

Defining the Thick Journal: Periodical Codes and Common Habitus

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My aim in this short position paper is to explore some of the theoretical questions that arise from any attempt to analyse a single issue of a literary periodical. Focussing on the November 1964 issue of the East Berlin journal *Sinn und Form*, the paper elaborates three theoretical terms: Foucault's 'author-function'; Brooker and Thacker's 'periodical codes'; and Bourdieu's 'common habitus'. As I hope to show, these three perspectives can be harnessed in a typological analysis that relates the individual issue both to the wider run of the journal and to its comparators and antecedents. Success for *Sinn und Form* derived from the alignment of its common habitus and periodical codes under the discursive function of the journal's name.

What's in a Name? Literary Journals and the Author-Function

'What is a work?' asks Michel Foucault (1986, 105), almost in passing, in the course of his famous questioning of the notion of authorship. 'What is this curious unity which we designate as a work? [...] Is it not what an author has written?' In the case of the literary periodical such apparently straightforward questions acquire a complexity that will be familiar to those who work in periodical studies. When we approach a serial title like *Sinn und Form* that extends across more than six decades, the boundaries of the individual work are difficult to draw. Should we treat this individual issue as the essential unit, a material object and a self-contained work in its own right? Or should we be guided by the title of the periodical that seems to designate the entire run as a single work? Perhaps neither of these is a work at all. After all, whichever definition of the work we choose to apply to a periodical, we are faced with stubbornly problematic questions of authorship. Through its contrasting traditions of anonymous contribution and multiple authorship, the periodical is a form of publication which resists and disrupts a conventional idea of the author as the principle of circulation for literary texts. If a work is 'what an author has written', then perhaps SuF 6/1964 is not a work at all.

For Foucault, of course, authorship is less a practical or technical question of provenance and contribution, and much more a matter of discursive construction. Performing a 'classificatory function', the author's name 'permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others'. The author-function, as Foucault (1986, 107) puts it, 'establishes a relationship among the texts'; it operates as 'a principle of grouping of discourses, conceived as the unity and origin of their meanings, as the focus of their coherence' (Foucault 1981, 58). Viewed from this perspective, the locus of authorship for SuF 6/1964 begins to emerge more clearly. For what fills the discursive void created by the surplus and absence of conventional authorship – both in the internal discourse which binds contributions and issues together and in the external classificatory discourse in which they circulate – is the name of the journal itself, a 'node of coherence', to use Foucault's suggestive expression (1981, 59), around which its otherwise diverse texts are organised and controlled. Indeed, in the most successful cases, such as *Sinn und Form*, that name can function as a powerful discursive construct: as a brand, a myth, a legend even, that legitimises the texts ascribed to it. Or as the current editor-in-chief of *Sinn und Form* has put it, 'the magazine itself acquires authorship'.

From this point of view, we might usefully think of SuF 6/1964 as a new work 'authored' by the journal in its own oeuvre, brought into 'a relationship of homogeneity, filiation, and authentication' (Foucault 1986, 107) with the previous and subsequent issues that are co-designated under the discursive function of the journal's name. As an ersatz author-function, that name acquires an ordering and classificatory function, acting as a shorthand for the restrictive assumptions that circulate with the journal. In what follows I explore what exactly that shorthand represented for *Sinn und Form* and the extent to which SuF 6/1964 fulfils or contests these discursive expectations.

Thick Periodical Codes

We can also make McGann's bibliographic codes more precise by discussing a particular subset, the periodical codes at play in any magazine, analysing a whole range of features including page layout, typefaces, price, size of volume [...], periodicity of publication [...], use of illustrations [...], use and placement of advertisements, quality of paper and binding, networks of distribution and sales, modes of financial support, payment practices towards contributors, editorial arrangements, or the type of material published. (Brooker and Thacker 2009, 6)

One of the distinctive characteristics of the periodical is the plurality that extends beyond the textual dimension. To use Jerome McGann's distinction, it is a work where a range of both linguistic and bibliographic codes are at play. Indeed the latter – through typography, design, and material form – are often decisive in shaping readers' perceptions of content, or the 'horizon of expectations' they bring to the journal, to use Jauss's well-known term. But as Brooker and Thacker's adaptation of McGann's framework suggests, there is much more to a periodical than this: their 'periodical codes' encompass financial and editorial practices, for example, that extend beyond the confines of the material object, but that exercise a strong influence on it. Indeed, as Brooker and Thacker suggest, it is often the relationship between internal and external elements, such as the extent and nature of advertising, that offers the most telling insights. Any adequate conceptualisation of the discursive function of a journal's name, then, depends on a truly holistic approach that explores the interrelationships between the diverse elements that shape that function, and in this way the capacity to identify a set of 'periodical codes' that defines any given journal is extremely attractive to those of us seeking to develop a more systematic theoretical approach to the periodical. But it is here that the current theorisation of periodical codes reaches its limits. Beyond the distinction between internal and external elements – a distinction that is difficult to sustain given that almost all 'external' elements acquire some internal presence too – there is no attempt to elaborate the kind of categorisations that might form the basis for the comparative or typological analysis that is still lacking in periodical studies. To help develop that kind of perspective, my own thinking has taken me towards a formalisation of these periodical codes into five sets that highlight the different dimensions through which a periodical functions: i) temporal codes, ii) material codes, iii) economic codes, iv) social codes, and v) compositional codes. Below I present a sketch of how these sets of periodical codes interact with one another to create a distinctive identity in SuF 6/1964, an issue located at the transition between two of its most successful editors, Peter Huchel and Wilhelm Girnus, and at a moment of generational change in the GDR.

In addition to the specific temporality defined by its date of publication, we can identify three further dimensions of the journal's **temporal codes**: its periodicity, its regularity, and its longevity. First and foremost, *Sinn und Form* defined itself as a bi-monthly magazine, insisting on the greater detachment that this afforded the journal, what Huchel referred to as its 'deeper topicality' (Parker & Philpotts 2009, 46). Certainly the presence of Mittenzwei's essay on contemporary drama and Brion's review of recent West German publications lend SuF 6/1964 a topical flavour, but the predominance of longer essayistic and literary pieces is far removed from the immediate responsiveness of a weekly or daily publication and allows for wider and longer-term patterns to be developed. By this stage, the journal was also well-established in its seventeenth year of continuous publication and settled in a fixed and regular pattern that was interrupted only by the occasional double-issue. Importantly, the longevity and detached topicality of the journal's temporal codes are also reflected in the **material codes** of SuF 6/1964. At a little over 150 pages, printed on high-quality paper in an octavo format, soft-bound with card covers and the familiar neutral wrapper which was wrapped in turn across its centre by a coloured paper band, SuF 6/1964 has much more in common with a volume in a series of fine-print books than with the provisionality of other, more frequent or short-lived forms of periodical publication. And emphasising regularity and continuity across its oeuvre, SuF 6/1964 is indistinguishable in its material form from the first issue of the journal published seventeen years earlier and, but for minor variations, even from the most recent issue published nearly sixty years later. In its material form, then, SuF 6/1964 offers an imposingly and uncompromisingly elite cultural product, so it comes as little surprise that its **economic codes** were oriented towards subsidy, rather than financial profit. With a print run of

around 5,000 and sold by subscription internationally and through book shops in East Germany, SuF 6/1964 was never going to be a viable financial concern in its own right, especially as it carried no advertising and incurred relatively high (Western) fees for publications such as Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade*. In fact, the financial model was a simple one: the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) subsidised the journal generously through the East Berlin Academy of Arts in exchange for the reflected prestige of a high-quality cultural product that was read and valued internationally. The aim was symbolic, rather than economic profit.

The two remaining categories of periodical code – the social and the compositional – are the most complex and involved. **Social codes** cover the wide network of actors involved in the creation, circulation and reception of the journal and include editorial personnel, contributor networks, and readership. In keeping with many literary journals, and in contrast to the vertical managerial structures of more commercial publications, the editorial codes of *Sinn und Form* were flat and highly personalised. Shaped by Huchel as the first post-holder, the role of editor-in-chief continued even in 1964, under the party functionary Girnus, to be invested with considerable charismatic authority, much to the displeasure of the SED and the rather more bureaucratic social structures of the socialist dictatorship. If the tension between those contrasting social codes was a constant across the Huchel and Girnus editorships, the list of contributors to SuF 6/1964 demonstrates how a change in editor can shift the social network of which he is the focal point: seven of the ten contributors were making their debuts in *Sinn und Form* and another had been published for the first time only the previous year; and in Reiner Kunze, Wolfgang Bieler, Werner Mittenzwei, and Wolfgang Heise the profile of the core *Sinn und Form* contributor seems to have shifted in 6/1964 decisively towards a younger generation of GDR authors and intellectuals. At the same time, the established profile of the journal set limits on this shift. The journal's emphasis on quality and international reputation meant that new contributors could not simply be orthodox proponents of the party line, and so it proves in SuF 6/1964. Bieler, Kunze and Heise were all associated with dissident groups and would suffer official sanctions as a consequence. Meanwhile the centre of gravity of the journal remained firmly oriented towards the West, in part through such contributors as de Vries and Weiss – the latter rapidly assuming a leading international reputation unfettered by the party discipline that bound GDR writers – but also through the presence of Picasso, Hemingway, Hochuth, Walser, Böll, Bachmann, and Camus as topics of discussion. Little wonder that some of the journal's most attentive readers, the officials from the Cultural Department of the Central Committee, singled out many of the contributions from this issue in their highly critical report on *Sinn und Form* the following year. And, of course, this was precisely what made the journal so influential, as its select readership of elite opinion-formers willingly sustained its legend.

This emphasis on established quality is the common strand that runs through all the codes we have considered so far, and it is the defining feature also of the **compositional codes** (textual, visual, and design) that characterise SuF 6/1964. It has become a commonplace to assert the heteroglossia of the magazine, and it is in the form of a periodical and its multiple visual and design codes that the polyphony of the genre is often found. In SuF 6/1964 we find no such heterogeneity: there is not a single illustration, nor a single advert to break up the severe textual uniformity; there is no typographical variation, only the same Bodoni antiqua typeface that has been used throughout the journal's existence; and the only variation in page layout comes in the double-column format of the review section at the rear of the issue, itself a readily recognisable design code used by comparator journals such as *Die neue Rundschau* or *Merkur*. Indeed, in its design and layout, SuF 6/1964 conforms not only to the tradition of preceding issues of *Sinn und Form* but also to that of a host of notable antecedents with comparable claims to quality and breadth, such as *Corona*, *Mass und Wert*, *Nouvelle Revue Française*, or even Eliot's *Criterion*. In these journals, the polyphony lies entirely in the textual dimension of their compositional codes, the generous space afforded to each contribution providing a breadth and range of discourse in which a more indirect heteroglossia flourishes. At the same time, the careful selection and combination of contributions made possible in SuF 6/1964 by the material and the temporal codes of the journal create intricate patterns of contrast and equivalence, as the composite textual dimension is privileged in a poetic composition that centres on resignation and revolution as intellectual responses to power. In

this sense there is a fundamental typological distinction between plurality of a journal of this type and that which is found in periodicals where each page features a more overt plurality of visual and design codes in a much more dense patterning of individual items or where a looser composite dimension is subordinated to patterns that privilege the serial dimension. In the case of SuF 6/1964, the 154 pages of the journal accommodate only ten contributions, and while we can add to this count paratextual items of editorial apparatus (notes, title page, contents), the overall item density of the issue remains extremely low, around one tenth of an item per page. In this way *Sinn und Form* epitomises in its compositional codes the coarse, regular 'texture' of what I would term a 'thick' journal.

Typology and Common Habitus

What should be clear from the discussion above is that the periodical codes of SuF 6/1964 demonstrate a striking degree of commonality. From the temporal to the formal, via economic, material and social codes, *Sinn und Form* was oriented so as to fulfil its core mission as an elite literary journal where quality and breadth were the defining values. To return to the discursive function that rests in the journal's name, it is the close alignment of codes that helps to explain the strength of the *Sinn und Form* 'author-function'. So strong was that name that the generational and editorial change of the mid-1960s left these codes largely untouched, those innovative forces being mediated and neutralised through the established identity of the journal. Indeed, it is one of the more remarkable features of the journal's history that the party loyalist Girnus came to align himself so closely with the ethos of the journal that he published such controversial texts as Volker Braun's 'Unvollendete Geschichte' (5/1975). But it should be clear too that a conceptualisation of the journal's identity as a discursive construct, even one that is bound up in institutional power in Foucault's terms, is inadequate to describe and explain both the breadth of features that contribute to the journal's identity and the force of that identity in shaping this convergent cultural practice. My final theoretical move, then, is to turn the Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of culture to help theorise SuF 6/1964 as a site of socio-cultural practice and, crucially, as an agent in its own right in the cultural field. More specifically, I suggest conceptualising that core ethos as a 'common habitus', a term applied by Bourdieu in his very brief consideration of another established European review journal, *Nouvelle Revue Française* (Bourdieu 1996, 273-74). For Bourdieu, the defining selection of texts and core contributors for a literary review is not so much the product of cynical calculation as of 'common habitus', a term presumably to be understood as a shared, institutional realisation of the set of dispositions that generate practices and perceptions in his theoretical model.

I have argued elsewhere that this notion of common habitus offers considerable potential in theorising the role of the journal editor (Philpotts 2012), in particular in the fascinating encounter between individual and institutional habitus that in the case of 6/1964 results in the subordination of Girnus's dispositions to those of the journal. But in these final comments I want to point to the implications of this analysis for periodical typology. It was not only the specific identity of *Sinn und Form* that was so strong but also its identity as a recognisable type of periodical, the dominant established review journal for which I reserve the term 'thick'. We are used, of course, to thinking of 'littleness' as a typological category for literary journals, usually as a designation deriving from the social codes of the non-commercial modernist magazine, with its distinctly 'little' readership and its limited financial resources. Undoubtedly the readership of SuF 6/1964 was little too, at least in strictly quantitative terms, but in all other respects this was anything but a little magazine: across its other codes breadth is the dominant dimension, from the heft of the individual issue to the generous subsidy it received and the influence of its readership, from the range of themes discussed to the periodicity and longevity of its publication. It is in this kind of application that the notion of periodical codes reaches its full theoretical potential, not merely as a comprehensive descriptive inventory but as a designation for a set of values and attitudes, codes aligned not only with one another but also with a readily recognisable position in the field. For thick review journals, this is the established median position that they occupy, the thickness of their codes at once the product and the source of the wealth of cultural capital that can be accumulated from that position and that explains their success and longevity.

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