is a virtual reality detached from the weather” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 98). It is thus not unlike the written page. On the other hand, this detached vision finds its counterpoise in the audience, which “is responsive and extra attentive” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 98). There is “a kinesis in the audience, a

¹⁰³ *The Shootist*, directed by Don Siegel, produced by Paramount Pictures, 100 minutes, 1976.

refusal to be passive” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 99), and the receptive attentiveness during the screening is then followed by a collective cultural response to the film. The Aboriginal community enters a mourning ritual related to the film, because of the *screen* death of its John Wayne character.

The Bardi community in their specific take on the film not only treat the post-auratic artwork auratically within their idiocultural con/text, but furthermore approach the events on screen thoroughly within their own con/text as real. Because *they* have encountered and were presently affected by the film, they fully embed its narrative within their cultural con/text by reacting to the screen death with traditional mourning. By contrast, for Jones’ presumably(?) predominantly Western educated readership with its tradition of film receptive practices “[t]o grieve for John Wayne is insubordinate; it is a reclamation of social consequence from mere simulacra; it is a conversion of the specular into the performative” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 102). For Jones the Aboriginal response amounts to “consubstantiation, an insistence that the sign somewhere connects with bodies and with souls” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 102). And this “somewhere” she thus firmly locates on the *readerly* side.

Jones’ move re-admits auratic elements into her theory of *relating* to post-auratic media such as film and text. As she acknowledges, “by communal reception, audiences may reconstitute a sense of authority associated with auratic art. The Aboriginal audience participated, one might say, in this communalized assertion, this refashioning reception” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 103). Their communal reading of the post-auratic film presently restitutes an auratic character. Jones draws on Benjamin’s famous distinction between auratic and post-auratic artworks in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”¹⁰⁴ to effectively relocate the aura of art in our framing work of *relating* to it.

The Aboriginal community’s shared idiocultural con/text and practices in relation to film have effectively overruled the dominant Western assessment of the medium’s epistemology.

Rather than indicating submissiveness and cultural defeat, the mourning ceremonies can be read as an assertion of the primacy of tribal epistemology over Western meaning. It can be read, that is, as abrogative and counter-discursive. (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 102)

¹⁰⁴ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, London: Penguin, 2009, p. 228-59.

A general consequence of this insight, which ultimately implies Jones' readership as well, is "that audiences are capable of mobilizing symbolic effects that are counter to, and in contradistinction with, conventional and predisposed significations" (Jones, "Thaumatropes," p. 103). Notably, she reminds her reader of this via a scenario that emphasises "the *transactive* nature of cross-cultural screen engagement" (Jones, "Thaumatropes," p. 103). Jones' meta-commentary on her own cross-cultural observations and assessment thus appears in a different light, too, and with it the anthropological reading situation *per se*.

As it turns out, because "the Pallottine brothers had a history of showing movies to the community [...] including ethnographic footage of Bardi life earlier that century" (Jones, "Thaumatropes," p. 105), the Aboriginal community at the screening already had its own reception history of film firmly established. They have previously been "inducted into varieties of filmic knowledge, the generically specific (slapstick, Western) and the putatively mimetic (ethnographic)" (Jones, "Thaumatropes," p. 105). Significantly, "[t]he ethnographic material was under restriction and regulation, since it was regarded as spiritually improper to show images of people who were known and deceased" (Jones, "Thaumatropes," p. 105). Thus, not a previous absence of filmic experience, but their firmly established idiocultural tradition of film reception has given the Lombadina community reason to conduct themselves in relation to the events depicted in the way they did.

What seems, perhaps, surprising or curious at first is, in fact, a different approach to the medium, its referentiality, and epistemology. In their reaction to *The Shootist* the Bardi people continue *their own* tradition of filmic encounters, especially because the narrative focus of the film is likely to have resonated heavily with the significance of kinship in the tribe (Jones. "Thaumatropes," p. 110-1). Jones contrasts this with one Western discourse in particular.

The synchronic pretence of ethnography – its paradoxical manoeuvre to fix in an atemporal present that which is simultaneously regarded as always past – was here clearly refused: the Aboriginal community simply *assumed* the historical entailment, disposition and consequentiality of the film.
(Jones, "Thaumatropes," p. 105)

Indeed, through their cultural con/text the Aboriginals had very good reason to bring their idiocultural interpretive resources to bear on the film like this. Realising this, Jones, too, finds good reason to avoid the pretentious voice of her opening fragment.

As she continues to paint the picture in which “the community at Lombadina may have responded in part to the problematic logic of the medium itself,” (Jones, “Thaumatrope,” p. 105) Jones presents a more and more sophisticated constellation that throws in relief the in/formed expectations of the different idiocultural con/texts and practices in relation to the medium. Furthermore, she notes that the cross-cultural perspective exacerbates the contrasting practices towards “a medium that, while pretending process and materiality, adumbrates most profoundly closure and loss” (Jones, “Thaumatrope,” p. 106) – at least to Western eyes. To the Aboriginal community by contrast “[t]his is film as séance, medium as medium” (Jones, “Thaumatrope,” p. 106). Clearly, what is at stake here are the cultural practices of medial reception, and Jones *ficto*-critically brings those of her reader into the picture.

In this way, Jones aims to establish a *ficto*-critical *vector* by figuratively intersecting the present text with the filmic medium ostentatiously at the centre of attention. Her perspectival shift from (essential) medial characteristics to (performative) practices of medial relating has implications for our act of reading from within which we access her text’s considerations. She makes the constitutive possibility of accessing the post-auratic medium auratically her text’s subject, and the Aboriginal community’s cross-cultural reception of *The Shootist* contrasts with the (potentially) stifling cross-cultural embrace of Western anthropology in particular. In a second move, she then reaps the metaphorical potential she sowed in her original fragment.

Turning Windy, Taking Breath (a *ficto*-critical twist)

The initial imagery of the textual motion picture heralds the crucial significance of imagery throughout the essay. Jones skilfully develops a further structural metaphor of wind/breath to contrast different principles of both post-auratic projection and the cross-cultural embrace. Ultimately, she converges all these images in the figure of a cinematic toy, her thaumatrope.

Re-reading her own account in the first fragment, Jones realises “that the mysticism of the narration, the bizarre wind, is at once a naturalizing, an authority, and a kind of radical pyrrhonism, a flight into bewilderment” (Jones, “Thaumatrope,” p. 101). In the third section “West wind” (Jones, “Thaumatrope,” p. 101-4) she aligns this *kind* of wind, which is the pervading presence in the opening scene, with Western anthropology. Jones reflects the initial speaking position of her narrator in this manner: “She finds herself at the margins. She feels the wind from the sea blow directly through

her body. She feels finally no more or less than this wind: it identifies her sense of insubstantiality” (Jones, “Thaumatrope,” p. 99). She thus marks herself as marginally positioned in a way that suggests the ideal of an omnipresent observer, an absently present speaking position that relays without re-laying. “In ethnographic terms,” she observes, “this is a classic dilemma of social positioning, a ‘being there’ [...] which affirms, paradoxically, both the *authority* of the Westerner and her *incorporeality*” (Jones, “Thaumatrope,” p. 101). Her position in the depiction thus matches the anthropologist’s writing position. Notably, this removed positioning is further naturalised by the textual medium and exercised by our textual practices.

In particular, Jones notes a transcendental bend in her description that would suggest her pervasive as well as pervading position as the narrator. On re-reading, this makes her uneasy. She is concerned about “the anti-materialist rhetoric implicit in [her] telling of the movie tale” (Jones, “Thaumatrope,” p. 100) and wonders, “[f]rom whence does this metaphysical impulse derive” (Jones, “Thaumatrope,” p. 100), this flight into “the textual ether” (Jones, “Thaumatrope,” p. 101)? Problematically, this “textual ether” coincides with her depiction of herself as “the normative in a story about the loss of normatives” (Jones, “Thaumatrope,” p. 99), which coincides with the *medial* necessity to project the other in one’s own con/text. She highlights filmic vision and the textual ether as transcendently sealed-off generalities by virtue of their post-auratic medial bases, whose socio-corporeal and practical significance she would now like to analyse, revise and deploy differently, *ficto-critically*.

Jones then juxtaposes her *personal* motivation and positioning to the ethereal West wind. Her twofold imagery of wind/breath relates to different principles of post-auratic projection, both of which operate the same constitutive filmic mechanism captured by the thaumatrope. The impersonal West wind pervades Jones’ opening depiction of the Lombadina screening, while her intimate breath animates the cinematic projection of her childhood toy. While she aligns the West wind with the *general* cross-cultural embrace of anthropology, her breath on the thaumatrope not only represents the constitutive mechanism of filmic projection but also figures her subjective motivation to write *ficto/critically*. At the end of the essay, Jones favours her own breath to operate the thaumatrope together with its particular figuring of the cross-cultural embrace. Her turn from the West wind to her breath highlights the profound shift of her perspective and approach over the course of the essay.

Jones counter-continues the metaphysical West wind by introducing the intimate and subjective, for example, by telling us that “[a]s I read my movie tale, I know that

the body I wish to recover is really very young; it is the child who spent years visiting the Sun Pictures in Broome, enwrapped in the many-coloured arms of her friends” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 107). Writing like this she breaks ranks with the generic and opts for the kind of subjective textual conduct that is still often sanctioned in academia. The personal experience of a cross-cultural embrace becomes her ideal of textual representation and communication. She also explicitly wonders, “To what extent is my difficulty in finding a speaking position an elaboration of this childhood confusion of the bodily and the social and the wish to recover, in any case, a utopian possibility of alterity?” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 108). Jones intimates a personally inflected, ethical motivation at the heart of her self-reflexive meta-commentary on our reading and writing practices. By way of its purposive playful brilliance “Thaumatropes” is thus indeed a *ficto-critically* purposive text throughout.

From this perspective, it is significant that Jones describes the children’s section at Sun pictures as “an area interracial, libidinal, deterritorialized and blent with the exotic of the Hollywood imagery. Rained on. Screen lit. Star bright. *Wind swept*” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 108). But *this* is a different breeze from the West wind. Her memory juxtaposes the adult segregation in the cinema with this child enacted cross-cultural utopia, which further parallels the conflation of *corporeal* arrangements with the filmic image conflation of the thaumatrope. Most importantly, these memories generate Jones’ desire to write in a way that would match her breath on the thaumatrope: to replicate in writing the benevolent, corporeal, and reciprocal cross-cultural childhood embraces at Sun Pictures, rather than follow the West wind with its transcendently removed, and yet stifling cross-cultural embrace of (academic) anthropology. Exemplarily, Jones’ windy structural metaphor of the breath that operates the thaumatrope unites her text’s theoretical insights and ethical concerns – the constitutive mechanism of post-auratic projection and her cross-cultural childhood memory turned writer’s wish.

Moreover, Jones’ realisation that “we project these desires onto the screen-shaped spaces that hang, gently flapping, between experience and interpretation” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 109) identifies the constitutive *medial* level of post-auratic reception on which the Bardi people’s and her own practices converge. Located *between experience and interpretation*, post-auratic medial reception already relies on idiocultural capital, which may or may not opt to presently reconstitute an aura to the artwork by way of its framing *work* of art. The imagery constellation of wind/breath and thaumatrope evokes *both* the juxtaposition of principles *and* their convergence in the

constitutive mechanisms of filmic projection. It aims to deconstruct the academically instituted hierarchy between the two principles. The *same* constitutive mechanism throws in relief the ethnographic ideal of reception and a *ficto/critical* ideal of how other recipient practices are possible. Jones achieves this in tune with her theoretical considerations which privilege the recipient's position over fixed medial characteristics.

This is the *ficto-critical* capital of Jones' imagery. However, she proceeds to capitalise on this *ficto-critically* by feeding this imagery into the difference between the two cross-cultural filmic encounters at the beginning and the end of her essay – her insubstantial presence in narrating the screening at Lombadina and her embodied, animating wish in blowing the thaumatrope. In this fashion, then, the text provides the potential for a *ficto-critical twist* when it constatively presents a poetics of film – which *qua* post-auratic medium also applies to text – that manages to combine the self-reflexive performative awareness provided by the *ficto-critical* vector with the explanatory force of the combined wind/breath *and* thaumatrope structural metaphor.

Thaumatropical Cross-Cultural Turns (*ficto-critical* edge)

“Thaumatropes” develops *ficto-critical* edge because it endows the explanatory poetics of its structural metaphor with im/mediately significant practical direction. It intersects the *aesthetic* imagery of the winds and thaumatrope with the *ethical* concern that pervades the text both as subjective narration and meta-ethnographic consideration, namely *the cross-cultural embrace*. Against the backdrop of her concern with cross-cultural interpretation Jones thus combines a poetics of post-auratic media – the subject of her text's *ficto-critical* vector and twist – with the ethical motivation for her protocol of re-reading the initial fragment. This is how she lets her accumulated constellation of structural metaphors culminate to *ficto-critical* effect:

I possess a small antiquarian scientific toy called, somewhat ostentatiously, a thaumatrope. Despite its fine name, it is blithely simple, consisting of a series of cardboard discs strung on a string. When the discs are rotated, by breath or manipulation, images on either side are visually combined. On one side, for example, is a black Mummy figure, on the other a white baby; [...] when the disc spins around the woman appears to hold the baby. (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 112)

The figure of this little toy thus converges the *ficto-critical* and *ficto-critical* aspects of Jones' text in a single, deceptively simple, image.

At a basic theoretical level, “[t]he thaumatrope is a device [...] notable for its discovery and illustration of the principle of the persistence of visual impression, that fortuitous ocular capacity upon which the technology of film relies” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 112). Jones’ fascination with it comes partly from “the pleasure of seeming to contain, so very modestly, something of the originary logic of film itself” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 112). And yet, this interest also pertains to her *ethical* concerns. Although the thaumatrope is already captivating on account of “the figure itself, the intransitivity of the sign, the confidence-trickery of the turning word” (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 112), for Jones, its significance is further enhanced in a practical direction on account of the cross-cultural image her particular toy combines.

There is something in all this that provides a kind of metaphor for cross-cultural scholarship. We blow – the *afflatus confident* – hoping to set in process a dialectic by which, in an act of consecutive easy encirclement, the self and the other will breezily combine, cultures discontinuous will appear continuous, the limitations of the image will be delimited and animated. (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 112)

The thaumatrope presents the constitutive mechanism operated by both the impersonal West wind and one’s intimate breath as different principle facilitators of the cross-cultural embrace.

In conclusion Jones notes how re-reading her initial fragment has led to the distinction between the removed general and personally involved principles of cross-cultural writing:

Yet I wonder, if one of the winds I wished to describe is really, at some level, the breath on the thaumatrope: the impelling exhalation, the fast-motioning embrace of that which wishes to reconvene, ideally and utopianly, the beautiful black woman with the small white baby. (Jones, “Thaumatropes,” p. 113)

The socio-corporeal and cross-cultural embrace in her childhood memory is thus aptly figured by a toy she operates *by breath*. From this perspective, the thaumatrope demands a particular, socio-corporeally subjective deployment of its medial potential from the agent at work – and so, by analogy, for (ficto/critical) ethnographic reading and writing. It figures the fusion of horizons that is also constitutively effected in the act of reading and writing, which in the case of cross-cultural representation and communication, however, so often comes at the cost of a con/textual con/fusion of horizons.

With regards to the difference between *constitutive* filmic projection and the ideal of *receptive* filmic projection, the insightful contraption of the thaumatrope captures, firstly, the essential mechanisms of the post-auratic medium film, secondly, the principle driving forces of wind and breath as well as, thirdly, Jones' personal concern with the kind of embrace that we enact in our practices of cross-cultural representation and communication, as epitomised by traditional, academic anthropology. By way of its poetics, the toy condenses into a single image the figures of the cross-cultural embrace that is a *general* aim of anthropology and the possibility of a positioned and embodied stance in terms of one's *particular* breath. Jones' thaumatrope signals an approach that does not stifle its subject, but rather breathes life into it via a living and enacted relationship. By virtue of its threefold metaphorical combination, "Thaumatropes" develops *ficto-critical* edge, as it manages to connect the im/mediate, self-reflexively performative interpellation of the *ficto-critical* vector and theoretical insights of the *ficto-critical* twist with Jones' personally motivated *ficto-critical* concerns and interests. Ingeniously, her layered structural metaphor of the thaumatrope captures it all.

For example, in Jones' depiction of the Aboriginal community's cross-cultural film reception, we suddenly recognise the constitutive mechanism that we successfully abstract from in our cross-cultural practice of anthropology. Jones' *ficto-critical* insight in this respect then aims to conceive of the constitutive mechanism differently in order to better address, potentially even redress, her critical concerns. The mechanisms under critical consideration underlie Jones' textual acts as well as that of her readers, thus connecting the experiential awareness triggered by the *ficto-critical* vector with the *ethical* concerns of the text. Thus im/mediately pointing out to the reader their own implication in the representational practices under critique amounts to a textual interpellation with interventionist tendencies.

Also, with particular regards to our *generic* practices of post-auratic reception Jones wonders, "How [...] does the authority of the real real become firmly established over, and discernible from, the more various orders of fictions?" (Jones, "Thaumatropes," p. 110). How come one model of representational practices dominates even though alternative (text) cultural practices are not only available, but in fact the subject of many such investigations?

If in other areas of scholarship we grant the interpenetration of different orders of disclosure (the 'fictive' and the 'factual'), why do anthropological topics so assiduously dissever them? Is the issue one of epistemology [...] or of lexical poverty [...]? (Jones, "Thaumatropes," p. 110)

If post-auratic media allow for different modes of engagement and epistemological relating, even referentiality, then why is it that where the stakes are as high as they are in cross-cultural encounters we insist on one-way practices and generically prevent reciprocal exchange?

At this stage of the thesis it is important that “Thaumatropes” in this manner identifies elements of classic and instituted anthropological practice that deploy the potential of post-auratic projection in a way of which Jones is critical. Her essay then takes a turn to produce *ficto-critical edge* when it points out the way in which the constitutive mechanisms of post-auratic representation and communication – which are also the subject of her text’s *ficto-critical* vector and twist – are employed to certain effects with which she disagrees.

*

Where texts intersect their aesthetics with a poetics of reading to *ficto-critical* effect, they feed the experience and insights of the *ficto-critical* vector and twist into the ethical concerns that they simultaneously raise constatively. Generally speaking, the *ficto/critical* trope presents a *ficto-critical* experience and understanding whose practical significance is given wider discursive implication by the text’s other issues and concerns. It endows texts with *ficto-critical* edge. In this way, *ficto/critical* strategies that are motivated by experiences in specific contexts engage post/modern formal means to serve certain ethico-political agendas. Their mutual aim is to inscribe such textual structures that can lead her readers towards realising their own *ficto/critical discourse analyses* motivated by their respective idiocultural and con/textual positionings. Ultimately, the goal is to raise awareness of the reading self’s agency and potential – if not responsibility – to transform certain textual and generic practices thus under *ficto-critique*.

After the intersection of *aesthetics* and *poetics* has been the detailed subject of Part Two, this first section of Part Four has now re/traced its further chiasmic intersection with *ethics*, which allows *ficto/critical* texts to im/mediately, performatively and self-reflexively address aspects of our textual practices *under way* as cultural techniques with detrimental effects. Highlighting to the reader their performative implication in the textual practices constatively *under critique* is precisely *ficto-critical*. Notably, the realm of potential for this twofold intersecting, *ficto/critical* trope is thus pre-structured by its possible points of origin in the paradigmatic situation of our textual practices, which alone can be addressed *ficto-critically*.

b) Qualifying a Complete Ficto/critical Text

Now that the two-step ficto/critical trope has been established across my readings of Muecke's "The Fall" and Jones' "Thaumatropes" I would like to further substantiate these findings by turning to another, fully accomplished, ficto/critical text. Katrina Schlunke's *Bluff Rock: Autobiography of a Massacre* presents this exceptionally rich textual structure. My following reading qualifies it as an exemplary ficto/critical text that instantiates all the defining traits this thesis proposes.

At the general level, *Bluff Rock* investigates the *historiographic* textual relation that allows *local* discursive entities to form, circulate, and effectively serve wider cultural functions. Her particular object of scrutiny is the discursive formation of "The Bluff Rock Massacre" that a leaflet presents to tourists travelling the New England Highway whose view conveniently leads onto the topological bluff in question from a distance (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 29-32).

Importantly, Schlunke's thorough examination of the leaflet's archive reveals not a singular and exceptional event, as the leaflet purports to commemorate, but a multiple scene of frontier violence that was part and parcel of early Australian settler society's mundane exploitation and expulsion of Aboriginal people. In response she carefully researches how the official leaflet yet *documents* and at the same time *fictionalises* The Bluff Rock Massacre into discursive existence. Furthermore, Schlunke also conducts something of a critical discourse analysis of her archive that assesses the mutual parameters of *its* construction and *her* reception. In so doing, I want to argue, Schlunke turns her creatively critical discourse analysis into something more of a *ficto/critical discourse analysis*.

For example, from a *local* perspective Schlunke reads outside the texts proper in order to locate the discursive events in the landscape they imply (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 92-4). On finding it impossible to map these textually mediated occurrences onto the geography of the bluff, she then sets the leaflet's pre/scribed reading situation in relation to the setting on the bluff, with the effect that the spatial intricacies at work in the textual relation of The Bluff Rock Massacre as a discursive event are thrown into relief. From a *historiographic* perspective Schlunke cross-reads the tourist leaflet, local stories, letters, diaries and other records which, between them, allow her to carefully re/construct the con/texts – past and present – of each text's historical production and reception (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 59-97, 135-87, 213-36). Thus, she emphasises to

uncanny effect how our relation to the *fictional history* of The Bluff Rock Massacre has always been – and continues to be – a *present textual relating*.

Bluff Rock brilliantly exemplifies the characteristic pattern of the ficto/critical two-step with regards to historiography. Firstly, Schlunke pursues a general *epistemological* interest in the narratives of local history. Due to the particular archive of The Bluff Rock Massacre her initial question “How do we know the past?” (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 11) soon becomes something more like: How do we know the past through text? The curious text-cultural detour of relating to the past *by way of* relating to text lets her envisioned epistemology of local history soon overlap almost to congruence with the epistemology of textual representation and communication. Schlunke’s leading question now reflects the *historio-graphic* relation as a *textual relating*, which is how the *ficto-critical* perspective of *Bluff Rock* commences.

Secondly, however, these text-epistemological considerations arise out of Schlunke’s *ethical* concern with our – personal, local as well as national – relations to the past that always already imply the present and future. In this respect her leading question is how the textual relation between our/selves and the past can affect present relations in the world. Schlunke’s epistemological concern with historiography arises out of an *ethical* concern with present cultural relations in Australia. At the heart of *Bluff Rock*’s concern with the representation of exploitative and violent inter-cultural relations during Australia’s past frontier conflicts lies the practically significant self-conception of each particular (local? white? Australian?) reader in the present, which effectively p/re/structure present and future Australian inter-cultural relations. This is how the central *ficto-critical* perspective of *Bluff Rock* commences.

Taken together, the ficto/critical two-step emerges, because the perspective under which Schlunke is concerned with the *historiographic* relation has an *ethical* interest at heart. *Bluff Rock*’s *ficto-critical* interest in textual representation and communication is *ficto-critically* motivated. Firstly, the epistemology of historiography concerns the question of how the relation between a self and a text can both effect and affect the relation between a self and the past. Formulaically rendered this *ficto-critical* constellation is:

((self – text) – past)

Secondly, however, this epistemology of historiography may affect present and future cultural relations between self and other because such wider discursive formations are

p/re/structured by linguistic discursive formations of the past. This extended *ficto-critical* constellation is:

(((self – text) – past) – other)

Typically *ficto/critical*, Schlunke's ethical perspective on the epistemology of historiography locates the textual medium firmly at the centre of attention. Its p/re/structuring parameters and frame/work, after all, present the theoretical hinge for any *ficto/critical* two-step strategy.

Furthermore, *Bluff Rock* also creates potential for the realisation of a *ficto-critical* vector. Consider, for example, Schlunke's self-reflexive focus on her own reading and writing as only the latest – albeit interventionist – link in an ongoing chain of textual acts. This chain reaches back to letters, diaries and records from the Australian frontier context which function as precursors to the tourist leaflet that she now reads and writes about in *Bluff Rock*. But the chain of textual acts does not stop there. Schlunke's programmatic scrutiny of particular textual acts – her subjects' as much as her own – forces upon her reader the sense that through their act of reading they, too, are implied in the text's subject of investigation. Before long it dawns on the perceptive reader that we now occupy her erstwhile recipient position, whose protocol of reading we now read in turn. In this manner, Schlunke's self-reflexive meta-commentary works to interpellate her reader *qua* reader, in *reading*, as the next link in a chain whose constitutive mechanisms come under scrutiny while they are under way.

In other words, not dissimilar to the previously considered reverse *mis en abyme* structure of two mirrors facing each other, the foregrounded chainlike logic of textual production and reception indicates the underdetermined readerly position and thus brings the constitutive frame/work with its parameters into the picture. Only *in reading* can the reader realise her im/mediate linkage with the depicted chain of textual mediations. Our textual relating, which is the subject under scrutiny, is *necessarily* under way because it is the only means of access. The represented chainlike structure of textual acts can thus hit home as a *ficto-critical* vector. While there is a *contingent* historical beginning of the textual chain under consideration, the *systemic* nature of the analysis implies our recipient acts to come. This *ficto-critical* reversal of direction does not point deeper into the transcendental realm of past textual re/presentation, but presently towards its non-transcendental frame/work of reception.

Note against this background, how the *fictocritical* two-step in *Bluff Rock* lies condensed in the trope of the historiographic relation. The key insight is that the

conceptualisation of the past by means of a textual epistemology becomes an ethically significant act in the present with p/re/structuring relevance for the future. In Schlunke's words, "we shape ourselves through how we think about the past. We tell stories about where we come from and who we are" (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 11). And because such stories structure present conceptions of identity, they also p/re/structure the realm of conceivable future action. Something purely linguistic-discursive here becomes in/formative of wider discursive, worldly structures.

Throughout *Bluff Rock*, Schlunke is acutely aware that there is something pressingly, albeit counter-intuitively *current* in our seemingly backward-directed concern with history.

The art of the past is to remember that it is always told in the present. We are not what we were, and we cannot predict what we will become. As new ways of being open to us, so new ways of knowing become available, and these possibilities happen to us *here* and *now* [my emphases]. (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 22)

Looking back onto history is thus a present activity directed at an essentially unknown future, which is yet p/re/structured in the blind spot of this reverse outlook. This is also the gist of how Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History"¹⁰⁵ famously figure "the angel of history" (Benjamin, "Theses," p. 257-8). Historiography, as Alasdair Gray alternatively puts it in *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland*,¹⁰⁶ "bring[s] the past up to date" (Gray, *Scots Rule*, p. 76-7, 105) – albeit necessarily from a certain perspective and to certain effect. In other words, the re/presentation of past constellations is always simultaneously a re/configuring of notions in the present that can p/re/configure the realm of conceivable future constellations. And to mark *Bluff Rock*'s own potential as a textual moment of such p/re/structuring Schlunke deliberately deploys the deictic shifters "here and now."

Because Schlunke is ethically concerned with present Australian inter-cultural relations, she analyses, in the form of The Bluff Rock Massacre, current textual formations of frontier violence against Aboriginal people. Partly she approaches her subject as an academically distanced, white, privileged, and thus central cultural critic – who may still have reason to feel marginalised in Australian society as queer. But, partly, she is also aware of her proximity to The Bluff Rock Massacre as a local, which

¹⁰⁵ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken, 2007, p. 253-64. [Hereafter: Benjamin, "Theses," p. ...]

¹⁰⁶ Alasdair Gray, *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland*, Edinburgh: Cannongate, 2001. [Hereafter: Gray, *Scots Rule*, p. ...]

leads her to investigate her discursive familiarity with similar narratives she encountered growing up not too far from the bluff. Thus multiply situated Schlunke's creative inquiry skilfully draws on her expertise as a cultural critic to make sense of her own potential complicity with a representational violence that is not only traditionally ripe, but presently ongoing in our textual relations to Australia's frontier past. Her academic project is thus personal from the outset and includes herself as – at least partially – a product of the mechanisms she is scrutinising (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 234).

For example, Schlunke detects a connection between her childhood knowledge about the demise of local Aboriginal people and the fictive narrative of the tourist leaflet. In both cases the point was to seal off history from the present, and to obscure the *present* significance of such historiographic relating. Only in retrospect she now recognises the discursive function of what knowledge she had of frontier violence as a child. At the time, knowing “[t]hat Aboriginal people were killed was another way of saying Aboriginal people did not exist now” (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 12). In this manner, a radical discontinuity in Australian inter-cultural relations with Aboriginal people was implied. Structurally, the question of a present and indeed future significance of these aspects of the past was effectively forestalled. As a result, the present and future that were p/re/structured by this kind of historiographic strategy did not have to be as affected by obvious guilt as would otherwise have been appropriate.

What particularly bothers Schlunke about this strategy and prompts her inquiry into the Bluff Rock Massacre is the *discursive* function that actual – yet actually significantly different – events have acquired. She is troubled that because of such historiography “historical deaths were part of the shutting down of a history, not of its continuous opening up” (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 13). Adding insult to fatal injury, massacres of Aboriginal people were endowed with the ongoing discursive function to prevent practically meaningful engagement, paradoxically, *by our ways of knowing them*. Especially her childhood reflection on knowing about local frontier violence thus “isn't a complaint about knowing too little” (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 14). As she puts it, “I always knew, but I also always knew *how* to know” (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 14). The motivation for Schlunke's analyses thus derives directly from the ethical implications of not only *what* one knows, but of *how* one knows something *to a certain effect*.

Realising that at the time “knowing Aboriginal people died did not have the effect it should have” (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 13), she lays her finger straight onto the crux of

the matter: the ethical problem she investigates is also an epistemological problem. Additionally, this intersection of the *epistemology* of the past with the *ethics* of knowing the past becomes even more pressing when her investigation leads her to consider the epistemology of the *past* in terms of the epistemology of *text*. After all, text is just what she produces in protocolling her readings of the archive. In response to this self-reflexive realisation, Schlunke makes it her task not only to track down the actual deaths in her archive but also to re/trace the representational violence *in writing* that has encompassed the actual massacres as much as it has enabled their documentation to enhance the annihilation (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 174-5).

What is decidedly uncanny about Schlunke's approach is that she lets her *ficto/critical* discourse analysis of these textual practices cut to the bone of her own as well as her reader's textual acts. She not only gives up generic academic distance by letting her subjective local perspective creatively contribute to her study, but by virtue of its self-reflexive text-practical focus her investigation furthermore collapses the medial distance for the reader. As Schlunke establishes that the mechanisms under scrutiny and critique are not only condensed in the particular contexts under investigation but *constitutive* of the communicative situation of textual representation any pre-theoretically assumed innocence of the textual medium and our textual practices as such evaporates. As the reader is brought to realise this in reading, the *ficto-critical* vector hits home with *ficto-critical* edge.

In direct response to the awareness that *there* and *then* textual acts were instances of ethically charged practices in as much as they always happened – and continue to happen – *here* and *now*, Schlunke shifts her own textual conduct in at least two crucial respects. Firstly, she signals a strategically *ficto-critical* double vision in the following statement.

I am both writing a cultural history, and attempting a model of what writing a history might look like if it were constantly concerned with how the writer was able to write, and how that writing came into a particular form at a particular time. (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 15-6)

This strategy makes her project both particular and general in outlook. While she investigates the *specific* cultural history of The Bluff Rock Massacre, she also investigates the *universally* applicable frame/work of the textual acts she thus engages *both* as an object of study and as a writing subject. In this manner, her *ficto-critical* stance supplements an *outward-directed*, truthful re/construction of history with an *inward-directed*, critical assessment of the textual mechanisms and parameters that

effect as well as affect such historiographic re/constructions. This latter, more inward-directed pursuit eventually leads her to the mutual conditions of im/possibility of both her archive and her own textual activity, *as well as* that of her readers.

Schlunke's investigation into the practices of her subjects thus yields both substantial knowledge on a particular Australian frontier context and murders of Aboriginal people *there* and *then* as well as a self-reflexive meta-commentary on the past and present textual practices of delivering this knowledge always *here* and *now*. In this twofold perspective she accounts for the parameters and practices that underwrite such *text-discursive inventions* as The Bluff Rock Massacre. In many ways, her ficto/critical textual form is motivated by a self-reflexive awareness of how the ethically charged communicative situation of textual representation she investigates implies her as a reader of her archival subjects and the writer of *Bluff Rock*. But Schlunke pursues an even wider emancipatory enlightenment impetus when – in addition to re/mediating our historiographic relation to The Bluff Rock Massacre and Australian frontier conflict in general to re/medial effect – she also endows her writing with a theory of textual practices that aims to empower the readerly position *per se*.

The curious double vision of simultaneously focusing on a specific textual archive *and* its text-medial conditions of im/possibility alone makes *Bluff Rock* an extraordinary textual mediation. But Schlunke furthermore lets the insights of this twofold investigation in/form her own textual conduct in terms of style and strategy. Her written critique thus self-reflects its insights into the textual acts she simultaneously analyses *and* produces. In response to her findings Schlunke is going out of her way to circumspectly mark and strategically counter aspects that could imply her own writing – *qua* text-cultural technique of historiography – in the representational violence she critiques. All the while, she steers her reader *to consider* the implications of her conception of the historiographic relation *while following* it.

Secondly, because of her acute ficto-critical concerns Schlunke thus *invests* in writing that is already in/formed by the *ficto-critical* insights it *investigates*. Recognising how *constitutive* parameters of our text-cultural techniques seem to have favoured such ethically unacceptable representational violence as The Bluff Rock Massacre significantly complicates her own act of writing. Knowing that new practices lead to new epistemologies, she begins to experiment with *textual strategies of counter-continuation* in response to her awareness of the ethically problematic epistemology of the historiographic relation. She is keenly aware that her writing has to tread carefully in order to mark – if not altogether avoid – the potentially detrimental effects of its

constitutive structures. Her strategy thus aims to harness *and* critique, to continue *and* counter the textual conditions of the im/possibility of historiography by generically *other* means. Schlunke's aiming to explode a generic mode of text by exploiting its power, by short-circuitously re/directing its distinct force, makes her writing *strategically* ficto/critical.

For example, Schlunke deploys such counter-continuation to the aforementioned shutting down of history, declaring "[t]o avoid the threat of 'resolution' that narrative has, I have chosen excess" (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 16). Especially the section "Taking it personally, making it personal" (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 199-202), in which she figures her textual intercourse with Edward Irby, one of her subjects, as the consumption of marriage forces a sense of epistemological and functional uncertainty onto her reader. As she anachronistically writes her present – white, female, queer, etc – readerly context into a pre/post/erous fiction of the past frontier context, which she reads into existence via her archive, Schlunke cleverly takes Hans-Georg Gadamer's literary-hermeneutic notion of a "fusion of horizons"¹⁰⁷ to the extreme. But she simultaneously highlights a constitutive mechanism of textual reception by so blatantly inserting her own *con/text* into the text she reads, which precisely *cons* the *text*.¹⁰⁸ The irony being, of course, that this is how we make sense of any text to begin with. It is simply what constitutes (a) reading – even, and especially, where this is not as apparent.

Additionally, a mysterious night parrot turns the textual exchange into a *ménage a trois*. Abducted from the poetry of Dorothy Porter (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 202) the bird figures as a trope for historiography in Schlunke's fiction. She thus invests increasing estrangement rather than reductive familiarity in her textual p/re/scription of the past and its p/re/structuring capacity. This brilliantly outrageous passage of *Bluff Rock* presents a textual *intervention* that assertively re/deploys the criticised historiographic potential of textual *invention* for its own purposes. Forced to ponder which function this *in(ter)vention* serves, Schlunke conducts her reader towards the realisation that she *continues to countering effect* the same mechanisms she simultaneously critiques in the formation of the tourist leaflet. Her textual strategy is thus not so much one of distanced external critique, but one of involved engagement, of traitorously re/directing a constitutive potential from within.

¹⁰⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer Philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1972, p. 289-90. [Hereafter: Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. ...]

¹⁰⁸ Henceforth, I shall use the slashed spelling "con/text" to highlight this conning aspect of both contexts and texts.

When Schlunke states that “I want to unknit *how* we know something, I want to unravel how stories can both fix ideas (and so our ways of knowing) and intimately undo these certainties” (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 14), she turns this stance ficto/critical by starting at home and letting her writing self-reflexively perform this. In this sense, *Bluff Rock* presents an instructive texture of unknitting the weaving of knowledge of which it consists. But the ficto/critical formation of *Bluff Rock* is also the result of Schlunke’s ethical motivation for this epistemological resolve. This is why Schlunke’s ficto/critical strategy ingeniously shifts from *investigating* the text-discursive *invention* of The Bluff Rock Massacre to *investing* in a pre/post/erous text-discursive *in(ter)vention* herself. It is also how *Bluff Rock* becomes a counter-continuation of historiography by ficto/critically *other* means. Such *apotropaic* counter-continuation is one hallmark of a ficto/critically *traitorous* strategy.

Effortlessly ticking the usual boxes of (unmarked) fictocritical writing – or (hyphenated) ficto-criticism, for that matter – *Bluff Rock* also perfectly fits the slightly more complex notion of (slashed) ficto/critical strategies this thesis proposes. Crucially, *Bluff Rock* is pervaded by a ficto/critical understanding of our textual practices which in/forms both its *ficto-critical* and *ficto-critical* perspectives. Precisely this double writing, the twofold pursuit of mediating a message while making the underlying medium strange again, makes Schlunke’s text *strategically* ficto/critical. In this sense her own strange mediations in *Bluff Rock* seem best characterised by the words she reserves for the actual landscape feature that is Bluff Rock: “A message. A strange angel.” (Schlunke, *Bluff Rock*, p. 20).

Towards a Ficto/critique

At the time when I began to read more and more ficto/critical texts for this study, a classmate reported back to our *Colloquium für Examenskandidaten* from an academic conference in which he had participated. Although I can neither remember the conference title nor even its general topic Lyam's informal report to our little group stoked and formatively influenced my nascent thinking on ficto/criticism. He laid his finger on something that resonated strongly with an idea I was working on; something that I had intimated the ficto/critical would implicitly address, but that I was as yet unable to formulate. Hearing Lyam complain about goings-on at the conference suddenly threw into clear relief for me where one particular virtue of the ficto/critical and its unusual itinerary lay in contrast to more established forms of academic critique. While he was still excited by the clever and pertinent papers that had been delivered, this nevertheless only compounded his simultaneous sense of resignation that, as he put it, all we ever do is write another paper. It's always only ever yet another text. That's our response to all these pressing and depressing concerns. It's all we ever do. But it just doesn't seem to connect, he insisted.

In a short aside, Lyam considered this situation to be the reverse scenario from footage he had seen of a factory manager who, clipboard in hand, walks alongside his employees telling the camera about numbers and figures, production and sales, the necessity to restructure and lay-off, while the people he is talking about are *right there* next to him – but he could not care less. Whatever was written on that piece of paper on the manager's clipboard mattered greatly to the people present on the assembly lines, but the same text simultaneously facilitated the manager's staggering situational abstraction. Now, the reverse scenario with the papers at the conference – all of which were very much ethically aware and concerned about real people and real situations – was that these concerns remained theoretical, on paper, contained in, if not by, these texts. Engaging with real matters of concern in their way means engaging first and foremost with text, which creates another arena entirely – paradoxically, even in abstraction from the one ostensibly at the centre of attention. It was almost, Lyam suggested to our little Po/co Research Forum, as though it were systemically preferable

that all of these engaged and concerned academics, critics, and theorists were thus engaged in their own reading and writing rather than where *it* mattered.

A great deal of Lyam's frustration on that day would have been caused by the realisation that you cannot change things quickly, even when you see through plain (systemic) injustices and produce a compelling theory and pertinent critique to address these concerns, because the discourses under consideration are mostly at work in very different loops and bubbles from the ones into which our academic theorising and critiquing usually enter. Personally, I'm fairly sure that thoughts to this effect cross every aspiring and engaged academic's mind at one point – Lyam for one was not amused. He vowed to take up a position where he could really hands-on do something that matters, and for all I know that is precisely what he did, where he found purpose, and how he blossomed.

As for theorising the ficto/critical, however, Lyam's input gave my thinking a perspectival spin. As he had said, the point was *not* that academic theorists and critics “don't do *anything*,” but rather that precisely what they *were* doing – theoretical and critical reading and writing – seemed to be systemically implicated in ways that their theories and critiques neither reflected constatively nor performatively. The internal perspective of thus reading and writing is that you are doing this one thing and are *thereby* concerning yourself with another matter entirely. By contrast, the ficto/critical texts that enthused me at the time seemed to suggest otherwise. They seemed to address precisely the instituted *gap* between our frequent theories and critiques of reading and writing, on the one side, and our theories and critiques of other issues and concerns, on the other side. This is how Lyam led me towards a first blue print model of how indeed to theorise and critique our textual practices *in their role for* wider discursive practices that still ought to be theorised and critiqued *at the same time*.

This itinerary struck me as especially timely because while much academic writing delves straight into theorising and critiquing the first principles of its respective subjects, there are also practically relevant aspects to the first principles of thus engaging issues textually – and these may indeed *connect* to the wider discursive issues under scrutiny. It also promised to be a particularly productive inroad to conceptualise some effects of the ficto/critical because the performativity of our reading and writing can hardly be denied *in reading and writing* and thus presents an im/mediate basis on which to self-reflexively address *and* engage individual agents in precisely the discursive circuit and bubble where *their textual acts* indeed matter. In this manner, I began to realise, the ficto/critical provides a response to the conundrum of what form of

textual address to fashion if our textual practices are implied in – even systemically integrated into – the subjects under critique.

Lyam's schematic suggestion provided several more stepping-stones to the ficto/critical that I expanded in my textual encounters. With regards to his perspective on critical practice, the issue was not only being preoccupied with reading and writing instead of getting hands-on involved, but it already also pertained to how the performance of our textual practices would introduce, exercise, perpetuate and naturalise elements and aspects ostensibly under critique. Likewise, with regards to the hitherto prevalent (unmarked) fictocritical or (hyphenated) ficto-critical perspectives on textual theory, the issue included not only discursively consequential *rhetorical* effects of dominant generic forms, but also the equally discursively consequential *performative* effects of our textual practices. Taking its cue from both these realisations, my approach of the (slashed) ficto/critical has narrowed its focus onto the intersection between textual theory and critical praxis by proposing a critical theory of our textual practices *in their relevance for* the wider discursive practices and effects under critique in our textual cultures. Rather than dropping the text-discursive side entirely, the ficto/critical thus addresses the only aspect in which it can indeed legitimately hope to intervene: our textual practices under way.

In this dimension the ficto/critical problematises what much academic reading and writing takes for granted. Because our textual practices are so deeply ingrained in our textual cultures, precisely because reading and writing presents itself as the natural and ultimate academic tool, this may prevent even the inclined and engaged theorist or critic from reflecting them as potentially, even systemically, implied in their respective subjects under critique. Moreover, not only may particular text-cultural forms of reading and writing be part of the subject under critique, but indeed our cultural techniques of reading and writing *per se*, of which academia perceives itself as naturally the highest echelon. In this sense, the ficto/critical point is to avoid simply forging ahead doing what we have always been doing in the same ways we have already been doing it. The point is no longer to simply aim for “better” writing in the sense of writing specifically tailored to an agenda. Instead the ficto/critical suggests, firstly, to self-reflect the issues under critique in relation to the practices in which we participate and which we perpetuate in thus mounting our critique and, secondly, to create the same theoretical awareness for the recipient agent by letting the text interpellate them to ficto/critical effect – that is, by highlighting the *ficto*-critical and indicating the *ficto-critical*. Hence, the ficto/critical point is to aim for writing that can create a self-reflexive meta-

commentary *and* an im/mediate awareness of the practical implications of our textual performances.

If writing always just another text is what we do, and if writing *qua* cultural technique is just as much part of the subjects *under* critique as it is our medium *of* critique, then the *constitutive* level of our textual practices ought to be included in the critique, so as to let it pre-emptively in/form both our textual form and practices in their relevance for the wider discursive issues under critique. If writing another theoretical or critical text in the academic circuit about something else cannot easily precipitate change in the wider discursive circuits with which it is concerned, it can certainly matter in the academic circuit which comprises such acts. While wider discursive concerns are thus only addressed through a narrow focus on the complicity of our textual practices in them, this gains the advantage of im/mediately interpellating the agent at work. In this fashion, the transcendent medial fiction of the text is made im/mediately relevant for the mediating agent's textual conduct under way, which has the potential to short-circuit the distance of mediation on top of collapsing the distanced academic speaking position. Even our acts of reading and writing are ethically charged, and this is what the ficto/critical can address in a way that endows it with a particular edge novel to established forms of critique.

Although there is no neat congruence between the complex that so exasperated Lyam and the complexes to which ficto(-)criticism initially was a response, his report still led me to pursue the following thoughts with regards to the ficto/critical. Firstly, if fictocriticism had credentials as *interventionist* writing then what could it meaningfully be said to intervene in other than our linguistic-discursive and textual practices? Secondly, if our textual practices were to be made the *nexus* between an im/mediately involving interventionist critique and the mediation of wider discursive issues of concern, then suddenly the distance between textual subject and object, between textual agent and textual concern would be short-circuited to im/mediately striking effect with counter-continuing intent. Thirdly, if literary studies are to mount theories and critiques beyond their realm, then it is preferable for their own conduct to reflect and implement these theories and critiques.

In other words, if the text-cultural techniques we engage and perpetuate are an integral part of our textual cultures under scrutiny, then they should by right pre-emptively instantiate the insights of our theories and critiques. Theorising and critiquing wider discursive, cultural, and political practices needs to be recognised and reflected as discursive, cultural, and political practice itself – potentially even as implicated in the

very practices under scrutiny. These points resonated productively with the primary texts I was reading at the time. Looking back, my study has thus – almost in response to Lyam’s frustration – outlined the itinerary of the ficto/critical as follows.

Part Two has proposed the counter-intuitive route of im/mediate *ficto*-critical reference. The *ficto*-critical vector was introduced as a trope whose performative self-reflexivity im/mediately interpellates the mediating agent at work on the text. It thus enables a kind of textual intervention that, unlike its generic academic counterpart, is not based on another gaping textual bridge towards its subject matter, but instead bridges the gap towards its textual agent short-circuitously. Ideally, this im/mediate experiential interpellation of the recipient is then accompanied by a structural metaphor that explanatorily illuminates what its *ficto*-critical vector illumines. This further tropical turn has been introduced as the *ficto*-critical twist, whose ultimate aim is to access and p/re/structure the textual agency at work on the text *from within*, that is, *while* at work on the text. The combination of frictioning conceptual work that highlights the textual frame/work under way at the same time as its aesthetics and poetics are inextricably intersected has been qualified as pre/post/erous because in the last instance it is geared towards p/re/structuring the mediating agent.

With regards to Lyam’s stance it is significant that Part Two has transacted the following interrelated shifts in perspective that have already been anticipated in the Introduction: from a writerly and textual focus towards the readerly perspective, from writerly or textual self-reflexivity towards readerly self-reflexivity, from textual performativity towards the readerly performance of the text, and from interpellation through mediation of experience towards interpellation through the im/mediate experience of our *mediating* – all of which, taken together, have precipitated a broader shift in perspective from the level of generic *between* towards the *meta*-generic level, where the first principles of our textual practices come into focus. Illumining *and* illuminating our textual frame/work necessarily under way in reading, *ficto*-critical strategies can legitimately hope to intervene where *it* matters. The crucial point is that the *ficto*-critical does not simply put its ideas out there, but brings them home to each individual reader by generating an im/mediate awareness of their, always present, textual implication and agency. In this manner the *ficto*-critical activates unprecedented inroads for critical textual interventions.

At the same time, with regards to a potential *general* ficto/critique of our textual practices, Part Two has heeded the initial call for a different thrust in our literary studies and textual analyses and provided a novel perspective which aspires to focalise the

constitutive *text-epistemological* frame/work of reading and writing from within *particular* textual acts of reading and writing. Importantly, the counter-intuitive route of the combined *ficto-critical* tropes thus delivers an equally evident and solid basis on which ultimately to theorise and critique the paradigmatic communicative situation of textual representation.

Part Three has first refined the notion of the *ficto/critical* in a way that retains its potential for particular positions to resist detrimental generic patterns via counter-continuation. It has then juxtaposed two ideologically opposed text-practical interpretations of the constitutive frame/work of textual practices. Finally, it has reformulated a theory of the *ficto/critical* in terms of artful thought experimental writing. Firstly, both elements of the two-step *ficto/critical* trope have been analysed in order to focalise how *ficto/critical* practices harness their enlightening thrust towards readerly positional emancipation in the equation of textual work for their empowering notion of apotropaic counter-strategies. Secondly, the analysis of the polar academic and *ficto/critical* text-practical ideals has re/traced *the ideological drive* at work in the theoretical guidance of our text-practical conduct, and has thus identified its respective potential to either maintain or change (wider) discursive formations in which it participates. Thirdly, with its interrelated layers of meaning the notion of artful thought experimental writing has ventured to capture both the strategic dimension and ideological stance of the *ficto/critical* *in the precise way* in which these have mutual conditions of im/possibility with their targeted genres of textual form and conduct – that is, with their academic other.

In response to Lyam's sinister intimation that our academically critical conduct might as well serve systemic purposes, Part Three has effectively corroborated the sentiment evoked early on that there is nothing innocent about our allegedly disinterested and objective academic textual practices. Every single one of our textual acts has ethico-political potential that we always already performatively (re)mediate together with the constative mediations at the centre of attention. Most importantly, the realisation that different text-practical principles engage the same constitutive textual frame/work to very different (wider) discursive effects focalises the ideological bone of contention that is tacitly and continuously at stake in all our textual practices. Here, *ficto/critical* writing as much as *ficto/critical* theory can legitimately hope to make a difference. Such is the *ficto/critical* lifeline that this study can offer Lyam to perhaps salvage his confidence in critical textual interventions.

Towards a general ficto/critique of our textual practices Part Three has thus contributed the envisioned shift from textual analysis towards text-cultural analysis. Between the poles of generic fidelity and generic resistance, between conservative tradition and radical betrayal, as well as between perpetuation and counter-continuation it has brought the ideological dimension of our textual conduct into sharp focus. Its close readings have even come good on the promise of a different perspective for cultural studies by directing them towards the level of text-practical ideology. First and foremost, however, Part Three has brought my theory of the (slashed) ficto/critical into its own by substantiating the introductory outline of it as *an im/mediately striking interventionist aesthetic of deconstruction* in terms of artful thought experimental writing that aims to precipitate equally artful thought experimental reading responses.

While there may be different degrees of ficto/criticality pre-scribed by different texts, one crucial point of Part Three has been that the ficto/critical is also a readerly as much as writerly *stance* towards text. My study's focus on ficto/critical strategies and ideology has been at pains to ensure that the *particular* positioning of each textual agent remains underdetermined. In so doing it has made palpable another perspective directed towards a *general* critique of the discursive effects that our textual practices introduce, exercise and naturalise. Having formulated a theory of ficto/critical strategy and ideology against the background of a ficto/critical understanding of textual representation and communication, the general perspective of a ficto/critique of our textual practices has now indeed become a distinct possibility.

Furthermore, the course of Part Three has implemented the anticipated transition from a concern with the concepts of judgement, interpretation and representation to a post-generic understanding of the principle tropes of fiction, criticism and theory. The deconstruction of this erstwhile generic triad has yielded an aporetic state in which the communication of a representation's *medial fiction* is necessarily primary to the secondary differentiation of its epistemological status as either fictional truth-constituting or non-fictional truth-representating. Iain Sinclair's enigmatic formulation "fictionalized through documentation"¹⁰⁹ aptly captures how fictional *or* non-fictional facts in writing always already constitute a *medial* fiction. We always already encounter a *medial* fiction to which we then index either *fictional* or *non-fictional* significance.

In other words, *fiction*, which has previously been conceptualised as derivative of non-fictional language use, has now been re-conceptualised as the constitutive term

¹⁰⁹ Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair, *Rodinsky's Room*, London: Granta, 2000, p. 7.

within whose realm the tropes of *theory* and *criticism* identify the respectively idealising and manifesting principles of reading-writing. Fiction thus re-emerges *both* as the primary term in a deconstructed understanding of the traditional hierarchy between fiction and non-fiction *and* as the post-generic realm within which the principle directions of idealising theory and manifesting criticism unfold the frame/work between the object text and its medial fiction, the textual object.

Part Four finally supplements the second step of the ficto/critical trope. First, the generation of ficto-*critical* edge by way of harnessing the *ficto*-critical vector and twist for wider discursive issues and concerns has been exemplarily retraced. Next, the motivational drive to write differently, ficto/critically, has been illuminated against this self-directed two-step trope. Because a ficto/critical awareness links the epistemology of our own textual practices to the wider ethical issues with which we concern ourselves textually, it generates the urge to break with current generic forms and practices. Our present textual cultures often play a part in wider discursive problems simply because our textual practices have gained systemic significance, because they are our culture constituting techniques. In light of this, the ficto/critical thus presents a textual form of address that can legitimately hope to *both* intervene in our textual acts *and* deconstruct our conception thereof *in order to* work towards ultimately redressing wider discursive issues and concerns. Completing the scope of ambitions for this thesis, Part Four has thus actualised the initially desired cultural studies perspective that focalises the ethical dimension of our textual practices.

So, while Lyam, on that day, despaired at what he perceived as the futile path of academic critique, the ficto/critical itinerary that this study has sketched out would suggest that another – im/mediately available – way out of this dead end is, in fact, through. The *ficto*-critical takes its cue from the one aspect that can indeed be im/mediately addressed textually, namely our practices of textual mediation. By making this inroad for text-practical intervention central to their wider discursive concerns, *ficto-critical* strategies seize the only sure-fire option for im/mediate readerly interpellation. Thus, a broader picture of how *both* our constitutive *and* generic text-cultural practices affect our cultural formations will eventually emerge. What I have called a more general ficto/critique would thus focalise those constitutive text-cultural effects that formatively affect our wider textual cultures, by which I mean (our) cultures in which certain text-cultural practices have not only become pervasive but now actually function as *foundational* cultural techniques.

* * *

Whereas since the second half of the 20th century a succession of waves of critical perspectives have made different issues central to their approaches, their textual means and conduct of critique have hardly changed. In fact, more often than not they have maintained and strengthened the textual practices that they have in common with their subjects of critique. Meanwhile, the contingent and constitutive sides of our textual practices that would self-reflexively apply to our theorising and critiquing have hitherto not been fully included in the scope of analysis. Because textual practices are almost all-pervasive in our present textual cultures, however, this kind of ficto/critical thrust is highly pertinent and should, ultimately, be carried into all walks of life in which relating to the world, the other, and the self is increasingly mediated textually, and in which these wider discursive formations are thus manipulated by the mechanics of textual meaning formation – more often than not in the blind spot of our ostensible intentions.

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