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Preface

This volume takes its place alongside the efforts of others that—swimming against the currents of *passe-partout* theory and cultural studies—still wish to preserve the field of literary studies, although not in its established form, but through a fundamental reconstruction comprising both its “internal” conceptual or methodological rearrangement and “external” response to postmodern social, political, and economic realities. My aims are: *first*, an attempt at conceptual reconstruction that takes into account recent deconstructions of literary criticism’s key notions and critically embraces them in a revised set of hypotheses, not forgetting the constructedness of all knowledge (including that of literature); and, *second*, to justify contemporary meanings, relevance, and functions of knowledge about literature. Both aims imply a critical redistribution of scholarly topics, methods, and competences that literary criticism has to deal with if it wishes to survive in the present context of disciplinary redivisions and cross-disciplinary methods (in linguistics, the social sciences, cultural history, psychology, cognitive science, etc.). Only by coming to terms with the global redistribution and commodification of knowledge as well as with relocation of scholarly competences can literary criticism still claim greater general validity and broader social relevance for its insights. This book, which could be entitled “Site under Construction,” is an introduction to these problems and is divided into two parts. In the first part, I comment on the prospects of two main branches of literary studies: literary theory and literary history, both “national” and comparative. In the second part, I try to reconstruct and revise some basic critical concepts that are used for modeling literary texts and their temporal or spatial contexts.

In postmodernity, literary theory has become pluralistic, perspectivized, and—in parallel with the weakened autonomy of belletristic writing and the deconstruction of the concept “literature”—intertwined with the transdisciplinary, eclectic, and critical discourse of “Theory,” which is directed towards cultural studies rather than towards explorations of the artistic field. Hermeneutic and

neo-pragmatist self-reflection has made literary theory aware of its own contingency and of being merely one among several (discursive) practices. As one of the “sciences of the subject,” it has also come to realize that knowledge is subject-dependent and that the field of research (i.e., literature) changes together with and under the influence of its scholarly observation. The answer of literary theory to these challenges proposed here is its disciplinary reconstruction into a theory of literary discourse. Such a theory accounts for the fact that literary texts are part of historical becoming and cultural changes in human life-worlds. This is why it must choose new objectives: first, with its ability for apt descriptions of literary devices (i.e., as a descriptive poetics), it may also contribute to a better critical understanding of the rhetorical powers of other discourses and language in general. Second, it may provide strong arguments to legitimize the indispensable anthropological values of the literary—including and primarily in the present time, marked by the triumph of the new media and globalized economization of all knowledge.

Literary historiography, the second main branch of traditional literary studies, has synthesized its particular research results mainly in the complex and prominent form of literary histories. National and supranational literary histories, as known from the nineteenth century on, are in fact a narrative and/or encyclopedic nonfiction genre that has been fashioned through inter-systemic interaction of the academic field with its own “object” of study: literature. With its comprehensive synthesis, literary history as a “great” genre has gained authority over the shaping of public past, national and broader cultural identities, and the literary canon. The postmodern historic turn in the humanities and social sciences makes new demands upon this genre: it must provide an explanation for the constructionist and semi-fictionalized character of all representations of the past; it must be aware of the assertive power of its speech-acts, which take part in sociopolitical negotiations about history; traditional omniscient narrative should be dismissed and supplanted by the polyvocality of interpretations and by collages of telling fragments; the ties between the literary work and its historical background should be reassessed in terms of semiosis, which transgresses the text-context boundary; and, above all, it seems that literary history can preserve its own genre identity (i.e., the *literary* of literary history) only through historical and anthropological analysis of literature as a discourse and social system. One possible reconstruction of the great genre of literary history is also offered by electronic hypertext archives, because these make possible an open-ended, revisable, multi-layered, highly contextualized, and polyfocal representation of literary processes.

Chapter 3 is a rethinking of the notion of world literature. Recently, the original Goethean idea of world literature as analogous to the capitalist world system has become relevant to transnational comparative literary studies: “world literature” presupposes concepts, practices, media, and institutions of cultural transfer, as well as local intertextual absorption of global cultural repertoires, and self-

conscious production for international audiences. Goethe, feeling disadvantaged in comparison to writers from the French or British metropolises, was among the first to experience *Weltliteratur* as a growing circulation of literary works across linguistic and national borders. Cultural exchange between nations, continents, and civilizations appeared to him in the guise of the modern capitalist market going global. On the other hand, he considered critical, imaginative, and intertextual responses to global cultural repertoires essential both to the viability of any national literature and to the cosmopolitan idea of the “generally human.” Ever since Goethe’s time, world literature, conceived either as a network of cultural transfer or a category of ethical, political, and aesthetic discourses, has been shaped by multifaceted experiences of cultural otherness (colonialism, translations, global news, archeological discoveries, tourism, etc.). It is important to stress that, from the times of its origin, *Weltliteratur* has been intertwined with the ideogeme of “national literature.” Inclusion of the national in the world, the presence of the world in the national, and nationality as a pre-condition for the appearance of world literature are symptoms of the interlocking ideologies of the post-Enlightenment cultural nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and the aesthetic understanding of art practices. In literature, national identity has been established internationally and within the global cultural market. Marx and Engels, following Goethe’s economic metaphors, connected the planetary expansion of capitalism to the beginnings of world literature. Indeed, the world system of capitalist economy, with its cores and peripheries (Wallerstein 2004), shows striking analogies with the modern “world republic of letters” (Casanova 1999) or “the world literary system” (Moretti 2000), in which the established and emerging literary fields interact from asymmetrical positions. World literature seems to be reserved for the diffusion of literary texts that, after having been produced or recognized by some global metropolis, exceed the original linguistic boundaries and become actively present in major languages or cultures (Damrosch 2003). However, the strong literatures that function as centers of the world literary system today used to be peripheral during their emergence (Even-Zohar 1990); without the interference of peripheral productivity, even central literary systems would stagnate. Centrality and peripherality are thus variables that depend on historical dynamics and system evolution. Moreover, ever since the cultural nationalism of the nineteenth century, the theoretical or poetic consciousness of world literature, its intertextual coherence, and its material networks have been “glocalized.” The world literary system is plural and accessible only through the archives of local cultural memories, particular cognitive perspectives, and singular acts of critical or creative self-reflection.

The second part of this book begins with the elucidation of recent developments in textual criticism and critical editions of literary texts; in doing this, Chapter 4 raises the question of how the materiality of media products, such as literary manuscripts or books, influences the production and comprehension of

textual significance. Far from being a subsidiary discipline, textology is vitally intertwined with the theory, interpretation, and history of literature. It transfers literary texts from the domain of art to the discourses of scholarship and education, strengthens their social relevance, and influences their canonization. Thanks to the textual critic, the literary text, restored and purged of all subsequent interference and error, should speak beyond the confines of its historical frame. The “old” historicism attempted to reconstruct an image of the text closest to the original, but in fact produced an additional textual version, marked with normative finality. Modern, text-centered trends in literary studies, striving to ensure aesthetic pleasure, would, in the process of editing, also filter and retouch the text’s historicity. The postmodern humanities have deconstructed history, presenting it as an interplay of interpretation and narration; however, they have striven for a return of the historical presence, but within a structure of the present: the past should reveal itself in its contingency, polyphony of detail, openness, and becoming. Within these horizons, a different understanding of texts has been formed: they are seen as an open process of writing and reading. Such views have touched the theory and practice of textology as well. The role of the two subjects, the author and editor, becomes looser, as does the notion of the literary work as a finished product. The literary work, observed in the processes of genesis, distribution, and post-production, is presented as a “fuzzy” set of drafts, versions, corrections, and rewriting. Postmodern textology does not reduce the text to its verbal structure, but also pays attention to the circumstances of publication, as well as to the medium; these factors are crucial for the meaning of the work and its cultural position. The postmodern tendencies to restore the historical presence and mutability of literary texts are—paradoxically—answered by the potentialities of virtual cyberspace, which is “in the service of postmodern detailism and the micro-contexts of knowledge” (Sutherland 1997: 13). Moreover, the electronic medium and the hypertext have led to recognition of the semantic role played by older media, the book in particular. E-text is thus not only a rival to a classical book-text, but also a useful tool that represents and interprets its historical specificity.

The concept of the verbal text, discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, is central to any attempt at rethinking literary studies in terms of at least partially autonomous discipline. The structure of a literary text does not differ essentially from that of other texts (cf., for example, a historical biography with a biographic novel, or a court trial with a drama) because literariness is a text- and system-dependent cultural variable. It is argued that the question of literariness concerns the very identity and social existence of not only literature *per se* but of literary theory as a discipline. Literary theorists are not mere observers of literature; they are also participants, who—at least indirectly, via the social systems of science and education—are engaged in constructing both the notion and the practice of literature as well as the study of literature. Literariness is neither an invariant cluster of

“objectively” distinctive properties of all texts that are deemed literary nor merely a social, scholarly, and/or educational function. Rather, it can be defined as the effect of a text in the literary system, which is only possible on the basis of ocidocentric paradigms and conventions derived and transferred from the “Western canon” itself. It is therefore no longer necessary for literary theory to stick to its own set of terms for describing basic literary structures and to avoid well-tested interdisciplinary categories provided by text linguistics and other kinds of contemporary textual studies. Textual structure should not be reified, but seen as a virtual model of the relations between linguistic and cognitive elements that, grasped in provisional wholes and matched to recurrent patterns stored in sign systems, represent concepts and produce the effect of sense. Being temporal, the structure is constituted in the process of writing/speaking and through acts of reception. However, it is also spatial: its coherence is constructed from several layers of differently articulated sense-constituting elements. After an outline of processes of text structuring and comprehension, arguments are presented for the historicity of textual structure that is understood as a representation of and basis for meaning-constituting acts (mental and speech alike). A literary work of art is historical as long as: (a) it exists via acts of writing, distribution, and reception; (b) it is the product of a socially specific form of work; (c) it is a complex speech act situating the subject in a constellation of discourse; (d) it is a generator and accumulator of cultural memory; and (e) in reception it triggers pragmatic effects within changeable interpretative frameworks. The identity of the text is disseminated along the interval in which the time of each reading encounters the representation of historical otherness.

The relation between the literary text and genres of discourse is the focus of Chapter 7. An anti-essentialist drive—a characteristic of recent genre criticism—has led postmodern scholars to the conviction that genre is but a system of differences and that its matrix cannot be deduced from a particular set of apparently similar texts. According to such logic, genre identity is historically unstable, depending merely on “extra-textual,” pragmatic, or contextual factors, as a final consequence of how routines in the production and consumption of cultural products are being institutionalized or decomposed. The concept of intertextuality may prove advantageous for explaining genre identity in a different way: genres exist and function as far as they are embedded in social practices that frame intertextual and meta-textual links or references to prototypical texts and textual series. Genres are classificatory categories and pragmatic schemes inscribed in practical knowledge and communicative competence. They are cognitive and pragmatic devices for intertextual pattern-matching. Texts or textual sets become genre prototypes by virtue of intertextual and meta-textual interaction: on the one hand, there is the working (influence) of semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic features of prototypical texts on their domestic and foreign literary offspring; on the other hand, we see

meta-textual descriptions and intertextual derivations or references, which establish or retroactively revise the hard core of genre pattern. Because of the genre and pragmatic component of the author's communicative competence, any given text is dependent on existing genre patterns. However, a text with intertextual reference actively takes part in the plurality of genre context; by citational links to various genre conventions, the author articulates the significance and structure of the text and in this way influences the reader's expectations and response.

Chapter 8 tackles the issue of style in literature as a textual identity-marker. Following the decline of scholarly paradigms based on text and author, stylistic research in literary studies became subject to serious criticism. Traditional notions of literary style were sharply criticized for their conceptual vagueness, for dependence on traditional expressive aesthetics and romantic organicism, for taking the author as the authoritative source and proprietor of the textual meaning, for neglecting the realities of reading processes and perceptibility of stylistically relevant patterns, for naive coupling of stylistic devices with a preset code of their meanings and functions, for the seclusion of "poetic language" from other social discourses, and for establishing abstract relations between a literary text and linguistic norm. After the deconstruction of structuralism's main binary oppositions, the conceptual pairs that used to support prevailing understandings of style became suspicious or even obsolete (e.g., norm vs. deviation, neutral vs. marked, deep structure vs. surface, invariant meaning vs. variant expression). The linguistic norm proved to be relative and contingent, dependent both on changeable positions of communicational partners acting in different sociolinguistic contexts and on their pragmatic skills in language use (knowledge of the literary styles characteristic of individual writers, epochs, periods, genres, regions, classes, and trends thus belongs to general sociolinguistic competence). Style may be described as a distinctive use of language that—through deliberate and spontaneous choices from linguistic repertoires, suggested by particular contexts—connotatively and intertextually affiliates the text or utterance to certain linguistic subcodes, differing and distancing them from others. This is precisely the logic of identity: on the one hand, it is based on the repetition of pre-given, more general, conventional patterns characteristic of social communities, ideologies, cultures, and so on; on the other hand, it marks off its difference from the generally repeatable. The concept of style gains new relevance in the framework of contextual approaches to language and literature. It may be compared with notions of "lifestyle" or social "habitus;" what is more, textual style may be considered an essential part of culturally significant and socially distinctive behavior. It is an indexical sign of the textual subject's cultural identity. As such, from the standpoint of the text producer, it is a result of a performative strategy that profiles and stages the public image of writing and, from the observer's point of view, it is a product of perception and interpretation of the text against the intertextual backgrounds evoked. Textual

style is therefore a dynamic, changeable property, articulating the identity of the literary work of art.

Fiction is addressed in Chapter 9 as a part of the complex issue of literature's autonomy and its relation to reality and social discourses; my case study is taken from the late modern conflicts between literature and law. Recent suits for defamation brought against works of fiction (e.g., the novel *Modri e* [The Blue E], 1998, by Matjaž Pikalo, or the fable *Ko se tam gori olistajo breze* [When the Birches Up There Are Greening], 1998, by Breda Smolnikar) are a case in point of how literary discourse, with its inherent conventions, is presently compelled into negotiating with other discourses about different regimes of truth; that is, about drawing the boundary between fiction and reality. Pronouncing sentences against both these Slovenian writers of fiction for libeling real individuals that are not publicly known is symptomatic of how the ideology of aesthetic autonomy and the privileged cultural role of writers has lost its broader social legitimacy. The genealogy of conditions making it possible to prosecute defamation in fiction goes back to the nineteenth century, when legal control of fictional representation, once used to secure the ideological monopoly of the ecclesiastical and secular authorities (mainly by censorship), began to be legitimized by public morality and protecting the dignity and good name of private individuals or specific communities, and when literature, organized as an autonomous social field, paradoxically aimed for a "reality effect" (cf., for example, the trials of Flaubert for his novel *Madame Bovary*). Literature in postmodern society cannot secure its legitimacy within its own field; the sense of its distinctive features is weakening, and so is the sense of what is proper to fiction. In public discourse, dominated by liberal-democratic ideology, the same ethical and legal principles hold for journalists as well as writers. In cases of defamation by fiction, two legitimate interests of two ideologically equal "liberal subjects" collide: on the one hand, there is the writer's freedom of speech and artistic creation, and, on the other hand, there is the individual's right to privacy and his or her good name. A telling legal consideration of this conflict is presented by Richard Posner (1988), who argues that criminal liability of writers for libel should be limited because the protection of freedom of speech and artistic expression is more socially valuable than the individual right to a good name. The justification of lawsuits brought for defamation in fiction is further problematized by the deconstruction of their theoretical foundation: the fiction vs. reality opposition. There is always something fictional in reality, and vice versa. The boundaries between the two fields are subject to cultural and historical change because they are cognitive and pragmatic by nature. Fiction may be considered an elaborated possible world that is ontologically homogeneous but also represents versions of persons from extra-literary reality and intertextuality (i.e., a transworld identity of persons, places, etc.). Transgressive play with the possibilities of reality makes literary discourse appealing, but may cause serious difficulties to its authors.

The broad topic of textual and contextual spaces of literature is studied in Chapter 10 from a special angle: how spatial boundaries are transgressed in literary texts and what role intertextuality plays in this. Time and space are categories that cognitively found and organize the contexts in which literature is produced and operates (e.g., geo-cultural spaces, regions, and semiospheres); they are also imaginary dimensions of textual worlds. The experience of “real” and “imaginary” spaces transgresses their ontological boundary via semiosis. The discourse of the text penetrates the inner speech of reading subjects, interpellating them to take positions in the imaginary. Through such perspectivization, the imaginary space creates the illusion of presence. Presence, supported by the text’s spatial syntax, is undone by forces producing transgressive spaces (i.e., co-extensive, flowing spaces): figural and palimpsest transgression, textual explosion, and intertextuality. Represented spaces of other texts are intertextually transposed into the structure of the literary text and interfere with its spatial syntax; the text can also evoke extratextual socio-cultural spaces functioning as typical contexts for certain kinds of discourse. The interplay of spaces and discourses constitutes identities and social relations. Because of unstable spatial boundaries and due to the fundamental intertextuality of space, identities are in permanent hybridization and mobility.

Turning from space to another fundamental category, that of temporality, the last chapter is devoted to cultural memory and literature. The meanings and structures of individual memory have a social framework. Thousands of years before Halbwachs, Plato and Aristotle’s definitions of memory, as well as the traditional imagery of the imprint, book, or treasury, point to the presence of the collective in the individual; that is, the collective inhabits the individual’s memory through images and signs representing what has become absent. Signs are the instantiation of the Other in the construction of identity. Memorizing has been also a rhetorical skill, the *ars memoriae*. In it, the content and structures of individual memory were institutionally (through education) regulated with cultural memory. Following Halbwachs, Lotman, J. Assmann, Lachmann, and others, we may say that cultural memory is the area within collective memory, the content of which is considered permanently important. It circulates through more strictly codified, fixed, and specialized semiotic practices, which are dealt with mostly by elites, selected individuals, and professionals. One of the main media of cultural memory is literature. Its function is to mimetically exemplify historical otherness and, at the same time, to shape cultural identities of social groups. Literary texts are traces of past experiences and mentalities, and they are built like palimpsests of semiotic layers of various times and durations. Through social mechanisms—from criticism and history to the school system—the literary canon ensures the permanence of representative ideas and images and incorporates them into ever new textual repertoires and frames of reference as paradigmatic

patterns or prototypes. Topics and mnemonic techniques are the vehicles of continuity in argumentation, style, and imagination in image-creation. Themes and motifs are nexuses that tie the texts to established memory schemata through the processes of production and reception. Genres preserve and restore old representations of the world, and through citationality literature recalls its tradition, reshapes it, and enters a socio-cultural context. All of this is demonstrated in the history of Slovenian sonnet writing.

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