

# **Modern Literary Theory in the Cultures of Central and Eastern Europe as an Entangled Intellectual History Beginning in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present: A Handbook Project at the University of Tübingen**

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In the upcoming years, a handbook entitled *Literary Theory between East and West: Transcultural and Transdisciplinary Movements from Russian Formalism to Cultural Studies* will be published under the editorship of Michał Mrugalski, Schamma Schahadat and Irina Wutsdorff (University of Tübingen) as well as Danuta Ulicka (University of Warsaw). The handbook project will take an in-depth, research-based look at the cultural and historical conditionality of literary theory in Central and Eastern Europe as well as its *histoire croisée*. The time period ranges from the beginnings of modern literary theory at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to the developments in the present day. From a historical perspective the stories of intellectual entanglement and the transfer of theories and ideas between players and institutions in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond will be investigated (specifically: Russian, Polish and Czech theories in exchange with each other and with the German-language area). Submerged and overlooked knowledge, which in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was part of a European intellectual field but tended to be suppressed as the so-called *East Bloc* was excluded, should thus become visible in the Western field of theory. Political but also linguistic barriers have contributed to the fact that large parts of Central and East European thought and knowledge were not at all or very barely taken into consideration in Western Europe and in the Anglo-American area.

However, the project assumes that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was intensive intellectual movement in the Central and East European region as well as between Eastern and Central Europe and Western academia, not only as a result of an active exchange of ideas, but also as a result of personal and institutional, official and unofficial contacts. Yet this exchange was only possible in a rather restricted manner over long periods of time: Political events, on the one hand, led to a number of waves of people going into exile, and, on the other, to the seclusion of larger parts of Central and Eastern Europe. A few theories nonetheless made it into the Western discourse on literary theory via exiled scholars where some of them (e.g., Bakhtin's *Dialogicity*) became known only indirectly and were transferred to new cultural contexts, while others (e.g., the theories of Ol'ga Frejdenberg or by Stefania Skwarczyńska) had a limited reception outside of the Russian or Polish context.

A famous example for a successful and yet inhibited transfer of ideas is the story of literary structuralism — the origins of which can be traced back to transcultural



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Prague of the interwar period — which split into numerous trends following World War Two: the internationally renowned Paris structuralism captured the attention of academia, whereas the Warsaw structuralism and the further developments of Prague structuralism were much less known in the West. This was unwarranted since both contained, among other outstanding features, elements of those theories that were later (re-)imported to Central and Eastern Europe from France and the USA under the label of post-structuralism.

Within the framework of the project we will follow a two-fold thesis: First, that Russia as a place where modern literary theory came into existence did not come about by chance. The intent of discovering a neutral, culturally independent literariness and associated specific artistic methods in literary texts, which Russian scholars of literature and linguistics formulated in the 1910s and 1920s, was a reaction to the traditionally high regard for literature as a place of national-cultural identification with a community in the Russian, as well as the Polish, Czech and German culture. Secondly, the concepts of literary theory came from and moved into different disciplines, that can be seen as a reaction to the fact that literatures in the literature-centric countries of origin were always thought of in relationship to other cultural areas. Thus, the project is interested in further analysing two movements of exchange, of transfer and of entanglement: between cultural areas and between disciplines, between literary theory and other disciplines of the humanities and cultural studies.

## 1. RESEARCH CONTEXT

In 2004, Galin Tihanov formulated two theses that received a great amount of attention: first of all, according to Tihanov, modern theory of literature originated in Central and Eastern Europe; secondly, he maintains that this theory is momentarily going through a crisis which became visible as a result of the turn from the theory of literature towards the anthropology of literature in the late 1980s (Wolfgang Iser) and as a result of Yuri Lotman's cultural semiotics (semiotics as a 'global theory of culture', Tihanov 2004, p. 61).

Both theses are of importance to our project insofar as we intend to analyse how modern theory of literature — which was formed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (initially as literary formalism) — evolved, how individual concepts were reviewed, transformed and incorporated into new cultural contexts, how different literary theories (structuralism, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, system theory, etc.) emerged and over the course of time fell back on the terminological and conceptual reservoir of early literary theory. How did literary theories dissociate themselves from Central and East European discussions and continue to develop in Germany, France and in the USA? In the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, how was the dialogue of theories stemming from Central and Eastern Europe (at first formalism and structuralism, later [cultural] semiotics) conducted in exchange with Western theories and how were local traditions suppressed in favour of American and French theories? What do theories, transformed by Western discussions which are re-imported into Central and Eastern Europe, look like? (cf. the movements of a theory-(re-)transfer, Hüchtker — Kliems

2011). Since these movements between the cultures also include a transdisciplinary dimension, it is also important to ask whether literary theory with its movements into other disciplines and with its expansion in different literary theories in the plural (e.g., psychoanalytical theory of literature, literary anthropology) has actually reached its end or whether, from very beginning, it was always also a theory of culture.

Thus, with this background in mind, the focus of the planned project will be on the analysis of two transfer movements: 1) the one between cultural spaces primarily involved in the development of literary theories (Central and Eastern Europe, Germany, France and the Anglo-American cultural area), and 2) the movement between the disciplines since there was an active exchange between literary theories and other subjects in the humanities (e.g., psychoanalysis, historical sciences, ethnology just to name a few).

The beginning of a modern literary theory in the writings of the Russian formalists in the 1910s builds on a European culture of science which emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: In addition to the local traditions (such as the Russian reception of Wilhelm Humboldt by Aleksandr Potebnia, the foundation of comparative studies by Aleksandr Veselovskii and the literary critique and the poetic practice of the symbolists Viacheslav Ivanov and Andrei Bely), the following played an important role: the *explication du texte* which had developed in France since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, German aesthetics (Broder Christiansen, Theodor Lipps), German psychology (Wilhelm Wundt), *Allgemeine Kulturwissenschaft* ('general cultural studies', Alois Riegl), the science of art and musicology (Heinrich Wölfflin, Eduard Hanslick), linguistics, stylistics and morphology of literature (Karl Vossler, Leo Spritzer, Wilhelm Dibelius), phenomenology as well as neo-Kantianism. Tihanov (2004, p. 65) considers the beginning of literary theory as a paradigm change within the context of a process of disintegration of philosophical concepts. What happened was a transfer of terminology, concepts and ideas between German philosophy, the writing of history, linguistics, arts and literary studies and the Slavic cultures. Thus, the classical philologists Tadeusz Zieliński and Stanisław Srebrny, who both stem from Poland and gave impulses to both the young Russian futurists and formalists and also to Michail Bakhtin, completed their studies in Germany; the Polish linguist Baudouin de Courtenay, who was important for the development of phonology and for the francophone structuralism, lectured both at Russian and Polish universities.

There are different versions of the history of literary theories in research: either a genealogy is constructed based on few references to the conditions under which these theories came into being (e.g., as a movement from phenomenology to psychoanalysis via structuralism and post-structuralism, Eagleton (2008), Waugh (2006) in turn describes this development as one from a 'theory of literature' to a 'theory revolution', i.e., from concentrating on literature to concentrating on theory as such). Or it is narrated as an institutional history of literary critique, which is closely connected with the public space (on developments in Western Europe see Hohendahl 1982), or rather as a repression of the public space, i.e., the political (as in Russia, cf. Dobrenko — Tihanov 2011). Or, however, in a completely different way: it is narrated as a story of decline, as the history of a theory of literature which abandoned its specificity in that it further diverged into different theories and in the end opened uptowards cultural theory (Tihanov 2004).

Even though at the very beginning (in the early formalist writings) modern literary theory did demand a status of autonomy, what can be observed nonetheless is that it already very early did exhibit a cultural theoretical dimension: the movement of the Russian formalism from literature-immanent methods (according to Hansen-Löve 'paradigmatic model of reduction' F I) to extra-literary rows (F III according to Hansen-Löve, cf. Hansen-Löve 1996) marks this jump from literature to culture; Renate Lachmann (1970) observes this breach of the border already in the early Šklovskij when she asks the question of whether Šklovskij with this thesis of the 'resurrection of the word' 1914 (Šklovskij 1972) was indicating that there was a 'regaining of life', a new 'awareness of life', a new 'view of things' or whether it was an art-immanent process of perception. The same is true for the Prague structuralism which was multi-disciplinary from the beginning and included e.g., important ethnological texts (cf. Bogatyrev 2011) and in Mukařovský's aesthetic concept ([1936]/1982) took into consideration the stance towards reception of the social collective. His late structural aesthetic of the 1940s ultimately is based on an anthropological functional model. Essentially the developments of literary theory towards a literary anthropology or towards cultural semiotics can thus also be considered to be a consequent advancement of these early approaches.

## 2. AIM OF THE PROJECT

### WHY LITERARY THEORY?

Reflections on literary history by German early Romanticism and Idealism (Schelling, Hegel) which were of fundamental importance for the Central and East European region can be interpreted as initial impulses towards a type of literary theory. As the East and West Slavic cultures, in the Age of Enlightenment, oriented themselves primarily towards France, they then subsequently reviewed German Romanticism as well as Classicism and Idealism and started a dialogue, which in turn had repercussions on German culture (e.g., August Cieszkowski as a leading philosopher of the pre-March). The works of the Russian Formalists beginning in the 1910s however are regarded as the beginning of a modern, institutionalised literary theory which for the first time considered literature as an autonomous subject matter and whose theories were recognized and discussed across Europe. In connection with de Saussure's structuralism they had a considerable influence on the advancement of literary theories. This is where our project sets out to analyse the movements of cultural transfer and the *histoire croisée* of a widely branched literary theory.

The second movement the project wants to keep in mind for the analysis, the one between the disciplines, assumes that formalist literary theory not only took literature into consideration, but phenomena from other disciplines as well as social issues and consequently soon was moving into other areas. This is especially true for the literature-centric cultures of Central and Eastern Europe: On the one hand, the emerging literary theories developed in the direction of cultural semiotics (Jurij Lotman, s. Lotman 1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 1992d) and on the other, in the direction of anthropology (Wolfgang Iser, cf. Iser 1993, Tihanov 2004 already observed this movement), e.g., ty-

ing the aesthetics of reception also to anthropologically oriented approaches of the Prague Structuralism. For some years now, the ‘anthropological turn’ in theory has been discussed in the Russian context in *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* (initiated by Prochorova 2009 /vol. 122, 2013/ with journal for instance a reaction to Brejninger 2013). A culturally rooted literary theory (‘kulturowa teoria literatury’) has crystallized also in Poland (e. g. Nycz — Markowski 2006 and Walas — Nycz 2013). In the newer West European debate in which literary theory gives way to cultural theoretical approaches, there has been a convergence between literary and cultural studies in form of ‘literary studies as cultural studies’ (cf. Schößler 2006) established in the 1990s in the course of the *cultural turn* (described primarily by Bachmann-Medick 1996, 2006), whereby it falls back on concepts stemming from the 1920s (cf. Voßkamp 2003, p. 75).

#### WHY CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE?

Literary theory formed in Central and East Europe migrated with its scholars. The most famous are Roman Jakobson and René Wellek and in the German-speaking area Erich Auerbach is a popular example (cf. Konuk 2010 on Auerbach). However, there are also less popular cases we would like to trace: The Polishist Manfred Kridl from Vilna dedicated his work to Russian Formalism in Poland at the beginning of the 1930s, i.e. about the same time as the theory debates in Prague (cf. Karcz 2002, p. 105 f.); in 1944 Kridl was the first in the USA to write about Russian Formalism (Kridl 1944), followed in 1955 by Viktor Erlich who before World War Two studied Polish Studies in Warsaw (Erlich 1955). In other cases, the scholars remained in their home countries and merely their ideas migrated, as was the case with the repeated re-contextualization of the theories of Michail Bakhtin or Yuri Lotman. Julia Kristeva — a Bulgarian socialised in France — in a new reading (or rather: misreading) introduced the Russian theoretician Michail Bakhtin to Western Europe as a theoretician of intertextuality as a result of which Bakhtin’s ideas were advanced on the one hand in the emerging field of Intertextuality Theory — cf. for instance Lachmann 1990, Mai 1991, Lesic-Thomas 2005 — and on the other in the context of Postcolonial Studies — cf. for instance Young 2000 (cf. Grübel 2011 on the migration of Bakhtin’s concept of dialogicity; on the reception of Bakhtin cf. Emerson 2010). In this context, Bakhtin’s embeddedness in the German tradition of hermeneutics has been receiving more attention as of late (cf. Soboleva 2010). A point less embraced by Western reception is the dependence of Bakhtin’s dialogicity on Russian (and not only Russian) philosophy of religion often pointed out by Russian Bakhtinologists (cf. for instance Ivanov 1999, Hirshkop 2002, Tamarčenko 2011). At first Yuri Lotman was successful in West-European semiology and narrative theory (cf. Schmid 2014) and then advanced to become a theoretician of the border concept in order to finally again act as a narratologist in newest German theory (Koschorke 2012). Roman Ingarden who in Germany was received within the context of the group „Poetics and Hermeneutics“, as of late receives attention in France and this on the one hand as a missing link between Paris structuralism (via Wellek and Warren’s *Theory of Literature* from 1949) and the reception aesthetics which on the other hand was the precursor to neurosemiotics and neurosciences (Potocki — Schaeffer 2013). Our aim is to reflect on why some thinkers from the alleged intellectual periphery of Central and Eastern Europe

became prominent while others (Ol'ga Frejdenberg and Stefania Skwarczyńska were already mentioned) are ignored or forgotten. In this way the project intends to uncover the discursive mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion of a scientific development of a canon which dominates the field of literary sciences.

It is our aim to (re-)write the history of literary theory whereby we however do not want to produce a *great narrative* about a literary theory which in part stems from *small* cultures and has been integrated into the *master discourse* of the Anglo-American and French theories in transformed form. Instead, many small narratives of seemingly local concepts will be integrated into a greater transcultural context.

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