

**Elina Mikkilä**Beyond Blite & Whack. Embracing *Leerstellen* and *Grenzüberschreitungen* in Creative-Critical Writing

**Abstract** – This article examines how interdisciplinary practices operate as epistemic-aesthetic acts within practice-led literary research paradigms. Taking my non-linear doctoral project as its point of departure, it argues that knowledge in post-postmodern contexts is produced not merely through established modes of theorization but also through formal disruption, conceptual mobility and hybrid forms of transgression. The reflection unfolds across six movements. The text explores structural experimentation as an alternative to methodological exposition and considers epistemic innovation without disciplinary grounding. After engaging with terminological power struggles over conceptual authority, it seeks insight into the generative instability of inhabiting a creative-critical space in suspension. Nomadic negotiations of method and genre extend this line of questioning. The piece concludes by positioning *creational writing* as a mode of interdisciplinary inquiry. By foregrounding my previously introduced concept of ‘*creational writing*’ as a practice that resists both hermetic theory and instrumentalized creativity, the article proposes discursive defiance as a mode of inquiry in its own right. What first appears as detour, non-compliance with established norms and heterogeneous subversion, is reframed as a performative proposition that exposes the limits of institutional intelligibility while opening spaces for alternative forms of understanding. In doing so, the article views indiscipline not as a lack of rigor but as a necessary condition for epistemic plurality in contemporary research cultures.

**Keywords:** *creational writing*; creative-critical writing; practice-led literary research; autotheory (anecdotal theory); literary knowledge production; experimental life writing

**Résumé** – Cet article examine comment les pratiques interdisciplinaires s’inscrivent comme des actes épistémiques et esthétiques au sein des paradigmes de recherche littéraire axée sur la pratique. En prenant comme point de départ mon projet de thèse non linéaire, il avance que, dans les contextes post-postmodernes, la connaissance ne se produit pas uniquement par le biais de modes de théorisation établis, mais aussi par la rupture formelle, la mobilité conceptuelle et des formes hybrides de transgression. Cette réflexion se déploie en six temps. Le texte explore l’expérimentation structurelle comme alternative à l’exposé méthodologique et examine l’innovation épistémique sans fondement disciplinaire. Après s’être penché sur les luttes de pouvoir terminologiques autour de l’autorité conceptuelle, il cherche à mieux comprendre l’instabilité générative inhérente à l’occupation d’un espace créatif-critique en suspension. Des négociations nomades autour de la méthode et du genre prolongent ces questionnements. L’article conclut en positionnant la recherche-crédation littéraire (« *creational writing* ») comme un mode d’enquête interdisciplinaire. En mettant en avant ce concept de recherche-crédation littéraire, que j’ai eu l’occasion de présenter précédemment, comme une pratique qui résiste à la fois à la théorie hermétique et à la créativité instrumentalisée, l’article propose la défiance discursive comme un mode d’enquête à part entière. Ce qui apparaît d’abord comme un détour, un non-respect des normes établies et une subversion hétérogène est reformulé en tant que proposition performative qui expose les limites de l’intelligibilité institutionnelle tout en ouvrant des espaces à des formes alternatives de compréhension. Ce faisant, l’article considère l’indiscipline non pas comme un manque de rigueur, mais comme une condition nécessaire à la pluralité épistémique dans les cultures de recherche contemporaines.

**Mots-clés :** recherche-crédation littéraire ; recherche artistique (littérature) ; interdisciplinarité ; savoir littéraire ; théorie littéraire réflexive ; écriture performative

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# Beyond Blite & Whack

## Embracing *Leerstellen* and *Grenzüberschreitungen* in Creative-Critical Writing

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### On Structural Choices as Form of Knowledge Production<sup>1</sup>

Ten years ago, on the day my compatriots crowded the streets for the carnival of students and laborers, I was in a friend's apartment in Vienna – in what was a rare performance of household rigor – *ironing* my blouse, while mentally preparing arguments for my viva one last time. Somewhere in the midst of retracing the intricacies of post-postmodern autofiction and explicating an emerging paradigm shift toward a (meta)literary mode of inquiry, the phone rang. With just a few hours left to my defense, the university called to inform me that I might not be admitted to proceed.

A few days earlier, freshly arrived from Berlin, I had already been summoned to the office of the Dean of Studies. The reason: a gap of 260 pages at the core of my thesis. Years of carefully prepared academic content missing. *By design*.

Concretely, this omission took the form of an intertextual wink to Google Books, which confronted the readers with a radical leap in pagination at the heart of the dissertation. Following the tripartite prologue, the text stated: „Die Seiten 116 bis 375 werden in dieser Leseprobe nicht angezeigt.“<sup>2</sup> At the end of the omitted chapters (with corresponding headings listed in the Table of Contents), the thesis resumed with the epilogue on page 376.

By the time I landed in the university's bureaucratic heart, I had already grown accustomed to justifying this decision. My conviction in the conceptual stringency of the approach made me certain of my structural choice whilst I remained oblivious to the possibility of it ever being perceived as a formal provocation that could trigger institutional discomfort. With a sense of assured familiarity, I proceeded to explain the three functions of the missing pages – on this occasion to the vice dean (if memory serves):

In its symbolic function, the gap marks a decisive step in the development of an authorial voice that occurs precisely as a leap<sup>3</sup> – as a moment of revolution rather than gradual evolution.

At the level of narration, the structural caesura serves as a textual hinge between the prologue's *telling* across three genres (experimental literary narration, academic writing and essay) and the epilogue's metatextual *showing* of the omitted content.

In a broader sense, the void stages a shift from the hermetic discourse rooted in postmodern homogeneity toward a post-postmodern practice characterized by democratic stylistic plurality.

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<sup>2</sup> Engl. 'Pages 116-375 are not shown in this free version.' Elina Mikkilä, *Der autofiktionale Verständigungsprozess in der Post-Postmoderne: Entwurf einer (meta)literarisch forschenden Praxis*, PhD thesis, University of Applied Arts Vienna, 2015, p. 116. NB: My use of language-specific quotation marks is deliberate – a small, situated intervention that tests how multilingual scholarship is read and normalized. As a minimal act of linguistic friction, the practice mirrors the page gap in my dissertation: not an error to be corrected (as diverse actors attempted during the evaluation and publication process), but an invitation to read across conventions.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Klupp, Verena Rosbacher and Tasos Zembylas, „Kreative Prozesse: Auf welche Weise kann die Entwicklung eines Textes von der Idee bis zur Fertigstellung erforscht und nachgezeichnet werden? Wie lassen sich diese Erkenntnisse in die Lehre des literarischen Schreibens einbringen?“, *Die Praxis des Schreibens. Ein Symposium des Instituts für Sprachkunst der Universität für Angewandte Kunst Wien*, eds. Robert Schindel and Sabine Konrath, Vienna, Verein für Neue Literatur (Kolik. Zeitschrift für Literatur. Spezial), 2012, p. 111.

The gatekeeper at the far end of the administrative ladder frowned. If I were permitted to pass, he dreaded the next candidate would hand in a dissertation of a thousand empty pages. Startled though I was by his reasoning, my mind did not go blank. Given that my thesis had taken shape under conditions of discursive isolation, I had verified the formal justifications of my conceptual choices multiple times. I referred to the curriculum, stating that a thesis must demonstrate independent work while conforming to the standards customary in the field (with knowledge of the relevant scholarly literature and established scientific practices).<sup>4</sup> My dissertation fulfilled these requirements – in both scope and substance. Even with the missing pages.

I was dismissed; formally reassured yet intellectually disillusioned, as I walked out through the hallways where minimalist steel and glass led an uneasy coexistence with imperial opulence. I found myself wondering whether the University of Applied Arts – with its doctoral graduates expected to move beyond predefined trajectories instead of merely producing ideas for others<sup>5</sup> – should not have been the kind of institution to embrace the (modest) transgression in my dissertation. If such defiance was not possible here, then where?

As the outcome of a slowly unfolding creative process, the structural decision in my dissertation felt entirely coherent to me. Its deconstructive character – while seemingly unsettling to others – had faded from my awareness. This discrepancy struck me months after my defense (ultimately passed with distinction) when I was contacted by meticulous library staff at the time the thesis was being catalogued, informing me that there were pages missing. These communications – sent out of bureaucratic concern in the hope of having me fill the disquieting void – became symbolic of how institutions not only resist but remain oblivious to indiscipline, in failing to recognize or accommodate it.

When the revised book version of my thesis was published<sup>6</sup>, I received a message from the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin: a reader wished to get in touch. Coming from a literary writer, for a moment, I entertained the idea that this was a long-awaited invitation to collaborate on a project. Instead, it was yet another inquiry about the *forlorn* pages. I could not suppress a faint unease: it seemed that not only were there a few hundred pages missing from my thesis but also the information the reader had expected to find. A disruption not merely in pagination, but in communication – ironically the very topic of my dissertation.

Expressed in the pragmatic terms of the systems-theoretical code for art *„stimmig/nichtstimmig“*<sup>7</sup> (coherent/noncoherent), however righteously contested<sup>8</sup>, the text manifestly failed to be *in-sich geschlossen* (self-contained). While the communication gap may be conceptually framed as a double metatextual staging – tracing the yet tentative post-postmodern discourse characterized by scarcely intersecting micro-communities alongside the still-nascent autotheoretical *Verständigungsprozess*<sup>9</sup> – this was less an explicit positioning than the result of an overextension caused by my effort to perform both emergent form and content in a single gesture.

Yet what might at first glance appear as failure held the potential to become a mode of research. Subsequent poetological reflection demonstrated that the unsettling politics of rupture can itself generate insight. Perhaps this was the inescapable paradox of my structural defiance: it exemplified how absence and omission function not as voids but as propositions. The gap that first appeared as a lack to most recipients had become a place of encounter – a *Leerstelle*<sup>10</sup> inviting presence where understanding took shape through what was conveyed or withheld in the space opened by omission and non-interference. Overall, the thesis proposed to reconfigure academic writing through a performative

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<sup>4</sup> University of Applied Arts Vienna (ed.), „Mitteilungsblatt“, Vienna, 29/04/2009, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Elina Mikkilä, *Der autofiktionale Verständigungsprozess in der Post-Postmoderne. Entwurf einer (meta)literarisch forschenden Praxis*, Berlin, Arkadien-Verlag, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1995, p. 366.

<sup>8</sup> Dominik Schreiber, „Literarische Kommunikation. Zur rekursiven Operativität des Literatursystems“, *Textpraxis. Digitales Journal für Philologie*, 1 (2010), urn:nbn:de:hbz:6-66429522090, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Verständigung* n. < *sich* *verständigen*, to make ‘oneselves’ understandable.

<sup>10</sup> Wolfgang Iser, „Die Appellstruktur der Texte“, ed. Rainer Warning, *Rezeptionsästhetik. Theorie und Praxis*, München, Wilhelm Fink (Utb 303), 1975, p. 228-252.

mode of knowledge production displaying forms of epistemic materialization that resisted conservative doctoral frameworks and overturned traditional expectations of scholarship.

### Self-Portrait of a Non-Existing Discipline

My doctoral inquiry evolved in the absence of an established German-language tradition of practice-led literary research at the intersection of Literary Studies and Creative Writing. Working outside a recognized field meant lacking disciplinary validation, while rendering the research potentially generative in its indeterminacy. The solitary experience resembled a nocturnal mountain ascent in pursuit of the sunrise: visibility receding into pitch-black darkness, the sporadic crackle of the surroundings cautioning an alert mind attuned to the possibility of missteps – with, as a distant incentive, the horizon opening onto first light should one reach the top.<sup>11</sup>

To operate in an unstructured space without the safety net of an established field meant coming to understand nothingness as an epistemically productive condition. What initially presented itself as peril gradually came to be experienced as privilege; the perceived lack – the absence of disciplinary grounding, methodological orientation and systemic relevance – became the very condition of possibility for this undertaking. The void that first opened to me as a risky playground slowly gave way to an epistemic open space in which discourse had not yet been codified, allowing innovative approaches to take shape. It was within this context that I was compelled to articulate a practice in search of a language that had yet to take form.

A multilingual internet novel paired with critical commentary modeled on communication theories: my doctoral project had begun as a bipartite enterprise of creative work and scholarly analysis – a dichotomy that is both discursively upheld in Artistic Research and institutionally enforced in (Anglo-American) Creative Writing PhD curricula<sup>12</sup>. As the project's epistemic logic clarified in successive stages, however, this binary structure proved increasingly untenable. Through the act of writing itself, the initial dichotomy gave way to a mode of insight-generating thinking in which form and reflection merged to perform a self-referential poetological gesture. The thesis ultimately staged its own metatextual implementation by enacting the topic it had set out to examine in showing *my* autofictional communication process. Through sustained reflection during the meandering development, it formulated a practice of *literarisches Forschen* (literally, 'literary researching') – as creation itself rather than commentary on existing scholarship.

Some years later, when I searched the international academic field for ways to pursue a line of work for which no tradition nor disciplinary infrastructure existed in the German-speaking context, I discovered that my approach resonated with what was being theorized in the UK as creative-critical writing. Accounts tracing 'a form of literary criticism that seeks to be truly and radically *literary*'<sup>13</sup> had emerged alongside the conceptual consolidation of my doctoral project<sup>14</sup>. By staging a hybrid between the analysis of autofictional post-postmodernity and poetological self-reflection, my work aligned with this in-between practice, as a self-portrait of (in)disciplinary knowledge produced within a non-existent discipline.

To write in a mode that replaces the institutionally enforced binary of creative work and critical exegesis was not merely an experiment in form but an emancipatory act. During an early secondment within my MSCA Individual Fellowship, I exchanged ideas with a Viennese colleague, one among the four PhD candidates in Literary Writing who began their projects after my research-related relocation to Berlin. During our exchange, he named an emerging discourse that retrospectively legitimized a stylistic development in my doctoral work I had pursued without awareness of this affinity:

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, cf. p. 391-421.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Eugen Bacon, "The scholarly exegesis as a memoir", *New Writing* 14/3 (2017), p. 390.

<sup>13</sup> John Schad, "Fusions", Lancaster University, seminar, lent term 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Benson and Clare Connors (eds.), *Creative Criticism: An Anthology and Guide*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

‘autotheory’. Like my method, which I had by this time come to term ‘creational writing’<sup>15</sup>, this genre-fluid approach unsettled academic conventions by weaving personal experience into critique, integrating subjective and theoretical registers while foregrounding emotional self-reflection and embedding concepts drawn from heterogeneous intellectual traditions.<sup>16</sup> What risked being (mis)taken for dilettantism – the impossibility of fixing a disciplinary home – constituted precisely its epistemic strength: a space of interdisciplinary invention. A further point of conversion: akin to autotheory being articulated as a feminist practice<sup>17</sup>, the experiential understanding gained while situating my doctoral work within a global context suggested that *creational writing* had emerged as a predominantly female discourse.

In hindsight, I seem to have manifested a home. Given that this occurred upon returning to Vienna – the *Heimat*<sup>18</sup> to all my university diplomas and a place to which I had come back to repeatedly – the process seems to have unfolded as a lived hermeneutic circle: a return marked by a slight shift that enabled me to see the point of departure from a different perspective, the vantage point opened by the path taken.<sup>19</sup>

## Politics of Terms

The terminological landscape of an emerging research field constitutes a contested space structured by entrenched linguistic and regional orientations. Among the overarching designations in the present context, ‘artistic research’ and ‘arts-based research’ are used across Europe, ‘practice-based’ or ‘practice-led’ research in the Anglo-American context and *recherche-cr ation* in the Francophone tradition. The multiplicity of associated ‘visions and manifestations’ has been documented in a complex cartography.<sup>20</sup>

Within this discursive field, literature has long occupied the role of a neglected stepchild – admitted to the family yet not fully belonging.<sup>21</sup> The notion of ‘Stiefmuttersprache’<sup>22</sup> – a non-native idiolect at the margins of linguistic normativity – resonates with the dismissed yet creatively generative status of Literary Writing within Artistic Research. To write in a dominant language while bending it from within is to speak in the idiom of *litt rature mineure*<sup>23</sup>: language in its deterritorialized practice undermines structures of power and meaning from the inside. As acts of social intervention, modes of

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<sup>15</sup> Elina Mikkil , “Hybridizing Creative Writing Research: A Creational Self-Portrait”, *CORDIS – EU research results*, 2025 (2021), <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101033579/>.

<sup>16</sup> Lauren Fournier, “Sick Women, Sad Girls, and Selfie Theory: Autotheory as Contemporary Feminist Practice”, *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies: Lives Outside the Lines: Gender and Genre*, 33/3 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2018.1499495>; Ralph Clare, “Becoming Autotheory”, *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature Culture, and Theory*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 76/1 (2020), p. 85-107; Robyn Wiegman, “Introduction: Autotheory Theory”, *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature Culture, and Theory*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 76/1 (2020), p. 1-14, 10.1353/arq.2020.0009.

<sup>17</sup> Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing and Criticism*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Engl. ‘homeland’.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. ‘[E]le estava duas horas mais perto do seu tesouro. Mesmo que, para caminhar estas duas horas, tivesse demorado quase um ano inteiro.’ (Engl. ‘[H]e was two hours closer to his treasure – even if it had taken him almost an entire year to walk those two hours.’) Paulo Coelho, *O Alquimista*, Internet Archive, 2016 (1988), <https://archive.org/details/o-alquimista-paulo-coelho>, p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Louis-Claude Paquin and Cynthia Noury, « Cartographies de la recherche-cr ation », 2024 (2017-2019), <https://lcpaquin.com/cartoRC/>.

<sup>21</sup> Creative Writing occupies a peripheral position on the agenda of the major global community for Artistic Research, SAR – as evidenced by the non-alphabetical enumeration of seven disciplines in the description of the ‘Language-Based Artistic Research’ group: ‘[t]he focus on language within artistic research is considered from a broad and transforming perspective to include diverse fields such as visual arts, performance, film, theatre, music, choreography as well as literature.’ <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/835089/835129>.

<sup>22</sup> Engl. ‘stepmother tongue’. Dragica Raj i , *Buch von Gl ck: Gedichte*, Zurich, Edition 8, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka : pour une litt rature mineure*, Paris,  ditions de Minuit, 1975.

individual expression are inherently political in their articulation; not least by mobilizing collective voices and marginalized perspectives that unsettle the limits of the (un)sayable.

The tension that arises from inhabiting a position between partial inclusion and structural marginalization resonates with the ‘subaltern’ position of enunciation mediated by dominant discourses.<sup>24</sup> It was within this structural paradox that my discursive stance emerged: oriented toward claiming space for literary writing in a field that barely acknowledges it, while reframing marginality as a methodological opening rather than deficit.

While artistic or practice-based research may be further defined as ‘literary’, a proliferating set of terms rooted in literary traditions circulates within this emerging postcritical paradigm<sup>25</sup>. The plurality of labels – autotheory, creative criticism, creative nonfiction, fictocriticism, life writing and philosophical criticism – underscores both ongoing processes of differentiation and the productive frictions characteristic of a field still defining its contours. The politics of terminology becomes inseparable from the politics of recognition.

The resulting regimes of visibility and validation are reflected in the mobility of concepts which acquire new meanings and undergo processes of exclusion in the course of their circulation<sup>26</sup>. The development of German-language terms for non-native literary authorship offers a telling parallel, with semantic shifts revealing power struggles over participation and legitimacy. The connotations associated with labels such as *Ausländerliteratur*<sup>27</sup>, *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, *Migrationsliteratur* and *Literatur ohne festen Wohnsitz*<sup>28</sup> illustrate how naming practices both situate and delimit: from the perspective of those concerned, it seems that external attributions flatten complex biographies and practices into reductive categories whilst self-positioning with a label that offers a sense of belonging provides a source of epistemic reassurance within an identificatory frame.

Such groupings confer rights of circulation not only in the science system but also within the literary field. Finnish best-seller author Mia Kankimäki’s creative-critical work (predating border-crossing awareness of the genre) defied the national book cataloguing system, exposing the inflexibility of reductive categories. This classificatory rigidity extends into publishing, where naming functions as a market strategy to ensure commercial viability. ‚Ich nenne es eine Textsammlung, der Verlag bezeichnet es als Roman‘<sup>29</sup>, explained Dorothee Elmiger, winner of the ‘German Book Prize’ 2025, in reference to her debut<sup>30</sup> – a dystopic logbook composed of quotations from scientific sources interwoven with poetically reflective entries.

No less structurally formative in academia, terminological positionings reflect institutional interests, determining what distinguishes itself within funding ecologies and inter-university competition. In the landscape of Creative-Critical Writing, a struggle for disciplinary authority has already emerged within British academia: creative-critical avant-garde at Lancaster and in Glasgow, conceptual practices in the tradition of Artistic Research in London and the South(-East) as well as experiments reflecting a more conventional scholarly orientation at Oxford and Cambridge.

The long-standing hierarchy between ‘scientific’ and ‘artistic’ brings underlying anxieties about legitimacy into view. In the German-language context, Artistic Research has struggled against the

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1988, p. 271-313.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Ulmer, Gregory L., Craig J. Saper and Victor J. Vitanza (eds.), *Electracy: Gregory L. Ulmer’s Textshop Experiments. Critical Studies in the Humanities*, Aurora, CO, Davies Group, 2015; Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. 151, 173.

<sup>26</sup> Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, Toronto, Buffalo and London, University of Toronto Press (Green College Lectures), 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Engl. ‘foreigners’ literature’.

<sup>28</sup> Engl. ‘literature without fixed abode’. Ottmar Ette, *ZwischenWeltenSchreiben: Literaturen ohne festen Wohnsitz*, Berlin, Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Engl. ‘I call it a collection of texts; the publisher labels it as a novel.’ Rico Bandle, „Wie eine junge Schweizerin zum Star aufgebauscht wird“, *Berner Zeitung*, 28/06/2010, <https://www.bernerzeitung.ch/kultur/buecher/Wie-eine-junge-Schweizerin-zum-Star-aufgebauscht-wird-/story/12112276>.

<sup>30</sup> Dorothee Elmiger, *Einladung an die Waghalsigen*, Cologne, DuMont, 2010.

dominance of science, often burdened with suspicions of subjectivity and amateurism<sup>31</sup>. Similar disdain marked the attitude toward ‘autofiction’ – dismissed as ‘feminine’ and ‘exhibitionist’<sup>32</sup> – alongside any mode of writing that foregrounds affect<sup>33</sup>. Having undergone semantic enlargement through international (notably German and Anglo-American) debate, a shift occurred from ‘the exhausted forms of postmodernism’ characteristic of early *autofiction* toward literary experimentation with the self ‘engaged in new practices and innovations’<sup>34</sup>. However debatable this development may be – the marginality of the more confessional tones of autofictional writing has been legitimized as a resource of theoretical innovation, as evidenced by Annie Ernaux’s Nobel Prize in Literature.

As the arguments developed above demonstrate, new epistemic concepts can be elevated, diminished or distorted depending on their terminological framing. Naming practices, in this sense, are never neutral: they demarcate territories, allocate legitimacy and shape the conditions under which new paradigms may – or may not – gain recognition.

### Never Two without (a) Th...ird Space

The dichotomy that still structures many discussions of Artistic Research and Creative Writing doctorates – practice-based work on the one hand, scholarly analysis on the other – suspends the development of a hybrid mode of writing that engages literary practice and epistemic inquiry at once, a *modus operandi* that has yet to be adequately theorized within prevailing institutional frameworks. In contrast to an academic culture oriented toward monolingual transparency – above all English as the global lingua franca and regulatory norm – my *creational* idiolect foregrounds plurilingual play and mistranslation as practices of resistance to homogenization. This stance insists on the epistemic value of what fails to translate, refuses singularization and remains irreducibly plural.

Despite the still limited institutional development of Creative Writing research in my country of origin, the Finnish language offers a terminological lever for revisiting the creative-critical divide with the aid of a near-minimal pair: when placed in a syntagma with the noun ‘research’ in the context of arts-based inquiry, the adjective *kirjallisuusteellinen* (which is generally understood as ‘belletristic’), translates literally to ‘literature-artistic’ – as opposed to the adjective *kirjallisuustieteellinen*, which is best rendered through the German adjective *literaturwissenschaftlich* (literally: ‘literature-scientific’). This lexical resemblance invites a reading of literary and theoretical idioms as two sides of a Möbius band continuously transforming into one another without ever reaching closure – experienced from within as a continuous surface on which reflection and invention become inseparable.

As a concrete example, the prologue of my dissertation developed from the post-modern depiction of a sociodrama workshop on artistic research through the scientific analysis of post-postmodern literary communication into an essayistic reflection about how to write at the epistemic-aesthetic intersection. Given the priority of process in Artistic Research<sup>35</sup>, it mattered methodologically that I did not begin with the premise that bringing together epistemic and aesthetic discourses should result in essayistic writing. Rather, I arrived at this mode in the inquiry itself – rendering the process of insight generation perceptible through performative staging. In doing so, the essay unfolded as a

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<sup>31</sup> Kathrin Busch, „Ästhetische Amalgamierung. Zu Kunstformen der Theorie“, ed. Judith Siegmund, *Wie verändert sich Kunst, wenn man sie als Forschung versteht? Zum epistemischen Status der künstlerischen Forschung*, Bielefeld, transcript, 2016, DOI: 10.14361/9783839432167-009.

<sup>32</sup> Isabelle Grell, *L’Autofiction*, Paris, Armand Collin, 2014, p. 29f.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Tous les films qui marchent sont des films qui font appel à des réactions sentimentales chez le public. Toutes les grandes œuvres, que ça soit du domaine de la littérature, peinture ou musique, sont précisément ceux que l’on traite de cérébrales.’ (Engl. ‘All films that work, appeal to the spectators’ emotions. All great works – whether in literature, painting or music – are exactly those that we label cerebral.’) Maurice Pialat, “1972 Conversation Between Pialat and Associates About the Film”, *Nous ne vieillirons pas ensemble*, Masters of Cinema Series 73, London, Eureka, DVD, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Hywel Dix, “Introduction: Autofiction in English: The Story so Far”, ed. *ibid.*, *Autofiction in English*, Cham, Springer International Publishing (Palgrave Studies in Life Writing), 2018, p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> Darla Crispin, “Artistic Research as a Process of Unfolding”, *Research Catalogue*, 2019, <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/503395/503396>.

mediating genre that dissolved inherited oppositions and crystallized an early form of border-crossing practice.

This creative-critical hybridity entails persistent friction. The challenge of amalgamating both discourses entails a continuous, often invisible effort to tone down the linguistic and literary norms acquired through academic scholarship during literary production<sup>36</sup> while the demands of rigor limit (care-)free fabulation. The research process is marked by competing epistemic pulls – as the writer-author negotiates discursive exigencies, genre conventions and conflicting identities arising from inner friction. The guiding metaphor for this practice is that of a sleepwalker on a roof ridge: neither side must awaken the other.<sup>37</sup> For it is on the ridge rather than on either side that the *creational* mode gradually comes into being, holding suspension open as a condition for insight generation instead of attempting to resolve the tension.

Intended as a ‚Versuchsanordnung *literarischer Forschung*,‘<sup>38</sup> the dissertation deliberately adopts this liminal stance. By *showing* a practice that exceeds binary oppositions by creating a synthesizing entity, its epilogue intertwines rhetorical devices, literature-sociological analysis, narrative fragments, poetological reflection, essayistic digressions and autofictional free association. Through idiosyncratic, anti-authoritarian gestures – parody, sampling, the juxtaposition of advertising slogans with philosophical musings – it unsettles hierarchies of discourse and tone. From this compositional arrangement, a hybrid voice began to emerge. The experiments with polyvocal forms gave rise to an insight-generating space with a fragile yet fertile zone of in-betweenness to navigate. It is this unstable position that constitutes the genre’s productive force.

Beyond the textual domain, the binary was further addressed through a threefold mode of transdisciplinary engagement with the concept of literature. My PhD research was carried out across higher education institutions in all three major German-speaking countries – in Biel-Bienne, Vienna and Berlin – the respective stays corresponding to the fields of *Literarisches Schreiben*, *Literaturwissenschaft* and *Literaturvermittlung*<sup>39</sup>. The underlying border-crossing reasoning proved foundational for my *creational* writing practice.

The diversified doctoral trajectory shaped the internal logic of the dissertation, which began progressively undermining dichotomous division. By allowing transitions between stylistic and discursive registers to generate productive dissonance, it foregrounded permeability, friction and transformation instead of privileging formal discipline. In this process my voice grew increasingly polyamorous, entangled with multiple disciplines and national traditions – the heterogeneous idioms held together by the writing self as a unifying instance.

Grounded in a polyphonic lifeworld in which ‚[i]ch ist viele‘<sup>40</sup>, this type of indisciplinary stance resists reduction to any single field, identity or approach. Such intellectual freedom is not an abstract principle but becomes enacted through the creating agent that sustains it: the researcher operates as

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<sup>36</sup> Writing literary texts with a background in Literary Studies entails ‚einen „permanenten kleinen Kampf“, das im literaturwissenschaftlichen Studium angeeignete Leseverhalten im Moment des eigenen literarischen Schreibens in Schach zu halten.‘ (Engl. ‘a “permanent, small struggle” to keep the reading practices acquired in literary studies in check at the moment of one’s own literary writing.’) Tasos Zembylas and Claudia Dürr, *Wissen, Können und literarisches Schreiben: Eine Epistemologie der künstlerischen Praxis*, Vienna, Passagen, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. ‚Es ist der Weg eines Schlafwandlers über einen Dachfirst. Der Germanist darf den Dichter dabei nicht aufwecken, sonst stürzt er ab.‘ (Engl. ‘It is the path of a sleepwalker crossing a roof ridge. The scholar must not awaken the poet, otherwise he will come crashing down.’) Hermann Burger and Carl Paschek, ‚*Künstler – Therapeuten der Wirklichkeit. Hermann Burger im Gespräch mit Carl Paschek*‘, ed. Gesellschaft der Freunde der Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt am Main e.V., *Wenn Schreibende reden... Gespräche zur Frankfurter Gastdozentur Poetik. Peter Bichsel, Hans Christoph Buch, Hermann Burger, Ludwig Harig, Ernst Jandl, Walter Jens, Sarah Kirsch, Wolfgang Koeppen, Günter Kunert, Marlene Streeruwitz, Dieter Wellershoff*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann (Frankfurter Bibliotheksschriften Bd. 6), 1998, p. 75.

<sup>38</sup> Engl. ‘experimental design of *practice-led literary research*’. Elina Mikkilä, cit., 2021, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Engl. ‘Literary Writing’, ‘Literary Studies’ and ‘literature communication/dissemination’. My use of the original terms indicates that the German-language and Anglo-American traditions do not translate directly.

<sup>40</sup> Engl. ‘I is multiple’. Ilma Rakusa, *Zur Sprache gehen. Dresdner Chamisso-Poetikvorlesungen 2005. Mit einem Nachwort von Walter Schmitz sowie einer Bibliographie*, WortWechsel Bd. 5, Dresden, Thelem, 2006.

method, the writer becomes a field of knowledge; the researcher-writer is simultaneously method and material as process and subject coincide. Attention shifts from pre-established territories of study to an individual who formulates and pursues a question, situationally mobilizing or bypassing disciplinary frameworks as required by the examination.<sup>41</sup>

### Nomadic Politics of Methodical *Grenzüberschreitungen*<sup>42</sup>

To describe my trajectory as nomadic is to capture both its chances and its challenges, potential promise alongside peril. Over the course of my life, I have navigated shifting institutional, geographic, linguistic, cultural, discursive, disciplinary and genre coordinates while studying and working in eight countries. This mobility was not purely elective: it often arose from systemic constraints resulting from short-term funding tied to national schemes. My repeated displacements have been as much imposed as chosen, symptomatic of an ecosystem in which academics and artists move within fluctuating degrees of agency shaped by self-exploitation, where empowerment remains inseparable from exposure and freedom is exercised under unstable conditions<sup>43</sup> of emotional belonging and structural exclusion.

The oxymoron ‚Prekariatsjetset‘<sup>44</sup> captures the tension inherent in the perpetual mobility shaping financially insecure intellectual and creative labor. What appears cosmopolitan on the outside is sustained by profound internal instability. While moving around and between countries, as ‘tourist’ and ‘vagabond’<sup>45</sup> in one, I transform existential uncertainty into an ever-intensifying spiral of (inter)cultural richness. While such academic nomadism remains shaped by nationally restricted funding structures, migration regulations and limited cross-border acknowledgment in the higher education system, it simultaneously contributes to a diversified horizon of intellectual reference. Each displacement – linguistic, disciplinary or institutional – generates not only difficulty but also epistemic innovation.

In a poetological ethics of thinking in motion, instability becomes precondition for insight. As a nomadic subject<sup>46</sup>, I resist settlement while inhabiting transitional spaces as sites of knowing. Rather than pursuing a single, unified identity or a stable home, I adopt a polylogical form of positioning that continually displaces and redefines the self. Switching codes intuitively while letting discursive frameworks and voices generate a myriad of entangled lines of inquiry, this kind of mobility inscribed itself in my dissertation as it morphed into a border-crossing ‘art-I-fact’ – that is, a text that performs the transgressive motion it describes instead of merely theorizing it.

What began as imposed academic nomadism within a largely contingent biographical reality gradually revealed itself as an epistemic strategy grounded in deterritorialization. *Grenzüberschreitungen* became a practice that engaged experiential, methodological and epistemic dimensions simultaneously. This informed my conception of writing as a state of perpetual transition,

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<sup>41</sup> Sylvie Catellin and Laurent Loty, « Sérendipité et indisciplinarité », *Hermès, La Revue*, CNRS Éditions, 3/67 (2013), p. 35.

<sup>42</sup> Engl. ‘border and/or boundary crossings’, ‘transgressions’.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Johannes Goebel and Christoph Clermont, *Die Tugend der Orientierungslosigkeit*, rororo Sachbuch Bd. 60599, Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1999 (1997), p. 93, 131, 142; Rosalind Gill and Andy C. Pratt, “In the social factory? Immaterial labour, precariousness and cultural work”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25/7-8 (2008), p. 1-30, DOI: 10.1177/0263276408097794.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Hausenblas, „Das beste Stück ... nachgefragt bei Sandra Gugic“, *Der Standard*, 13/04/2015, <http://derstandard.at/2000013960532/Dasbeste-Stueck-nachgefragt-beiSandra-Gugic>.

<sup>45</sup> Zygmunt Baumann, “Tourists and Vagabonds. Heroes and Victims of Postmodernity”, *Reihe Politikwissenschaft* 30, Vienna, Institut für Höhere Studien, Abt. Politikwissenschaft, 1996, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0168-ss0ar-266870>.

<sup>46</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994.

where the crossing of territories becomes a creative *modus operandi*. It resonates with a perspective described as ‚vektopisch‘<sup>47</sup>, conditioned by continuous displacement.<sup>48</sup>

My repeated shifts in perspective gave rise to a meta-perspective, which materialized in a seminar on *Literaturvermittlung*<sup>49</sup> toward the end of my doctoral journey. Weighing in my mind students’ standpoints from both ends of the literary production chain, it became evident to me that the literary field operates as a constellation of parallel discursive formations – authors and publishers speaking past each other by way of *déformation professionnelle*<sup>50</sup>. Such fragmentation exposes the structural blind spots that shape thinking modelled on hermetic life-worlds – already visible in the formative stages of professional training. It illustrates how systemic compartmentalization turns the ideal of a mutually enriching dialogue into a case study of literary field theory as lived practice.<sup>51</sup>

When viewed against academic formalism and imperatives of productivity my writing practice affirms an ethos of resistance despite unstable ground, beyond strategies of institutional normalization. The conviction that every act of writing constitutes a new struggle<sup>52</sup> captures this ethic: each work must invent its own conditions of intelligibility. This marks a moment of both crisis and renewal, a provisional constellation that resists systemic closure.<sup>53</sup> It stands, both structurally and conceptually, in critical tension with the academic graduate schools that lead into narrow pathways of conventional scholarship as well as the homogenized idiom associated with university Creative Writing graduates – *Institutston* – derided in German debates as emblematic of institutional domestication.

What scholarship often dismisses as failure or excess becomes the engine of discovery in a practice organized through *Umweg*<sup>54</sup>. By insisting on slowness, deviation and ambiguity as modes of survival and knowing, this approach resists common mechanisms of disciplinary surveillance exercised by academia such as formal consistency, methodological discipline and institutional pressures for measurability. Deviation becomes a productive gesture, allowing insights to emerge through reconfiguration of linguistic, cultural and discursive codes. Detours, delays and aborted beginnings are no longer residues of an abandoned trajectory but constitute the substance of a writing practice that insists on originality at the risk of incompleteness. *Abfall*<sup>55</sup> is revalued as epistemically valid.

The ‚Zettelwirtschaft‘<sup>56</sup> of my doctoral research process materialized as a symptom of lived instability in the disorder of scattered notes bearing witness to autotheoretical digressions and associated temporary constellations. The (plurilingual) filename of my working document – ‘Manuskript\_main\_Farben\_BIS\_BIS\_wiederhergestellt\_final\_NEU.docx’ – conserved a material trace of this restlessness, transformed into a strategy of poetological inquiry.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The neologism brings the noun *Vektor* and the adjective *utopisch* into resonance as associative layers.

<sup>48</sup> This perspective is exemplified by Adelbert von Chamisso, a 19th-century world-traveling botanist-writer. Ottmar Ette, „Abschlussvortrag“, 3. *Internationale Chamissokonferenz. Weltreisen: Aufzeichnen, aufheben, weitergeben – Forster, Humboldt, Chamisso*, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 27/02/2016.

<sup>49</sup> Engl. ‘literature communication/dissemination’. Marco Verhülsdonk, „Literaturvermittlung 2.0“, Free University Berlin, seminar, summer term, 2013.

<sup>50</sup> Engl. ‘professional bias’.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Elina Mikkilä, cit., 2021, p. 38.

<sup>52</sup> ‘[U]nless the book has been, in some way, for the writer, an adventure into the unknown; unless the writer has set himself or herself a personal problem not easily solved; unless the finished book represents the surmounting of some great resistance – it’s not [--] worth writing.’ Jonathan Franzen, *Farther Away*, London, Fourth Estate, 2012, p. 130.

<sup>53</sup> ‚Jedes fertige Buch ist wie ein gelöstes Problem, durch das neue Probleme erkennbar und lösbar werden.‘ (Engl. ‘Every finished book is like a solved problem that makes new problems visible and renders them solvable.’) Dieter Wellershoff, „Der Widerstand gegen das Schreiben“, eds. Herbert Achternbusch, Wolf Biermann and Dietrich Dietrichsen etc., *Es muss sein. Autoren schreiben über das Schreiben*, Cologne, Kiepenheuer & Witsch 1989, p. 242.

<sup>54</sup> Engl. ‘detour’.

<sup>55</sup> Engl. ‘waste’.

<sup>56</sup> Engl. ‘mess of papers’. Ronald Pohl, „Spinnwebfeines Leben als Zettelwirtschaft: Friederike Mayröcker erhält den Georg-Büchner-Preis“, *Der Standard*, 03/05/2001.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Elina Mikkilä, cit., 2021, p. 493.

Heterogeneous juxtapositions of genres and epistemic regimes beyond established stylistic hierarchies were not merely playful digressions but a rhizomatic method, cultivating insight at polyphonic intersections. In the most challenging phases, associations started to proliferate in multiple directions. This in-betweenness transforms such moments of junction and recombination into spaces of reorientation in which understanding takes shape and my *creational* approach develops its force.

### **Creational Writing as Indiscipline**

Drawing on *indisciplinarité*<sup>58</sup>, my method favors openness to multiplicity over the security of established rules. Neither predetermined nor programmatic, the idiolect that developed in the process of my doctoral research was intuitive, risk-embracing and structurally exploratory. As my studies were shaped by nomadic movement, the dissertation started to resist disciplinary settlement over time. In leaving the safety of a defined field, knowledge arose from transient moments of coherence and contingent reconfigurations. While the interdisciplinary stance may begin as a critique of disciplinary repetition, it unfolds as an experiment in intellectual freedom. The epistemic rigor of the resulting *creational* approach lies in the courage to think and write through uncertainty, improvising with existing methods in ongoing negotiation while refusing stabilization.

What is generally viewed as lack of *discipline*, may also be understood as responsiveness in practice: a willingness to remain open to plurality while suspending anticipation. While methodologically less disciplined, *creational* writing remains rigorous through its ongoing commitment to experimentation and its attentiveness to what evades classification. Such an approach reclaims modes of exploration that institutional research disqualifies – the intuitive, the subjective, the imperfect – and reframes them as productive sites of knowledge. Self-discipline ensues from within the work in progress, not guided by codified procedures but by the unfolding needs of the inquiry. Rather than following a fixed procedure, *creational* writing draws on existing disciplinary repertoires only as far as the question under consideration requires it, setting such frameworks aside once they begin to constrain thought.

A mode of research oriented toward the evolving demands of discovery rather than obedience to systemic imperatives – *creational* writing seeks to transform the cracks of the system into spaces of possibility, sustaining a voice beyond the strictures of canon and institution. Understanding unfolds as an ongoing process of becoming, a solved question opening onto the next inquiry. Beyond a set method, knowledge takes the form of situated acts of theorizing that are in essence provisional rather than prescriptive, develop as playful conceptual miniatures – ‚kleine Theorien‘, ‚Theorieentwürfe‘ and ‚Theoriespiele‘<sup>59</sup>.

Institutions transform methodological rigor into mechanisms that regulate visibility, legitimacy and access. *Indisciplinarité* interrupts the reiteration of academic rituals replicated through citation regimes and formatting conventions – in favor of practices that give rise to new perceptual and epistemic configurations. Instead of reproducing the ‚verquaste [--] Anhäufung von Zitaten und Fußnoten‘<sup>60</sup> of traditional Literary Studies scholarship, *creational* writing approaches citation as a performative and destabilizing gesture rather than an instrument for legitimation.

Indisciplinary freedom begins with the recognition that research fields are not neutral containers of understanding but regulatory regimes that structure what is rendered visible, articulated and legitimized. Critique within institutional structures may operate through forms of disruption immanent to the system, exemplified by the ‚undercommons‘<sup>61</sup>: a mode of collective thought that inhabits a space

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<sup>58</sup> Sylvie Catellin and Laurent Loty, *op. cit.*, p. 32-40.

<sup>59</sup> Engl. ‚small theories‘, ‚theory drafts‘ and ‚theory games‘. Stephan Porombka, Wolfgang Schneider and Volker Wortmann, „Vorwort“, eds. *ibid.*, *Theorie und Praxis der Künste*, Jahrbuch für Kulturwissenschaften und ästhetische Praxis 3, Tübingen, Francke, 2008, p. 10.

<sup>60</sup> Engl. ‚muddled accumulation of quotations and footnotes‘. Raoul Schrott, „Einige ganz private Überlegungen zur Literatur und den eigenen Anfängen“, *Ibid.*, *Die Erde ist blau wie eine Orange: Polemisches, Poetisches, Privates*, München, dtv, 1999, p. 126f.

<sup>61</sup> Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, Wivenhoe, New York and Port Watson, Minor Compositions, 2013.

of deliberate non-belonging, signaling subversion and marginality without romanticizing exclusion. Beneath the threshold of institutional legibility, alternative epistemic practices take shape, sustained by the loosening of disciplinary purity, the refusal of performance imperatives and a strategic resistance to normative unambiguity.

Unsettled within both academic and literary conventions, this mode of intellectual belonging emerges as a generative third space<sup>62</sup>, in which marginality becomes a site of invention rather than lack. To inhabit such a stance of epistemic non-alignment is to no longer beg for legitimacy, but to produce it – through writing that insists on operating creatively and critically at once without forcing resolution.

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<sup>62</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, eBook, London, Routledge, 2012 (1994), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203820551>.

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