



International Conference

Literarische Form. Geschichte und Kultur ästhetischer Modellbildung

Literary Form. History and Culture of Aesthetic Modeling

La forme littéraire. L'histoire et la culture de la modélisation esthétique

Münster, Germany, 5–7 October 2015

1. The Return of Form

The growing interest in the idea of form that has quite recently emerged in history of science, literature, and media studies seems to point to an increasing need: the re-evaluation of the productivity and agency of literature ‘as such’. This novel ‘consciousness of form’ aims to address two counter-trends in academic research: the expansion of the literary in the fields of discourse history and its reduction to a matter of narration. Instructive as the two approaches undoubtedly are, they tend to cast a shadow on the processes of aesthetic production that were once termed “languages of form” or “morphogenesis” (*Gestaltbildung*) (cf. Walzel 1923). That these attempts to introduce a “poetics of form” (Burdorf 2001) were by no means reducing the complexity of literary discourse to a system of aesthetic immanence can be derived from André Jolles’ early concept of a *Formenwelt*. This “world of forms” is always a result of (or at least entangled in) an “occupation of the mind” – a *Geistesbeschäftigung* as its contemporary epistemic context. At the same time, the idea of an ‘entangled form’ does not suggest refraining from detailed analyses. In fact, interpretation should “observe when, where and how language, without ceasing to be a system of signs, can be and will be a *Gebilde*” (Jolles 1930) – a formation or composition of forms.

The Münster Conference on Literary Form will build upon the recent interest in form and modeling (cf. e.g. Petersen 2014). It will explore both the *poetics* and the *history of form* through case studies that cover a wide range of topics – with regard to literary history as well as to affiliated discourses and academic fields. It aims to trace the functions of *poetic form-processing* (genesis, transfer and transformation). It will analyze the “states of formal aggregation” or *formalization* (e.g. in the concept of “generic knowledge” found in medieval literature or classified in Jolles’ works as “simple form” – “actualized form” – “artistic form”, Jolles 1930). Furthermore, the conference will trace *the cultures and milieus of form* (for instance intermediary forms between in the classic and the popular) together with their *strategies and policies of form*. The conference also distinguishes between the concept of poetic form and its competing notions (such as signature, contour, *gestalt*, structure, and system). It also covers well-established binaries like chaos vs. form, form vs. matter, content vs. form, as well as their dynamic counterparts in concepts like morphology and ‘inner form’, or form as operational self-reference (e.g. in the theory of systems).

2. Form and Model

Poetic texts establish models of reality that have been constituted, rendered visible, and made accessible (for reconfiguration and interpretation) by aesthetic form. On the other hand, however, literary forms also ‘result’ from modeling – from planning, testing and controlling –, carried out on different levels of aesthetic *poiesis* to regulate the scope of action: the micro level of devices, the meso level of poetic concepts and the macro level of cultural fields. Thus, as a history of models and devices, literary history is constituted by the mutual relations of individual culture, discourse, model, and form. It may be claimed that “works of art become discursive through their form” while discourses are formed in works of art (Baßler 1994). Forms of discourse thus provide the models of a certain knowledge, agency, or structure for poetic usage while contemporary discourses are pre-modelled and re-modelled in fictional forms.

A central question of the conference will be the way in which poetic modeling and form-processing constitute each other in producing a specific work of art. Heuristically, poetic form may be related to three types of modeling: *conceptual modeling* based on a *model hypothesis* (the level of judgement), *semiotic and material modeling* (the level of representation/device), *generic modeling* (the level of classification/convention/norm).

While modeling and being modeled, forms are also triggers of a double temporalization: On the one hand, they may act as *the conditions, sources, media and generators for, and prior to, (poetic) models*, such as structural units, (master) tropes, plot characters or prototypes, genres, literary strategies and normative poetics. On the other hand, forms also serve *as applications, i.e. as results or post-processings of (poetic) modeling* (Mahr 2012, Tenev 2012, Wendler 2013).

In aiming at a *history of literary forms* (and thus a *history of literary modeling*) the conference will highlight three related fields of research: I. *Theory of Form* as a poetics of form (history of concepts), II. *Form-Processing* as a dynamics of production of signs, texts and genres (history of devices) III. *Culture of Form* as a practice of cultural and medial mediation of forms (history of transfers). The Conference on Literary Form thus takes into account canonical approaches to poetic form and genre, together with the latest research and attempts at transdisciplinary modeling.

2.1 Theory of Form

In aesthetics, poetology, and literary theory, the notion of poetic form appears to be a concept of Protean volatility. While in the theory of form one may observe a change of concepts from holism and immediacy to differential notions, e.g. in the theory of systems or in deconstruction, as a matter of experience and agency form still appears to be a stable epistemological condition of poetic discourse. Therefore, forms have been addressed as structures, patterns, functions, and devices, but they are considered, too, as “media of emergence” (Seel 2000), differentiating observations (Baecker 2014), or “heuristic models for the self-reflection of a literary practice” that refers to the specific “self-unfolding of a literary consciousness” (Knörrich 1991). This observation may reveal a major argument: if form appears as ‘mobile’, ‘fluent’, or ‘dynamic’, the agility results from its dynamic modeling. Thus, *form is always charged by modeling, while modeling is always framed by form*. This dialectics may procure three types of formal modeling (or modeling with forms): *formalization* (by semiotic systems of abstraction and reduction), *forming* (via structure, patterns, and semantic closure) and – with tendencies to normative assessment – *formatting* (as disciplining, normalizing, re- or overwriting). The conference will trace the various techniques that constitute the temporal and logical dynamics

of these ‘mobile forms’. It might be also promising here to consider the extent to which a literary theory of models could develop new approaches towards the *rhetoric and theory of style* – in different cultural epochs, with regard to the specific rules of their formation and towards the intersection of fiction, theory and media. To point to the strategic impact in the history of theory, one may refer here to the works of Auerbach and Curtius: both authors seem to propagate a theory of form in order to create a history of formal continuity in European literature, around the models of *figura* (Auerbach 1946) and *topos* (Curtius 1948). What is more, both works have been produced in exile. Their holistic concepts were designed to vitalize and to refashion – i.e. to re-model – form as a *remedium* against the policy of form in Nazi ideology. Thus, form itself became a model not just for poetic theory, but for a post-nationalist, pan-European identity.

2.2 Form-Processing

According to these aspects we assume that modeling is carried through by and within the frames of ‘mobile forms’. From this assumption we derive three main hypotheses: 1. The act of modeling establishes a formal correlation between judgments (concepts), modes of being (modalities), delineations (representations), events (emergences) and actions (performances). 2. Poetic models are created (formed) by a four-level agency: a) by modeling non-literary models and devices (interdiscursivity); b) by modeling poetic models and devices (intertextuality); c) by modeling their model situations and adjacent features (meta-modeling); d) by modeling in literary studies (literary theory of models). 3. Perceived as a historical concept form can also be regarded as *a strategy by which historical discourses reflect and regulate their modeling procedures*. While satire in Quintilian is praised as the epitome of Roman poetry, in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century it is condemned because of its apparent failure to uphold the true aesthetic values necessary for substantial social criticism. With Lucan’s *Pharsalia* even contemporary Roman criticism raised the question as to whether it belonged to poetry at all – on account of its generic hybridity. Thus, form-processing is, and always was, extremely relevant for the production of genres (Frow 2006). One may even claim that *literary genres usually emerge where literary forms achieve the status of modeling agents*. How exactly the formation of a genre type is linked to literary modeling, especially to problems of convention (standardization, regulation, closure) and innovation (genre change, emergence and performance) is a major question of the conference. Moreover, how do genres gain, exert and lose epistemological impact? What strategies do they apply in discourse management or in the (re-)production and administration of knowledge? Finally, how can the problem of generic agency, “belonging” or “participating” (Derrida 1980) be tackled, when the general approach to genre faces an *implicit* “genre knowledge” as well as a variety of “genre cultures” (Michler 2015)?

2.3 Cultures of Form

The question how poetic objects and ideas acquire form has always been a focal point of *cultural self-fashioning*. It has been dealt with in poetic rules and regulations, but also in implicit poetologies. In fact, whenever concepts of aesthetic functionality and power are at stake, when they challenge (or are challenged by) political, ideological, religious, social, legal, economic, or scientific discourse, form becomes an epicenter of discursive dispute. It may even be the target of a cultural evaluation or the agent to enforce its claims. The conference will also focus on these aspects of aesthetic criticism, e.g. on the question whether a specific concept

of *Kulturkritik* assumes that a new “hype of media aesthetics” will result in a “desensitization of aesthetic facts”. According to this concept the success of digital new media establishes a “visual primacy” that will eventually produce a “monoculture of meaning” (Welsch 1995). Form, then, will be nothing more than a mere medial signifier, abstract and exchangeable (Städtke 2001). However, as a means of *cultural poetics*, forms are highly influential in all kinds of *media development and transfer*. Whoever tries to make accessible, to a contemporary audience, the origins and meanings of generic models such as tragedy, or elegy, or fable, will be well advised to point to modern genres often marked as trivial: the zombie movie and the gangsta rap, HBO serials, and video games. Within this blending of generic types of entertainment, media, and social networks, the emergence, coding, and codification of a whole new set of forms can easily be observed. Here one may recognize both the *formation of a viral semantics* and the *semantisation of form*. The conference will focus on that change of status, meaning, and significance of long-established forms within the context of new media and global culture(s), with regard to novel forms of authorship and (fictional) participation. Furthermore, we will discuss the strategies behind the models, rules of transformation, and performances that bring about the changes and emergences of forms. We will investigate the new continuum of textual, visual, and ludic models and devices, and we will inquire into the discursive circumstances and generic strategies that still allow established forms and genres to acquire model agency today.

List of cited works:

- Auerbach 1946: Erich Auerbach, *Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*, Bern.
- Baecker 2014: Dirk Baecker, *Kulturkalkül*, Berlin.
- Baßler 1994: Moritz Baßler, *Die Entdeckung der Textur*, Tübingen.
- Burdorf 2001: Dieter Burdorf, *Poetik der Form. Eine Begriffs- und Problemgeschichte*, Stuttgart/Weimar.
- Curtius 1948: Hans Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter*, Bern.
- Derrida 1980: Jacques Derrida, *The Law of Genre*, in: *Glyph* 7, S.202-232.
- Frow 2006: John Frow, *Genre – The New Critical Idiom*, London.
- Jolles 1930: André Jolles, *Einfache Formen*, Halle.
- Knörrich 1991: Otto Knörrich, *Formen der Literatur in Einzeldarstellungen*, Stuttgart.
- Mahr 2012: Bernd Mahr, *On the Epistemology of Models*, in: Günter Abel, James Conant, Hrsg., *Rethinking Epistemology*, Bd.1, Berlin/Boston, S.301-352.
- Michler 2015: Werner Michler, *Kulturen der Gattung. Poetik im Kontext, 1750-1950*, Göttingen, in print.
- Petersen 2014: Jürgen H. Petersen, *Formgeschichte der deutschen Erzählkunst: Von 1500 bis zur Gegenwart*, Berlin.
- Seel 2000: Martin Seel, *Ästhetik des Erscheinens*, München.
- Städtke 2001: Klaus Städtke, *Form*, in: Karlheinz Barck u.a., Hrsg., *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, Bd. 2, Stuttgart, S.462-494.
- Tenev 2012: Darin Tenev, *Fiktia i Obraz. Modeli [Fiction and Image. Models]*, Plovdiv 2012.
- Walzel 1923: Oskar Walzel: *Gehalt und Gestalt im Kunstwerk des Dichters*, Berlin.
- Welsch 1995: Wolfgang Welsch, *Ästhetisches Denken*, Stuttgart.
- Wendler 2013: Reinhard Wendler, *Das Modell zwischen Kunst und Wissenschaft*, München.

Papers:

We invite *case studies* in German, English, and French in the three areas outlined above. Papers may address (but are by no means limited to) the following topics: I. formalisms / form and ideology – form and system (theory of systems) – form and cognition – model and form – model and modality – model and simulation – coded form; II. forms of style – form and narrative – form and symbol – genre knowledge – genre hybridization – encyclopaedism – seriality – dramatized form – form as performance; III. *gestalt* – morphology – form and time – experienced form – form as ritual – form as function – form and gender – form and game (game theory, game studies).

Presentations will be allocated 20 minutes each plus 10 minutes for discussion. Prospective participants are invited to submit abstracts of up to 300 words. Proposals should include name, institutional affiliation and email address.

Conference languages / Konferenzsprachen / Langues de présentation: Deutsch – English – Français

Deadline for proposals:

30 June 2015

Conference fee: 50 EUR

Please send abstracts to:

grklitform@uni-muenster.de

Contact:

Leonie Windt M.A.

Graduiertenkolleg Literarische Form

Administration

Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster

Robert-Koch-Str. 29

D-48149 Münster

Germany

Email: leonie.windt@wwu.de

Dr. Robert Matthias Erdbeer

Principal Researcher

Email: erdbeer@uni-muenster.de

Website: <http://www.uni-muenster.de/GRKLitForm/Konferenz2015/index.html>