

Charlotte Rauth

**Fiction's Ability to Respond:
On the Poetics of Responsibility in Contemporary German and
English Literature**

Across the current German and English-language literary landscape, one can observe a proliferation of long prose works characterized by pronounced referentiality to empirical reality, the use of an autodiegetic narrative voice, and an interweaving of personal, historical, and contemporary cultural-critical concerns.¹ Assembling documentary, autobiographical, essayistic, and fictional strands, the form of these literary works deviates from conventional narrative structures and literary genres.

This dissertation explores these historically specific tendencies of literature through a close reading of works by Dorothee Elmiger (2020), Maggie Nelson (2015), and Kim de l'Horizon (2022). Drawing on both classical and recent approaches in narratology and fiction theory, as well as on a new materialist conception of 'response-ability' (cf. Avanessian / Hennig 2012; Hamburger 1968; Haraway 2016; 2007), the project first examines the narrative constitution of these works, focusing on the order, duration, and frequency of individual narrative strands and narrative perspective(s), in particular the construction of the first-person narrator in terms of genre, media, form, epistemological potential, and ontological status. Second, the dissertation analyses the ethical, political, and (post-)critical implications of the poetic structures against the backdrop of their thematic concerns and of the contemporary theoretical and sociopolitical debates (Felski 2020, 2008; Stengers 2005). Situated within specific contemporary discourses, the texts question not only established historical narratives, but also narrative forms and modes of emplotment as such. Prevailing concepts of narrative entitlement and of the representation of self and other, of (historical) materiality and everyday life, are thereby put into question.

The central hypothesis is that both content and form of these works articulate a new materialistic conception of entangled subjectivity, literary knowledge, and textual production through specific and explicit intertextual references that involve a selective use of authentic and fictional effects (cf. Avanessian / Hennig 2012; Weixler 2012). Rather than establishing narrative continuity, these texts operate as negatives of connections between stories, temporalities, and spaces. Through both their thematic and formal structures, they open interpretive horizons and generate various relations in the interplay with their cotexts and contexts. The narrative voice appears at once central and decentred, constituting both itself and the text through the iterative execution of multilayered responses at the interface of fact and fiction.

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Charlotte Rauth

Freie Universität Berlin, Department of Philosophy and Humanities, Friedrich Schlegel Graduate
School of Literary Studies, Habelschwerdter Allee 45, 14195 Berlin

Freie Universität Berlin, Department of Philosophy and Humanities, EXC 2020 Temporal
Communities: Doing Literature in a Global Perspective, Otto-von-Simson-Straße 15, 14195
Berlin

E-Mail: charlotte.rauth@fu-berlin.de