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Postcolonial Ecocritical Imaginings
in Dystopian Picturebooks

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1. Introduction

For several years, literary dystopias have seen a considerable rise on the book market, especially in young adult literature. Despite its current popularity, however, dystopian writing is by no means a genre of the twenty-first century. Its emergence goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century and to the utopian literature of the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. While Lyman Tower Sargent rightly assumes that dystopian writing is "primarily a type of prose fiction" ("Faces" 7), dystopias can also be found in other media such as drama, poetry, or picturebooks. Contrary to Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry's assumption that "utopias predominate in children's literature, whereas dystopias are far more common in young adult literature [… because] young children are rarely depicted to themselves as suffering, especially collectively" (9), since the 1970s, dystopian discourses have pervaded a considerable number of picturebooks. Conventionally viewed as a simple literary form (Nikolajeva/Scott 260) addressed to the youngest of readers (Nodelman *Words About Pictures* vii, Nikolajeva/Scott 260, Beckett 3) and frequently functionalized as an "educational vehicl[e]" (Nikolajeva/Scott 2), the picturebook has recently experienced not only an expansion of its readership to include people of all ages, but also an expansion and a diversification of its themes, contents, and forms (Beckett 2). In this context, narratives of dystopia negotiating a wide spectrum of sociopolitical themes have entered the picturebook, creating a notable subgenre of dystopian picturebooks. This has not yet been conceptualized and systematically analyzed as such, even though it constitutes a particularly compelling variant of dystopian writing for both the youngest of readers and readers of all ages in which the dystopia is constructed and negotiated by multimodal texts.

The term 'dystopia' itself consists of the Greek word 'topos' (place) and the Greek prefix 'dys' (bad, ill, abnormal) and is sometimes used synonymously with terms like anti-utopia (Sargent), negative utopia (Broich), utopian satire (Sargent), cacotopia (Burgess), inverted utopia (Ramírez/Olea), reverse utopia (de Smet), ambiguous utopia (Le Guin), critical utopia (Sargent), and others. In contrast to these, the term 'dystopia' describes a wider concept and leaves room for a definition of dystopia that neither works in negative terms nor poses dystopia as something "feed[ing] parasitically" (Kumar 100) on utopia. Indeed, dystopian literature has developed out of utopian writing and is often described as utopia's "malevolent and grimacing *doppelgänger*" (Kumar 99, orig. italics) or "Janus face" (Bagchi 2) as the two seem "locked together in a contrapuntal embrace" (Kumar 99). Nevertheless, dystopian writing has developed its own literary traditions, which in turn have conflated and intersected

again with generic traditions of utopian literature. While the manifold hybridizations of utopian and dystopian writing admittedly demonstrate the "antithetical and yet interdependent" (Kumar 100) relationship between utopia and dystopia, different variations of (classic) utopian, dystopian, and utopian-dystopian literature have to be differentiated from one another.

Apart from these difficulties in definition, scholars also disagree on the question who first coined the term 'dystopia.' While some attribute it to an 1868 parliamentary speech by Stuart Mill (e.g. Mohr *Worlds* 28), others trace it back as far as the 1747 text *Utopia: or, Apollo's Golden Days* by Henry Lewis Younge (e.g. Sargent *Utopianism* 4). What makes matters even more complicated is that dystopian (and utopian) studies are characterized by a multidisciplinarity, encompassing literary theory, philosophy, cultural and political critique. As a consequence, literary dystopias – the object of investigation in this paper – have to be differentiated from other forms of dystopias and from dystopianism (and utopianism) as a school of thought.

In the first part of this paper, I will discuss possible definitions of literary dystopias and dystopian picturebooks. While there is a rather consistent body of dystopian writing on the literary market, especially in young adult literature, the excessive use of the label 'dystopia' within academic discourses has led to an obscuration of the term. Based on the critical interrogation of the historical development of the dystopian genre as well as its interfaces with its twin-concept of utopian writing, a more precise use of the term and the literary concept it describes will be developed. I will suggest conceiving dystopian picturebooks as a literary genre that not only exhibits certain prototypical features, but is also characterized by specific genre expectations. Drawing on theories by Darko Suvin and Miguel Abensour, the literary technique of estrangement (Suvin 49) created by the integration of alterity-content (Abensour 45) is considered one of the most essential narrative devices in dystopian writing as it constitutes a necessary strategy for transcending the author's and the reader's reality. By setting the dystopia in an other space, an other time, or, put more generally, in an other society, it allows the dystopia to function critically from a distanced, strange perspective (Sargisson "Strange Places" 393).

At the same time, it has to be noted that descriptions of a literary phenomenon "perform creative acts" in themselves as they "bring into being that which they (claim to) describe" (Sargisson *Utopianism* 10). As Lucy Sargisson points out, drawing on Derridean poststructuralist thought, "the nature of the approach taken towards an idea or phenomenon

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affects the eventual product of conceptualization – the concept (as conceptualized)" (10), i.e. different questions and approaches towards a concept or a genre result in different answers and definitions (Levitas 207). This thesis adopts a poststructural, postmodern approach towards literary dystopias that poses the ideological power of (verbal and visual) language, discourse, and representation at the center of its considerations. Literary dystopias deeply invest in the hierarchized dynamics of seemingly antagonistic poles such as self/other, nature/culture, body/mind, individual/society and draw on their cultural significance passed on in Western cultural and ideological contexts. This paper investigates the discursive (de)construction of such cultural binaries, dominant stereotypes, logocentric essentialisms, and hegemonic power structures, and is interested in the disruptions of "the grand narratives" (Lyotard 15) and the transgressive potential of the literary texts under scrutiny.

The importance of ideological and discursive construction in "social-textual relations" (Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Empire* 163) is stressed by poststructuralist, postmodernist, postcolonial, and ecocritical theories alike. Following Michel Foucault, discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (*Knowledge* 49). In this sense, language means more than communication. It "constitutes our world-view by cutting up and ordering reality into meaningful units" (McLeod *Postcolonialism* 18) and, as such, obtains Foucauldian discursive significance. Discourse as a system of knowledge and a "space of enunciation" (Ashcroft *Transformation* 13), thus, becomes the site where language, power, and truth meet:

> Truth is what counts as true within the system of rules for a particular discourse; power is that which annexes, determines, and verifies truth. Truth is never outside power, or deprived of power, the production of truth is a function of power […]. Power is invested in the language because it provides the terms in which truth itself is constructed. (Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Empire* 165)

For Francois Lyotard, these truths are constructed by the grand or metanarratives produced by Enlightenment theories of progress and modern Western science, which aimed to create comprehensive, legitimizing explanations of the historical experience (xxiv). According to him, the postmodern condition implies an "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv) and the "breaking up of the grand narratives" (15). Similarly, Ato Quayson stresses the "antisystemic" nature of postmodernism, which highlights "pluralism, borders, and multiple perspectives […] as a means of disrupting the centralizing impulse of any system" (90). Quoting Craig Owens, also Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin hint at the postmodern "crisis of cultural

authority, specifically of the authority vested in Western European culture and its institutions" (57, qtd. in *Empire* 160).

Additionally, postmodernism questions the reliability of language and its ability to represent reality adequately. The postmodern aptitude for signs to become empty and arbitrary is a particularly common trope in dystopian literature (Bradfort et al. 24). In this context, Jens Thiele points towards the aesthetic potential of what he views as unconventional or 'different' picturebooks: "Wirklichkeit ist heute in Bildern längst nicht mehr direkt abbildbar. Sie kann im Grunde nur über *gebrochene ästhetische Formen* vermittelt werden, die Widersprüche, Spannungen und Gegensätze aufzeigen" ("Bilder" 419, orig. italics). It will be shown that dystopian literature in general, as well as dystopian picturebooks in particular, employ such refracted aesthetic forms using literary techniques of estrangement (Suvin 49), hyperbolism, or irony and, thus, effectively portray the tensions and contradictions of reality mentioned by Jens Thiele. Moreover, as estranged literary texts that move away from strict realism and employ alterity-content (Abensour 42), dystopian picturebooks fall in line with a more general postmodern tendency within picturebook art observed by Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott:

> In most of the picturebooks we have discussed, we can observe a shift in artistic representation from the mimetic towards the symbolic. This shift in approach may be correlated with the postmodern interrogation of the arts' ability to reflect reality by means of language, or indeed by visual means. (260)

This symbolic kind of representation is also employed by the two dystopian picturebooks under scrutiny in the second part of this thesis. Situated at the nexus of postcolonial and ecocritical politics, *The Rabbits* by John Marsden and Shaun Tan (1998, Australia) and *Varmints* by Helen Ward and Marc Craste (2007, UK) both narrate processes of colonization – the first with explicit historical, national, and geographical references – that focus on their destructive ecological and environmental consequences, drawing on eschatological archetypes such as the motif of the apocalypse. The multimodal analysis of word and image, both conceptualized as text, will be concerned not only with the form (*discours*) and content (*histoire*) of the selected dystopian picturebooks but also with their sociopolitical and ideological dimensions. It will focus on the (post)structural dynamics of the narratives, i.e. the question whether and how the texts construct and reaffirm binary oppositions such as colonizer/colonized, self/other, nature/culture, human/animal, human/machine, rural/urban, center/margin, individual/society, or whether and how they transgress and deconstruct these dichotomies. Additionally, the hegemonic power structures depicted as well as potentially

subversive constructions of deviance and agency[1] will be addressed. Exploring the transgressive potential of dystopian picturebook narratives, the texts will be interrogated using Dunja Mohr's postmodern concept of "transgressive utopian dystopias" (*Worlds* 3).

In this respect, the genre conventions and restrictions that result out of the didactic standards still widely demanded of picturebooks within the book market have to be taken into consideration. Although the picturebook is no longer necessarily defined by the ages of its readers, it has emerged as a genre in children's literature, which is why it also has to be considered within this context. On the one hand, Kimberley Reynolds suggests that, rather than denoting a "clearly identifiable body of 'children's literature'" (2), the term 'children's literature' "reflect[s] ideas about the purpose, nature, and modes of writing at any given moment" (2). In fact, she argues that there is no such thing as children's literature, just as there is nothing that could be labelled unquestionably as 'adults' literature.' While Reynolds stresses the similarity between children's and adults' literature, especially within the context of publishing, Maria Nikolajeva on the other hand emphasizes the "particular aesthetics of children's literature" (xvi), which result out of its specific "historical, social, communicative, and power-related factors" (xvi) and call for "a theory of its own" (xi). At the same time, however, she stresses that although children's literature is different from adults' literature, it is neither "necessarily simpler or artistically inferior to the mainstream" (xvii), nor does only children's literature have didactic implications. On the contrary, following Maria Nikolajeva, all literature is "both an art form and a didactic, or rather ideological, vehicle" (xii). While ideological and pedagogical intentions might appear less explicit in adult's literature, they are never absent and therefore "a matter of grade, not of nature" (xii). To some extent, the tendency that pedagogical intentions are often more obvious in children's literature can be attributed to the asymmetric power relations (O'Sullivan 194) that characterize children's literature in relation to its production, publication, and distribution. Because of "the 'adult-made' nature of children's literature" (Reynolds 54), literary communication in children's literature is almost always asymmetric, which often results in "thematic, linguistic and literary accommodation employed by authors to bridge the distance between adult and child" (O'Sullivan 194).

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[1] In postcolonial theory, agency refers to the "ability of post-colonial subjects to initiate action in engaging or resisting imperial power. […] Since human subjectivity is constructed by ideology (Althusser), language (Lacan) or discourse (Foucault), the corollary is that any action performed by that subject must also be to some extent a consequence of those things" (Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Post-Colonial* 6-7).

Similar difficulties arise when we discuss what is actually classified as children's literature. While some scholars suggest that both literary works that are specifically directed towards young readers, as well as those that are appropriated by young readers even if they were not originally directed towards them, can be subsumed within the body of children's literature (Reynolds 2, Grenby 5), others argue for a narrower definition. Hans-Heino Ewers, for example, differentiates intended and actual children's reading from what he perceives as "primarily children's literature," i.e. literary texts originally addressed to children (17-20). Definitions of this kind, which focus on the so-called "literary action system" (Ewers 53) – i.e. the production, distribution, marketing, evaluation, and readership – of the texts, however, disregard the "particular aesthetics of children's literature" propagated by Maria Nikolajeva (xvi). On the other end of the spectrum, definitions based on the "literary symbol system" (Ewers 105) focus on the forms and contents specific to children's literary texts. The principle research interest of this thesis is located within this area, more specifically: the forms and contents – and by extension, the politics and ideologies – of dystopian picturebooks in general and the two picturebook examples in particular.

Informed by postcolonial and ecocritical theory, the second part of this thesis focuses on the intersection of the processes of colonization, industrialization, and urbanization in the dystopian picturebooks under scrutiny. Related research questions are: How are ecological, environmental, industrial, and technological discourses mobilized in connection to imperial, colonial, and postcolonial discourses? How are themes like industrialization and pollution, urbanization and capitalism, imperialism and colonialism, decolonization and independence negotiated by the picturebooks? How are these discourses placed within a dystopian picturebook narrative? And most importantly, in which ways are processes of colonization and imperialism constructed as determining destructive ecological and environmental developments like industrialization, urbanization, and pollution?

Per definition, imperialism differs from colonialism in so far as it "means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" (Said 8), whereas colonialism constitutes one possible manifestation of imperialism and refers to "the settlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands" (Boehmer 2). Including the political, economic, and ideological control of the colonized people, land, and resources, colonialism constructs unequal relations of power and dominance between the colonizers/settlers and the

colonized/indigenous[2] people. The term 'postcolonial,' in contrast, is more difficult to define. Due to its "conceptual inadequacy in face of the immensity of its subject" (Huggan "General Introduction" 22) and the incredible number of different fields and different ways in which it has been adopted (Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Empire* 194), it is frequently referred to as a "contentious" (194) and "troubled term" (Huggan "General Introduction" 22). While scholars even disagree upon the spelling of the word – some vigorously argue for spelling 'post-colonial' with a hyphen (e.g. Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Empire* 197-98) –, most of them agree upon the fact that the 'post' in 'postcolonial' does not refer to a historical period that comes chronologically after colonization, but aims at the historically-situated discursive and imaginative practices as well as the historical, economic, and social material conditions during and after the period of colonial rule up to the present (Ashcroft *Transformation* 12). Postcolonialism, thus, stresses the "continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process" (Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Empire* 2) initiated by various manifestations of imperial power but not eradicated by independence, drawing attention to the legacies of colonization and the consistent workings of neocolonialism (195-200). In postcolonial theory, political, ideological, and economic dimensions are closely intertwined with cultural, discursive, and imaginative dimensions as colonization implies domination and oppression not only in the context of physical but also of psychological violence. By homogenizing and objectifying the colonized as cultural other in language and representation, the unequal social hierarchy between the colonizing self and the colonized other disempowers and objectifies the colonized, while fixing the colonizers' subject position (Spivak 247).

In this context, theories of colonial discourse have been highly influential, exploring the "mutually supportive relationship between the *material practices* of colonialism and the *representations* it fashions" (McLeod *Postcolonialism* 38, orig. italics) as instruments of colonial power in order to secure its dominant position. Drawing on Louis Althusser's theory of ideology and interpellation, Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson argue that colonialism "interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation" (3). As an "operation of discourse" (McLeod *Postcolonialism* 37), colonialism depends on the legitimation of its practices through the discursive construction of knowledge and truth (52). This implies the imperial control over representation in all forms of cultural production

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[2] Following Gordon and Krech, indigeneity can be conceived in biological, instrumental, moral, or ideological terms and is inscribed in theories and issues of race and belonging (5). The concept becomes increasingly complex to define as "[e]ach new wave of immigration, each new conquest or settlement, produced notions of indigeneity that became more complicated through time" (4) and some of these "newcomers – immigrants, colonizers, and settlers – also proclaim indigeneity" (5).

(Ashcroft *Futures* 36) and, thus, always involves relations of power. Several leading postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha have developed theories of representation that demonstrate how colonial discourses construct certain images of the colonized peoples to maintain the colonial rule, but also show how the colonized can use these stereotypes to challenge the dominant representations. Similarly, scholars like Bill Ashcroft or John McLeod emphasize the resistant and subversive forces within postcolonial discourse and conceive postcolonialism as describing also the different ways of engaging and "contending with various specific forms of colonial oppression" (Ashcroft *Transformation* 12). Seizing the power of self-representation is, of course, a central element in dismantling the colonial narratives about the colonized, an objective pursued by many postcolonial literary texts (Ashcroft *Futures* 2). In *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin famously formulated that postcolonial literature engages in the efforts of "writing back" from the colonized margins to the colonial center (32) and, thus, is invested in the decolonization of culture and mind (28), which is also fundamentally an issue of language and representation. More generally, postcolonialism is often conceived as a methodology (Ashcroft *Transformation* 7), a form of talk (13), or reading strategy (Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Empire* 186) that constitutes also a political act (McLeod *Postcolonialism* 33, 39).

Similarly to postcolonialism, ecocriticism is informed by a constructionist perspective and aims to contest the authority and centrality of representational and material systems of domination. Like colonial discourses, environmental and ecological discourses rely on systems of representation in order to construct knowledge and truth. In this context, ecocriticism distinguishes between the existing natural environment and the discursive constructions of nature (Garrard 10), which always depend on its "thematic, historical and geographical particularities" (16). Ecocritical perspectives informed by social ecology and eco-Marxism question the "overarching master narratives offered by classical ecology" (145), which include the belief that a balanced ecology can only by sustained in an "undisturbed nature" (145), and explore the cultural construction of concepts such as pollution, environmental crisis, or scarcity (4-31). By studying these cultural constructs in language and literature and its relationship to the physical environment (Glotfelty xvii), ecocriticism tries to contribute to the definition, exploration, and maybe even to the resolution of 'ecological problems' (Passmore 44). From a wider perspective, ecocriticism can be considered as "the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (Garrard 5). Indeed, many ecocritical and environmental scholars strive to overcome the normativity of anthropocentrism (202).

Deep ecology adopts one of the most radical positions within this context, demanding a shift from a human-centered system to ecocentric values, which is why it is often criticized as misanthropic (24). But also other ecocritical scholars identify the Cartesian dualisms of nature/human, nature/culture, and human/non-human produced by Western culture and philosophy as the ultimate source of ecological problems and environmental crises (e.g. Plumwood, Cronon). While these anthropocentric binaries certainly play an important role within Western imaginations and many environmental problems, Greg Garrard stresses that the latter are often intertwined with "systems of domination or exploitation of humans by other humans" (31) and other more general social problems (32).

What is more, based on the assumption that "any environmental trope is susceptible to appropriation and deployment in the service of a variety of potentially conflicting interests" (16), it has been shown how imperial narratives of colonial space and environment such as the doctrine of 'terra nullius' (ní Fhlathúin, Johnston/Lawson) or Western cartography (Ashcroft *Transformations*) have constructed dominant historical truths in order to legitimize colonial practices. This reinforces the need to consider the historical enterprises of imperialism and colonialism in ecological and ecocritical terms. For example, the environmental historians Alfred Crosby and Richard Grove have formulated influential theories of 'ecological imperialism' (Crosby) or 'green imperialism' (Grove) that illustrate the environmental and ecological embeddedness of European colonialism. Additionally, Val Plumwood has revealed how the human-centered dualistic thinking that secured European imperial powers and informs the Western notion of a rational, Cartesian self, hegemonic centrism, and instrumental reason structure Western attitudes towards the environment. She illustrates that the hyper-separation of self/other, subject/object, human/nature, and human/animal fundamentally contributed to the historical practices of ecological imperialism (4-5). In this context, Clare Bradford stresses the importance of language within the imperial enterprise in relation to both postcolonial and ecological issues since the first moment of the colonial encounter:

> The first encounters between colonists and Indigenous peoples generally involved the exchange of words – the names of people, places, objects – and are emblematic of the central importance of language in colonization. Relations of colonial power were constructed through language. Place names were used to claim ownership, to define, and to make connections between the Old World and the New; language was used to divide tracts of land, producing boundaries between one group of people and another; the language of disciplines such as ethnography and anthropology was used to objectify and classify colonized peoples; and the language of treaties was frequently used to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands. (*Unsettling* 19)

The discursive power within this complex interplay of postcolonial and ecological issues, both in "the colonial/imperial underpinnings of environmental practices" (Huggan/Tiffin 3) of the past and the "continuing imperialist modes of social and environmental dominance" (2) of the present, can only be sufficiently addressed when postcolonial and ecocritical perspectives are brought together. The second part of this thesis is focuses exactly on this intersection, and aims to investigate how the two picturebooks under scrutiny question, complicate, deconstruct, or perpetuate the colonial (and neocolonial) narratives of dominance that render both the colonized people and the colonized environment available for exploitation.

2. Theorizing dystopian narratives

Following Dunja Mohr, literary dystopias are "predominantly a modern phenomenon of the twentieth century" (*Worlds* 27), which emerged as a genre in the early 1900s. While some scholars identify *We* by the Russian author Yevgeny Zamyatin from 1924 as the first dystopian novel, others refer to the British Robert Hugh Benson's *Lord of the World* (1907) as the text that marked the formation of a new literary genre, whose roots lie not only in the Menippean satire and the anti-utopian novels of the nineteenth century, but also in realist writing (Moylan *Untainted* xi). Both Benson's and Zamyatin's texts predated the internationally more popular and successful classic dystopias by Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), and others. In the twenty-first century, dystopian literature continues to experience considerable popularity. Especially in the last years, literary dystopias have swamped the book market – particularly within the branch of young adult (YA) literature –, leading to a steadily increasing use of the label 'dystopia' by both producers and consumers of literature. As a lucrative marketing device, it helps authors and editors to position their product within a competitive international marketplace; as a catchy label, it serves critics to classify a text within a booming generic category; and as a seemingly inexhaustible research field, it offers academic scholars a popular, diverse, cutting-edge object of investigation.

Historically, the emergence of literary dystopias has been heavily dependent on its literary predecessor and twin-concept utopia. This stands in a long tradition of Romantic conceptions of childhood that have fundamentally effected views on children's socialization, education (Hintz/Ostry 6), and, last but not least, literature. Since the 1990s, however, Clare Bradford et al. have observed a "noticeable trend" in children's and young adult literature (CYAL), in which "the utopian imaginings of ideal communities have been largely supplanted by dystopian visions of dysfunctional, regressive, and often violent societies" (9), and which has by now developed into a downright "explosion of dystopian fiction for young adults" (Basu/Broad/Hintz 1). Although Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*-trilogy (2008-10) is probably the most successful and influential representative, it is certainly not the first example of this YA subgenre, which goes back to novels like Lois Lowry's *The Giver* (1993). With texts such as Malorie Blackman's *Noughts and Crosses*-series (2001-08), Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies*-trilogy (2005-06), Bernard Beckett's *Genesis* (2006), Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother* (2008), James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* (2009), Lauren Oliver's *Delirium*-trilogy (2011-13), and Veronica Roth's *Divergent*-trilogy (2011-13), the literary exploration of possible new

world (dis)orders has become one of the most popular and vibrant genres in contemporary young adult literature.

While this sort of texts constitutes a rather consistent body of literature that can be clearly classified as dystopian fiction, the excessive use of the label 'dystopia' within the academic discourse on CYAL has led to an obscuration of the term. The boundaries that define dystopian writing have become blurred to such an extent that arguments can be made for categorizing almost any book as dystopian as long as it contains some sort of locus terribilis, i.e. terrible place (Garber), rendering such a genre classification hardly useful. When the definition of dystopian literature is, for example, stretched so far as to include realist historical fiction about traumatic and painful episodes in history such as the holocaust (cf. Hintz/Ostry 5) or the reeducation of indigenous North American children in Indian residential schools (cf. Bradford "Art, Pain, Children" 1), a reconsideration of the genre that allows for a more precise use of the term and the literary concept it describes becomes necessary: What exactly does and does not count as dystopian literature? Who decides based on which factors whether a text is dystopian? Is the genre determined by extratextual elements such as the paratextual labelling placed by the author or the editor, or by the reader? Which intratextual elements render a text dystopian? In order to answer these questions, a critical examination not only of the historical development of the literary genre, but first and foremost of the academic discussions on dystopian literature is called for. Therefore, the purpose of the following chapters is one of clarification, more specifically, to establish clear terms and concepts on the basis of which a definition of the (sub)genre of dystopian picturebooks can be developed.

2.1. Literary genealogy and (de)construction of a genre

The genre of dystopian writing cannot be understood without what is sometimes called its "doppelgänger" (Kumar 99) or "Janus face" (Bagchi 2): utopia and utopian literature. The term that lent the genre its name was coined by Sir Thomas More in his Modern Latin book *De optimo reipublicae statu, deque nova insula Utopia* (1516), in which he describes an ideal society on an isolated imaginary island, where everyone is treated equally. The literary tradition of utopian writing, however, goes back as far as to Ancient Greece and Plato's description of a perfect city-state ruled by philosophers in *Politeia* (in English: *The Republic*) from around 380 BC (Mohr *Worlds* 18). Derived from the Greek noun 'topos' (place) and the prefixes 'u'/'ou' (no/not) as well as 'eu' (good), the term 'utopia' forms a neologistic pun

with the homophonic words 'ou-topos' (no-place) and 'eu-topos' (good place). As such, Thomas More's utopia not only describes a place that offers the possibility for an ideal social and political order, but simultaneously conveys the sense that it is an illusion, a speculation, impossible to be actualized (Bagchi 1).

These interpretations of More's *Utopia*, in turn, have strongly shaped what Lucy Sargisson calls "the standard view" (*Utopianism* 2) or "myth" (9) of utopia as "a place, state, or condition ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs and conditions" (2), as well as the dominant general understanding of utopia(nism) as "something unattainable, an illusion that can never be realized" (Mohr *Worlds* 11). However, these vague, sometimes negatively connotated everyday usages of 'utopia' that can be found in all sorts of contexts – from politics, philosophy, and ideology to architecture, music, and literature – have to be differentiated from the literary genre of utopian (and dystopian) writing. Fundamental to the literary definition of utopia, as well as its twin-concept dystopia, is its construction through language (Suvin *Metamorphoses* 40) or, put more generally, text – which in the case of picturebooks is both visual and verbal.[3]

2.1.1. Contents, forms, and functions of utopian and dystopian literature

Over the last decades, scholars have disagreed repeatedly on what constitutes utopian literature, coming up with many different, sometimes even contradictory generic distinctions, which seem to agree only upon the fact that "[u]topian writing is a genre notoriously difficult to define" (Hintz/Ostry 2). This high variation within the definitions of utopia and utopian literature can be attributed to the different aspects that are emphasized by different scholars. Ruth Levitas has shown that depending on whether the definitions prioritize content, form, or function, they approach the genre differently and, hence, may include normative, descriptive, or analytic elements (207). Additionally, the partly unclear use of terminology has led to a blurring of meaning within the academic discourse on utopian and dystopian literature. On the one hand, a number of scholars (e.g. Sargent "Faces" 9, Sargisson *Utopianism* 2, Gadowski 144, Bagchi 2) employ 'utopia' as an umbrella term to describe both literary eutopias ('the good place') and literary dystopias ('the bad place'). Nevertheless, their use of the term and concept 'utopia' is very often still pervaded with a vision of the ideal, while the term 'eutopia' is hardly used in their texts. Other scholars, on the other hand, distinctly speak of utopias as

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[3] Following the semiotic approach of Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, in the picturebook both word and image constitute text (1).

visions of ideal scenarios but include dystopian texts and tropes in their analyses (e.g. Bradford et al.). As a consequence, it sometimes remains unclear whether the scholars in question refer to the umbrella concept in general or the eutopian branch of utopianism when speaking of 'utopias.'

In order to avoid such confusion of terminology, I will follow Dunja Mohr, who distinguishes between utopian and dystopian writing on the levels of content, form, and function, focusing on the last one. She defines utopian and dystopian literature as the textual constructions of respectively "an ideal, a 'perfect' society" and "a much worse, bad society" (*Worlds* 12). Literary utopia and dystopia, in this sense, are simultaneously "generic sibling[s] and antonym[s]" that share a "discontentment with the present" but approach this discontentment in a "diametrically different" (27) way. While both "seek to implant a desire for societal transformation" (27) in the reader, "[w]here utopia compares social vision and reality by creating difference, dystopia presupposes and thrives on the correlation and similarity of the present social order and the [dystopian] scenario" (27). In other words, utopian fiction criticizes particular sociopolitical developments in the author's – and, by extension, the (contemporary[4]) reader's – society by constructing a non-existent society that is radically different and better.[5] Dystopian fiction, in contrast, describes a society that is portrayed as different and worse but just similar enough to be recognized as a reference towards the author's (and the reader's) society, by hyperbolically exaggerating contemporary tendencies engendering social and political anxieties using eschatological archetypes (32). Typically, dystopias are constructed as corrupted from the beginning of the text as they are supposed to repel and appall the reader, while utopias are initially designed to allure the reader but might also be revealed as flawed (27). Fundamental for both literary utopia and dystopia in this context is what Darko Suvin calls their radical difference ("Dystopia" 188) in relation to the contextual society. Defined as such, dystopia not only constitutes a bad place, a locus terribilis, but a society structured by a radically worse principle than the contextual society, while utopia is governed by a radically better principle (188-89).

An important step in the generic demarcation of utopian narratives, and consequently also of dystopian narratives, is constituted by Darko Suvin's definition of literary utopias. He conceptualizes utopian writing as a "sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction"

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[4] Contemporary, in this context, means belonging to (historically and culturally) the same society as the author.
[5] In contrast to Mohr's definition of utopia, scholars following Lyman Tower Sargent would not attribute a critical function to utopian texts per se, but rather define those texts that adopt a critical perspective towards the author's contemporary society as utopian satires (Sargent "Faces" 8).

(*Metamorphoses* 61) or "social-science-fiction" (14), which, like all science fiction or "estranged fiction" (18), opens up a "strange sense of newness, a novum" (4), as it creates "a radically or significantly different formal framework – a different space/time location or central figures for the fable, unverifiable by common sense" (18). Following Darko Suvin, science fiction is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (7-8). What is more, for Suvin, the 'science' in 'science fiction' includes not only natural but also social, cultural, and historical sciences and scholarship (13). Similarly, Krishan Kumar observes a decline of the scientific utopia and a shift within science fiction "from outer space to 'inner space'" (404), while Suvin's notion of social science fiction comes close to what other authors and scholars describe as speculative fiction. As an alternative to science fiction, the concept of speculative fiction de-emphasizes the natural science component of science fiction and allows the blurring of genre boundaries, which is why it has experienced very wide application and is sometimes viewed as a supergenre including all sorts of genres that "depart from imitating 'consensus reality' of everyday experience" (Oziewicz n.p.) such as fantasy or horror fiction and their derivatives.

Both utopian and dystopian literature share two key features that shape them as subgenres of science fiction and speculative fiction: speculation and extrapolation, i.e. "conjecture on the basis of prior knowledge" (Voigts 1) and "the imaginative inhabitation of new possibilities" (Roberts 145, qtd. in Voigts 1). Based on these assumptions, Suvin influentially defines literary utopia as

> the *verbal construction* of a particular *quasi-human community* where *sociopolitical* institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on *estrangement* arising out of an *alternative historical hypothesis*. (49, emphasis added)

Among similar lines, he describes literary dystopias as utopia's pessimistic counterpart, "having sociopolitical institutions, norms, and relationships […] organized according to a *radically less perfect* principle" ("Dystopia" 189, orig. italics) than in the author's community. Several aspects of these definitions are worth highlighting. After emphasizing the linguistic and *formal* construction of the literary utopia and dystopia, Suvin introduces the notion of a "quasi-human" (*Metamorphoses* 49) aspect of the utopian/dystopian society that defamiliarizes the imagined community and sets it apart from 'our' world, but at the same time retains the anthropocentric tendency of the two genres. The notion of the quasi-human,

thus, comprises two fundamental elements of utopian and dystopian literature that are referenced in Suvin's definitions: their social *content*, which is highlighted by Suvin's description of utopias and dystopias as communities; as well as their *formal* element of textual "estrangement" (49), which is established as the central narrative device in utopian and dystopian writing by Darko Suvin and scholars following him (e.g. Kumar, Parrinder Sargisson).

In contrast to this, the much-quoted definitions of utopian and dystopian literature by Lyman Tower Sargent do not explicitly refer to any form of necessary estrangement, displacement, or defamiliarization of the fictional society, but define literary utopia (which for him means both eutopia and dystopia) as a "non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space" ("Faces" 9). However, since all fiction, as a "general term for an imaginative work" (Cuddon 270), describes non-existent societies – otherwise it would not be fiction – the mere non-existence, i.e. the fictional status of the imagined society is hardly a sufficient basis for classifying a text as utopian or dystopian. But it might be one of the reasons why, recently, a considerable number of realist texts has been considered dystopian among literary scholars (see chapter 2.2). Not least because of this, definitions of utopia/dystopia like Darko Suvin's, which highlight the estranged quality of the utopian/dystopian society, are preferable over those that disregard it.

What is more, by evoking "informative, ideological, social and affective distance" (Sargisson "Strange Places" 394), estrangement plays a key role in displacing the reader (Sisk 5-6), which permits the critical interrogation of the readers' world from the distanced perspective of the remote, imaginary utopia/dystopia (Sargisson "Strange Places" 393). As it disrupts the familiar and "counter[s] habitualization" (Parrinder 40), estrangement essentially contributes to the sociocritical *function* of utopian and dystopian narratives. At work in both utopian and dystopian narrative trajectories,[6] estrangement not only "pertains to the 'ou' [i.e. the non-existence] of utopia [as an umbrella term for eutopia *and* dystopia]" (Sargisson "Strange Places" 295) but also "facilitates the articulation of repressed or marginal voices" (396). Similarly, Bradford et al. emphasize how dystopias (and utopias) can advocate transformative

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[6] In the typical utopian narrative, the utopian community is defamiliarized through the perspective of a visitor, who journeys through the utopian society and is guided by a member of the same society (Baccolini "Breaking" 140). In turn, the visitor's "contemporaneous gaze over the new world and […] back at her/his own" (Sargisson "Strange" 416) contributes to the mediation of estrangement, establishing a comparison between the two worlds and "a (usually growing) sense of discomfort" (416). In the dystopia, the utopian visitor is typically replaced by a character inside the dystopian society questioning the oppressive system, morphing into what Dunja Mohr calls the "dystopian rebel" (*Worlds* 34), while the utopian guide becomes a representative of the dystopian regime (34).

possibilities that challenge hegemonic structures of power and ideology restraining the needs and agency of certain people or groups (16-17). Also according to Darko Suvin's definition of utopian and dystopian literature, central aspects of both genres are their cultural, social, political, and moral structures and implications. Tom Moylan attributes even more importance to the "sociopolitical" (Suvin *Metamorphoses* 49) dimensions of dystopian literature and directly aligns the very emergence of the genre with the political and economic background of the early twentieth century (Moylan *Untainted* xi):

> Dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century. A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, depression, debt, and the steady weakening of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination. […]. Dystopia's foremost truth lies in its ability to reflect upon the causes of social and ecological evil as systemic. Its very textual machinery invites the creation of alternative worlds in which the historical spacetime of the author can be re-presented in a way that foregrounds the articulation of its economic, political, and cultural dimensions. (xi-xii)

Such *functional* approaches, however, have to be treated with caution because they also imply an attribution of authorial intention (e.g. Mohr *Worlds* 27). Nevertheless, they account for the sociopolitical and ideological dimensions of dystopian literature, which always participates in contemporary sociopolitical discourses.

Closely related to the sociopolitical function of dystopian texts is its *reception* by the reader as described by literary scholars. According to them, both utopian and dystopian narratives emanate from "a strong impulse for social change" (Zipes ix) and strive towards the readers' extrapolation "from the world of the text to their actual social realities" (Bradford et al. 185) as they constitute "socially [and] materially grounded articulations of desire" (Bagchi 4). Putting it in Darko Suvin's semiotic vocabulary, fictional utopias and dystopias "presuppos[e] the existence of the author's empirical reality" (*Metamorphoses* 71), which is why they operate deictically (37) and are "always to be read as an analogy" (76). Barnita Bagchi argues that, in contrast to the frequent dislocation of space and the characteristic displacement of the reader, utopian and dystopian texts often exhibit a "desire for emplaced communities whose histories, stories, myths, and narratives have to be recovered, reinvoked, and reconfigured" and, thus, show an "important element of critique of the present" (7). Raffaela Baccolini links this sociocritical aspect of dystopian writing to the more general generic context of science fiction, which, according to her,

has come to represent a form of counternarrative to hegemonic discourse. In its extrapolation of the present, it has the potential to envision different worlds that can work as a purely imaginative (at worst) or a critical (at best) exploration of our society. ("Persistence" 519)

Within the context of CYAL, where a certain degree of pedagogical value is traditionally attributed to and demanded of literary texts, this moral aspect of dystopian literature is heightened. Stressing the typically "unequivocal clarity" (5) of the message in YA dystopias due to their "overt didacticism" (5), Basu, Broad, and Hintz hint at the interaction of entertainment and education in YA dystopias, which (like CYAL in general) tend to move between the poles of pleasing and instructing the reader at the same time – a strategy that goes back to the beginnings of children's literature advocated for by John Locke (1693) and his contemporaries:

> With its capacity to frighten and warn, dystopian writing engages with pressing global concerns: liberty and self-determination, environmental destruction and looming catastrophe, questions of identity, and the increasingly fragile boundaries between technology and the self. When directed at young readers, who are trying to understand the world and their place in it, these dystopian writings are distilled into exciting adventures with gripping plots. (Basu/Broad/Hintz 1)

In accordance with CYAL conventions, in most of these novels, the distinction between good (usually the teenage protagonist and its associates) and evil (the representatives of the oppressive system) is quite clear. At the same time, many of the texts transgress the generic utopian/dystopian antithesis and, thus, fall into line with a more general generic development that is accounted for by a number of literary scholars (e.g. Moylan, Baccolini, Sargisson, Mohr).

2.1.2. Genre hybridity and transgression

According to Tom Moylan, literary dystopias are fundamentally defined by the negotiation of what he calls a "continuum between the Party of Utopia and the Party of Anti-Utopia" (*Untainted* xiii), on whose terrain the "narrative trajectory of a dystopian text" (xiii) is played out. For Moylan, the typical dystopian text in itself already exhibits a "politically charged form of hybrid textuality" (147). Also Basu, Broad, and Hintz observe this interdependence of utopian and dystopian narrative strands in contemporary YA dystopias, which often function "as a rhetorical *reductio ad absurdum* of a utopian philosophy, extending a utopia to its most extreme ends in order to caution against the destructive politics and culture of the author's

present" (2, orig. italics). Rafaella Baccolini refers to this blurring of genre distinctions in Derridean terms as a "deconstruction of genre purity" ("Genre" 18), in the course of which generic boundaries become "permeable" and allow a "contamination from other genres" ("Persistence" 520). She places this contemporary characteristic of utopian/dystopian texts not only into the literary context of science fiction as a genre that typically resists hegemonic ideology, but also into a more general context of a poststructuralist approach towards language and literature (520).

Dunja Mohr herself notes that the distinction between utopia versus dystopia as constructions of good versus bad places/times/communities is not always as clear-cut as her and Darko Suvin's definitions might initially suggest (*Worlds* 3) – which of course also contributes to the terminological and conceptual ambiguity in the field. What is considered utopian and dystopian extratextually might be quite or even entirely different across time and space. Apart from this, the intratextual complexity of the genres has increased considerably in the last decades. On the one hand, there is a long literary tradition within utopian writing of characters disagreeing on the (im)perfection of their society, and seemingly ideal societies being exposed as dystopian (Hintz/Ostry 3). Even More's *Utopia* is sometimes read as a utopian satire, in which a critical perspective towards the author's contemporary society is adopted, rather than as a classic utopia (Sargent "Faces" 8). On the other hand, in the last decades, the genre characteristics of utopian and dystopian writing have increasingly converged and intersected into what Dunja Mohr finally comes to call "transgressive utopian dystopias" (*Worlds* 3), which form the conceptual framework of this thesis.

As the first one in trying to conceptualize the hybridization of utopian and dystopian texts, Tom Moylan coins the term "critical utopia" (*Demand* 43), by which he refers to literary texts from the 1960s and 1970s, such as Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), Samuel R. Delany's *Trouble on Triton* (1976), or Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). Following Moylan, these critical utopias dialectically combine dystopian and utopian tropes by looking also at the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within the utopia and exhibit an awareness of the limitations of the utopian genre (10-11). In analogy to this concept, Lyman Tower Sargent develops the notion of critical dystopias that distinguish themselves from classic dystopias, which typically reinstate totalitarian order and end without any allusion to social or political progress (Mohr *Worlds* 52), by including a utopian imagination within the dystopia (Sargent "Faces" 7-9). Raffaela Baccolini and Tom Moylan further develop this subgenre into a complex, meticulous

typology (e.g. Moylan *Untainted* 195). They opt to reserve the term 'critical dystopia' for works of the late 1980s and 1990s, identifying earlier dystopian novels by Katharine Burdekin and Margaret Atwood as important predecessors (188). Including texts like Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Gold Coast* (1988), Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* (1991), and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), critical dystopias are characterized by open endings that resist closure and maintain "the utopian impulse *within* the work" (Baccolini "Genre" 18, orig. italics), thus, rejecting "utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream" (Moylan *Demand* 10). In contrast to the unidimensionality of classic dystopias, whose bleak ending amounts to a warning (Sargent "Faces" 8), these new forms of dystopian narratives mobilize the "literary motor of utopian agency" (Mohr *Worlds* 53).

Based on these assumptions and Jacques Derrida's concept of 'différance,' which "subverts and operates in the gaps of binary oppositional thought" (Sargisson *Utopianism* 108), Lucy Sargissons argues for a new conception of utopianism not as a representation of perfection but as the constant renegotiation of meaning and the "endless displacement of possibility" (103). Even though Sargisson focuses on feminist writing, her assumptions can be made productive within the analysis of any utopian or dystopian text. In her theory of transgressive utopianism, "the critical function of utopia is inverted on to the genre itself" (228) and traditional meaning "constructed by a complex and hierarchical system of binary opposition" (4) is criticized and displaced. Similarly, one of the central questions to be addressed in this paper is the (post)structural character of the dystopian scenarios depicted in the selected picturebooks. Dystopian (as well as utopian) narratives are fundamentally concerned with binary oppositions such as self/other, nature/culture, rural/urban, individual/society, human/non-human and invest in their hierarchized cultural significance. The issue of interest, in this context, is whether the dystopian narratives in question are committed to the construction and reaffirmation of these binary categories, or whether they re-negotiate and deconstruct their dichotomous status.

Transgressive utopianism, however, not only destabilizes any form of binary thinking, but also moves beyond logocentrism and essentialism. Celebrating multiplicity, plurality, and difference, it refuses closure and refutes universalism (98-99). Sargisson relates these transformative tendencies of utopian and dystopian writing to Derridean deconstruction: "Deconstruction's purpose, in Derrida's hands, is to unravel, expose and transform the text. This function is also performed by utopianism, which is rooted in and acknowledges complicity with the present" (101). Dunja Mohr extends this perspective to adopt a distinctly

postmodern view of utopia and dystopia and proposes to conceive the texts that other scholars described as critical utopias (Moylan) or critical dystopias (Sargent, Moylan, Baccolini) as part of a new literary subgenre, which she calls "transgressive utopian dystopias" (Mohr *Worlds* 3). According to her, what these utopian-dystopian texts have in common is the integration of a continuous utopian subtext within the dystopian narrative, which enables the texts to criticize, destabilize, and ultimately transgress[7] the binary logics of dystopia (3).

Mohr furthermore maintains that these hybridized utopian-dystopian narratives "discard the polarization of static dystopia and static utopia, of thesis and antithesis, and thus never arrive at a definite synthesis that comprises the blueprint for perfection" (*Worlds* 51). She goes even so far as to argue that, in many cases, the distinction between the seeming antagonistic poles of utopia and dystopia has become obsolete, due to the radical generic crossfertilization and fluidity of texts (7) such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* trilogy (1984-94), and Suzy McKee Charnas's *Holdfast Chronicles*-series (1974-99). Following Dunja Mohr, these texts occupy the ambiguous in-between space of utopia and dystopia:

> Narrating the point of transition from dystopia to utopia, these narratives illustrate the process of individual and societal transition towards a better yet imperfect and, therefore, dynamic society less riven by dualisms and potentially grounded in new conceptual spaces that suspend binary logic. Since utopia can no longer be fixed, the texts never claim utopia and the utopian dystopian texts hover in the in-between, the dynamic interstitial space between classical dystopia and utopia. (270)

The poststructural deconstruction of binary oppositions does then not only take place within the utopian-dystopian text but is also integral to the conceptualization of the genre in general. It leads to a blurring and, ultimately, a collapsing of generic boundaries, which results not only in a Derridean deconstruction of genre purity and a postmodern dissolution of generic boundaries, but also in a hybridization of social functions. Similarly, dystopian picturebooks participate in a variety of both contemporary and long-established generic discourses including but not restricted to utopia, classic science fiction, cyberpunk, steampunk, fantasy, and the fable (see chapter 2.2.2) and, thus, create complex narratives that can function as prophetic warnings, radical historical critiques, and proleptic manifestations of hope and transformation at the same time.

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[7] Following Dunja Mohr, transgression "must not be misunderstood as the dissolution of binary order to produce a permanent unity; rather, transgression contests the notions of unambiguity and authenticity. It is a dynamic process of 'neither and more,' signifying multiple and previously unconceptualized possibilities beyond our persistent binary structuring" ("Transgressive" 11).

2.1.3. Dystopian alterity: Other space, other time, or other society?

By defining literary utopias and dystopias as verbal constructions of *communities* (*Metamorphoses* 49), Darko Suvin not only highlights the social aspect of both concepts, but also skillfully evades the dilemma of defining literary utopias/dystopias as constructions of either different spaces or different times. Many contemporary scholars of utopian studies and utopian/dystopian literature consider the latter future-oriented genres, subsuming dystopian writing under the umbrella of future or futuristic fiction (e.g. Bradford et al. 1, Basu/Broad/Hintz 9, Levitas 207, Mohr *Worlds* 27). This can be accounted for by the historical development of the genre of utopian writing, which experienced a transition from spatial to temporal projections, out of which dystopian literature eventually emerged. As Darko Suvin notes, utopian literature, like science fiction in general, has seen a "historically crucial shift […] from space to time" as "the locus of estrangement" (*Metamorphoses* 10) and "the locus of utopian desire" (Mohr *Worlds* 19). From the Renaissance until the end of the eighteenth century, authors like Sir Thomas More, Francis Bacon, Francis Godwin, and Voltaire described so-called "space utopias" (Mohr *Worlds* 18) that are typically set in topographically dislocated spaces such as remote islands, isolated continents, or other planets. As such, they relate not only to the spatial locus and the 'topos' in 'utopia' but, following Mohr, also to the Renaissance "urge for the exploration of unknown parts of the earth and the discovery of previously unknown continents" (18-19).

After the eighteenth century, however, when the European "mapping of the earth had come to an end with the discovery of the last continent" (19), the preferred setting of utopian narratives moved from geographically dislocated spaces to unknown times such as the future. Moreover, Mohr argues, after the century of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the foundation of the American New World Democracy, fictional constructions of egalitarian utopian societies no longer merely constituted wishful thinking, but were considered as "an attainable, concrete political act" (19).[8] At the heart of utopia, in this context, is – even if it is not (yet) now and not (yet) here – hope, which always implicates a sometime and a somewhere (Anker 28-29). In *The Principle of Hope*, Ernst Bloch describes the creative, anthropogenic utopian impulse that is "grounded in our capacity to fantasize beyond our experience, and in our ability to rearrange the world around us" (Sargisson *Utopianism* 1). Based on his and Karl Mannheim's reflections on utopia and hope, Ruth Levitas describes utopias as "expression[s] of the desire for a better way of being" (9), while Lyman Tower

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[8] This kind of history of utopian literature maintains a distinctly European/Western perspective towards the genre. Utopia and dystopia, however, are evidently not limited to Western writing and thought.

Sargent conceives utopianism as "social dreaming" ("Faces" 3). In all of these cases, the concept of utopia comprises a possible (near or distant) future temporality, which is mobilized in many of its literary realizations. In so-called "time utopias" (19) or "euchronias" (Manuel/Manuel 4) – derived from the Greek word 'chronos' (time) – such as Louis Sebastien Mercier's *L'An 2440, rêve s'il en fut jamais* (1770, in English *Memoirs of the Year Two Thousand Five Hundred*), an extrapolation into the future of the author's and the contemporary readers' society is performed along with the dislocation of space (Mohr *Worlds* 19). Inherent to this orientation of utopia towards the future is the modern view of future as progress (Abensour 30), which in turn is negated by the dystopian future.

The widespread tendency to attribute utopian and dystopian literature a generic pervasion by a sense of time (but not necessarily the future) is present also in Darko Suvin's definition of literary utopias, when he claims that their estrangement arises "out of an alternative historical hypothesis" (*Metamorphoses* 49), i.e. an "*alternative reality* […] that possesses a *different historical time* corresponding to different human relationships and sociocultural norms actualized by the narration" (71, orig. italics). As far as dystopian writing is concerned, Dunja Mohr claims that "most dystopias are time-oriented rather than located in a different space" (*Worlds* 32). Similarly, Bradford et al. attribute a futuristic quality to dystopian (and utopian) narratives in their book *New World Orders in Contemporary Children's Literature*, which is ultimately also a result of their object of investigation. Apart from its political connotations, the phrase 'new world orders' already assumes an inherent futuristic temporality.

This frequent equation of dystopian scenarios with "future world orders" (Bradford et al. 1), which is especially dominant within contemporary academic discourse on dystopianism and dystopian writing, is probably also a result of the fact that the "most overt form of dystopia" (13) is the post-disaster or post-apocalypse narrative, which is set in the future and depicts "the present as history" (13). Temporal projections and relationships in dystopian texts, however, are much more flexible and complex than this post-apocalyptic pattern suggests. In contrast to Mohr and Bradford et al., Barnita Bagchi argues that utopian and dystopian narratives move "restlessly between the past, present, and future" (5) as they can not only describe places which are "in the future or futuristic" (5), but also places which are "in the past or preservations of the past in the present" (5) or even alternate pasts, and – I would add – places or societies which are not necessarily set either in the future or in the past, but could be interpreted as both. In analogy to Dunja Mohr's differentiation between spatial and temporal utopias, a (sub)generic distinction between 'space dystopias' and 'time dystopias'

(or, following Manuel and Manuel, 'dystopias' and 'dyschronias') could be made. However, these subcategories capture only insufficiently the different aspects of dystopian (and utopian) estrangement, which is not always located within the aspects of space and/or time but can also become manifest in different forms.

Concerning utopia and utopian literature, Ruth Levitas argues that since all definitions that exclusively focus on one of the aspects of content, form, or function are problematic (8), the "most useful kind of concept of utopia would be one which […] might allow us to relate the variations in form, function and content to the conditions of the generating society" (9). The same counts, of course, for dystopias: A useful definition of dystopian writing is not limited to the cultural and historical variation of the genre but takes into account its transhistorical and transnational development and considers the potential for further development. Such a definition is necessarily wide and inclusive rather than narrow and overly specific. In this context, Miguel Abensour proposes a theory of utopia and dystopia that avoids conceptualizing them primarily as oriented *either* towards (a future) time *or* towards space. He rightly claims that these narrow, one-sided theories of utopia/dystopia are misleading since they detract from the radical otherness of both utopias and dystopias (42). Based on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, he argues for a view of utopianism and dystopianism as radical alterity(-content) outside any form of synchronic, linear temporality (42-45). Instead of defining utopian/dystopian literature as constructions of either an other space or an other time, conceiving utopia and dystopia "under the sign of the alterity" (37) implicates considering utopia/dystopia as a "totally other social" (Levinas 8, qtd. in Abensour 37). Darko Suvin already established that the utopian/dystopian reality is "the empirical reality modified" (*Metamorphoses* 71). While this modification, i.e. the estrangement, can but does not have to operate on the spatial and/or the temporal level, it always operates on the social – which leads back to Suvin's definition of utopian and dystopian writing as "social-science-fiction" (14) that views literary utopias and dystopias as "verbal construction[s] of […] quasi-human *communit[ies]*" (71, emphasis added). This, in turn, is where the alterity-content (cf. Abensour 45) of the utopia/dystopia is created through techniques of defamiliarization and reader displacement (cf. Sisk 5-6), which in turn facilitate the utopian/dystopian estrangement (cf. Suvin, Parrinder, Sargisson).

Based on these assumptions, one might be inclined to assume that if the future is not the locus of the narrative scenario itself, it rather constitutes the locus of the inherent "utopian desire" (Levitas 8) and the extratextual sociopolitical change endorsed from within the text (cf. also

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Mohr *Worlds* 19). This seems even more likely in the case of dystopian picturebooks, where the didactic and moral implications are typically presented in an overt form and are often extrapolated onto the (child) reader. Similarly, Kay Sambell argues that literary dystopias for young readers express "deep-rooted fears for the future of those children being addressed" (163). Taking into account the possibility of future extratextual utopian transformation, Raffaela Baccolini comments on the interrelation of past, present, and future within dystopian texts:

> It is in the acceptance of responsibility and accountability, often worked through memory and the recovery of the past, that we bring the past into a living relation with the present and may thus begin to lay the foundations for utopian change. (521)

Lucy Sargisson, however, refutes the assumption that utopian change always lies in the realm of the future. Within her theory of transgressive utopianism,

> [t]he function of utopian thought […] is to anticipate the possibility of radically different 'nows' […]. This new utopian function operates in the political present, not in a desired future […, thus, moving] utopia from a speculative (or concrete) future to a no place/good place that is an alternative reading of the present. (*Utopianism* 52)

It remains to be analyzed whether the dystopian picturebooks under scrutiny operate within the same framework. What is certain, however, is that contemporary utopian-dystopian narratives offer a truly "complex interplay between the actual and the possible, dream and reality, spaces and temporalities, and competing versions of the ideal or the monstrous communities" (Bagchi 5), resulting out of their intrinsic genre hybridity that precludes clear generic and functional boundaries.

2.2. Approaching a genre theory of picturebook dystopias

Following Ruth Levitas, who maintains that "definitions are tools, not ends in themselves" (2), this thesis aims to develop a definition of dystopian picturebooks in order to construct a useful basis for (1) describing an existent body of literature, which comprises sociocritical, ecocritical, postcolonial, economy-critical, and media-critical picturebook dystopias, as well as their different combinations; and (2) analyzing the aesthetic and sociopolitical structures (on the levels of content, form, and function) of an exemplary sample of two dystopian picturebooks. As difficult as a genre demarcation of dystopian picturebooks might prove against the backdrop of the blurring of utopian-dystopian genres, it is nonetheless called for due to two main reasons.

(1) The emergence of a rather consistent body of picturebooks that can be classified as dystopian and that still lacks systematic scholarly analysis: Clare Bradford, for example, has investigated the use of dystopian discourses in picturebooks, but instead of conceptualizing dystopian picturebooks as a distinct genre, she restricts her analysis to picturebooks that include what she terms "dystopic settings" ("Art, Pain, Children" 3). Notably, dystopian narratives have entered the picturebook not only in contemporary texts but since the early 1970s in publications like Bill Peet's *The Wump World* (1970) or David Macaulay's *Baaa* (1985). The originated texts have come to comprise a multifaceted body of dystopian picturebooks that negotiate a wide spectrum of sociopolitical themes, adopting a variety of critical perspectives. These include but are not limited to (1) the sociocritical – negotiating issues of identity and belonging, de-individualization and mass culture, as in Shaun Tan's *The Lost Thing* (2000), (2) the ecocritical – negotiating issues of environmental destruction and animal extinction, industrialization and deindustrialization, urbanization and pollution, overpopulation and globalization, anthropogenic climate change and climate/environmental catastrophes, as in David Macaulay's *Baaa* (1985), Graham Oakley's *Henry's Quest* (1986), Timothy Ering's *The Story of Frog Belly Rat Bone* (2003), John Light and Lisa Evan's *The Flower* (2006), Rebecca Elliott's *The Last Tiger* (2012), or Torben Kuhlmann's *Maulwurfstadt* (2015), (3) the postcolonial – negotiating issues of colonization and decolonization, imperialism and war, totalitarianism and dictatorship, hybridity and transculturalism, globalization and cosmopolitanism, as in Bill Peet's *The Wump World* (1970), Michael Morpurgo and Christina Balit's *Blodin The Beast* (1995), John Marsden and Shaun Tan's *The Rabbits* (1998), or Helen Ward and Marc Craste's *Varmints* (2007), (4) the economy-critical – negotiating issues of capitalism and consumerism, commercialization and globalization, as in Aaron Frisch and Roberto Innocenti's *The Girl in Red* (2012), Torben Kuhlmann's *Maulwurfstadt* (2015), or Italo Calvino and Lena Schall's *Das schwarze Schaf* (2017), and (5) the media-critical – negotiating issues of medialization and digitalization, propaganda and surveillance, the arbitrariness and the ambiguity of language as well as the emptiness of linguistic signs, as in Jörg Müller and Jörg Steiner's *Der Aufstand der Tiere* (1989), Aaron Frisch and Roberto Innocenti's *The Girl in Red* (2012), or Torben Kuhlmann's *Maulwurfstadt* (2015).

(2) The blurring of meaning of the generic classification 'dystopian' within academic discourse on YA novels and, particularly, picturebooks: In her article on dystopian discourse in picturebooks, Bradford includes realist picturebooks that clearly do not participate in the genre of dystopian writing, such as Enda Tantjingu Williams, Eileen Wani Wingfield, and

Kunyi McInerney's *Down the Hole* (2000) about the forced removal of Aboriginal children in Australia, or George Littlechild's *This Land is My Land* (1993) about the re-education of Native American children in Residential Schools. Moreover, while Bradford et al. look at some picturebooks that can indeed be identified as dystopian, like Shaun Tan's *The Lost Thing* (2000) or Michael Morpurgo and Christina Balit's *Blodin the Beast* (1995), they also classify books like Jeannie Baker's *Belonging* (2004) or Anthony Browne's *Zoo* (1992) as dystopian although they lack the fundamental formal element of textual estrangement (cf. Suvin *Metamorphoses* 49). While all of these picturebooks indeed describe some sort of locus terribilis, most of them are not set apart from reality, i.e. they do not include any form of alterity-content (Abensour 45), which is why they classify as realist rather than as dystopian fiction. Before a more concise definition of dystopian picturebooks can be developed, the picturebook as a medium of children's literature and as a work of art has to be discussed.

2.2.1. Introducing picturebooks

Conventionally, the picturebook is viewed as a simple literary form addressed to the youngest of readers (Nodelman *Words About Pictures* vii, Nikolajeva/Scott 260, Beckett 3) and frequently functionalized as an educational vehicle (Nikolajeva/Scott 2). Indeed, picturebooks often constitute one of the first literary encounters for children and therefore play a considerable role in children's socialization, enculturation, language acquisition, (verbal as well as visual) literacy learning (2), and, last but not least, politicization. Within the "framework generally laid out by adults for children's books" (K. 47, qtd. in Beckett 12) in Western cultural contexts, this creates a certain type of generic expectations towards picturebooks that not only include formal aspects such as

> clear-cut narrative structures, a chronological order of events, an unambiguous, preferably didactic narrative voice, and, not least, clearly delineated and fixed borders between 'fantasy' and 'reality,' between the objective truth and subjective perception (Nikolajeva/Scott 260),

but also functional aspects with regard to expected didactic implications and moral lessons. Like children's literature in general, the picturebook is traditionally "an inherently pedagogical genre" (Hintz/Ostry 7) that should not only entertain but also teach and educate the child readers. Influenced by Romantic conceptions of childhood as an idyllic, protected space (Reynolds 29), for a long time it constituted a literary "Schonraum" (Steinlein et al. 132), largely avoiding dark or painful contents (Beckett 210). Sandra Beckett succinctly

summarizes how children's literary experiences have been restricted by "[w]idespread assumptions about the limited ability of children to deal with certain topics[, which have] led to an unwritten code of proscribed subjects and to censorship or auto-censorship in children's literature" (210). Regarding these generic expectations, authors and publishers of picturebooks frequently (have to) make concessions concerning the aesthetic realization of their literary works (12).

However, in many countries around the world, innovative picturebooks transgress these rigid moral codes and taboos with regard to content-, form-, and function-related aspects, challenging the assumption that picturebooks are only directed towards children (17). Indeed, children's literature has always been shaped by its dual audience: adult and child (Hintz/Ostry 7, Nikolajeva/Scott 21, Nodelman *Hidden Adult*). These new type of "[c]rossover picturebooks" (Beckett 16), however, constitute "multilevelled works" (16) designed for readers of all ages – small children, adolescents, as well as sophisticated adults – on a variety of levels. For example, complex intertextual allusions difficult to decode for the youngest are more likely to be enjoyed by older readers. Overall, crossover picturebooks not only deal with a wide range of cross-generational topics that include profound, often contentious content but also employ "complex narrative strategies – hybrid, genres, polyfocalization, metafictive discourse, intertextuality, parody, irony and so forth – in both text and image" (Beckett 2), thus, effectively advocating "the children's right to be taken seriously despite adults' concerns" (212). Similarly, the dystopian picturebooks selected for this thesis, John Marsden and Shaun Tan's *The Rabbits* (1998) and Helen Ward and Marc Craste's *Varmints* (2007), invite different forms of reading that depend on both the age and the (literary and world) experience of the reader. But even though they are more than merely "powerful teaching tool[s]" (Hintz/Ostry 7), their dystopian and utopian discourses, shaped by "the point of view and within the value system of a discontented social class or congerie of classes, as refracted through the writer" (Suvin "Dystopia" 189), are nevertheless complicated by the didactic agendas and generic conventions of much of children's literature.

Although the establishment of the picturebook as a widespread literary format and commodity was only enabled by the development of printing technology (Nikolajeva 236), scholars generally identify Johann Amos Comenius' *Orbis sensualium pictus* (1658) as the first illustrated book specifically intended for children (e.g. Trumpener 55, Nikolajeva 236). On its 310 pages, consecutively numbered woodcut illustrations are combined with Latin and (originally) German labels and descriptions that introduce the child reader to the realms of

nature, botany, zoology, religion, and humans. As the first encyclopedia and multimodal textbook for children, it is based on Comenius' highly influential pedagogy of viewing and reflects a humanist belief in the transparency and veracity of (verbal and visual) language as well as the knowability of the world (Trumpener 55-58). In the nineteenth century, it is followed by a number of similar formats that are influenced by the naturalist's sketchbook and the panorama (56), along with parodic cautionary tales that highlight the ambiguity of text and image such as Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter* (1844). Since its beginnings, the picturebook has crossed the medial boundaries between the fine arts, prose fiction, drama, poetry, and film, integrating multiple modalities and art forms (Nikolajeva/Scott 62). Recent publications, for example, increasingly incorporate elements from sequential art forms (cf. Eisner) like comic books, graphic novels, and mangas (Trumpener 74). As a consequence, the analysis of picturebooks is characterized not only by multimodality but also by interdisciplinarity.

The fundamental formal element of the picturebook is the double spread (divided into verso and recto), which can make up one entire picture, be divided into two pictures on verso and recto or into several separate scenes or panels. The story unfolds along with the turning of the page, which becomes "crucial to the pacing and overall dramatic effect" (Robinson 21) of the picturebook. Nikolajeva and Scott maintain that, like cliffhangers in novels, so-called "pageturners" (i.e. verbal or visual details) encourage the viewer to turn the page and go on reading (152). Barbara Bader has memorably described this genre-defining, dramaturgically important moment as "the drama of the turning of the page" (1), which creates anticipation, puzzlement, or confusion in the reader that is resolved with turning to the next double spread.

Furthermore, picturebook theorists have established that the unique formal character of picturebooks is its "specific 'text' […] created by the interaction of verbal and visual information" (Nikolajeva/Scott 4). Among the first scholars to address this word-image interaction are Joseph Schwarcz (1982), William Moebius (1986), Pery Nodelman (1988), and Kristin Hallberg (1982), who bases her definition of the picturebook on the notion of "iconotext," which describes the genre-specific way of creating meaning through the inseparable entity of word and image (Hallberg 165). In the late twentieth century, scholars started to develop a differentiated metalanguage to discuss the increasingly complex and dynamic interrelations between word and image in modern picturebooks, e.g. Joanne Golden (1990), Jens Thiele (1991, 2000), and Clare Bradford (1993). Building on their works, Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott have designed an elaborated typology that describes the

multilayered variety of word-image interactions in picturebooks (12). According to them, the tension between these two different types of signs, the iconic and the conventional, its two separate modalities, mimesis (showing) and diegesis (telling), and their different means of expression, the spatial-nonlinear and the temporal-linear, creates "infinite possibilities of word-image interaction" and an "ever-expanding concatenation of understanding" as the reader "turns from verbal to visual and back again" (2). Similarly, Gunther Kress stresses the distinct logics of the verbal and visual modality, respectively associated with time and temporal sequence or space, spatial relations, and simultaneity (31). These differentiations can be traced back to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's famous distinction of temporal arts (literature) and spatial arts (fine arts) in his 1766 text *Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Mahlerey und Poesie*. Nikolajeva and Scott go even so far as to argue that the picturebook presents

> a unique challenge and opportunity in their treatment of spatiality and temporality. This area […] is also an excellent illustration of word and image filling each other's gaps, or, of even greater significance, *compensating for each other's insufficiencies*. (139, emphasis added)

While the picturebook as a discontinuous medium admittedly cannot directly depict a flow of movement, a sense of movement and duration can be conveyed through sequential images or verbal narration. It is, however, true that the visual text of picturebooks can effectively represent space, including setting as well as figures and objects in space, their spatial relations, relative sizes and positions (61), which not only place the story in a particular cultural, social, and historical context, but also reveal social hierarchies and relationships as well as psychological status and mood (83). These visual elements prove especially significant in dystopian picturebooks, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

However, although word and image might be particularly apt to respectively represent temporal or spatial relations, picturebook definitions like the above based on the deficits of verbal and visual modality disavow the narrative potential of images highlighted for example by Aron Kibédi Varga. He asserts that "auch die Malerei wird in der Zeit gelesen" (357) and that there is indeed an "autonome visuelle *narratio*" (365, orig. italics) not only within sequential or pluriscenic images but also within monoscenic images (360), i.e. images that display only one scene. The narrativity of the latter marks "die äußerste Position visueller Narrativität" (363) as it is not created intratextually but only in the moment of reception, when the reader identifies the portrayed action or moment as part of a larger narrative context. The most effective monoscenic narrative images, Varga elaborates, represent

den zentralen Augenblick […], der sowohl die Vergangenheit (Vorbereitung) wie die Zukunft (Folgen, *dénouement*) der Handlung umfaßt […] (*pregnant moment, punctum temporis*) […], der in der Poetik wie in der Tragödientheorie der 'Umschlagspunkt' oder die 'Schicksalswende' genannt wird. (363, orig. italics)

Jens Thiele has applied Varga's painting-related theory of what he calls 'perceivable visual narratio' ("wahrnehmbare visuelle *narratio*"; Varga 363) to picturebook illustration and describes the picturebook as "ein primär narratives Medium" (Thiele *Bilderbuch* 36), attributing "eine pointierte erzählerische Kraft" (47) to the image.

2.2.2. Defining dystopian picturebooks

Following John Frow, genres form an intrinsic "part of the relationship between texts and readers" (102). They offer "aesthetic markers" (Baccolini "Persistence" 519) that organize verbal (as well as non-verbal) discourse and, thus, "contribute to the social structuring of meaning" (Frow 1), which is both enabled and restricted by generic structures (10). As a "set of conventional and highly organized constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning" (10), genres are always "drenched in ideologies" (Schenck 282) and, therefore, culturally constructed (Baccolini "Persistence" 519). As a consequence, genres are to be understood as historically and culturally specific, which is also why Jacques Derrida stresses the open-endedness and permeability of generic frames that move within a continuum of genre purity and genre contamination (57-59). The tension between these two principles has not only widely determined scholarly discussions on genre theory, but also fundamentally affected the definitions of utopian-dystopian writing (see chapter 2.1.2). By emphasizing the importance of edges and margins (Derrida 58), a poststructural, postmodern perspective on genre negates the existence of a generic essence and takes a special interest in the non-typical[9] and hybrid features within genres, the fluid boundaries between genres, and the transgression of generic conventions. According to this view, genre constitutes an open and evolving concept that is subject to constant transformation, continuously fusing and diffusing into new hybridized mutations.

What is more, John Frow argues that genre is not to be conceived as something that can be found and described, as a category that exists separately from the individual texts which 'belong' to the genre, like in traditional structuralist genre theory (24). Rather, every text

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[9] Genre is often defined in terms of classification by prototype developed in the field of cognitive psychology, i.e. "the postulate that we understand categories (such as bird) through a very concrete logic of typicality. […] Rather than having clear boundaries, essential components, and shared and uniform properties, classes defined by prototypes have a common core and then fade into fuzziness at the edges" (Frow 56).

"participates" (Derrida 230) in one or several genres and, thus, also shapes and transforms them just as much as it is shaped by them (Frow 28). At the same time, genre is "performed in the activity of reading" (139), as the readers "impute" (102) genre to texts. In this sense, genres constitute "classifying statement[s]" (Rosmarin 46, qtd. Frow 102) rather than classes and serve the "explanatory purpose of critical thought" (Frow 102) by offering "horizons of expectation" (Todorov 18) that guide our reading of the text. Their underlying schemata[10] draw on generically specific, implicit knowledge shared by the reader community (Frow 101) and place generic cues or "metacommunications" (104), which invite a certain reading in terms of generic perspective. Of particular importance for the reader's generic assessment of the text is the "preliminary generic conception" (Hirsch 74, qtd. in Frow 101), which is constitutive of our subsequent understanding of the text and determined by the very first words (or images) that we read. These also include the paratextual apparatus, which is usually a product of authorial (or editorial) intention (Genette 408). In the case of YA fiction, the label 'dystopia' is frequently placed in both peritext and epitext (Genette), whereas dystopian picturebooks are hardly ever labelled as such. In light of this absence of authorial guidelines towards the genre classification of the text, picturebooks have to place other signals to evoke a generic reading as dystopian.

An additional difficulty in the definition of dystopian picturebooks is posed by the ambiguous usage of the term 'genre' within CYAL, where it is frequently applied on several levels. On the one hand, CYAL in general is sometimes described as a genre (Nodelman *Hidden Adult*)[11], while some scholars speak of the picturebook as a genre (Nikolajeva "Literacy") and others understand (YA) dystopias as a genre in its own right (Hintz/Ostry, Voigts, Basu/Broad/Hintz). As a result, the answer to the question what primarily defines the dystopian picturebook as a (sub)genre (its affiliation to CYAL, its definition as a picturebook, or its use of dystopian narrative) becomes rather complex: Are dystopian picturebooks to be considered a subgenre of dystopian literature, of the picturebook, or of CYAL in general? Which of these categories is to be given priority in the definition of dystopian picturebooks? It has already been mentioned in the introduction that Kimberley Reynolds claims that "there is no clearly identifiable body of 'children's literature' any more than there is something that could be called 'adults' literature'" (2). Moreover, since picturebooks are not per se directed

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[10] John Frow uses the concept of schema from the field of psychology, where it describes "a pattern underlying a surface phenomenon which allows us to understand that phenomenon" (83) and "to infer the whole from the part" (84).
[11] Subsuming the many-faceted literary forms of CYAL within one genre classification (i.e. CYAL), however, does not account sufficiently for but rather discounts the diversity of this literary field.

(solely) towards young readers (Beckett 16), they are not exclusively regarded as part of CYAL in this thesis. In relation to dystopian and crossover picturebooks, an unambiguous attribution of a text to the supergenre of CYAL is even more questionable.

A useful way out of the remaining generic confusions is provided by John Frow, who has developed a terminology that allows for a differentiation between semiotic medium, genre, subgenre, and mode (67). Genre as conceived by John Frow has already been discussed in detail above, while subgenre means for him a "further specification of genre by a particular thematic content" (67). What is more interesting here, however, is Frow's concept of the semiotic medium, which refers to the "material and technical matrix within which genres are embedded" (73), e.g. verbal, visual, or audiovisual text, which shape various art forms such as novels, films, or picturebooks. According to Frow, the semiotic medium itself does not constitute "a component of genre, but […] form[s] part of the framing conditions which govern and may signal generic structure, and [has] direct consequences for the structural organisation of genre" (73). Based on this assumption, it can be concluded that dystopian picturebooks place other types of generic cues than, for example, dystopian novels due to their different media structures, which offer different possibilities to create meaning.

Picturebook dystopias necessarily distinguish themselves from YA or adult dystopias in a variety of aspects. First of all, since the picturebook is limited to a considerable smaller number of pages than the novel, picturebooks have to rely on "implications supplied by the reader" (Trexler 24) and necessarily reduce the complexity of sociopolitical issues and character developments.[12] Maintaining a balance between symbolic abstraction and reduction on the one hand and recognizable similarity to the contextual society on the other hand, they present (if at all) metaphorical solutions rather than catalogs of instructions or literary blueprints for political engagement. In that way, they confirm Lucy Sargisson's notion of transgressive utopianism, and are "catalytic to revolutionary thought rather than […] didactic" (*Utopianism* 42), although their moral implications often prevail. It remains to be analyzed whether the selected picturebooks propagate a truly creative change or a nostalgic return to the past, and whether they propose a transgressive, new perspective as described by Dunja Mohr in her concept of transgressive utopian dystopias.

In contrast to YA dystopias, dystopian picturebooks do not draw on narrative forms such as the Bildungsroman, the coming-of-age novel, or romance (Basu/Broad/Hintz 6, Hintz/Ostry

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[12] Following Nikolajeva and Scott, "picturebooks tend to be plot-oriented rather than character-oriented. Further, […] most characters are static rather than dynamic, and flat rather than round" (82-83).

9) because they do not engage in adolescent concerns of growing up. Nevertheless, they frequently set up a confrontation between the adults' and the children's world similar to the opposition of adults and adolescents in YA dystopias (cf. Hintz/Ostry 1). If there is a child protagonist – which is not the case in the two picturebooks selected for this thesis – they almost always appear as the catalyst for utopian transformation or at least as the locus for its potential, e.g. in Shaun Tan's *The Lost Thing* or John Light and Lisa Evan's *The Flower*. Influenced by Romanticism and Romantic views of children as innocent and not yet rationalized (Reynolds 29), the concept of the child saving the adults has a long tradition in literary history (10) and has become a popular motif in CYA fantasy fiction (Klaus 18). Similarly to YA and adult dystopias, the child protagonist of dystopian picturebooks usually constitutes a character situated inside the dystopian society who begins to question the oppressive system, morphing into what Dunja Mohr calls the (YA or adult) "dystopian rebel" (*Worlds* 34). In most picturebook dystopias, in contrast, the child acts alone and intuitively, (more or less) unaware of their momentous role, unlike most teenagers in YA dystopias, who usually act from within a collective of like-minded people (cf. Hintz/Ostry 10). In dystopian picturebooks, the YA dystopian rebel is, thus, transformed into the child savior, who challenges (as in *The Lost Thing*) and sometimes even begins to dismantle (as in *The Flower*) the oppressive adult system.

Of special significance for the aesthetic strategies of picturebooks to create dystopian (and, subsequently, also utopian) narratives is, of course, their multimodality. In this context, John Frow's notion of modes, which function as "qualifications or modifications of particular genres" (65) that "specify thematic features and certain forms and modalities" (65) of the genre and are usually expressed in an adjectival sense (67), becomes useful. For example, 'gothic' in the genre description 'gothic thriller' marks a specific "coloring" (67) of the genre thriller, and in 'satirical sitcom' the 'satirical' identifies a certain tone of the generic classification sitcom. In their portrayal of the dystopian society, dystopian picturebooks draw on a range of modes, which include but are not limited to (1) the *fabulous* (stemming from the genre of the fable), (2) the *science-fictional* (meaning natural science fiction, not Suvin's concept of social science fiction), and (3) the *fantastic* (referring to the genre of fantasy/the fantastic) – for a more detailed discussion of the individual modes see below. In most dystopian picturebooks, the estrangement and alterity-content are not so much implicated on the level of space or time,[13] but rather on the level of modality (realism vs. non-realism) and,

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[13] Notable exceptions include Graham Oakley's *Henry's Quest*, whose narrative is located in a post-apocalyptic, deindustrialized, apparently future scenario.

by extension, society. By modifying the reality degree of the texts, dystopian picturebooks typically create not spatial or temporal, but modal dystopias of a "totally other social" (Levinas 8, qtd. in Abensour 37). For example, in *Varmints*, *The Lost Thing*, or *The Story of Frog Belly Rat Bone*, fantastic elements (which cannot be explained by science or rationality; cf. Clute/Grant "Fantasy") are included, whereas *The Wump World* and *The Flower* primarily employ elements of science fiction (i.e. Suvian novums that can be explained in scientific or rational terms; cf. Cuddon) and books like *The Rabbits*, *Baaa*, or *Maulwurfstadt* draw more heavily on elements of the fable (using anthropomorphized animals, inanimate objects, or other artificial personae as characters). In the two picturebooks selected for this thesis, different combinations of the science fictional, the fabulous, and the fantastic mode (see chapter 3.1) fundamentally contribute to the alterity-content (Abensour 45) of the dystopias and, thus, engender their estrangement (Suvin *Metamorphoses* 49).

Ad (1): The fable, as defined by J. A. Cuddon, describes a "short narrative in prose or verse which points [at] a moral" and normally includes anthropomorphized "non-human creatures or inanimate things" as characters (256). Dystopian picturebooks in which the fabulous mode is particularly dominant include *Maulwurfstadt*, *Baaa*, *The Rabbits*, and *Der Aufstand der Tiere*. The issue of anthropomorphization becomes of particular interest with respect to the human/animal dualism discussed in chapter 3.2.3, as well as in relation to the animalization of the indigenous population of the colonies (see chapter 3.2.2).

Ad (2): Corresponding to the conventional conception of science fiction as pervaded by technology, natural science, and rationality, Jeff Prucher defines what I would like to call natural science fiction – in contrast to Suvin's broad notion of science fiction that also includes social science fiction – as

> a genre (of literature, film, etc.) in which the setting differs from our own world (e.g. by the invention of new technology, through contact with aliens, by having a different history, etc.), and in which the difference is based on extrapolations made from one or more changes or suppositions; hence, such a genre in which *the difference is explained (explicitly or implicitly) in scientific or rational, as opposed to supernatural, terms.* (n.p., emphasis added)

An essential part of the definition of any kind of science fiction forms what Darko Suvin has termed "cognitive estrangement" (*Metamorphoses* 4) and what Farah Mendlesohn describes as "the sense that something in the fictive world is dissonant with the reader's experienced world" ("Introduction" 5). In contrast to social science fiction, natural science fiction creates this difference not so much on an internal social but on an external "superficial level […] by

shifts of time, place and technological scenery" (5) and is defined by its tropes that are technological rather than magical or fantastical (*Inter-Galactic Playground* 9). Following Farah Mendlesohn, the most characteristic narrative strategy of science fiction in general is the so-called "sense of wonder" ("Introduction" 3), which has informed (social and natural) science fiction since its beginnings and on whose basis other literary structures characteristic of science fiction, such as 'the grotesque' (Csicsery-Ronay) or 'consequences' (Mendlesohn), 'the novum' (Suvin) or 'dissonance' (Mendlesohn), 'cognitive estrangement' (Suvin) or 'rupture' (Mendlesohn), have developed (4-5). Dystopian picturebooks draw on the (natural) science-fictional mode not only by including "dissonant" (5) elements that can be explained rationally or scientifically such as space ships and futuristic technology (e.g. *The Wump World*). Many of their bleak cityscapes also evoke the aesthetics of urban dystopias in cyberpunk fiction, film, and architecture[14] (e.g. *Varmints*, *Der Aufstand der Tiere*), while the material aspect of the visual, appearing frequently as steel and rust, and hybrid fusions of technology and organism refer to characteristic elements of steampunk[15] (e.g. *The Rabbits*, *The Lost Thing*, *Maulwurfstadt*).

Ad (3): In contrast to realist fiction and natural science fiction, fantasy or fantastic texts can be conceived as telling a story which is either "impossible in the world as we perceive it" or set in an impossible "otherworld" (Clute/Grant "Fantasy" 338). For Tzventan Todorov, the fantastic is constituted by the

> Unschlüssigkeit, die ein Mensch empfindet, der nur die natürlichen Gesetze kennt und sich einem Ereignis gegenübersieht, das den Anschein des Übernatürlichen hat. Der Begriff des Fantastischen definiert sich also aus seinem Verhältnis zu den Begriffen des Realen und des Imaginären […]. Das Fantastische liegt im Moment dieser Ungewißheit; sobald man sich für die eine oder die andere Antwort entscheidet, verläßt man das Fantastische (34).

Following Todorov, the fantastic is a very specific term that includes only a very specific kind of texts that are primarily defined by the effect they provoke in the reader: the moment of hesitation and suspension between belief and disbelief of the supernatural. As such, the fantastic is situated between the literary genres of the uncanny, characterized by the reader's

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[14] Following John Clute and John Grant, cyberpunk constructs "a future where industrial and political blocs may be global (or centred in Space Habitats) rather than national, and controlled through information networks; a future in which machine augmentations of the human body are commonplace, as are mind and body changes brought about by Drugs and biological engineering" ("Cyberpunk" n.p.).

[15] The term 'steampunk' was coined in analogy with 'cyberpunk' and "can best be described as technofantasy that is based, sometimes quite remotely, upon technological anachronism. […] a marriage of urban fantasy and the alternate-world tradition." (Clute/Grant "Steampunk" 895). According to the *Steampunk Magazine*, steampunk is "an aesthetic technological movement" that "re-envision[s] the past with the hypertechnological perceptions of the present" (4).

sense of fear, and the marvelous, which contains supernatural elements that do not induce any form of hesitation in the reader (55-70). In contrast to Todorov, Farah Mendlesohn defines the fantastic much more broadly but also in terms of the relationship between reader and author, which she describes as dialectic (*Rhetorics* xiii). In *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, she develops a poetics of fantasy and identifies four categories of the fantastic, which are determined

> by the means by which the fantastic enters the narrated world. In the portal-quest, we are invited through into the fantastic; in the intrusion fantasy, the fantastic enters the fictional world; in the liminal fantasy, the magic hovers in the corner of our eye; while in the immersive fantasy we are allowed no escape. (xiv)

Most dystopian picturebooks that draw on the fantastic mode use the immersive fantastic mode (e.g. *Varmints*), which is also the category that is closest to (natural) science fiction, both of which employ an "irony of mimesis" (xx). But also in general, fantasy and science fiction seem closely connected in Mendlesohn's definitions. She argues that, like science fiction, the fantastic constructs a "sense of wonder" (xiii), depends on a "consensual construction of belief" (xiii), and constitutes a mode rather than a genre (Levy/Mendlesohn 3). According to Mendlesohn, in some cases, the distinction between science fiction and fantasy becomes so difficult, that the only difference is that the immersive fantasy texts are "set in apparently archaic worlds that are not connected to ours" (xxi). However, this distinction seems insufficient and inaccurate. Instead of differentiating fantasy/the fantastic and (natural) science fiction based on the connection between the intratextual and extratextual world, it seems more useful to me to distinguish the two genres based on the parameter of (im)possibility as proposed by John Clute and John Grant. In their *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, they argue that "the most significant difference is that sf [=science fiction] tales are written and read on the presumption that they are *possible* – if perhaps not yet" ("Fantasy" 338, orig. italics), which echoes Jeff Prucher's definition of (natural) science fiction as a genre that constructs a world whose difference to our world can be explained "in scientific or rational, as opposed to supernatural, terms" (n.p.). Similarly, Tzventan Todorov regards science fiction as an aspect of the marvelous where the supernatural is explained in rational terms according to laws that do not (yet) apply within contemporary natural science (73).

Following John Frow's model, I would argue that dystopian picturebooks can be identified as participating in the genre of dystopia within the semiotic medium of the picturebook – more specifically, the interdependence of word and image (cf. Thiele *Bilderbuch* 42) –, whose subgeneric variations include mostly critical dystopias and transgressive utopian dystopias,

but (unsurprisingly) hardly any classical dystopias.[16] Frow's differentiation between genre, semiotic medium, and mode not only effectively replaces fuzzy conceptions of the notion of genre by introducing useful and more precise terminology, but also allows us to capture the generic convergence and hybridity within contemporary dystopian narratives including dystopian picturebooks, which fuse elements from the verbal and visual traditions of dystopia, utopia, science fiction, fantasy, fable, and other related genres. The complex amalgamation of different literary modes and genres and other media, however, is not a feature unique to dystopian picturebooks. Indeed, Jens Thiele has classified it as intrinsic to picturebook aesthetics:

> Es scheint so, als könne die Spezifik des Bilderbuchs nur unter Einbeziehung der anderen narrative Medien erfaßt werden, denn auf eine komplexe Weise bündeln sich viele ästhetische Merkmale in diesem Genre, so daß textliche, bildnerische und dramaturgische und filmische Formen des Erzählens ineinandergreifen und den Rahmen für eine theoretische Bestimmung setzen. (*Bilderbuch* 39-40)

Similarly, Sandra Beckett has argued that especially crossover picturebooks have "a remarkable propensity for hybridization ("Boundary-Breaking" 45), drawing for example on entertainment media, cinematography, or specific artistic movements.

In dystopian picturebooks, the alterity-content is usually either constructed by both word and image or by the visual text only,[17] leaving the verbal text to describe the story in such a way that it does not necessarily place the scenario in an estranged dystopian society but leaves room for different interpretations. This is the case, for instance, in Italo Calvino and Lena Schall's *Das schwarze Schaf* as well as in Helen Ward and Marc Craste's *Varmints*, whose verbal text does not include any form of estrangement. Both the verbal narrative in *Varmints* and *Das schwarze Schaf* do not necessarily invite a dystopian reading. Only the images add alterity-content, induce the estrangement, and thus create the dystopia.

Multimodal texts can employ a variety of visual strategies to construct such an estranged dystopia. As one of the most salient visual features in contemporary dystopian picturebooks, the use of space and coloring, such as extreme light and dark contrasts, exaggerated spatial proportions, strongly exaggerated, distorted, or fragmented perspectives, indispensably

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[16] Notable picturebooks that end pessimistically and, thus, remain within the dystopia are Italo Calvino and Lena Schall's *Das schwarze Schaf* and (to a certain extent) also Aaron Frisch and Roberto Innocenti's *The Girl in Red*.
[17] So far, I have not encountered any picturebook that tells a realist story on the visual level and includes alterity-content exclusively on the verbal level. This might be accounted for by the direct effect images have on the viewer (cf. Nikolajeva/Scott 1), based on which it can be assumed that a realist visual depiction of a scenario makes it difficult, maybe even counterintuitive to read the story as an estranged dystopia even if alterity-content is included in the verbal mode.

contributes to the narrative. In *Varmints*, for instance, the characters shrink into de-individualized, miniaturized types, while the intimidating dark urban space viewed from panorama or bird's eye perspectives visually expands over the entire double spreads, which underpins the critique of postmodern urban mass society in the picturebook. In dystopian picturebooks, space, setting, and colors then not only create effective visual impressions but carry important layers of meaning and, thus, gain narrative functions (cf. Nünning 46, Prestel 27-28). In many dystopian picturebooks, they amount to genre-distinctive portrayals of a so-called "gestimmter Raum" (cf. Ströker 22, Hoffmann 47), which is characterized by what Elisabeth Ströker calls the atmospheric (23) constructed by the use of colors, forms, sizes, and perspectives. Beyond creating a certain mood and commenting upon social hierarchies, space and setting of dystopian picturebooks establish generic expectations as they provide "a pervasive affective climate that sets the reader's emotion in response to a particular register" (Nikolajeva/Scott 61). Following Gerhard Hoffmann, the 'gestimmte Raum' is particularly apt for foreshadowing upcoming events and creating expectations in the reader/viewer due to its intersubjectivity which combines both subjective and objective components of literary space. While the 'gestimmte Raum' is, of course, fundamentally shaped by the subjective perspective of the experiencing subject, it nevertheless maintains the objectivity of space by making the 'gestimmte Raum' experienceable for the readers/viewers (55).

What is more, the use of space and coloring in dystopian picturebooks can reinforce their critical discourses, which, in most cases, are not explicitly spelled out by the verbal text but are conveyed indirectly through the image and have yet to be decoded by the (child) reader. Additionally, most of the detailed description of the non-existent society characteristic of utopian and dystopian literature (cf. Sargent "Faces" 9, Bagchi 2) is assumed by the image, which can depict their "topographical as much as moral-political contours" (Bagchi 2) – e.g. through spatial relations and proportions – not as elaborately but just as, if not more effectively and immediately, as verbal text in dystopian novels. Instead of merely forming the spatiotemporal backdrop of the story, setting and space, thus, become integral to the genre of the dystopian picturebook itself.

3. Dystopian picturebooks at the nexus of postcolonial and ecocritical politics

For the second part of this thesis, two dystopian picturebooks have been selected to serve as generic examples that are subjected to a more detailed analysis. *The Rabbits* by John Marsden and Shaun Tan (1998) and *Varmints* by Helen Ward and Marc Craste (2007) negotiate two of the sociopolitical themes commonly addressed in dystopian picturebooks. Combining postcolonial and ecocritical discourses, they relate processes of colonization that come with destructive consequences not only for the indigenous population, who is dispossessed of their country and their communities, but also for the environment, which experiences the forces of urbanization, industrialization, and agrarization up to the point of almost total devastation. Informed by the "'politics of knowledge' about colonization, relations between indigenous and non-indigenous people, and the projected futures of postcolonial societies" (Bradford *Unsettling* 4), the selected dystopian picturebooks participate in the construction and deconstruction of ideologies and ideas about colonization and (post)colonial identities.

From the sixteenth century until the late twentieth century, the British Empire constituted one of the world's leading authorities of imperial power and control. Its colonial endeavors lasted around four hundred years and included areas of land on all five continents. The two picturebooks under scrutiny are published in countries that were and continue to be shaped by their colonial and imperial histories within the British Empire, including both the former settler colony[18] of Australia (*The Rabbits*) as well as the formerly colonizing power Great Britain (*Varmints*). While *Varmints* remains entirely indefinite as to its intratextual cultural and national context, the historical and symbolical references to the colonization of Australia in *The Rabbits* explicitly situate the picturebook in a concrete national Anglocolonial context. Overall, both picturebooks look back towards European colonial histories and can therefore be read analogous to the settler colonies of the British Empire. Through the effective use of the narrative techniques of ellipsis and summary, the texts construct a narrated time that probably covers several decades or possibly even centuries. In a quick run through the history of the utopian-dystopian other-world, the readers are left to fill the gaps in between the

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[18] In postcolonial theory, so-called 'settler colonies' are distinguished from 'invaded colonies' (such as the colonies in Africa and Asia), which are a consequence of 'classic colonialism,' where "a small group of colonists occupy a land far from the colonial metropolis (*métropole*) and remain a minority, exercising control over a large indigenous population" (Weaver 223, orig. italics). In contrast to this, 'internal colonialism' creates settler colonies (such as Australia or the United States), where "the native population is swamped by a large mass of colonial settlers who, after generations, no longer have a *métropole* to which to return. *Métropole* and colony thus become geographically coextensive" (223, orig. italics).

narrated moments with the help of their reading experience and their cultural knowledge about the (British) colonization of other continents like Australia, Africa, and the Americas.

3.1. Modal dystopias of an other society

Both picturebooks create their dystopias on the social rather than on the spatial or temporal level. In fact, there are no definite explicit specifications where or when the story is located, although *The Rabbits* unarguably points towards an Australian context through mostly visual but also some verbal historical, literary, and ecological references, while *Varmints* does not explicate its temporal or spatial setting. Both picturebooks are told from a retrospective point of view, whose introductory lines, "Many grandparents ago […]" (*The Rabbits*, DPS4) and "There was once […]" (*Varmints*, DPS3), establish a considerable temporal – but not necessarily emotional – distance towards the narrated events. In the creation of its estranged other-society, *The Rabbits* dominantly draws on the fabulous mode as both protagonist groups are portrayed as (visually defamiliarized, but nevertheless identifiable) animals. The eponymous rabbits take the role of the colonizers, while the colonized are only referred to by a collective "we" in the text but depicted as numbat-like creatures, a small marsupial native to Australia and classified as an endangered species, in the images.[19] Among other things, it is due to this principal use of the fabulous mode that the tale of *The Rabbits* obtains its allegorical character (see chapter 3.2.3). On the visual level, *The Rabbits* sometimes also uses the science-fictional mode by including surreal futuristic technology that goes unmentioned in the eminently sparse text, whose short, downright sentences avoid any direct description of visual impressions of the external environment, focusing instead on the main elements of action.

In chapter 2.2.2, it has been established that dystopian picturebooks can create their alterity-content either through both the visual and the verbal text, as in *The Rabbits*, or only through the images. The latter is the case in *Varmints*, where only the illustrations include alterity-content by drawing on the fantastic (and partly the science-fictional) mode, while the verbal narrative remains entirely realistic, if considered separately. Within Nikolajeva and Scott's model of a continuum between word-oriented and image-oriented texts, *Varmints* constitutes a classic counterpoint in modality (24) as the images (non-realist) invoke a different modality

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[19] For the purposes of this thesis, the colonizers will be referred to as 'Rabbits' and the nameless indigenous creatures as 'Numbats' in order to highlight their non-biological, alienated representation.

than the words (realist). In the written text, the characters are referred to only by personal pronouns or, in the case of the invaders, as "OTHERS" (DPS5, orig. capitals), whereas the images show both of them as fantastic creatures resembling rabbits. In general, the verbal descriptions always remain vague and general, leaving considerable space for interpretation. It is only the visual text that fixes the verbal narration in a dystopian scenario and, for example, interprets the ominous "SAFER place" (DPS13, orig. capitals) that comes to offer a new home for the colonized population as supernatural or science-fictional enormous brightly glowing bubbles floating high in the sky. Like in *The Rabbits*, the text mostly refrains from describing the external environment in detail, which is instead depicted by the images. On the verbal level, the focus lies on the main elements of action, the internal psychological and emotional developments of the characters, and the consequences for the environment.

In relation to the similarity of their characters – both picturebooks include rabbits or rabbit-like creatures –, their (visual and verbal) aesthetics, and their narrative structure, it seems likely that Helen Ward and Marc Craste created *Varmints* against the backdrop of John Marsden and Shaun Tan's *The Rabbits*. Regardless of whether *Varmints* is indeed intended as a direct response or rewriting of its predecessor, the significant similarities between the two picturebooks establish compelling points for comparison, especially in relation to the aspects in which the narratives diverge.

In accordance with the traditions of dystopian writing, both picturebooks recur to the use of eschatological archetypes such as the myth of the apocalypse and the post-apocalypse motif. However, instead of locating their narrative in a dystopian post-apocalyptic scenario like many traditional dystopias do, the beginnings of the picturebooks situate the reader in a utopian pre-'apocalyptic' scenario that is shaped by an idyllic preindustrial character. In the following, the picturebooks narrate the deteriorating, apocalyptically charged developments, leading to an almost-apocalypse that creates a dystopian world which is partially resolved in the end, leaving the reader with hope for an improved post-'apocalyptic' world. Despite occupying the major part of both narratives, the dystopia itself is only a transitory stage between an idealized before and a transformed utopian-like afterwards. Like many other dystopian picturebooks, the texts under scrutiny follow the pattern of utopia > dystopia > transformed *utopia (as future outlook), whose narrative is driven by the tensions and ambiguities between the temporary dystopia, its preceding utopia, and the envisaged/desired *utopian future, which is not an exact repetition but a reconstruction of the initial utopia under new parameters and which might correspond to the extratextual political present. Since both

texts are clearly directed at a dual audience, the refusal of psychological and imaginative closure in form of a happy ending that supplies all answers and solutions cannot be explained simply by the classic conventions of children's literature (cf. Sambell 172). In fact, the integration of utopian hope and transformation at the end stands in the literary tradition of critical dystopias (cf. Moylan, Baccolini) and utopian dystopias (cf. Mohr), which are characterized by open, ambiguous endings that "never claim utopia" (*Worlds* 270) but retain the promise of a new beginning.

3.2. (Socio-)Spatial dimensions: Negotiating dominant power structures

Literary scholars influenced by poststructural, postcolonial, and feminist theory have shown that (Western) literature frequently relies on cultural and ideological dualisms, constructing a "meta-pandemonium of literary opposites" (Mohr *Worlds* 1). In general, all literary texts are informed by (over or covert) ideologies (Bradford *Unsettling* 14). In particular, literary dystopias highly invest in the dichotomous dynamics of cultural binaries such as self/other, white/black, male/female, nature/culture, center/margin, body/mind, in which one of the oppositions is constructed as dominant. Drawing on their ideological significance passed on in Western cultural memory, dominant symbolic orders, and thought structures, literary dystopias negotiate the asymmetrical power structures inherent in these antagonized dualisms. Dunja Mohr argues that dystopian fiction is predisposed to challenge and transgress the violent hierarchies inscribed in Western binary oppositions, since it expresses a fundamental discontent with the status quo and often introduces radical paradigm changes. Nevertheless, many dystopian texts ultimately remain within and reinforce the binarisms they seek to dismantle (*Worlds* 50). Instead of assuming that dystopian texts are intrinsically progressive with regard to the ideological systems in which they are embedded, I am interested in the extent to which the dystopian picturebooks under scrutiny indeed transgress or in fact reinscribe dominant naturalized ideologies and hegemonic power structures.

The study of the structures of binarism was first established by the French structural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who demonstrated that signs become meaningful not only by their reference to extralinguistic objects, but also and primarily by their opposition to other signs (12). Poststructural and postcolonial theories have illustrated how the binary logic of imperial ideology and colonial discourse have constructed and actively perpetuated the relations of dominance created by the dualisms of colonizer/colonized, civilized/primitive, center/margin,

métropole/empire (Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Post-Colonial* 19). It has been shown that the rhetoric of colonialism serves to privilege one of the binary oppositions at the expense of the other (19), naturalizing the superiority and normality of the colonizers and, thus, accommodating the imperial impulses of exploitation and civilization (20). Similarly, Val Plumwood has shown how nature has been constructed as culture's other within a dualistic paradigm similar to colonial discourse (*Environmental Culture* 3-5, 29). In this context, discourses of place in general, especially the relational dimensions of space, movement, and characters, as well as colonial constructions and negotiations of space in particular become of vital importance.

Central to all of these dichotomies is the dialectic opposition between us/the self, i.e. the West, and them/the other, i.e. everything other than the West. This self-other division imposed by imperialism, in which the other is typically described "in a series of negative terms that serve to buttress a sense of the West's superiority and strength" (McLeod 41), serves to constitute Western and non-Western identity. In general terms, the existence of others is fundamental for the definition and the location of the self (Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Post-Colonial* 154). However, it is through colonial discourses that the colonized are produced as "a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (Bhabha 101), a process which Gayatri Spivak has termed 'othering' and which constructs the colonized other as object and the colonizing self as subject. But just as the other exists only in relation to the self, the self needs the other as a consolidation of the self's own subject status (Spivak 247). Similarly, Frantz Fanon has described the "absolute reciprocity" (217) between the other and the self, both of which crucially rely on the "concept of recognition" (217). Both Spivak's and Fanon's considerations are influenced by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's idea of the dialectic, which is constituted by an antithetical dichotomy, such as the master and the slave, that is resolved through the processes of negation and sublation ('Aufhebung'), the latter of which means the simultaneous overcoming and preservation of the dialectical oppositions (Morton 162).

The gaze of the Western self onto the colonial other is intrinsic to many children's texts. Clare Bradford observes that most children's literary representations of colonization and indigeneity are produced by white or Western authors – the selected picturebooks are a case in point – and are therefore "filtered through the perspective of white culture" (*Unsettling* 10), which according to her is seldom "free of stereotyped or colonial views, since the ideologies of the dominant culture are so often accepted as normal and natural and are thus invisible" (10). The

following section of this thesis investigates how *Varmints* and *The Rabbits* negotiate the dualisms of self/other, colonizers/colonized, civilized/primitive, nature/culture, rural/urban, human/non-human, human/animal, human/machine, center/margin, individual/society, and child/adult as informed by colonial and ecological ideologies. More specifically, it will be analyzed to which extent the narratives perpetuate or transgress these binary oppositions, how they mobilize postcolonial and ecocritical discourses in order to do so, and to what extent they perpetuate, problematize, or deconstruct colonial stereotypes, fantasies, and anxieties about the indigenous people, the settlers, and the colonized land.

3.2.1. Colonizers – colonized: Negotiating the paradigm of self/other

In utopian fiction, a common narrative strategy is constituted by the visit of a stranger (usually from a society similar to the author's one) to the utopian other-society and the recordings about his/her discoveries and reactions. Typically, this visitor is guided by a member of the utopian society who acts as an intratextual and extratextual mediator between his/her society and the visitor as well as the readers (Baccolini "Breaking" 140). This "'stranger in a strange land' strategy" (Bradford et al. 23) contributes to the defamiliarization of the utopian other-society that is usually viewed from the perspective of the visitor. The picturebooks under scrutiny invert this narrative perspective, situating the point of view inside of what is initially constructed as a utopian other-society that is visited, or rather invaded, by (Europeanized) outsiders.

Verbally, both picturebooks are narrated from the perspective of the colonized, by a homodiegetic collective narrator (*The Rabbits*) and a focalized heterodiegetic narrator (*Varmints*) respectively. By representing the story from the point of view of the indigenous people, the picturebooks defamiliarize European settler practices and construct the invaders, unlike dominant forms of representation, as others. At the same time, the indigenous perspective that is historically constructed as other is familiarized. In *Varmints*, the colonizers are even explicitly referred to as "OTHERS" (DPS5, orig. capitals) and in *The Rabbits*, the perspective of the Numbats is reinforced by the fact that they remain verbally unnamed and uncategorized, which counters a Western outside perspective that would, in contrast to the indigenous people themselves, immediately label the Numbats as 'indigenous' or 'Aboriginal.' This verbal decentering of the "'automatic' view of culture and history" (Fisher 164) not only facilitates a reexamination and reevaluation of the hegemonic perspective on

colonization and history (see chapter 3.3), but also subverts the Western domination of language and the written word. By subverting the bipolar oppositions of colonial self and colonized other, the picturebooks open up a "space of contestation and opposition for [a group…] whose subject position hegemonic discourse does not contemplate" ("Genre" 18), which, according to Raffaela Baccolini, constitutes a typical feature of critical dystopias.

However, picturebooks construct narrative perspective not only by the verbal text but also through the images. Following Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, pictures are particularly apt to convey point of view, i.e. focalization, but limited in their possibilities of directly expressing narrative voice, introspection, and internal focalization (117-18). Nevertheless, Nikolajeva and Scott acknowledge that images "have their own expressive means" (119) to convey the abovementioned narrative effects, as will be seen in the following analysis. Clare Painter, J. R. Martin, and Len Unsworth have shown that the viewer of a picture(book) can be "positioned to assume different viewing personas" (18), for example, that of an outside, unmediated observer or as a (to some extent) internal participant in the narrated world by establishing a relationship/contact with or identification as one of the characters. In bimodal narratives, they elaborate, these different possibilities "may harmonise with or counterpoint the focalization provided by the verbal narration" (18).

For the most part of *Varmints*, the pictures take over the perspective of the indigenous population, oscillating between positioning the viewer as an external observer (in distanced frontal long shots of the cityscape) and establishing a close relationship between the viewer and the characters. The latter is achieved by portraying the characters as gazing directly at the viewer, by following the visual perspectives of an indigenous protagonist and, last but not least, by positioning the viewers as character. Additionally, the images systematically follow Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's principle of the placement of 'New' and 'Given' elements in order to visually reposition the colonial object as subject. In their "grammar of visual design" (1), Kress and van Leeuwen differentiate between the different placements of elements within the image composition depending on their information value (209). In cultures that write from left to right, elements positioned right of the center usually represent something 'New,' something not yet known or agreed upon by the viewer, while elements on the left-hand side are presented as 'Given,' something known, familiar, and agreed upon by the viewer (181). Accordingly, when *Varmints* first introduces the invaders or the glowing bubbles, the natives are always positioned on the left-hand side and, thus, presented as Given, while the New elements are presented on the right side (e.g. DPS5, 12, 13), which creates the

impression that the story is told from the perspective of the natives. Additionally, when the natives and the invaders first meet (DPS5), the invaders' movement from right to left inverts the traditional Western direction of forward-movement, progress, and future-orientation (cf. Lakoff/Johnson 24, 54-6, 138, Kress/van Leeuwen 191). In contrast, the indigenous move along with our direction of reading from left to right, placing them as the center of the viewers' attention and the parting point of the story. Additionally, the placement of the natives on the left-hand side and the invaders on the right-hand side echoes a movement from East to West, which could be interpreted as a reference to the westward expansion of European settlers in North America, placing the narrative in a more concrete cultural and historical context.

In *The Rabbits*, the principles of direction and New/Given are applied in similar ways predominantly at the beginning of the story. For example, in the Numbats' first encounter with the Rabbits, the first are placed left of the center looking towards the Rabbits on the right-hand side, who move from right to left (DPS5). However, while *Varmints* consistently constructs the colonized as self and the colonizing people as others in both word and image, the constant frontal views in *The Rabbits* suggest an outside viewing position that rouses considerable tension in relation to the homodiegetic narrative voice of the verbal text. Additionally, the pictures frequently place the Rabbits as the salient[20] elements while marginalizing the Numbats (DPS6-9, 13-15), maintain the direction of the Rabbits' movement from left to right (DPS7, 12-14), and, thus, center the Rabbits' perspective.

For instance, the arrival of the Rabbits on the Numbats' land (DPS7, see figure 1) focuses on the Rabbits' rather than on the Numbats' point of view. Moving from left to right, the Rabbits and their overwhelmingly magnified ship constitute the central theme of the image. Their straight, sharp lines of their physical contours and shadows cut violently through the curvy formations of the land, the sea, and the clouds, whose dark-to-bright coloring and billowing formation create the dramatic, almost apocalyptic atmosphere of the scene, lending an air of physical aggression to the Rabbits' landing. Under this overpowering dominance of the intensively colored Rabbits and their ship, the Numbats shrink to marginalized miniatures hardly distinguishable from the surroundings, who look passively onto the events from the right side of the double spread. While the Rabbits' uniforms and weapons portray their arrival as military conquest and foreshadow the devastation and violence to follow, the industrialized

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[20] Following Kress and van Leeuwen, salience describes the quality of visual elements to most attract the viewers' attention in a composition and is realized by factors such as relative placement, size, tonal value, coloring, or sharpness (177).

ship and the mechanical symbolism on their clothing anticipate the subsequent transformation of the Numbats' land following the Rabbits' arrival.

Figure 1: The arrival of the Rabbits (Marsden/Tan DPS7)

Moreover, the image locates the narrative in the historical context of the colonization of Australia only by the use of European historical and cultural references. There are no historical references to Australian Aboriginal cultural artifacts or clothing apart from generic or stereotypical markers of indigeneity like spears and physical nakedness. The Rabbits' flags, however, allude to the British national flag (see also DPS2, 8, 12) and their black and red uniforms resemble the British uniforms of Australian settlers. Additionally, the scene takes reference to the historical painting *Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay 1770* by Emanuel Phillips Fox (1902), which "depicts a colonial fantasy about a 'foundational moment' in modern Australian history" (Nabizadeh 35). As part of a dominant narrative that constructs Cook as a foundational national figure, the painting represents the colonial conquest of Australia as "an epochal event" (38) and an iconic moment in Australia's history. Moreover, it constructs Cook's arrival as the "point of origin for the notion of modern 'Australia'" (38) and its history, stripping Australia from its precolonial past. Placing the colonizers rather than the colonized at the center of the viewers' attention, the illustration in *The Rabbits* ironically draws on the colonial fantasies inherent in the iconic painting.

In a passionate article, Brooke Collins-Gearing and Dianne Osland have argued that *The Rabbits* "constructs dichotomous representations of the 'coloniser' (Rabbits) and 'colonised' (Numbats): strong, weak; modern, ancient; civilised, primitive; centre, peripheral; conqueror, victim; [which] reveal the text's seemingly neutral colonialist discourses to be rooted in colonialist ideologies and legacies" (n.p.). Indeed, the Europeanized Rabbits always appear with clothing that is frequently marked by symbols of Western civilization, such as numbers, writing, or mechanical elements (DB7-8), and are represented as more individualized than the indigenized Numbats, who are always naked and often placed on the margins or in the background of the images. However, it has to be stressed that the individualization of the Rabbits only displays the power hierarchies within their military ranks but mostly excludes any form of social identity in terms of age, gender, or familial affiliations.[21] Arguing that *The Rabbits* "ultimately reinforce[s] the colonised perspective as the marginal one" (n.p.), Collins-Gearing and Osland claim that the narrative "silences the colonised, denying their ability to speak for themselves, refusing them the right to their own identity and history [...] and effectively colonising the original inhabitants' voice" (n.p.). Based on the assumption that *The Rabbits* does not truly take over the viewpoint of the colonized but instead centers the colonizers' perspective, they conclude that it remains within a "collective memory of colonialist superiority that can conceive of only one kind of story to tell [in which w]hat becomes important is what the Rabbits do, not what the Numbats do" (n.p.). It cannot be denied that *The Rabbits* centers, at least in its images, on the colonizers' viewpoint – after all, it is titled *The Rabbits*, not *The Numbats*. Moreover, it certainly is problematic that the Numbats, who are often marginalized on the narrow fringes of the images, decidedly separated from the Rabbits, mostly remain locked in passive positions of observing victims that yield to the Rabbits' dominant power, as for example in the Rabbits' arrival and the subsequent scene.

However, I would argue that it is also problematic that instead of analyzing the picturebook text of word and image as a whole, Collins-Gearing and Osland constantly hyper-separate verbal from visual text,[22] which unsurprisingly leads them to criticize the reductionism or one-sidedness of one or the other. Since picturebooks construct their narratives by the interaction and interdependence of both modalities (cf. Thiele *Bilderbuch*), establishing "an

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[21] Only in two instances, the picturebook includes representations of children: first, when the Stolen Generation of Aboriginal children in Australia is referred to (DPS14), and second, when the urban Rabbit society is portrayed (DPS15).

[22] This sort of approach might result out of Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott's school of picturebook theory in *How Picturebooks Work*, which tends to contrast and oppose verbal and visual modality rather than considering their dynamics as a dialogic unity.

inherently dialogic relationship" (Yannicopoulou 66) between verbal and visual modality, however, it is more accurate to conceive and analyze picturebook narratives as a word-image-dynamic that goes beyond the individual scope of either word or image – even if the use of conflicting narrative or focalizing options creates tensions within this dynamic.

In general, it seems that Collins-Gearing and Osland come to many of their conclusions because they are disturbed by the fact that *The Rabbits* constructs a counterpoint of perspective (cf. Nikolajeva/Scott 25), in which text (homodiegetic perspective of the Numbats) and image (external perspective centering on the Rabbits) position the reader in different viewpoints. Admittedly, the visual focus on the Rabbits seems to undermine what the book sets out to do on the first double spreads. By establishing the indigenous people as both focalizers and retrospective homodiegetic narrators, *The Rabbits* sets up an expectation of revising colonialist narratives of history and identity *from an indigenous perspective*, which is probably why Collings-Gearing and Osland so vehemently criticize the book's failure to do so. While their critique of *The Rabbits* is in some aspects justified (see following chapters), Collings-Gearing and Osland fail to acknowledge the subversive potential that remains nonetheless, precisely because the images are less concerned with the objects of the colonialist narratives of history and identity than with the subjects who perpetuate them.

In this context, one of the most important narrative strategies in *The Rabbits* is the irony with which it centers and defamiliarizes the colonizers' perspective. Following Clare Bradford, political strategies of mockery, provocation, and pointed social critique through the use of exaggeration and burlesque, as for example in caricatures, are also frequently deployed in children's texts, especially if they are directed at a dual audience (*Unsettling* 26-7) like crossover picturebooks (Beckett). Linda Hutcheon has described postmodern irony as an intrinsically "suspensive" (36) structural strategy of critique that "knows it is inescapably implicated in that which it contests" (37) and, thus, questions the very possibility of taking "any position […] that assumes a discursive situation exterior to that which is being opposed" (37), i.e. the dominant hegemonic order. Similarly, *The Rabbits*' representations of the alleged superiority of British civilization rely on a pointed sense of irony and ironic hyperbolisms whose intrinsic ambivalences and ambiguities reveal the constructedness of representation and the importance of myths for the colonial "machine" (Césaire 43), whose grand narratives are contrasted with the colonial realities portrayed in the visual and verbal text and, thus, deconstructed. What is more, by revising colonial narratives from the colonizers' perspective, the non-native illustrators avoid the artificial construction of a native perspective that runs the

risk of adopting a voyeuristic, exoticizing, or essentializing view onto the indigenous population.

For example, by hyberbolically reshaping the events of the Rabbits' arrival and by prefiguring the violence of colonization, the image constructs the landing of the colonizers as spectacular and disturbing at the same time (Nabizadeh 43), formulating a critical, ironical comment on the glorification of the settlers' arrival in European and non-Aboriginal Australian history. While the text describes the events in an extremely reduced and simple form, "They came by water." (DPS7), the image embellishes them in a surrealistic, artificial aesthetic and critically draws on the ideological implications of Fox' Eurocentric painting. Thus, the image recognizes the dominant representations of the landing of the supposed 'conquerors' as an idealized spectacle and exposes the colonization of Australia as a forceful, violent invasion. Additionally, the Rabbits' alienated, denatured, almost grotesque physical appearance reinforces the ironic, critical perspective onto the colonizers' self-representation. Admittedly, some readers, especially younger ones, might not be able to recognize all the ideological and ironic underpinnings of the images. However, a differentiated analysis of *The Rabbits* as a crossover picturebook (cf. Beckett) that includes complex cultural, historical, and artistic references has to consider all its ideological contexts and undertones.

In *Reading Race*, Clare Bradford has argued that *The Rabbits* contributes to an essentialized myth of aboriginality, in which "the Indigenous creatures who tell their story are naked and vulnerable, always the objects of the gaze of the colonising Rabbits" (113). Undeniably, in almost all double spreads, images of ever-watching eyes symbolize the colonial gaze that objectifies and essentializes the indigenous population. But it is also through these representations that the mechanisms of colonial power and control are exposed. On the double spread after their landing (see figure 2), the Rabbits have drawn up a pretentious painting that could be interpreted as an analogy to a construction plan but also as a glimpse into the supposedly bright future of the urbanized land and the grand narratives of colonization created by the colonizers. Under the surveilling, controlling eye of the colonial "machine" (Césaire 43) situated in a circle on top of the painting, tall, impressive buildings and a straight pavement moving towards the backdrop of a yellow sunset are placed within the otherwise completely empty land. Strict geometrical lines that contrast with the ostentatious baroque frame determine the composition of the painting. The colonial reality, however, looks entirely different. Full of little irregular details, alive flora and fauna, and indigenous inhabitants, the land resists the colonial narrative of 'terra nullius' (see next chapter) constructed by the

painting. In relation to this, the hyberbolic spectacle of colonial urbanization and land conquest of the painting creates an air of artificiality that exposes the colonial narrative of progress and civilization as an idealized cultural construction, a colonial fantasy, while the words emphasize the unequal discursive and material hierarchies of colonialism: "They didn't live in the trees like we did. They built their own houses. We couldn't understand the way they talked." (DPS8). While the representation of the natives as living in trees is indeed problematic (see following chapters), the image also reveals the violent reality of colonization and the material power of language when a precolonial animal is literally squashed to death by the colonizers' plans for the future.

Figure 2: Colonialist master narratives of space (Marsden/Tan DPS8)

Another essential visual strategy in *The Rabbits* that serves to subvert Western master narratives of colonization is the aestheticization of destruction, which is again pervaded by a painful sense of irony. While the Rabbits' painting excludes and, thus, conceals the devastation of the land and its inhabitants, the picturebook images frequently aestheticize the ecologically devastating effects of colonization. While jets of polluted waste water that intoxicate the dying, peripheral land of the displaced Numbats are arranged in harmoniously structured compositions (DPS16), the spectacular metropolitan center and its colonial tributes in form of gigantic statues shine in apparent, but similarly polluted and highly regulated glory (DPS15). As war machines and gun-pointing Rabbits are multiplied and positioned in line,

creating perfect vectors moving towards a common center, the intraiconic (cf. Nikolajeva/Scott 118) tautology of "MIGHT=RIGHT=MIGHT=RIGHT=MIGHT=RIGHT" reveals the absurdity of the colonialist narratives of superiority (DPS11).

What is more, the picturebook not only denounces the injustices done to the Aboriginals by the colonizers but also challenges the dominant construction of non-Aboriginal Australian settler identity. By exposing the hostility of the colonizers and the physical violence of colonization, whilst the indigenous population struggles to survive (DPS8-9, 11-13, 16), *The Rabbits* revises the settler's national myth of "tenacious survival in a hostile landscape" (ní Fhlathúin 25). In settler colonies such as Australia or North America, the native land was invaded by colonial settlers, who constructed permanent settlements away from the original colonial 'métropole.' As they are "both colonized and colonizing" (Johnston/Lawson 363), settlers constitute an ambivalent identity:

> They were frequently characterized in domestic cultural and political discourses as ungovernable, uncultured: as 'colonials' they were second-class […] Englishmen, and often came to be seen as political or economic rivals to the domestic citizens of the 'home' country. At the same time, of course, the settler was an agent of colonial rule over the proportionally, and usually numerically, shrinking indigenous population (363).

Following Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson, the settler acts as "a mediator rather than as a simple transmitter of Imperialism's uncomfortable mirroring of itself" and is located in an in-between space of continuous (re)negotiation of power, identity, and subjectivity (370). In order to reinforce their legitimacy for occupying, using, and exploiting the colonized land, "complicated politics of representation, working through the settler's anxieties and obsessions" (363), served to construct the settlers as indigenous in order to put "the settler in the cultural and discursive place of the indigene" (364), who has already been displaced physically. In this context, narratives of the disappearance of native people as a 'dying race' were constructed, which "enabled a narrative of ethical indigenization in which the 'settler' simply assumed the place of the disappearing indigene without the need for violence (or, of course, the designation 'invader')" (364). In relation to Native Americans, Brian Dippie has analyzed the discursive creation of the colonialist narrative of the 'Vanishing Indian' who is constructed as doomed to extinction in face of the unstoppable advance of Western civilization and progress (10-12).

According to Collins-Gearing and Osland, *The Rabbits* perpetuates colonial narratives of the dying natives, who will eventually make way for the settlers:

> The coloniser's perspective is enforced in the text by the idea that the Rabbits conclusively defeated the Numbats. While the resistance of the 'Numbats' is apparent in Tan's double page illustration, in sepia-tinted cameos, of the Numbats sabotaging the Rabbits' technology and engaging in sporadic or collective warfare, the following page blatantly states "We lost the fights", as if subsequent ongoing fights for self-determination and sovereignty never occurred. (n.p.)

While it is true that the verbal text alone, "Sometimes we had fights, but there were too many rabbits. We lost the fights." (DPS10-11), oversimplifies the complexity of indigenous resistance against colonization and suggests that they were simply overpowered by the sheer number of the colonizers, it should not be underestimated how the differentiated visual representations act against the reductionist words. The images not only show the different creative ways of the Numbats' active resistance, e.g. manipulating the Rabbits' technological installations, redirecting their water ways, and destroying their settlements and machineries, but also expose the brutality of the physical conflict on both sides, subverting the historical victimization of the colonized. Violence, pain, suffering, and death are explicitly visualized and the Numbats are shown to engage in organized collective resistance. Additionally, on the subsequent double spread, where the dead Numbats have been buried while the Rabbits have taken the land and planted their flags, the murdered Numbats occupy almost the entire image. Although they are subsumed under the regularity and geometry of the Rabbits and are represented as transparent "underground, fossilised skeletons" (Collins-Gearing/Osland n.p.) surrounded by darkness, they have not vanished. The transparency of their bodies suggests that the indigenous genocide is in danger of being forgotten as dominant narratives of colonization as discovery and settlement have tried to cleanse it from history. However, by giving the Numbats considerable space and salience while banning the conquering Rabbits to the margins, the traditional top-down- and center-margin-hierarchies are complicated and the Numbats' death is remembered, this aspect of their (hi)story is told.

What is more, *The Rabbits* reveals the violent and performative power of institutionalized language and discourse when addressing the so-called Stolen Generations, i.e. Aboriginal children who were removed from their families by the Australian government between 1905 and 1970. The violent disruption of the families is portrayed by way of numerous little Numbats being pulled away from their parents, who longingly stretch out their hands towards them, through the blue sky by the Rabbits' mechanized flying objects. The regular placement of the figures and the objects give the carefully arranged composition an almost picturesque melodramatic air, while the individual words of the verbal text are printed onto several acts of

parliament held by Rabbit officials, who have recently signed the decrees and, through this discursive act, significantly altered the lives of the Numbats.

Yet, the Numbats' resistance indeed ceases with the loss of the initial physical confrontations, which denies post-independence Aboriginal agency and eventually forces them into the posture of passive, helpless victims, as for example also in the abovementioned double spread on the Stolen Generations. The urbanized modern metropolis seems to offer no opportunities for the Numbats as the image shows them to end up drunk or homeless, living in cardboard boxes and pushed to the margins of society (DPS15). At the same time, also the Rabbits are portrayed as victims of modernity and the environmental pollution and social degeneration that come with it, catering to cultural anxieties about modern urbanization and industrialization (see chapter 3.2.3).

While Marsden's verbal text has been careful not to perpetuate colonialist assumptions at the beginning of the picturebook, it becomes more reductionist and one-sided towards the ending. This culminates on the last page, whose words, "Who will save us from the rabbits?" (DPS18) construct the Numbats as passive victims in need of a savior, denying their ability to rescue themselves and their agency in determining their own lives. At the same time, the ending exposes the continuing control of indigenous peoples' lives by Western society in a globalized world, as also Collins-Gearing and Osland admit. Moreover, it has to be stressed that it is again only the verbal text which portrays the Aboriginal people as powerless, whereas the image hints at a divided responsibility and agency in the construction of a better future for both Rabbits and Numbats. It shows the two of them in a waste land polluted by scattered pieces of debris and litter, looking into a puddle of water which reflects the nightly star-strewn sky. While it remains unclear how the expected transformation will look like, the picture suggests that Rabbits and Numbats will have to collaborate in order to construct a society in which both of them can live together. In this context, the interaction of word and image on this page could also be interpreted as a question-answer relation, in which the image provides a response to the verbal question "Who will save us from the rabbits?" (DPS18): i.e. only the joint efforts of both colonizer and colonized. In fact, the different viewpoints of word and image in *The Rabbits* allow the picturebook to oscillate between the respective representations of colonizers and colonized as objects and subjects, thus, escaping the dichotomous separations of colonialist subject/colonized object and vice versa.

Similarly, *Varmints* deconstructs the one-dimensional grand narrative of colonization and its binary relations of domination and subordination. Both Helen Ward's verbal and Marc

Craste's visual text subvert the marginalization of the colonized perspective by centering consistently on the indigenous perspective, suggesting that it is their story that is told, their history that is recorded. The second half of the narrative even focalizes on one individualized protagonist, who might already have been introduced by the images at the beginning but, in any case, remains unnamed by the verbal text. Later on, the text initially refers to him as "someone" (DPS10) and marks him as male in the following page (DPS11), while maintaining his age indefinite throughout the narrative. Despite the immense power of the invaders, the colonized never remain peripheral in the narrative but instead relegate the colonizers to both the topographical and conceptual margins.

In spite of its metaphorical, figurative tone and the absence of any direct interpersonal physical violence, the text makes explicit the devastating and violent consequences of colonization as invasion, dispossession, and (physical, cultural, and symbolic) displacement. From the viewpoint of the colonized, the colonizers are positioned as the eponymous varmints, which are described by a definition on the endpaper that resembles a dictionary entry: "var+mint ('va:mint) *n. informal.* an irritating or obnoxious person or animal [c16: dialect variant of *varmin* VERMIN]" (DPS1, orig. italics and capitals). Correspondingly, the colonizers are often placed between the high buildings on the narrow streets, which are full of miniaturized invaders and seem to be teeming with vermin (DPS7, 15). Additionally, the dark and threatening portrayal of the invaders with devilishly glowing eyes bustling in the streets coated in red color (DPS7) counters, for example, the US-American myth of foundation. By constructing the North American settlers as destined to bring enlightenment and civilization from the East to the West, the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny naturalized the world's westward expansion as "the crowning achievement of the age of imperialism" (Levy 9). Instead of light, however, the invaders in *Varmints* predominantly bring destruction, pollution, and darkness. On the one hand, the frequent demonization of the colonizers dismantles the idealization of North American settlers as heroes, but on the other, it maintains the reductionist binary opposition of colonizer and the colonized, which is only transgressed at the end of the book.

While the colonizers are marginalized in terms of narrative perspective and visual salience to the point of total de-individualization, the colonial process is nevertheless represented as two-sided and dynamic, involving both parties of the colonizers and the colonized as well as their complex, ambivalent dependencies. Of central importance is not either what the colonizers or exclusively what the colonized do, but the relation, causality, and interdependence of the actions of both. Additionally, the picturebook exposes the artificiality of racial boundaries and

differences between the two groups. Although the colonizers and the colonized are portrayed as conceptually different and also labelled as such in the verbal text, in the images, their physiognomy appears not to be so different after all. Both are represented as rabbit-like, anthropomorphized, fantastic creatures that are sometimes hardly distinguishable from one another. For example, when the text states that "…there was so much noise no one could hear themselves think! So they stopped thinking." (DPS8-9), it is not specified whether the personal pronoun "they" refers to the colonizers, the colonized, or both. The respective illustrations show multiple blurred and magnified faces that could be interpreted as both colonizers and colonized.

Figure 3: The indigenous' bubbles inside the settler metropolis (Ward/Craste DPS14)

Furthermore, the protagonist's visual salience in the second half of the picturebook, his placement and movement according to the principle of New/Given (Kress/van Leeuwen 179-85), and the reflections of his gaze in windows and bubbles (DPS11, 19) create a sense of first-person perspective that subverts the dominant gaze of the colonizers. For example, the horizontal vectors of the protagonist's movement through the urban buildings repeatedly cut through the vertical upward-moving vectors of the cityscape that suppresses him/her, his/her people, and their land (DPS12-14), which reinforces their agency and their ability to determine their actions. The bubbles ultimately transgress any form of linear movement and direction by engulfing the horizontal and vertical vectors of the technological angular city

with their organic curved lines (DPS14, see figure 3). As the protagonist moves upwards into the bubble towards the end of the story, the viewer is positioned as character viewing the image entirely from below through the protagonist's eyes (DPS17), i.e. from a completely new and unique angle that creates the impression of being sucked into the bubble by force (see figure 4). These changes of perspective counter the Western colonial gaze that is echoed in the repeated bird's eye and panoramic views that suggest an omnipresent, superior narrative position by placing the characters below the level of the viewers' gaze. The superordinate narrative voice of these images is additionally subverted by close-ups of the characters looking directly at the viewer (DPS8-9, 11) that demand the viewer's attention (Kress/van Leeuwen 148), creating a direct and close contact between the protagonist and the viewer.
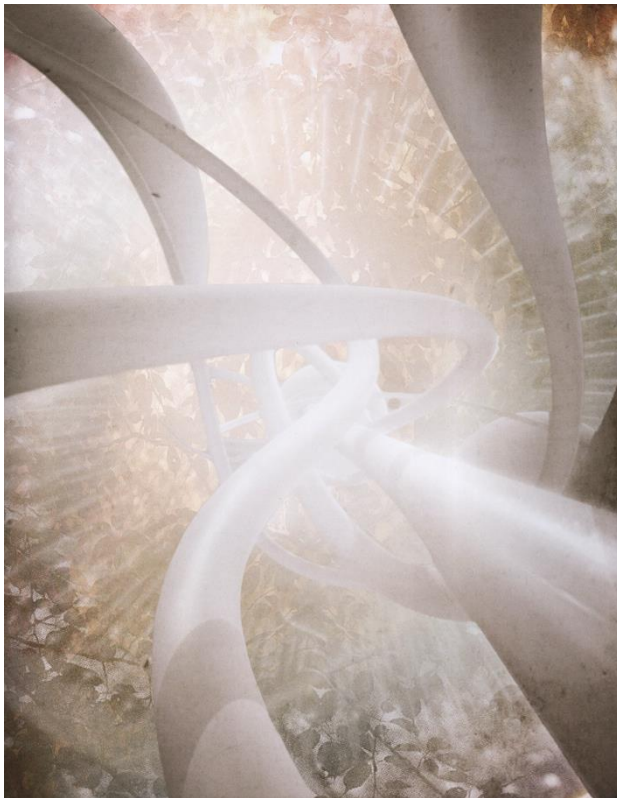

Figure 4: Moving upwards into the bubbles (Ward/Craste DPS17, recto)

In contrast to *The Rabbits*, *Varmints* does not reduce the natives to passive, observing victims, to "someone from whom something has been stolen" (Chow 31) that translates into an absence, incompleteness, or "lack" (Collins-Gearing/Osland n.p.), but actively counteracts their historical victimization. Gaining both individual and collective agency, the colonized voices do not let themselves be silenced and marginalized by the imperial center or the settler metropolis but strongly assert their persistence. As they move out of the position as the passive and powerless objects and victims of colonial rule, they engage in personal and

systematic strategies of active resistance and, thus, deconstruct the colonial rhetoric of the dying, vanishing native. Stressing the responsibility of the individual, the protagonist is shown nurturing his personal element of resistance, which becomes manifest in the text as a "little piece of wilderness" (DPS10) and is portrayed in the image as a healthily growing plant. In the meantime, a number of bubbles floating above the city towers, glowing in the urban darkness, have appeared. Whether they have magically sprung from nothing, naturally grown by themselves, or been constructed (magically or scientifically) by a group of rebels is not specified, but the external structure of the bubbles suggests that it could have involved some sort of crafting. Moreover, after the protagonist takes his plant up towards one of the bubbles, the image shows two hands collecting in this "final fragment of the wild" (DPS14), which indicates that a to some extent planned and organized rebellion is taking place. While the text's passive construction, "A final fragment of the wild was carefully collected in." (DPS14), suggests that the power behind the bubbles could also be a divine force, the image fixes the text's meaning and indicates that the colonized are not passive receivers but at least active co-authors of their resistance.

Overall, both verbal and visual text suggest that the utopian transformation of the dystopia essentially depends on the natives' agency as the people and the environment cannot recover independently from the devastation they experienced. Thus, *Varmints* also decidedly counteracts the colonialist ideology that the native population would eventually die out and portrays resistance as a dialogic and transformative process that does not merely replace the center with the margins, but constructs something new out of both, which has transformative potential for both indigenous and non-indigenous culture and thought. The bubbles are constructed as a powerful enduring counter-force against the destructive powers of colonization, urbanization, and industrialization. Symbolically loaded with the longing expressions of the protagonist (DPS11, 15) and the transformative meaning of seeds (DPS15), the bubbles are represented as emanating a vertical shaft of light onto the protagonist and, thus, sacralized as a place in which all the "hopes and wishes" (DPS15) of the colonized for the future are condensed. In a more material sense, they offer a renewed diasporic sense of belonging for the dominated minority and new homes outside the imperial control of the settler metropolis. Thus, the narrative metaphorically echoes historical indigenous struggles for independence, sovereignty, and land rights.

Along these lines, the bubbles could be read as an empowering metaphor for indigenous reservations in North America or Australia, which are significantly revaluated as they come to

harbor the source of utopian transformation within themselves. In contrast to historical North American Indian and Australian Aboriginal reservations, the natives in *Varmints* have possibly constructed the bubbles themselves after they were displaced from their ancestral homes. Additionally, they are not forcibly (re)moved to the bubbles by the invaders, but migrate there voluntarily, as a form of empowering subversion.

Figure 5: Gazing into the settler metropolis (Ward/Craste DPS19)

In this context, the bubbles can be read as a 'Third Space' as described by Homi Bhabha in relation to the hybridization of cultures in *The Location of Culture*. As an ambivalent in-between space, the Third Space enables a fluid exchange of identity and alterity, and the negotiation of the incommensurable (156, 218). Following Dunja Mohr, the Third Space holds the potential for utopian transgression (*Worlds* 66) since it constitutes an area of cultural translation and the "negotiation of meaning and representation" (Bhabha in Rutherford 211). Similarly, the bubbles are located at the interstices of cultures. While they clearly constitute a locus of the colonized, their thick stems also anchor them to the ground, now the space of the colonizers. Additionally, the ambivalent double vision of the Third Space (Bhabha 126) that transgresses the binary division of either/or, colonialist self/colonized other becomes manifest in the bubbles. In a combination of shot and reverse shot, the protagonist is first shown in a frontal view of the recreated precolonial nature in the bubbles full of plants and animals, and then from behind, looking down towards the dark towers of the settler metropolis, while his

face is reflected in the transparent walls of the bubbles (DPS17-19). As his gaze penetrates the border between the two worlds, the power of looking is restored to the colonized and the boundaries between colonizers and colonized become increasingly porous (see figure 5). Thus, the neat opposition between the colonizers and the colonized is deconstructed and their "complex reciprocity" (Loomba 232) is revealed. On the penultimate double spread, seeds start spreading through the walls of the bubbles (or possibly from their stems) and fall down into the settler metropolis, where they start to blossom, transforming the colonialist space from within. Rather than constructing solid borders, the walls and stems of the Third Space of the bubbles become permeable membranes that secure the protection of the safe place, while enabling a mutual exchange between the cultures.

3.2.2. Nature – culture: Negotiating colonial discourses of place

Postcolonial theory has shown that the imperial project was largely "built on the desire for land and for the resources (minerals, timber, soil for farming) that derived from the appropriation of territory" (Bradford *Unsettling* 13). Therefore, a central aspect of postcolonial studies, especially in relation to settler colonialism, is the dialectic of place and displacement, real and imagined geographies, home and 'Unheimlichkeit' (Heidegger). As John McLeod puts it, the colonial "conflict over space […] is always at the same time a battle over the historical and discursive rendering of that space" (*Environments* 194-95). In other words, the production of postcolonial spaces is highly dependent on the dominant discursive constructions of colonialist and precolonial places, which are embedded in Western ways of constructing space such as the separation of space and time (Ashcroft *Transformation* 125) and the hegemony of ocularcentrism (Jay 82-85).

The picturebooks examined here, however, demonstrate that the colonialist order of space is more fragile and uncertain than its grand narratives suggest. *The Rabbits*, for example, extensively demonstrates the role of language in the Eurocentric disruption, redefinition, and control of space, which is realized through such means as cartography and the renaming/restructuring of places, issues entirely disregarded by *Varmints*. As a way of 'bringing into being' of 'undiscovered' lands, the map and the colonial practice of mapping perpetuates the colonial rhetoric of discovery and demonstrates that space is "a series of erasures and overwritings" (Rabasa 181) of knowledges of the structures of the world. In an attempt to silence the indigenous knowledges of place, the Rabbits draw up maps and

meticulously measure and mark the landscape, physically reinscribing their ways of knowing the world onto the land (DPS10). Within their rigid world views – which is explicitly criticized by the verbal text: "They won't understand the right ways. They only know their own country." (DPS6) –, the Rabbits are represented as ignorant and unable to adjust to different world views, which is emphasized by the carefully arranged props on the double spread and the lettering of the last sentence that conforms to rigid geometry of the measuring instruments (see figure 6). Only in the left upper corner of the double spread, a small instance of a two-sided intercultural exchange is represented as the Rabbits show the Numbats a technological device while the Numbats present a native plant. But also in this representation, the highly asymmetrical relations between the colonizers and the colonized become manifest, criticizing the dominant power hierarchies. While the Numbats seem interested in the artifact to which they are being introduced, the Rabbit is so occupied with distributing their cultural achievements that he/she ignores what the Numbats have to offer and looks into the other direction.

Figure 6: Inspecting the land and its inhabitants (Marsden/Tan DPS6)

Similarly, the following images show the Rabbits completely submersed in practices of observation and categorization of the land and its 'alien' objects, maintaining a distanced relationship towards both the Numbats and their land, driven only by scientific interest. Almost all the traces the Rabbits leave on the land are governed by strict geometrical

orders,[23] accommodating the colonialist impulses to measure, structure, map, number, and label the foreign land and objects. By exaggerating the regularity of the movements and actions of the Rabbits, the images reveal how the colonial mapping constructs the land as "finite and potentially knowable" (Ashcroft *Transformation* 128) and ironically criticize the colonialist hyper-organization of the indigenous land, which is literally overwritten and resignified. In an attempt to master and control the 'discovered' land, the Rabbits are shown constructing the landscape on a drawing board while drinking tea in the toxic glow of electric lights (DPS10, see figure 7). On the same double spread, the Rabbits' installations literally cut into the land, revealing the violent consequences of the Rabbits' material constructions for the environment. Pipes cut out big chunks of the surrounding mountains, dividing and disconnecting the elements of the native landscape, destroying all the obstacles in their way. The accompanying text, "The rabbits spread across the country. No mountain could stop them; no desert, no river." (DPS10), echoes the threatening atmosphere of invasion and the in-depth perspective of the converging vectors of the spreading pipes in the image.
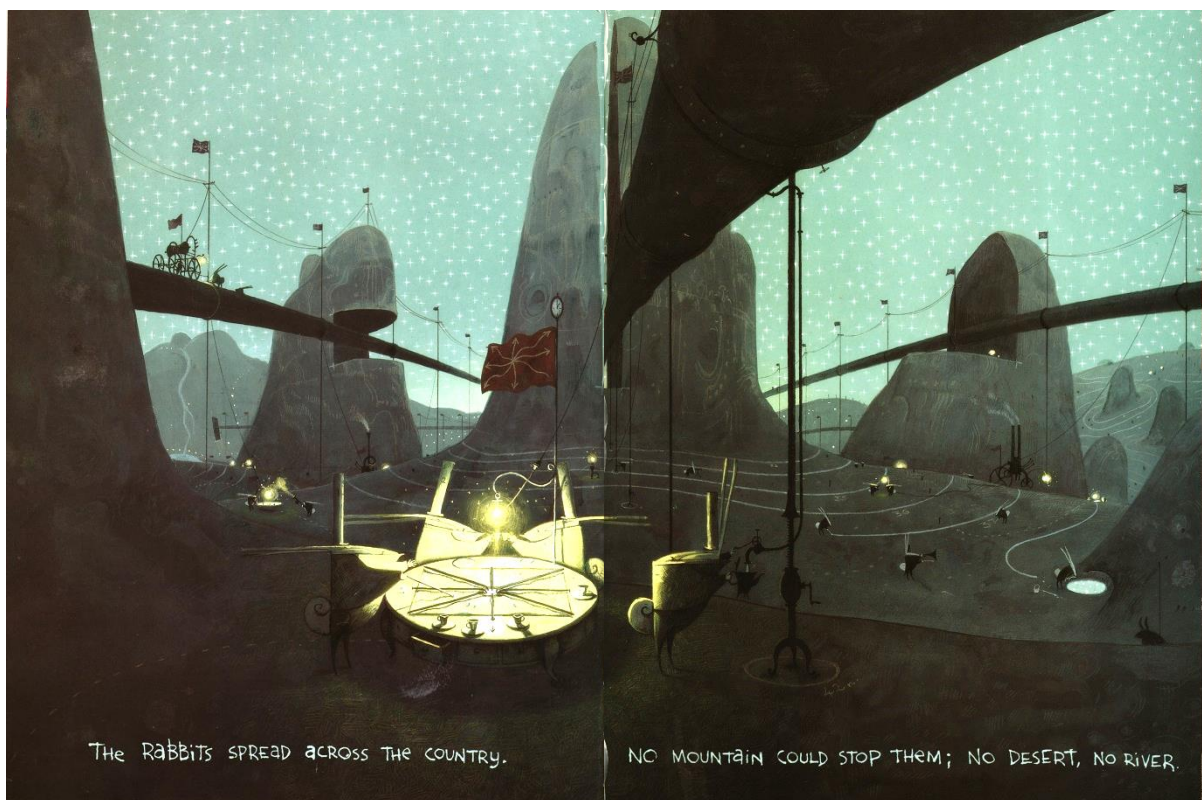

Figure 7: Mapping the land (Marsden/Tan DPS10)

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[23] However, in one instance, the image represents a significant distraction from the Rabbits' rigid regularity and their discourse of scientific measurement, when a Rabbit is lured to stray from correctly marking and measuring the native land, attracted by its to the Rabbits unknown wonders (DPS10 right lower corner, see figure 4), which demonstrates that also the colonizers can learn something from the colonized (land) and prefigures the multidirectional cultural exchange emphasized in the image at the end of the book.

In *Post-Colonial Studies*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin have shown how maps "inscribe their ideology on territory" (28), constructing their "blank spaces [as] a literal *terra nullius*, an open and inviting (virginal) space into which the European imagination can project itself and into which the European (usually male) explorer must penetrate" (28, orig. italics). In Australia, the strategic construction of the land as 'terra nullius' (literally nobody's land) was perpetuated by both popular and legal discourses (Johnson/Lawson 364):

> Vast and empty lands, insistently recorded in both texts and visual images, called out, obviously, to the European imagination to be filled, and they were filled by, successively, people, crops, and herds, but also by the stories and histories that, like the economically-productive crops, legitimated the settlement. For the settler, too, the land had to be empty. Empty land can be settled, but occupied land can only be invaded. (364)

This topos of an untouched land and nature not only had "the discursive effect of 'evacuating' the country of its indigenous inhabitants" (374) but also constructed a hierarchy of space from wild and waste to settled and utilized (Bradford *Unsettling* 13), which continues to pervade non-indigenous representations of colonization, even after the legal doctrine of terra nullius was abandoned, in form of a "psychological terra nullius" (Behrendt 20). *The Rabbits* overtly deconstructs the myth of an uninhabited land by consistently portraying the land as densely populated, full of diverse vegetational, animal, and human life and by minutely describing how precolonial ecologies were altered by the arrival of the settlers. Similarly, *Varmints* counteracts the assumption that the indigenous peoples did not utilize their natural resources, representing them working and farming the land (DPS5). Moreover, both picturebooks reevaluate not only the indigenous' but also the colonizers' relationship to the land as constructed by colonial myths by revealing the violent power of colonialism and representing its destructive consequences on the land in considerable detail (see also previous chapter). However, within both narratives, the settlers remain largely "unreconciled with the landscape" (Collins-Gearing/Osland n.p.), relegating a successful renegotiation of the settlers' relationship to the (post)colonial land into the future that is anticipated to hold transformations for both colonizer and colonized.

In order to describe the ecological transformations in the course of colonization, Alfred Crosby has coined the term 'ecological imperialism.' He and scholars following him have stressed that the introduction of foreign diseases, crops, and livestock considerably disadvantaged indigenous peoples by endangering the native flora and fauna on which they depended (cf. also Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Post-Colonial* 70) and "instigating widespread ecosystem change under conspicuously unequal power regimes" (Huggan/Tiffin 6). Through

a number of concise details, *The Rabbits* demonstrates on one of its double spreads (see figure 8) how the introduction of livestock, mass animal farming, and industrial agriculture transformed the land and its inhabitants into commodities and provided the basis for their systematic exploitation. While the text reads, "They brought new food, and they brought other animals. We liked some of the food and we liked some of the animals. But some of the food made us sick and some of the animals scared us" (DPS9), three quarters of the image demonstrate the industrial exploitation of European farm animals. The bodies of the cows, whose milk is being extracted by automatic milking machines, are already categorized into edible parts, reducing the individual animal into a commodified product, and the sharp, grinding teeth of the grazing sheep visualize the violent colonialist disruption of the native ecologies brought about by industrial capitalism. At the same time, the partitioned and fenced off land embodies the Western hyper-separation between the human and the landscape and its fauna, which are not conceptualized as disconnected in the Western cultural sense in many indigenous cultures (Rudd 247).
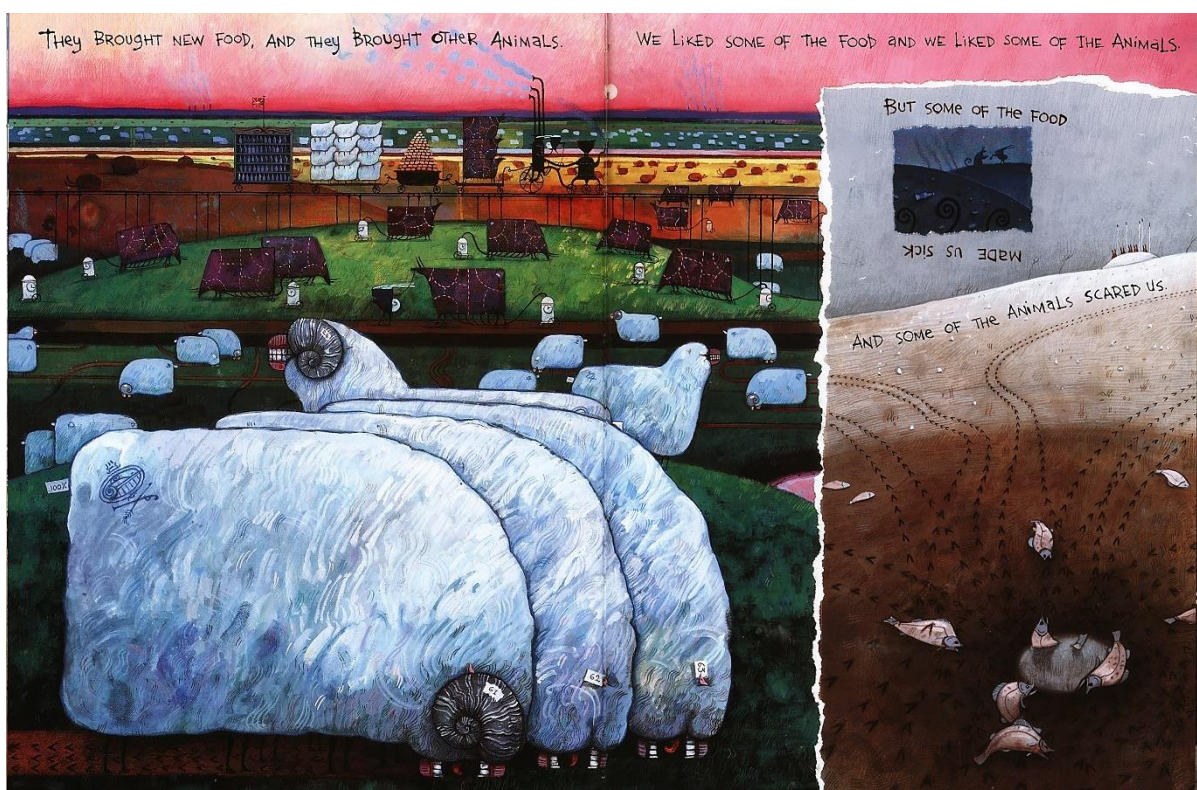

Figure 8: Ecological imperialism (Marsden/Tan DPS9)

On the recto, the fourth quarter of the image, separated from the rest in a panel-like layout, provides a glimpse into the subsequently destroyed environment, whose barren, brown land is scattered with dead animals and empty bottles, which hint at the invaders' introduction of European alcohol and the issue of indigenous (and non-indigenous) alcoholism (DPS9).

Similar before/after image sequences are included in other instances as well (DPS6), suggesting that the initial warning of the text, "be careful" (DPS6), and its prophecy of violence and destruction has already come become material. Drawing on the contrast between the alive, colorful abundance of the indigenous ecologies and the now dead, colorless emptiness under/after colonial rule, the picturebook constructs warnings filled with "anticipatory regret" (Bradford et al. 61) that also cater towards contemporary politics of exploitation in the context of globalized industrial capitalism (see also DPS18).

Stressing the books' "materialist understanding of the changing relationship between people, animals and environment" (Huggan/Tiffin 12), Filippo Menozzi has analyzed how *The Rabbits* portrays the capitalist deterritorialization of the native landscape and the subsequent reterritorialization through "[m]assive buildings, oil pipes, roads, and gigantic factories" (193). In *The Rabbits*, the technological and industrial control over space and 'nature,' which is mastered and tamed by the achievements of modernity, gains an apocalyptic dimension. The radical environmental destruction by a seemingly unstoppable force and indestructible machines represented in the picturebook strongly hinges on the Western dualism of nature and culture, which have been artificially separated by European modernity (White 37). Constructed as culture's objectified other, nature comes to signify everything "either external to human needs, and thus effectively dispensable, or as being in permanent service to them, and thus an endlessly replenishable resource" (Huggan/Tiffin 4).

In *The Rabbits*, the Rabbits' industrial technologies and urban constructions are repeatedly placed in stark contrast to the natural and organic environment associated with the indigenous people. As a glorified evidence of industrialization, the Rabbits' ship seems to be powered by a mechanic engine. Clouds of smoke and steam issue from its many funnels, while numerous tubes, wheels, and gears cover its colossal body (DPS7). In contrast to this colorful depiction of the Rabbits' industrial power, their urban metropolis adheres to a monochrome color scheme. The densely populated and built-up city, its buildings, machines, tubes, and wiring are governed by a strict geometrical regularity (DPS15) that strongly contrasts with the curvy, irregular shapes of the indigenous landscape of the first pages (DPS4-6). The little remaining blue and clean air is absorbed by the urban 'machine' that pollutes the air and water of its inhabitants and transforms its peripheries into bare and brown destructed lands, where "the wind blows empty across the plains" (DPS16). By emphasizing the destruction and emptiness of the now dead land, word and image reverse the colonial myth of terra nullius, constructing colonization and the subsequent industrialization and urbanization as having emptied the land

of is precolonial abundant flora and fauna as well as its indigenous population. Additionally, the waste land of the last page, scattered with unused bits of the Rabbits' technology (DPS18), could be read as a reference to contemporary issues of deindustrialization.
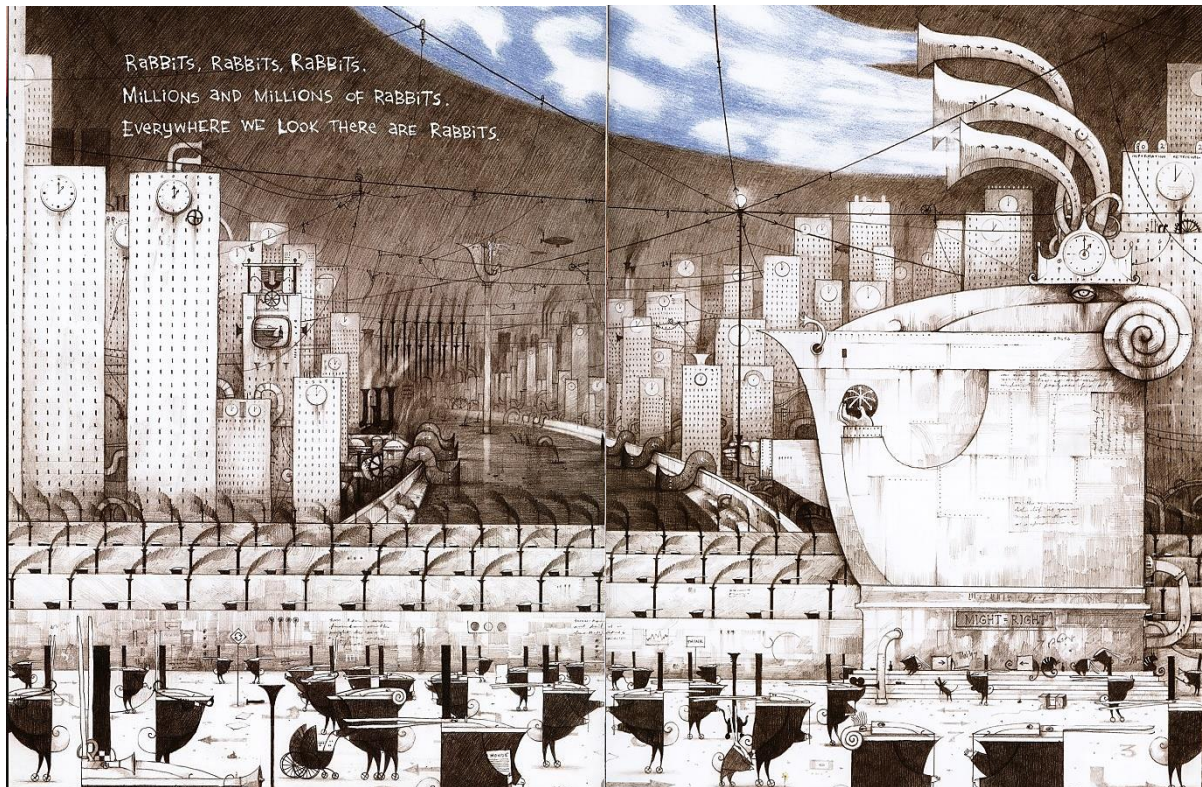

Figure 9: The settler metropolis (Marsden/Tan DPS15)

The settler metropolis (DPS15, see figure 9) is portrayed as an industrialized, overpopulated, urban society corroded by violent racial and class hierarchies, massification, blind conformity, and alcoholism, where only small instances of resistance persist. In little but significant details, the image shows manifestations of critical counter-discourses that promote the recycling of waste (in the left lower corner a recycle sign is visible, but it remains unclear who put it up), the critical interrogation of dominant narratives (in the lower center a Rabbits holds up a sign with the inscription "THINK"), and the hope and responsibility that resides in the future generation (in the lower center a child Rabbit points at a colorful flower that breaks through the solid concrete of the streets but goes unnoticed by the adult Rabbits). This, once again, shows the differentiated and subversive quality of the Shaun Tan's images. In turn, John Marsden's text, if considered separately, could be criticized as it continues to insist on the destructive power of the colonizers' apparently endless numbers, who seem to breed like rabbits: "Rabbits, rabbits, rabbits. Millions and millions of rabbits. Everywhere we look there are rabbits." (DPS15). At the same time, it alludes to the forceful displacement of the Numbats, who had to be physically removed from their ancestral lands so that the colonizers

could invade the country and construct their settlements. Together, however, verbal and visual text largely construct a more elaborated and differentiated critique of the European colonization of Australia.

Also in *Varmints*, urbanization radically cuts through the bright and shining rural idyll represented on the first pages. The violence that colonization exercises on the land is portrayed in vivid imagery and typographically emphasized by putting selected words in capitals: "They [= the colonizers] scraped away the wiry grass. […] Tall buildings SCRATCHED the sky where the birds once sang." (DPS6). Also in the corresponding picture, the physical violence and painfulness of colonization and the subsequent urbanization and industrialization becomes visible. Ropes of steel pulled by a de-individualized mass of invaders repeatedly crisscross the double spread, while tall dark towers dissect the formerly green meadow, whirling up dense clouds of polluting black dust. In this context, the relative coloring and light-dark-contrasts importantly contribute to the dystopian, apocalyptic atmosphere of the colonial cityscape that strongly opposes the loci of indigenous resistance, which are always brightly illuminated and, thus, attributed an air of utopian hope, a metaphorical light at the end of the dark tunnel of colonization, oppression, and exploitation.

Figure 10: Utopia vs. dystopia on the front matter (Ward/Craste DPS2)

Indeed, even before the actual narrative sets in, the indigenous rural utopia on the left page of the front matter is set against the urban dystopia of the colonizers on the right (DPS2, see figure 10). Underlining their binary opposition, the symbolic color coding (green and blue versus black and grey) and material aspect (natural, organic versus artificial, manmade) of the images load the two scenarios with highly evaluative meaning, set the ideological frame of the narrative, and create expectations for the reader. Correspondingly, the mechanized city is composed of opaque steel, metal, and concrete, whereas the translucent bubbles "growing among the dark towers" (DPS11) seem more alive and organic (DPS15-17), drawing symbolically on the contrast between life (the illuminated, flourishing plants) and death (the dark, empty buildings).

While the readers' orientation in the urban chaos is complicated by the multidirectional traversing vectors of the colonizers' steel ropes (DPS6), the misty atmosphere of the image that displays no horizon on the seemingly endless land creates the impression of a lost paradise (DPS3-4). The introductory lines, "There was once…" (DPS3), contribute to the construction of the precolonial ecology as a utopia irrevocably lost to the colonizers' industrialized society, which seems to sustain one of the most widespread myths of the non-European other. In relation to North America, the anthropologist Shepard Krech III has described the common colonialist trope of the 'Ecological Indian,' which constitutes a type of environmental racism, itself a form of ecological imperialism (Huggan/Tiffin 4). While Native Americans are the "locus classicus" (Garrard 129) for the Romantic assumption that the native "understands the systemic consequences of his actions, feels deep sympathy with all living forms, and takes steps to conserve so that earth's harmonies are never imbalanced and resources never in doubt" (Krech 21), indigenous people all over the world have been represented as dwelling in harmony with nature due to their alleged primitivism, i.e. their lack of modern Western civilization (Garrard 129). Although many indigenous peoples "thoroughly knew and cherished the places they inhabited" (143), the kind of ecological and environmental understanding superimposed onto them by modern environmentalism, which is based on the Western nature/culture divide, does not necessarily correspond to indigenous understandings of their relation to other beings and the land (Krech 146, Garrard 143). On the contrary, Richard Grove has shown that the first instances of nature protection and conservation in a Western understanding emerged under colonialism. What is more, colonial conservation practices often constituted a means of exercising power over the indigenous population, discounting their knowledge and use of the environment (Oslund 12-13).

Both *Varmints* and *The Rabbits* evidently draw on the stereotype of the ecological native, representing the indigenous people in a close, positive relation to the environment and its inhabitants. Whereas *Varmints* hardly differentiates the physiognomy of colonizer and colonized, who both appear as rabbit-like creatures, *The Rabbits* represents the brown Numbats with curvy, organic shapes that contrast strongly with the strict angular geometry of the white Rabbits' two-dimensional surreal bodies, so that the unclothed Numbats look more like 'natural' animals than the constantly dressed Rabbits, who appear more alienated, even grotesque. This caters to the colonial rhetoric of animalization (Ahuja, qtd. in Mount/O'Brien 528) of the racialized other, according to which indigenous people are "coded as closer to nature" (Rudd 242). In contrast, in *Varmints*, only the indigenous people are repeatedly represented with different clothing (DPS5-6, 12-14, 18-20).

Moreover, the picturebooks unilaterally accuse the Europeanized colonizers of seriously damaging both the native environment and the ecology. Although the fact that there is hardly "any evidence that colonial states were more destructive toward or transformative of the environment in larger ways than other modern states" (Oslund 4) should not prevent the exploration of the destructive ecological impact of colonialism, the one-dimensionality of this representation is, nevertheless, problematic. At the same time, however, *The Rabbits* reveals environmentalism as such as a Western concept whose first movements surged under colonialism (see recycling sign on DPS15). *Varmints*, on the other hand, demonstrates that indigenous people significantly altered and transformed the landscapes before colonization, showing them working the land and nurturing plants (DPS5). By not positioning the indigenous people as uncivilized and rationally/scientifically inferior, the picturebook subverts the superiority of the 'civilized' colonizers and deconstructs the rhetoric of the primitive and the "ideological mystification" (Garrard 135) from which the Ecological Indian/native stereotype descends. *Varmints* goes even so far as to attribute to the colonized the ability to modify the settlers' practices and conceptions of space and nature, even if the details of this prefigured transformation are situated outside the narrative.

Additionally, contrary to the ocularcentrism of the imperial project, i.e. the Western tendency to privilege vision (and, consequently, the word) over other senses (Jay 82-85), *Varmints* moves sound and hearing into its perceptual and epistemological center. In the beginning, the precolonial world is filled with the pleasant sounds of "bees and the wind in the wiry grass, the low murmuring of moles in the cool dark earth… and the song of birds in the high blue sky" (DPS3-4), for whom the wide, open spaces of the images generously leave room to

unfold. After the arrival of the colonizers, however, these natural sounds are "lost" (DPS5) and replaced by the artificial scratching, roaring noises of urbanization and industrialization. At the same time, the peaceful, harmonious rural landscape of the first pages has to make way for a crowded, but at once desolate metropolis that is filled with people and noise but empty of feeling and critical thought. While the precolonial sounds "touched and warmed the hearts of those few who paused and cared to listen" (DPS5), the rapidly multiplying settlers are constantly "MAKING MORE NOISE… listening less… UNTIL THERE WAS SO MUCH NOISE NO ONE COULD HEAR THEMSELVES THINK! So they stopped thinking." (DPS7-9, orig. capitals). The accompanying images add an additional layer of meaning to the verbal text, which criticizes the lack of agency and the increasing cooptation, apathy, and insensitivity within the emerging urban mass society as the "empty heads of the OTHERS fell quiet and still" (DPS15, orig. capitals). Among others, they show a deindividualized mass of hardly distinguishable colonizers and/or colonized, whose vacant stares are directed straight at the viewer and in which the characters are blurred to such an extent that it remains unclear whether they are colonizers, colonized, or both (DPS8-9). The subsequent image of an entirely black and empty page (DPS9) reinforces the blankness of the city dwellers' minds described by the words, whose silenced voices are contrasted with the violent uproar of the metropolis. It is only "high above […] the wailing roar of the traffic" (DPS10), in the glowing bubbles "growing among the dark towers" (DPS11), that the "fury of the streets" (DPS10) is transformed into an "endless pause" (DPS16), in which the sounds of nature can finally be reinstalled: "there came the sound of bees. There was once more the sound of the wind in the wiry grass… and the song of birds… in the HIGH BLUE SKY" (DPS17-20, orig. capitals). In contrast to the final verbal phrase, however, the corresponding image shows a grey and, albeit partly brightly illuminated, largely dark sky that is enclosed above and below by a broad black frame (DPS20), which creates a cinematoscopic impression of distress and restriction heavily weighing down onto the new 'utopian' spaces. The resulting ambivalence between word and image illustrates that – despite the rebuilt homes and the prefigured transformation loaded with utopian hope – the reconstructed *utopia is utopian only within the scope of the new (post)colonial order, i.e. the best possible situation within the new limitations, and that going back to the precolonial utopian past has become impossible.

The differentiated and subversive qualities of the images in *Varmints* also become visible when they collapse dominant spatial power structures and traditional top-down-hierarchies, by repeatedly locating the colonized on the top of high buildings or in the bright sky, while the

invaders constantly remain on the ground, cramped in the dark narrow streets.[24] On the one hand, threatening and claustrophobic urban spaces that demonstrate the dominant power of the colonizers are created by a combination of constant, radical darkness and strongly distorted, fragmented perspectives onto miniaturized masses of people, who face an overwhelming urban landscape characterized by sharp-edged, angular shapes, blocks of concrete and steel, and sharp, upward-moving vertical vectors. On the other hand, however, the indigenous population is significantly empowered by increasingly claiming these high-above places constructed by the invaders. Although the inhabitants of the city frequently appear intimidated by its hyperbolically magnified dimensions and heights, there is always something higher than the colonizers' skyscrapers. As the ground has been occupied by the colonizers, the colonized take refuge in their apartments on high buildings and later in the *utopian bubbles, which are introduced as a "place high above" (DPS10) situated above the streets, where the varmints are creeping (DPS7, 15), and, for the time being, come to constitute the final refuge of the colonized, a safe place beyond the hegemony of the colonizers. Overall, all new manifestations of indigenous homes during and after colonization are created not outside but inside the colonialist space, which is thus effectively revaluated as it comes to facilitate indigenous empowerment.

Moreover, by reconceptualizing the indigenous people's relationship to the land, *Varmints* subverts the Western environmentalist notion of wilderness as something "uncontaminated by civilization" (Cronon n.p.), which is only 'pure' or 'authentic' if humans are absent from it. By portraying 'the wild' as something nurtured and bred by people, the picturebook deconstructs the "myth of the wilderness as 'virgin' uninhabited land" (n.p.) and familiarizes the wild, which is moved out of the realm of the other and becomes part of the self. Thus, *Varmints* transgresses the dualistic vision that situates the human and culture outside of nature and shows that humans are inextricably entangled with both poles of the nature/culture divide, which is itself destabilized and reconfigured into what Donna Haraway has called "naturecultures" (*Species* 3). In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour had already introduced the notion of hybrid "nature-cultures" (11), indicating that the natural does not exist outside but only in interaction and "interbreeding" (12) with the social. In her radical revision of anthropocentrism, the dualistic constructions of nature and culture, and the "historical congealings of the machinic and the organic" (21), Donna Haraway once more recognizes the inseparability and intimacy of both nature and culture, the human and the non-

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[24] Additionally, classic top-down-directionalities are subverted, for example, when the protagonist's upwards movement is visually composed in downwards organized scenes (DPS13).

human. Within the "symbiogenetic tissues of naturecultures" (Haraway *Species* 17), ecological relationships are always "both biophysically and socially formed" (Malone/Ovenden 1). Similarly, in the transformation released by the bubbles, the spaces of the colonizers and the colonized as well as those of nature and culture are no longer mutually exclusive but interpenetrate one another. This not only blurs the boundaries that have separated them, but also demonstrate that power "operates dynamically, laterally and intermittently" (Ashcroft *Transformation* 191), i.e. rhizomatically,[25] rather than vertically in a simple binary relation of center/margin.

3.2.3. Human – non-human: Negotiating narratives of anthropocentrism

In relation to the nature-culture dynamic, Val Plumwood has demonstrated that the Western definition of humanity is contingent on the presence of the non- or more-than-human, e.g. the animal, the environment, the machine, which are devalued and excluded from the domain of the human (*Environmental* 3-19). In the ideology of colonization, the anthropocentrism of the Western reason- and human-centered culture is inseparable from the Eurocentrism of colonialism, which constructs "indigenous cultures as 'primitive', less rational, and closer to children, animals and nature" ("Decolonizing" 53). Decentering the human is, thus, not only an issue of environmental politics but also of postcolonial thought. In both picturebooks, anthropomorphized animals or animal-like creatures act as a foil for the human, which not only serves to circumvent aspects of identity such as age, gender, and social status, but also creates an emotional distance that permits portraying the violences of colonization outside the realms of (human) childhood.

What is more, the anthropomorphized (fantastic) animal characters allude to an allegorical reading of the two narratives. Despite its obvious historical anchorage, *The Rabbits* is referred to as a "rich and haunting allegory of colonization for all ages and cultures" (publisher's blurb) and has been embraced as such by an international readership (Collins-Gearing/Osland n.p.). Through the persistent use of the plural first-person pronoun "we," the picturebook gives voice to a national and at the same time transnational indigenous collective memory of colonization. If read as allegories of colonization, industrialization, and ecological destruction, both picturebooks circulate across local/national/global relations and could be placed in any national or cultural context, in relation to which *Varmints* remains particularly

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[25] Contesting the colonialist binarism of center/margin, the rhizome metaphor accommodates the complex "subject positions an individual may occupy within colonial discourse" (Ashcroft *Transformation* 51).

vague. Stephen Slemon has described the subversive power of allegories as a key site of "textual counter-discourse" (11) within postcolonial literatures. Both picturebooks mobilize this "particularly potent mode of historical revision, [which] lays bare the tropes, figures, and teleologies on which dominant versions of history are built" (Bradford *Unsettling* 199) and address colonization as a transnational, global phenomenon. Since animals are often represented in groups (Menozzi 191), this way of representation lends itself particularly well for a collective representation of the paradigmatic encounter between colonizer and colonized.

However, as David Rudd has pointed out, "[p]enning in the animal is […] never a simple, straightforward process" (243) – especially not within a postcolonial context – but always also points to the social and ideological anxieties of the society in which the narratives are created. I have already described how *The Rabbits* criticizes the exploitation and commodification of farm animals within industrial agriculture. In the course of this, it becomes visible how industrial capitalism removed most animals from everyday life, hiding them in the intensive agricultural processes. In the urban landscapes of *The Rabbits*, animals are only visible as pets (DPS15), marginalized as "human puppets" (Garrard 152), while the verbal text explicitly laments the displacement or extinction of native animals: "Where are the great billabongs alive with long-legged birds?" (DPS17). Similarly, in *Varmints*, the animals themselves remain powerless against the colonial expansion. Displaced from their green meadows by colonization and urbanization, they can only return into the (hi)story as the colonized reconstruct a new habitat for them. In this context, the disappearance (and the final reappearance) of the bees as a synecdoche for a larger environmental catastrophe can also be read as a metaphor for anthropogenic climate change.

Moreover, in *The Rabbits*, the uncontrollably spreading settler-Rabbits serve as a metaphor for an invasive species, which, like settler identities, destabilize the dichotomy between alien and native (Menozzi 183). In the first waves of the colonization of Australia, the English rabbit was introduced into the country (190), where the colonialist transformation of the Australian bush into agricultural, pastoral land enabled it to breed so massively that it became a plague (Coman 31). In a similar way, the fantastic creatures in *Varmints* collapse the human/non-human binary, while the natives' perspective disables the colonizers as vermin, positioning them as 'lesser' beings than even the average animal. This overlapping of animals and humans reveals the arbitrary boundary between the categories hyper-separated in Western cultures. As Filippo Menozzi puts it in his ecocritical reading of *The Rabbits*:

> As a character in the story, the rabbit cannot be totally explained away by a binary choice: *either* rabbit *or* human coloniser. The animal is *both* rabbit *and* human coloniser, so that ecological reality is connected, in an unstable and incomplete way, to the history of political subjugation. […] I suggest a reading of *The Rabbits* as a critique of capitalism and the complementary social and ecological damage it causes. In this context, the ecological does not become symbol of the social; instead, these two levels constantly overlap and shift one into the other. (191-94, orig. italics)

I would suggest going even one step further and argue that, in *The Rabbits*, the ecological is superimposed onto the social as the picturebook accommodates cultural anxieties about technology and its potential to transform humans themselves into machines, as well as modern science as the instrument of tyranny and mass conformity. In the course of this, the indigenous people become a foil for the idealized primordial nature untouched and unaltered by man and machine, while the European invader is converted into a personification of industrialization and mechanization. Thus, *The Rabbits* largely fixes the Numbats in a preindustrial, rural identity, denying them the ownership of differentiated technological artifacts like the Rabbits, who are associated with advanced technological inventions.

Indeed, both picturebooks represent ecological and humanitarian catastrophes, which are "technologisch vom tatsächlichen Fortschritt der Wissenschaft ermöglicht und ideologisch von den Machthabern als gesellschaftlicher Fortschritt ausgegeben" (Hienger 255), suggesting that the depicted devastations are grounded in the growing alienation of technologized life from the natural basis of existence. It is by means of machines and technology that the invaders appropriate the indigenous' land and its natural resources. From the beginning, both picturebooks antagonize the native flora and fauna and the indigenous preindustrial idyll with the arriving colonialist industrial forces. In *The Rabbits*, a smoking transport machine is visible on the horizon in the first image of the narrative (DPS4), while the following double spread positions the preindustrial natives with their manually crafted sticks and the industrialized colonizers with their modern mechanized weapons in antithesis, separated at the joint (DPS5). As the environmental destruction advances, the surrealist landscapes are portrayed as infested with enormous hyper-mechanized machines demolishing everything in their path and miniaturized technological inventions that relentlessly leave their marks on the formerly rich and alive but now dispossessed and increasingly desolate land (DPS5, 10, 13). Remaining within the master narratives of colonization, these representations reinforce the colonialist linkages between native and nature/natural, colonizer and technology/artificial.

As Gorman Beauchamp has shown, the condemnation of technology and the fear of "mechanomorphism" (60) are common themes in dystopian fiction (54), which often portrays

technology as "dehumanizing" (Mohr 30) and "intrinsically totalitarian" (Beauchamp 5). In *The Rabbits*, it is not entirely clear whether the machines are merely instruments of the colonizers or autonomous agents. Looking suspiciously like the Rabbits themselves, some machines even seem to have feet, eyes, ears, and mouths (DPS13, see figure 11). As no operators are visible, it remains unclear whether they are simply a tribute to the Rabbits, or whether the creations have emancipated themselves from their masters. As the machines seem to gradually morph into Rabbits and the Rabbits into machines – both agents of the colonial "machine" (Césaire 52) –, technology ceases to be an external object and turns into the "very substance" (60) of the human. In this context, the notion of the 'Anthropocene' suggests that we have arrived at a new geological era, in which human transformations of nature such as genetic engineering or climate change have inextricably linked the 'natural' and the 'artificial,' the human and the non-human, to the extent of seemingly "eras[ing] the line between the two" (Fry/Willis 3). In relation to this, both picturebooks show that "[t]echnology is inseparable from culture, which is neither evil nor benign, but is bound up in corporeality" (Mount/O'Brien 535) and desacralize the purity of the 'natural' by reinforcing that human modifications of the environment do not necessarily constitute a contamination.
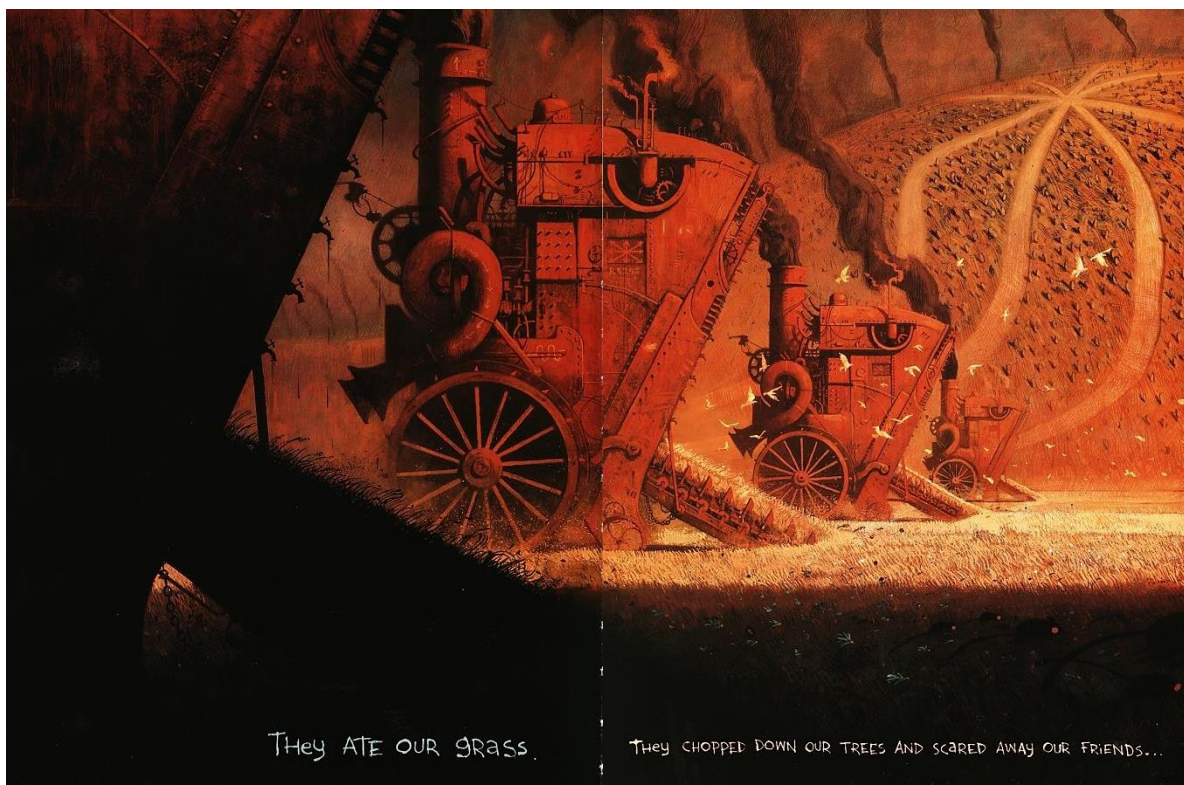

Figure 11: Machine-Rabbits (Marsden/Tan DPS13)

Moreover, both books disconnect the naturalized conjunction of technology and civilization, demonstrating that indigenous people did not live in a pre-civilized, 'primitive' society, but

had established their own forms of civilization. While *The Rabbits* largely maintains "the ecological gap between colonizer and colonized" (Huggan/Tiffin 2), *Varmints* eventually succeeds in overcoming it. On the one hand, the colonialist industry in *Varmints* depends, like in *The Rabbits*, on "a massive technological apparatus – […] a technotopia" (Beauchamp 54) –, which becomes manifest in the settler metropolis (see previous chapter). On the other hand, in the bubbles, the scientific and the technological increasingly coalesce with the supernatural, magical, and theological. At once organic and the product of some sort of 'science,' the bubbles cut across the dualisms of physical/non-physical, organism/machine, animate/inanimate, natural/artificial (see figure 12) and could be read analogous to Donna Haraway's transgressive metaphor of "cybernetic organism[s]" (*Cyborgs* 149), which constructs nature as ambiguous and "eternally renewable" (Huggan/Tiffin 227) as it hybridizes with technology and science and, thus, becomes "ambiguously natural and crafted" (*Cyborgs* 149). While both picturebooks represent colonization as dependent upon technology in its mastering of an externalized nature and the preindustrial native society, in *Varmints*, technology pervades both colonizer and colonized and is prefigured to enter into a symbiosis with nature and the human, revealing their ambiguous interrelations and dependencies. More than a simple metaphor of urban greening, the postcolonial naturecultures of the bubbles, thus, look into a postindustrial future, instead of simply returning to a preindustrial past.
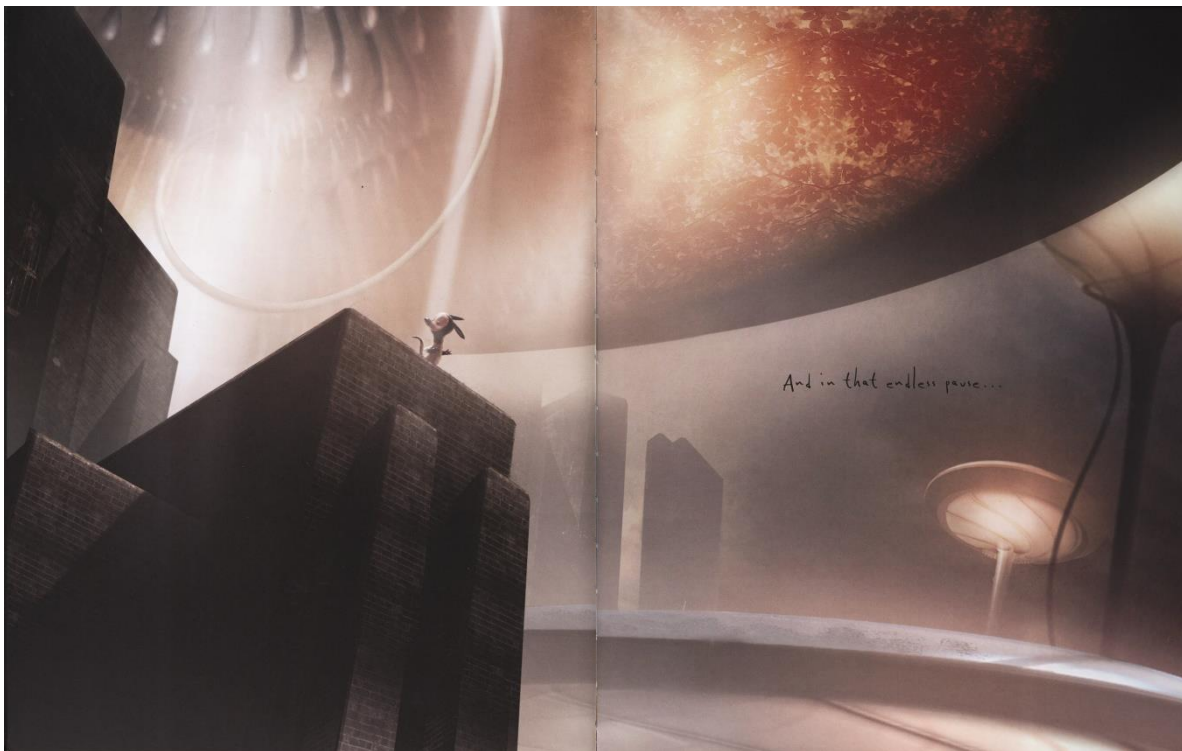

Figure 12: Blurring the boundaries between the natural and the artificial (Ward/Craste DPS16)

3.3. Temporal dimensions: Negotiating history and the linearity of time

In contrast to the majority of contemporary YA dystopian novels, the two picturebooks under scrutiny do not construct explicit (near-)future scenarios in which contemporary tendencies are exaggerated and, thus, viewed under a critical perspective. Instead, their allegorical narrations of colonization could be interpreted as situated in the past, as alternate pasts, or as located in "*a totally other temporal*" (Abensour 42, orig. italics) outside the Western understanding of synchronic, linear time or history. Postcolonial theory recognizes and explores the "inseparable relationship between history and culture in the primary context of colonialism and its consequences" (McLeod "Introduction 8), drawing attention to history as "a knowledge system […] firmly embedded in institutional practices" (Chakrabarty 19) and as a discourse produced by the Eurocentric master narratives that construct history and colonization despite its violence against indigenous peoples as progress.

Moreover, postcolonial theory has emphasized how colonialism not only colonizes space but also time, creating a form of "disjunctive temporality" (Rothberg 360) similar to the temporalities discussed in memory studies, which describe "the relative weight and 'mixture' of past and present in a temporality beyond any notion of linearity or 'homogenous empty time'" (360). As a "disciplined and institutionally regulated form of collective memory" (Chakrabarty 21), history is strongly permeated with colonial and postcolonial practices of remembrance. Postcolonial studies explore not only the "ruptures produced by the imposition of imperial cultural memory and the erasure of pre-colonial histories" (Rothberg 369), but also the possibilities for reconfiguring and reappropriating memory as "a tool in the struggle against the colonial 'machine'" (366). For the anticolonial theorist Aimé Césaire, colonialism relies on a "forgetting machine" (52) that erases the precolonial past from collective memory and history, imposing an imperial canon of cultural memory (Rothberg 365) and replacing indigenous notions of temporality with a Western teleological, linear concept of time.[26] Following Miguel Abensour, the 'totally other temporal' of the dystopia often constitutes "a time of disquieting of the same by the other, time which undergoes the test of the exteriority and thereby forms a relationship to the infinite" (43). Similarly, the picturebook narratives exhibit a sense of timelessness and exemplariness, not least due to their use of animal and fantastic rather than human characters, which contributes to the transnational, global character of the narratives as retellings of a collective memory of colonization (see previous chapter).

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[26] In this context, also the 'post' in 'postcolonialism' itself perpetually contends "with the spectre of linearity and the kind of teleological development it wants to contest" (Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Empire* 196).

As both picturebooks are told from the narrative perspective of the colonized, they set out to challenge the grand narrative of history told from the winners' perspective. Their narratives of the destructiveness of colonization subvert the positivist master narrative of history as progress,[27] revealing that it involves considerable violence against and suffering for those positioned as inferior within the hegemonic power structures. While it becomes clear that these structural inequalities can by no means be resolved easily or rapidly, they are nevertheless represented as opening spaces for empowering transformations when met with creative forces of individual and collective agency. In turn, these postcolonial transformations construct new hybrid spaces that harbor the potential for subversive transgression and cross-cultural translation and alliance. Establishing postcolonial transformation as a "strategic feature of all cultural practice" (*Transformations* 1), Bill Ashcroft has described how colonized, dominated societies transform "the very nature of the cultural power that has dominated them" (1), which relies on strategies of appropriation and reveals the dynamic, circular rather than unidirectional nature of cultural influence (1-2).

Similarly, *The Rabbits* subverts the tropes and grand narratives by which the colonized people and environment have been marginalized through its pointed use of irony and exaggeration. Additionally, the placement of the Numbats on the right-hand side (New) and the Rabbits on the left-hand side (Given) as the future transformation is anticipated (DPS17-18) suggests that the Numbats have an essential contribution to make to the imminent change. While the accompanying verbal text expresses a retrogressive longing for an idealized past, whose irretrievable passing is bemoaned: "Where is the rich, dark earth, brown and moist? Where is the smell of rain dripping from the gum trees? Where are the great billabongs alive with long-legged birds?" (DPS17), the black background (i.e. blank page) of the image and the birds flying towards the right suggest a new beginning and an orientation towards the future. The solution, it might be concluded, lies somewhere in-between.

Also in *Varmints*, which operates even more explicitly in the political present than *The Rabbits*, the past is not reinstalled but transformed into a new "beginning" (DPS21). If read as empowering metaphors for indigenous reservations, the bubbles in *Varmints* constitute in-between spaces of a "past-present" (Bhabha 7) that "anticipate the possibility of radically different 'nows'" (Sargisson *Utopianism* 52) and, thus, move their transgressive utopian transformation "from a speculative (or concrete) future to […] an alternative reading of the present" (52). At the end, *Varmints* neither discounts nor lingers on the "destructive nature of

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[27] In this context, *Varmints* also repeatedly subverts the dominant visual direction of progress (from left to right).

the colonial encounter" (Huggan "Introduction II" 303) or its initial nostalgic idealization of the past, but instead creatively imagines transformative postcolonial future-presents.

In this context, *Varmints* effectively collapses Western linearity and a teleological notion of time by creating a spiral temporality, in which each ending is converted into a new but transformed beginning. For example, along with the image of the blossoming of the first flower in the dystopian cityscape at the end of the book, the text announces "The beginning…" (DPS21), and also the book's subtitle, *(part one)*, suggests that there is a 'part two' of the story – which does not exist – and, thus, alludes to the open-endedness of the narrative and its utopian-dystopian dynamics. Raising the question what comes after part one and the new beginning if there is no chronologically subsequent part two, the narrative seems to suggest there is only ever a part one, repeating itself endlessly, in different forms and under different parameters. Challenging "the secular, linear calendar that the writing of 'history' must follow" (Chakrabarty 19), this spiral temporality destabilizes Western notions of linear time and chronology.

In *The Rabbits*, the colonizing Rabbits not only seem obsessed with measuring and mapping the colonial space but also with the measurement of time. Denaturalizing Western linear temporality, *The Rabbits* illustrates how the colonizers, who are equipped with watches, numbers, and digits (DPS7-8, 11, 15), superimposed Western concepts of time onto the colonies while displacing the indigenous temporalities that become manifest in the introductory lines: "The rabbits came many grandparents ago. At first we didn't know what to think. They looked a bit like us." (DPS4-5). Despite maintaining a temporal linearity, the verbal text resists the Western conventions of time measurement. Additionally, *The Rabbits* exhibits a tone of indigenous oral storytelling, replacing the standard Western concept of recorded history with a mythic, oral account of the world as it tends to be generated in oral societies (cf. JanMohammed 280, qtd. in Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Empire* 81). This departure from Western historical 'truths' subverts the dominant hierarchies between written (Western) history and oral (indigenous) myth and challenges the dominant historical narrative according to which only colonization and the colonizers "brought [the colonized] into history" (Cabral, qtd. in Rothberg 365).

In this context, both *The Rabbits* and *Varmints* not only subvert the grand narrative of colonization as progress by revealing its devastating consequences, but also recognize the indigenous' precolonial past. For example, *Varmints* dedicates three double spreads to the introduction of the indigenous culture and life, and also after colonization, their (personal)

past is present by form of photographs of the protagonist's ancestors (DPS10). On the first pages of *The Rabbits*, the visual portrayal of the precolonial flora and fauna takes over almost the entire double spread. The landscape, its plants, and its inhabitants are represented in great details full of life. Even as the Rabbits' assault on the land and the Numbats advances, the traces of the Numbats can still be seen and read, both physically on the land and culturally. At one point, the phrase "the right ways" (DPS6) appears as a reference to the cultural conventions of the Numbats, they are shown to have lived in trees (DPS8) – admittedly a more than unfortunate representation of indigenous dwellings (see chapter 3.2.2) – and to have had a close relationship to the trees and animals on their land, latter of which are referred to as their friends (DPS13). Additionally, one might even be inclined to make out rock paintings on the throughout densely decorated indigenous landscapes (e.g. right upper corner DPS6); in the narrative, it remains unclear who left these traces, nature or the indigenous population. Thus, postcolonial space is portrayed as "palimpsest" (Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Post-Colonial* 158), imprinted not only with colonial histories but also with indigenous histories predating colonization that trigger complex, multilayered experiences of historical place.

Nevertheless, Brooke Collins-Gearing and Dianne Osland question whether *The Rabbits* really subverts Western notions of time and history, arguing that the book imposes "a decidedly Western temporal perspective" on the supposed viewpoint of the indigenous inhabitants:

> Indigenous views of time as cyclical do not always separate these acts of invasion and colonisation from other important moments in Indigenous life and knowledges. […] But in *The Rabbits,* the original creatures appear only in relation to the act of colonisation; any notion of pre-existence is unnecessary and therefore pre-historical. This serves to reinforce the Western linear approach to time, movement from one period to the next and therefore movement further away from the original period: that is, the book starts with the arrival of the Rabbits and Numbats' existence before this is now long gone and forgotten. (n.p.)

For Collings-Gearing and Osland, the fact that the story lacks a detailed account of the precolonial period and the Numbats' life before it was tainted by the Rabbits means that the narrative suggests that "this is the only version of history that needs to be told" (n.p.). While there is indeed no detailed separate periodical account of the Numbats' life before the arrival of the Rabbits – which would, after all, again reinforce a Western periodical understanding of time –, the story does not erase precolonial history entirely from its narration. In fact, it repeatedly appears as glimpses of ever-present memories and traces between the accounts of

the events of colonization. Moreover, by pervading its representations of Western superiority and the European-Australian national myth with a sharp sense of irony (see chapter 3.2.1), *The Rabbits* clearly reveals and criticizes how the colonizers "made us [=the colonized] leave history, our history, to follow them [=the colonizers], right at the back to follow the progress of their history" (Cabral, qtd. in Rothberg 365).

However, Collins-Gearing and Osland rightly argue that while subverting the master narrative of history and colonization as progress, *The Rabbits*, at the same time, creates another linear master narrative of history, namely the "allegory of the dominance of the colonisers, their slow destruction of the land and its creatures" (n.p.). This is the case not only because *The Rabbits* maintains a Western temporal perspective of linear, historical time within its chronological narrative, but also because it reduces the complexities of industrialization and urbanization in settler colonies to a simplified one-dimensional chain of causalities, allowing for hardly any cultural or ideological hybridization between the colonizers and the colonized.

For the most part, similarly reductionist structures of causality and segregation are constructed in *Varmints*. Immediately after their arrival, the OTHERS invade the natives' land and superimpose their urbanized, industrialized culture and technology, while pushing the indigenous population to the margins of society, whence they foster new hope and loci of resistance. In the images, the effective perspectivization of the (hi)story through the use of coloring, placement, and perspective clearly represents the viewpoint of the colonized, which radically demonizes the invaders while constructing the natives as highly positively connoted subjects for identification. While this certainly maintains the binary opposition between colonizers and colonized, albeit complicating its dominant hierarchies, it also leaves the readers to draw comparisons between the dominant historical narratives of colonization and this similarly biased perspective. Thus, *Varmints* reveals how history is always a subjective construction, never an objective 'truth,' regardless from whose perspective it is told. As both in *Varmints* and *The Rabbits* "the familiar becomes strange, the natural unusual, the unquestionable debatable, and the transparent visible" (Yannicopoulou 77), the dominant norms and standards are denaturalized as the apparent certainties of Western history are revealed as cultural constructions. At the same time, this questions the absolute authority and totality of any kind of historical narrative, which is always relative and subject to partisan perspectives.

Moreover, the two picturebooks establish that colonialism constitutes a central part not only of the colonies' but also of European history, showing how "the past enters the present in the

form of relations of power, systems of government, modes of representation, and myths of national identity" (Bradford *Unsettling* 4). Although postcolonial scholars today insist that there is not only one form of colonialism but "*different experiences* of colonialism" (McLeod *Postcolonialism* 240, orig. italics) or "multiple colonialisms" (Huggan "General Introduction" 22), the general global impact of colonialism(s) cannot be denied. Following Máire ní Fhlathúin, colonialism in general and British imperialism in particular have "shaped the course of the world's history" (21). The relevance of colonialism in a global historical framework is illustrated by both *The Rabbits* and *Varmints*, which not only reinforce that "[e]mpire, colonialism and colonized peoples are not marginal, or additional, to the history of Europe, but lie at its very heart; just as the European nations have irreversibly altered the histories of the terrain and populations they colonized" (McLeod "Introduction" 2), but also reinstate European imperialism as an integral part of global history.

4. Conclusion: (Utopian-)Dystopian picturebooks as transgressive counter-narratives?

Raffaela Baccolini has argued that dystopian texts are typically "built around the construction of a narrative [of the hegemonic order] and a counter-narrative [of resistance]" ("Womb" 293). In postcolonial theory, Richard Terdiman's theory of discourse and counter-discourse, according to which signs obtain meaning in contradiction (40), has repeatedly been mobilized to illustrate how dominant discourses maintain their dominance and how discursive resistance occurs (e.g. Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Empire*, Ashcroft *Transformation*, Slemon). Similar structures of resistance and subversion inform the relations between canonical cultural memory (Assmann) and counter-memory (Foucault *Language*), which are both implicated in (post)colonial power relations. In a political context, counter-memory unsettles the hegemonic constructions of memory and history by resignifying the past in the present, i.e. "remembering back" (Rothberg 370) to the center, just as postcolonial counter-discourse and counter-narratives "write back" from the empire to the colonial center (Ashcroft/Griffiths/Tiffin *Empire* 32).

Similarly, in *The Rabbits*, the ironic quality within the portrayals of colonialist superiority and self-glorification holds an important subversive potential, while *Varmints*, for example, sets the counter-discourse of sound against colonialist ocularcentrism. Displacing the dominant "angle of vision through which we approach history" (Rothberg 368), both picturebooks to some extent deconstruct naturalized ideologies about and dominant memories of colonization, colonial space(s), the colonizers, and the colonized, revealing the fluctuating boundaries between the Western cultural binaries of human/non-human, organism/machine, nature/culture. However, as a consequence of the allegorical character of the stories, both picturebooks reduce their narratives of colonization considerably and simplify the complex processes of centuries of systematic persecution, disenfranchisement, and marginalization of indigenous people. Neither of them directly addresses the complex colonial treaty policies or mention contemporary struggles for land rights. Focusing on the material effects of colonization and settlement, the picturebooks only implicitly hint at their psychological effects. Furthermore, the reductionist portrayal of all indigenous populations as one homogenous group disregards (intra)cultural diversity, the different forms and experiences of colonization, and the influences of other migrant groups after colonization. Moreover, the absence of any intercultural mingling such as marriage, partnership, or offspring could be

interpreted as reinscribing colonial anxieties regarding miscegenation. In this context, one could argue that the complex processes and interrelations of colonization, urbanization, and industrialization can hardly be portrayed in the medium of the picturebook, which is usually limited to a rather small number of pages. Particularly *The Rabbits*, however, constitutes a solid counter-example against this argument, as it calls into question the grand narratives of colonization and settler identity in complex ways, and portrays the historical processes of Australian colonization, urbanization, and industrialization in extensive detail.

Additionally, within most of their narratives, both picturebooks maintain the binary opposition of colonizer and colonized even while subverting their respective dominant subject and object status. In *Varmints*, the invaders and the indigenous appear as segregated throughout the entire process of colonization and the indigenous struggle for decolonization, even though colonizers and colonized both live together in the same city. While there is some intercultural exchange in *The Rabbits* when the Rabbits and the Numbats first meet, and both groups live side by side in the settler metropolis, the Numbats are always either separated by explicit boundaries from or considerably marginalized in relation to the Rabbits. Thus, both picturebooks largely reinscribe the colonial dualism and hyper-separation of self and other as always and inevitably antagonistic, even if they do so from a counter-discursive perspective, and fail to effectively subvert the system that constructs these hierarchical binary relations within their narratives. In this context, it could be illuminating to look at similar non-Western texts that revise Western master narratives from an indigenous author's point of view.

It is only towards their endings and outside their narratives that both picturebooks open up "new conceptual spaces" (Mohr *Words Apart* 62) that do not simply reverse the existing power structures but offer possibilities for a creative, multidirectional postcolonial transformation (cf. Ashcroft *Transformation*, *Futures*) which involves the interaction of both colonizer and colonized, native and settler, whose identities have increasingly mingled as the invaders themselves gradually become native. As ambiguous spaces of "neither and more" (Mohr "Transgressive" 11), the bubbles in *Varmints* transgress the binary structures of human/non-human, animate/inanimate, natural/artificial, rural/urban, opening up possibilities beyond these apparent antipodes. Moreover, by referencing historical instances of colonialization and emphasizing their destructiveness for both the land and its inhabitants, both picturebooks under scrutiny construct not only historical critiques, but also warnings that cater towards contemporary politics of exploitation in the context of globalized industrial capitalism, suggesting that the depicted struggles over place and identity are by no means

over. At the same time, the endings can be read as proleptic manifestations of utopian transformation for the future or as transgressive utopian alternative readings of the present that retain the element of hope despite the seemingly bleak outlook of the dystopian other-world. Overall, both picturebooks construct transformative counter-discourses and counter-memories that dismantle the illusion of totality and certainty of Western historical and ideological master narratives of various kinds, challenging the imperial European "monopoly on knowledge" (Pratt 7) about colonial and global history and (post)colonial identity. In their endings, they demonstrate the multidirectionality of cultural interaction and memory, which is "both disjunctive and combinatorial: it both disassembles and reassembles" (Rothberg 372-73), especially in today's globalized postcolonial world, where the "*mobilizing* nature" (375, orig. italics) and the "spiralling, echoing tendencies" (176) of (transnational and transcultural) memory and culture are particularly evident.

In this context, *Varmints* attributes a greater amount of agency and active resistance against dominant orders to the colonized than *The Rabbits* and stresses the importance of the self and the individual subject position within a larger community and the ideologies of a society. According to Dunja Mohr, "reframing the utopian possibility as an individual, achievable project" (Bradford et al. 33) is a typical feature of transgressive utopian dystopias (*Worlds* 52). In *Varmints*, the value and ethical responsibility of the "personal engagement of the individual, driven by discontent to participate in the negotiation of a larger social transformation" (52), is strengthened by the construction of a subject position (i.e. the protagonist) for young readers, who are often "assumed to be the decision-makers and citizens of the future" (Bradford et al. 77). While *Varmints* places the dystopian collectivism of imperialism in opposition with the individualized dominated minority, *The Rabbits* generally disregards the value of personal investment and responsibility in favor of its collective, allegorical dimensions. Instead, it emphasizes the necessity of joint efforts between the mostly homogenized groups of colonizer/settler and colonized to bring about a utopian transformation that enables the (re)construction of an inhabitable world.

However, if the two texts are considered in relation with similar dystopian picturebooks such as Bill Peet's *The Wump World* (U.S. 1970), the tendency towards a transnational, transhistorical literarization of colonization as radical social, cultural, but especially environmental and ecological destruction can be observed. This results in the creation of a new, linear, one-dimensional master narrative across nations and cultures that can also be observed in other literary texts and media, such as Ursula Le Guin's *The Word for World is*

Forest (1976) or James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009). A broader investigation of this ostensibly critical, but effectively regressive master narrative of colonization as ecological destruction would certainly be revealing. The picturebooks under scrutiny prove to be fundamentally informed by anxieties about industrial capitalism, modern science and technology that interfere with their postcolonial concerns. Apocalyptically exaggerating the processes of industrialization and urbanization exclusively depicted as Western (colonial) enterprises, especially *The Rabbits*, largely fixes and idealizes the native population as the locus of a primordial nature, which causes it to (re)institute some of the dominant colonialist hierarchies it set out to subvert. In this context, *The Rabbits* and, to some extent, *Varmints* remain complicit in colonialist constructions of the conjunctions of nature/culture, nature/technology, natural/artificial, and native/settler. Combining postcolonial and ecocritical politics, both picturebooks present decolonization as an issue not only of culture but also of environment and ecology that requires, among others, a renegotiation of the relations between (the Western binaries of) nature and culture, the human and the non-human, which is prefigured to reconcile both colonizer and colonized with the land and its non-human inhabitants, as well as with one another.

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Illustrations

Abstract (English)

Recently, literary dystopias have seen a considerable rise on the book market, especially in young adult literature. In this context, dystopian discourses have also entered the picturebook, creating a notable subgenre of dystopian picturebooks. Even though picturebook dystopias constitute a particularly compelling variant of dystopian writing for both the youngest of readers and readers of all ages in which the dystopia is constructed and negotiated by multimodal texts, dystopian picturebooks have not yet been conceptualized and analyzed as a (sub)genre in its own right. In the first part of this thesis, possible ways of defining dystopian picturebooks are discussed, drawing on Darko Suvin's theory of 'estrangement' and Miguel Abensour's concept of '(radical) alterity'. In the second part, the thesis investigates two dystopian picturebooks that connect processes of colonization with environmental and ecological developments like industrialization, urbanization, and pollution, which are attributed almost apocalyptic consequences: John Marsden and Shaun Tan's *The Rabbits* (1998, Australia) and Helen Ward and Marc Craste's *Varmints* (2007, UK). The foci of the multimodal analysis are the ways in which these linkages are constructed by the picturebook dystopia, and how the verbal and visual representations of the colonizers, the colonized, and the environment transgress or perpetuate cultural stereotypes – such as 'terra nullius' (ní Fhlathúin, Johnston/Lawson), the 'Vanishing Indian' (Dippie), or the 'Ecological Indian' (Krech III) – and dominant binary oppositions such as nature/culture, human/animal, human/machine. Within this poststructural framework, the picturebooks are examined using postmodern concepts of literary dystopias such as Dunja Mohr's definition of 'transgressive utopian dystopias.' Informed by postcolonial and ecocritical theory, the thesis shows how processes of colonization are constructed as determining destructive developments of industrialization, urbanization, and pollution in a transnational, transhistorical context.

Abstract (Deutsch)

Auf dem Buchmarkt – vor allem im Bereich der Jugendliteratur – erleben literarische Dystopien derzeit einen veritablen Aufschwung, im Zuge dessen dystopische Diskurse auch in die Gattung Bilderbuch Einzug gehalten haben. Obwohl Bilderbuchdystopien eine besonders bemerkenswerte Spielart dystopischer Literatur sowohl für die jüngsten Leser_innen als auch Leser_innen jeden Alters darstellen, in welcher das dystopische Szenario durch einen multimodalen Text konstruiert und verhandelt wird, sind dystopische Bilderbücher noch nicht als eigenständiges (Sub-)Genre konzeptualisiert und untersucht worden. Im ersten Teil dieser Arbeit werden, mit Rückgriff auf Darko Suvins Theorie der ‚Verfremdung' und Miguel Abensours Konzept der ‚(radikalen) Alterität', Möglichkeiten der Definition dystopischer Bilderbücher diskutiert. Danach werden im zweiten Teil der Arbeit zwei dystopische Bilderbücher untersucht, die Prozesse der Kolonisierung mit ökologischen Entwicklungen wie Industrialisierung, Urbanisierung und Umweltverschmutzung in Verbindung setzen, welchen beinahe apokalyptische Folgen zugeschrieben werden: John Marsden und Shaun Tans *The Rabbits* (1998, Australien) und Helen Ward und Marc Crastes *Varmints* (2007, Großbritannien). Im Fokus der multimodalen Analyse steht die Frage, wie diese Verbindungen in den Bilderbuchdystopien hergestellt werden und inwiefern die verbalen und visuellen Darstellungen der Kolonialisten, der Kolonialisierten und der Umwelt kulturelle Stereotypen – zum Beispiel die Topoi der ‚terra nullius' (ní Fhlathúin, Johnston/Lawson), des ‚Verschwindenden Indianers' (Dippie) oder des ‚Ökologischen Indianers' (Krech III) – und dominante binäre Oppositionen wie Natur/Kultur, Mensch/Tier oder Mensch/Maschine perpetuieren bzw. unterlaufen. Im Rahmen dieser poststrukturellen Herangehensweise werden die Bilderbücher mithilfe postmoderner Blickwinkel auf dystopische Literatur, wie zum Beispiel Dunja Mohrs Konzept der ‚transgressiven utopischen Dystopie', untersucht. Anhand von postkolonialen und ökokritischen Theorien zeigt diese Arbeit, wie Kolonisierung in einem transnationalen, transhistorischen Kontext als ein Prozess konstruiert wird, der destruktive Entwicklungen der Industrialisierung, Urbanisierung und Umweltverschmutzung bedingt.