Central European Cultures 5, no. 1 (2025): 291–298
doi.org/10.47075/CEC.2025-1.16

Shared heritage – gemeinsames Erbe. Kulturelle Interferenzräume im östlichen Europa als Sujet der Gegenwartsliteratur. Edited by Silke Pasewalck

Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter/Oldenbourg, 2023. 312 pp.

Morten Nissen
Department of Slavic and Hungarian Studies, Humboldt University of Berlin, Unter den Linden 6, 10117 Berlin, Germany; morten.nissen@hu-berlin.de

> "Erbe" heißt: Dem Vergangenen kommt eine Faktizität zu, die man in der Gegenwart nicht abschütteln kann, selbst wenn man es wollte. In Form des historischen Erbes gegossen, ist die Vergangenheit eben nicht überholt, "von gestern" und überwunden, sondern sie *vergeht nicht* […][1]

The ambiguity of 'heritage' is manifold: the concept intertwines aspects of determinant, conventionalizing, and contingent connotations. More specifically, it involves biological, social, legal, and cultural processes of transfer. 'Heritage' as a cultural process of transfer generally marks a period of transition. In this period, intergenerational transformation may be completed, interrupted, adopted, or rejected. From this brief definitional introduction, the significance of heritage as a concept can already be anticipated—its meanings oscillate between external necessity and internal freedom of choice. Moreover, mixed into these distinctions are emotional ambivalences: be it mourning for the death of the testator, the irreversible change of time itself, or the happiness or misfortune of transferring the past into the present as an heirloom. In essence, then, heritage as a concept has an inherent temporal component that can address the fear of the uncontrollable life of the past as an object or latent structure of continuity in the present.[2] That 'heritage' as a conceptual figure can be instructive

1 Reckwitz, *Verlust. Ein Grundproblem der Moderne*, 300.

2 Koselleck, *Kritik und Krise*, IX.

for cultural and literary studies is clear, as it conceptualises both private and societal transitions, as well as retarding temporal structures.

How the themes of contemporary literature in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989/90 can be interpreted in terms of temporal latency structures is addressed by most of the contributions to the volume *Shared Heritage – Common Heritage Cultural Interference Spaces in Eastern Europe as a Subject of Contemporary Literature* (2023). The question is why it has taken more than half a century for the violent events of the Second World War in Eastern Europe to be the subject not only of narratives but also of theoretical reflections on heritage.

The volume is the result of a conference (2021) organised by the *Federal Institute for the Culture and History of the Germans in Eastern Europe* (Bundesinstitut für Kultur und Geschichte des östlichen Europa). The contributors come mainly from the field of intercultural German studies. They analyse texts of different origins in different languages. The focus is on German (Eszter Propszt, Sabine Egger, Aleksandra Burdziej, Erik Schilling, and Michaela Nowotnick), Polish (Joanna Jabłkowska, Katarzyna Śliwińska, Gudrun Heidemann, and Alina Molisak), Czech (Hans-ChristianTrepte, Anne Hultsch, and Jan Vaclav König), Hungarian (Csongor Lőrincz), and Russian (Silke Pasewalck) prose literature. Their conclusion seems to lie in two readings of the inheritance process as a concept: first, in relation to the contamination of heirlooms with the past, and second, as a latent or hidden layer of temporality in the space of Eastern Europe. While the first perspective has been the focus of German and cultural studies in the past,[3] the approach of understanding 'heritage' both in relation to 'cultural interference spaces' and as a spatialised temporal structure opens new perspectives on seemingly charted terrain.

The volume begins by discussing some of the basic assumptions before examining in more detail the contributors' thematic interventions into the ambiguity of heritage. Essentially, they present three main areas: The violent transfer processes of Polish–German history as a literary subject, then multiperspectivity as a narrative structure of cultural spaces of interference, and finally the spatialisation of time, in which heritage is understood as a latent temporal structure or dynamic.

In the introduction, Eastern Europe is described conceptually as an interfering movement and temporal coexistence. (Pasewalck, p. 16). However, this description of spatial interference dynamics inevitably implies conflict and negotiation. Originally, interference refers to a physical superposition of wave patterns that may lead to varying intensities in space; key variables in this process include wave intensity, the nature of the superposition, and the time span within which the process occurs (Sabine Kyora, p. 63).

3 Ulrike, *Das Testament als literarisches Dispositiv*; Willer et al., "Erbe, Erbschaft, Vererbung."

As a literary subject, cultural spaces of interference are, according to most contributions, first understood as descriptions of a shared process of heritage under external necessity. They draw on theories of cultural memory and the recollection of inherited experiences, such as *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (Marianne Hirsch, 2012) and *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonisation* (Michael Rothberg, 2009), but also theoretical approaches by Aleida Assmann and Reinhart Koselleck. In addition, Freud's reflections on the "uncanny" (*Das Unheimliche*) and Derrida's "hauntology" (*L'hantologie*) will be used in the contributions to explore the temporal structure of heritage.

Building on these two conceptual understandings of cultural spaces of interference in Eastern Europe, different processes of shared and divided heritage are described. Conceptually, shared heritage also implies shared responsibility for common cultural goods and landscapes. When applied to literary studies, this meaning undergoes a nuanced shift: Shared heritage now refers to paradoxes of spatial, object-related, and temporal structures of the past in the present, which the spaces, characters, and objects of the prose texts the authors interpret cannot escape, although they strive to.

By describing a spatialisation of time and a temporalisation of space in contemporary Eastern European literatures, two additional overarching perspectives are presented, understood through the interference fields of shared and divided heritage as a concept. Such approaches to the movement of cultural interference aim at analysing the processuality of heritage as a subject of contemporary literature.

The subtitle of the volume, *Cultural Interference Spaces in Eastern Europe as a Subject of Contemporary Literature*, should not be limited to a binary opposition, such as victim and perpetrator, mine and yours, justice and injustice, nor should it be reduced to a mere description of spatial or thematic proximity, as some of the contributions suggest. Rather, heritage should be understood as a process in the context of spatial dynamics of interference, as violent or hasty acts of removal and allocation, which are then expressed in (also linguistic) practices of alienation and appropriation in the literary subject.

Polish–German History as a Subject in Contemporary Literature

The larger thematic part of the contributions focuses on Polish–German history and its object- and space-related configurations of memory. The multifaceted papers by Śliwińska, Burdziej, Pasewalck, and Heidemann examine correlations of experience and memory under the assumption of so-called "multiperspectival" narrative

strategies, based on interpretations of novels by Olga Tokarczuk, Joanna Bátor, Karolina Kuszyk and, above all, Ulrike Draesner's *Seven Leaps from the Edge of the World* (Sieben Sprünge vom Rand der Welt, 2014). In order to discuss the engagement with Polish–German literature and its historical perspectives in the present volume, the readings of the contributions on Tokarczuk's texts and Draesner's novel will be examined in more detail, as several contributors focus on these texts, in particular Pasewalck, Heidemann, and Burdziej. They typically highlight an oscillating dynamic of appropriation between material legacies (household objects) that unfolds between irreconcilable strangeness and intimate proximity. It is emphasised that only future generations will be able to develop a broader view of the ambivalence of violent transfer processes.

In Draesner's case, the violent expulsion of the population, the abandonment and appropriation of household goods, on the one hand, and their uncanny appropriation, on the other, as well as the German and Polish memories as intergenerational traumas, are used to develop the argument that history is not an objective process of development. The incomprehensible new object rationality becomes a cipher for an intense experience of loss and foreignness in the new environment, characterised by several stages of transition, including aspects of assimilation.

Contributions on common and shared history as a subject also explore the significance of prose in literary history. Molisak (p. 117) identifies 1989 as a turning point in Polish literature and Hultsch (p. 191) in Czech literature. Beyond these levels of investigation, the potential of the novel as a singular contemporary form of differentiation is also discussed. For Burdziej, Draesner's novel represents a trend in post-war German literature that has only recently led to more differentiated writing about the interconnectedness of perpetrator and victim. In this "multiperspectivity", the narratives of victim and perpetrator are expressed neither hierarchically nor relativistically.

The contributions represent a balancing act between the regional specificities of Central and Eastern European literatures and the paradigmatic aspects of time-delayed transfer processes as subjects in recent prose. With different narrative methods and their own definitional approaches to cultural interference and heritage, they arrive at a similar conclusion: "At best, literary quotations may exist beyond reality as a common heritage"(Jabłkowska, p. 93).[4] The thematic reference point of the prose texts examined is violence at the beginning of the transfer processes of objects and memories transferred without instructions. These are heritage processes that impose themselves and, therefore, cannot be described in terms

4 This sentence is my translation of the original: "Allenfalls Literaturzitate können als gemeinsames Erbe bestehen – jenseits der Wirklichkeit."

of a legal inheritance between acceptance or rejection. Rather, they are temporal imprints through which the past is involuntarily passed on to future generations.

On the one hand, the spatial and object-related omnipresence of, for example, household goods and inscriptions cannot be existentially overcome, and the traces of former owners can never be completely erased (Śliwińska, p. 37 and p. 45). In this way, the claim to autonomy of the present becomes questionable. The shared inheritance is therefore sometimes in the form of an indirectly transmitted memory that reappears disruptively, but also in the form of an everyday structure that continues seamlessly. These are second-hand memories that remain in the present as a continuous past: like a second temporal nature of spaces, figures, and things.

Multiperspectivity

The definitional approaches to multiperspectivity the papers present are sometimes closely linked to time and literary history. This is particularly revealing with regard to the one-sidedness and silencing of the suffering of the victims and perpetrators of the Second World War as a literary subject, as well as for a socio-historical literary history. Multiperspectivity is the strategy of not dissolving the 'pluricultural' as a narrative structure into a historiographical causal chain, but of allowing seemingly contradictory coexistence (Pasewalck, p. 15. and p. 141). This approach emphasises the reflection of previously separate, contradictory perspectives of memory in the narrative structure: Multiperspectivity is developed as a reflection on the one-sidedness of inherited memories by revealing dialectical relationships between apparently competing memories (Egger, p. 153).

Although they do not use the term, Schilling (p. 231) and Heidemann (p. 113) also assume an inclusive aspect of figures and narrative structures in which mutually exclusive ideas can be formulated: an alternative way of representing the linear narration of individual moments and one-dimensional figures. The aim of this concept, therefore, does not seem to be to synthesise its disparate elements into a unified whole. This also suggests an epistemological aspect.

The contributors develop multi-perspective narrative structures that are conceptually and definitionally close to the metaphor of the cultural interference space. They stand in contrast to the spatial concept of a melting pot. Instead, they become possibilities for describing and reflecting on competing primary experiences, as well as their literary processing. In contrast to historiographical narrative techniques, permissible and probable stories and biographies are developed. Such a narrative structure assumes that clarity and certainty are not available and, therefore, cannot be established by contemporary literature (Schilling, p. 233).

As already analysed in Draesner's novel, the contributions to Tokarczuk's texts, among them *House of Day, House of Night* (*Dom dzienny, dom nocny,* 1998), describe the household objects of the former owners in the new living world and the uncanny continuation of these objects as a contaminated heritage process (Pasewalck, p. 7). Tokarczuk describes this relationship with objects as a process of appropriation, which, through the continued existence of heirlooms, constantly raises the question of transgenerational trauma. This includes the reification of time, especially when it is unclear whether objects can retain their original meaning while being appropriated. Since Vedder has already presented extensive research on the testament and definitions of heritage as contamination, it is regrettable that, despite the originality of the approaches collected here, this dimension is not taken into account.[5]

Some contributions attempt to discuss appropriate textual forms for the multiperspectival, using such descriptors as 'mosaic', 'echo', 'palimpsest', or 'kaleidoscope', but without reaching a unanimous conclusion. There is much to be said for discussing the multiperspectival structure as a kaleidoscope, since this idea encompasses the possibilities of combination, probability and, not least, dynamism as structuring elements of multiperspectivity. Dynamism is also addressed at another point in the volume, namely in relation to the question of what exactly Eastern Europe could be as a subject in literature. Trepte suggests understanding Eastern Europe as a dynamic interference, which is why travel literature as a genre takes up an important position (Trepte, 56).

It would have been illuminating to examine the content and form of the Shared Heritage texts in the volume: What are the parallels between overlapping concepts of biological heritage and the dissolution of linear and sequential narrative structures through kaleidoscopic formations?

The Uncanny

Finally, the volume shows that cultural interference as a theme in contemporary literature can also be understood as a temporal-spatial stratification. This is done through the interpretive approach based on the "uncanny" or "ghostly". Śliwińska and Lőrincz derive the concept of heritage as a temporal latency structure, on the one hand, from Freud's notion of "the uncanny" and, on the other, from Derrida's "hauntology". Śliwińska (p. 32) links the uncanny to the repressed origins of inherited household objects and insightfully refers to the etymological and semantic dimension of the German term *"das Heim"* (home, homely, uncanny). The uncanny thus derives its unresolved form from an irresolvable tension between the spatial proximity of a

5 Vedder, "Erbstück," 397.

house (home) and the foreignness of formerly German objects, for which she also draws on texts by Tokarczuk. Lőrincz, on the other hand, understands the uncanny as a latent, hidden layer of temporality that is less describable by theories of cultural memory, but can be paradigmatically shown in the linguistic structures of Ádám Bodor's novels (p. 249).

By further qualifying the concept of latency in the context of a cultural space of interference, the contributions could have reflected more closely on the concealment and delay of temporal structures in the literary subject of inheritance. This is particularly the case, since the volume generally offers approaches to defining heritage as a conceptual figure of temporal relations and, in particular, attempts to prove it as a tendency in the recent history of Eastern European literatures.

Although a volume with such wealth of methodological interventions in the study of shared heritage does not necessarily need to examine additional media forms, further analyses of such forms as graphic novels, as insightfully done in Heidemann's contribution (pp. 106), and their iconic-textual ambiguities would be worthwhile. Also, the relationship between form and content could have been explored more thoroughly, especially in the papers that conceptually develop multiperspectivity.

One of the most commendable aspects of this multifaceted volume, however, is undoubtedly its multimethodological approach to the theme of multiperspectivity and cultural interference as a literary subject. The merit of the volume lies in its consideration of these aspects of transmission processes in spaces of cultural interference, some of which are truly comprehensive. Further cultural-theoretical investigations, even outside Eastern Europe, may profit by them. One of the benefits of reading this volume is the discovery of two latencies within the contributions themselves: namely, that most of the essays examine the connection between historical events and texts as literary historiography, and also include the socio-historical conditions for literary references to contemporary literature.

Literature

Koselleck, Reinhart. *Kritik und Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2021.

Reckwitz, Andreas. *Verlust. Ein Grundproblem der Moderne*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2024.

Vedder, Ulrike. *Das Testament als literarisches Dispositiv. Kulturelle Praktiken des Erbes in der Literatur des 19. Jahrhundert*. Paderborn: Fink, 2011. https://doi.org/10.30965/9783846750612

Vedder, Ulrike. "Erbstück." In *Handbuch Literatur & materielle Kultur*, edited by Susanne Scholz and Ulrike Vedder, 397–99. Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110416497-053

Willer, Stefan, Sigrid Weigel, and Bernhard Jussen. "Erbe, Erbschaft, Vererbung. Eine aktuelle Problemlage und ihr historischer Index." In *Erbe. Übertragungskonzepte zwischen Natur und Kultur*, edited by Stefan Willer, Sigrid Weigel, and Bernhard Jussen, 7–36. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013.

© 2025 The Author(s).

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International Licence (CC BY-NC 4.0).