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**Editorial: Towards a History of the Modern Practice of Fiction  
(Abstract)**

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This issue of the *Journal of Literary Theory* is devoted to the »History of the Modern Practice of Fiction«. As this title already signals, the idea for this Special Issue stems, on the one hand, from a certain way of thinking about the phenomenon of fiction developed in literary theory and philosophy and, on the other hand, from research carried out in the historical disciplines. The property that makes a literary work a piece of fiction – henceforth: the property of ›fictionality‹ – is increasingly understood as a social practice, which is essentially determined by sets of rules for authors and readers and their shared knowledge of these rules. At the same time, researchers in literary and cultural studies tenaciously pursue the idea that what we nowadays call fictionality, fictionality in the modern sense, has a colorful history worth studying. Although these strands of research have so far existed relatively independent one from another due to disciplinary boundaries, three research developments over the last decades favor an integrated approach for a history of the modern practice of fiction.<sup>1</sup> These developments are:

First, the growing importance of pragmatist approaches in the humanities in general (cf. Schatzki/Knorr-Cetina/von Savigny 2001) and in fiction theory in particular has established an interface between fiction theory and literary historiography. Fictionality is increasingly understood as a social practice, or, in other words, as a social institution that is essentially determined by sets of rules for authors and readers and their shared knowledge of these rules (cf. Lamarque/Olsen 1994; Zipfel 2001, esp. 279–287; Köppe 2014a; Zipfel 2016; Konrad 2017; cf. also Eco 1994, 75, for the related idea of a contract or ›fictional agreement‹ between authors and readers). Since these rules concern the production and the reception of fictional texts, institutional theories of fiction typically integrate insights from production-oriented speech act theories (cf. Searle (1975); Currie 1990; Genette 1991), as well as from reception-oriented approaches (cf. Ryan (1980); Lewis 1983; Walton 1990; Stühning (2011)).<sup>2</sup> Insofar as the rules for the production and reception of fictional works are presumably not only historically variable, but also accessible to historical-empirical investigation, this ›practice turn‹ has established an interface between fiction theory and literary historiography. This interface concerns, first and foremost, the modern practice of fiction, which systematically oriented fiction theories seek to describe on the basis of the contemporary practice of fiction.<sup>3</sup>

Second, the collection and analysis of diverse empirical material on the history of fictionality in different disciplines has generated a highly diverse and partially contradictory picture, which underlines the need for preliminary conceptual clarifications and methodological reflections. Over the last few decades, the ›invention‹, ›birth‹, or ›rise‹ of fiction, as well as the establishment of fictionality or of a so-called ›consciousness of fictionality‹ have been postulated in different disciplines for different periods of time: for antiquity (cf. Rösler (1980); 2014; Finkelberg 2004; Primavesi 2009; and the recent survey-study by Feddern 2018), the High Middle Ages (Jauß 1983, esp. 427–429; Nykrog 1985; Green 2002; Haug 2003), the early modern period (cf. Nelson (1969); Kleinschmidt (1982); Trappen (1998); Duprat 2009; Lavocat 2016, ch. II.2), and most frequently, although depending on the language areal considered, for different phases of the 18th century (cf. Davis 1983; Foley 1986; Berthold 1993; Gallagher 2006; Herman/Kozul/Kremer 2008; Friedrich 2009). What remains problematic, however, is

not only that the narratives about the establishment of fictionality put forward by these studies are quite different, but also that their comparability, even if related to the same time period, is hampered by three factors: (i) Investigations are often based on (implicitly) divergent concepts of fictionality; (ii) the studies base their arguments on very different sources or aspects of these sources, which are; (iii) analyzed using different methods. The latter range from conceptual history analyses of relevant terminology (e.g. *argumentum*, *fabula*, *mendacium*) in poetological texts, to the analysis of paratexts, such as prefaces or authors' self-commentaries, the analysis of literary works with regard to text-world relationships and textual markers, or the analysis of reception documents and significant changes in literary works' translations and new editions.

Third, influential *métarécits*, according to which there exists no history of fictionality in the sense of a transformation in fiction practices and their rules, only a history of the establishment of fiction(ality), have been forcefully criticized for their teleological character (cf. Orlemanski (2019)) and their data-poor quasi-religious attempts to discover ›deep‹ epochal change from a few canonical works (cf. Paige 2011, 18–25). Such metanarratives typically take the form of »They become Us« (Paige (2017), 523) and connect what they call the »rise of fiction«, the »rise of the novel«, or something similar to aspects of modernity (contingency, empiricism, liberalism, rationalism, skepticism, etc.) and, more broadly, to the secularization thesis (cf. Blumenberg 1964; Davis 1983; McKeon 1987, esp. 127–128; Gallagher 2006). Since criticism concerning the secularization thesis itself and the trend towards quantitative methods in literary studies have both cast doubt on this type of broad-stroke picture, a space for more differentiated analyses has opened up. More complex accounts interpret the postulated epistemological watershed as based in a practice shift, e.g. in the »institutionalization of factuality in the press and in scientific discourse«, of which the impression of a »rise of fictionality« (Fludernik (2018), 84) would be a distorted reflection.

In a nutshell, the reasons why a comprehensive and consistent history of the modern practice of fiction is still a desideratum can be summarized as follows. Some researchers think that there is no (interesting) history of fictionality at all, while others think that there is, but the latter group is rife with very different (implicit) concepts of fictionality (e.g. fictionality as a semantic phenomenon in terms of lack of reference or lack of truth; fictionality as a narratological/syntactic textual property; or as a certain attitude of the author to his text), which ignore or neglect important aspects necessary for a practice-account of fictionality. This is all the more unfortunate, because such an account, once it integrates a historical perspective, promises to be a fruitful endeavor for both literary history *and* literary theory. This is for various reasons:

(1) If taken seriously, the proposal to understand fictionality as a social practice could initiate a ›methodological restart‹ in historical fiction research. This is because the change of practices as rule-governed interindividual patterns of behavior (for an elaborated account, cf. Tuomela 2002) needs to be studied in different and more comprehensive ways than mere poetological change, the history of certain techniques of narration, or the history of a generic form (cf. Reuvekamp-Felber (2013), esp. 420sq.; Köppe 2014b; Gjerlevsen (2016); Gittel 2019). Such methods can focus on many different features of literary texts (mostly *not* signposts of fictionality) that indirectly provide information about the rules of production and/or reception in place at the respective time (cf. Descher, Lavocat, Manuwald in this Special Issue), and probably will increasingly include quantitative approaches (cf. Paige (2017); [forthcoming]; Gittel [forthcoming]), or even computational modeling (cf. Piper [2016]016; Underwood 2019, esp. ch. 1). At the same time, this approach does not entail that earlier historical material and previously conducted research lose their value: it rather makes it necessary to reassess and synthesize these works in the light of a new research agenda. A key question for this reassessment is how social practices that are governed by usually implicit rules relate to

poetological reflections in treatises, prefaces, or authorial intrusions in fictional texts themselves.

(2) Since social practices are typically governed by rules for specific situations or for dealing with certain types of objects, a practice-oriented approach to the history of fiction is likely to overcome the present research focus on the novel. At the same time, taking into consideration other genres and their respective practices of production and reception can raise rarely debated questions about the relationship between genre-specific practices and the practice of fiction – or even the practice of literature (cf. Lamarque/Olsen 1994, *passim*; Köppe 2014a, 46; Karnes (2020); Manuwald and Korn/Werle in this Special Issue). Concepts like ›sub-practices‹ or the ›overlap‹ of (partially contradicting) social practices, eventually falling within an »overarching practice of literature« (Lamarque 2010, 386), open up the opportunity for more fine-grained descriptions of specific historical constellations – rather than the binary logic enforced by terms like ›rise‹ or ›discovery‹. They also suggest the prospect of integrating the neglected strand of research occupied with the history of ›literariness‹ (cf. e.g. Zamora (1987)) or »the peculiar sense of the literary as constituting an autonomous world« (Teskey 2010, 388).

(3) Once literary theorists and philosophers venture into the field of historical fiction research, they will presumably point out the extent to which certain historical discourses, on the one hand (e.g. the discourse about imagination or verisimilitude), and institutional theories of fiction, on the other, speak about the same phenomenon (cf. Zipfel in the present volume). Moreover, they will help to clarify the assumptions that should be built into the history of fiction, and determine the extent to which they depend on the results of systematic fiction theories. Such questions and the resulting problematizations have so far largely been neglected in research (cf. Konrad in this Special Issue).

(4) The task of clarifying the premises of a history of fictionality is of interest to more than just the literary historian. The project of a history of the modern practice of fiction points to a blind spot in most (institutional) fiction theories, which do not usually specify a temporal scope. This is no coincidence, since the task of defining the boundaries of the term ›modern fiction practice‹ is connected to far-reaching theoretical questions that have so far largely remained outside of systematic analysis. These include: What are the identity conditions of a literary-social practice, which is essentially constituted by a set of historically variable rules? Which historical changes can (still) be described as internal differentiations within this practice, and which mark discontinuities or fractures that can no longer be described as part of the practice? Is a change, for example, of the taxonomic properties of the notion of fiction (inter alia, two- or multi-limbed taxonomy, taxonomic completeness), or the conceptual structure (inter alia, prototypical or definitional, graduable or classificatory) conceivable within a single practice? When should one speak about intensional or extensional change of an institutional concept? And what is the relationship between findings from, on the one hand, conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*), and, on the other, praxeography in the context of an institutional history of fictionality?

(5) Last but not least, the study of practices provides an antidote against the aforementioned overgeneralizations and teleological *métarécits*: practices are by definition bound to groups of individuals with different cultural, educational, regional, and social backgrounds. The rules or conventions that structure the practices can be more or less widespread, individuals can be more or less aware of them, and can regard them as more or less binding with different degrees of sanctioning in case of non-compliance. This framework not only creates a relatively flexible vocabulary for appropriate descriptions of historical constellations, but should also encourage researchers, as much as possible, to clarify the scope of their findings, especially concerning certain groups of individuals and specific rules or conventions. Such findings may even reveal

that the expression ›modern practice of fiction‹ is oversimplistic, because empirically demonstrable practices of fiction tend to occur in the plural.

The contributions to the present Special Issue of the *JLT* are taking the first steps towards a history of the modern practice of fiction from an interdisciplinary perspective. Specialists from literary theory and philologists with different disciplinary backgrounds are thus preparing the ground for future research in the field outlined above.<sup>4</sup>

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