

Title of the Thesis: A Formalist Path to the Complexity of Literary Form

With the increasingly instrumental usage of computational techniques, the discipline of digital humanities risks degenerating into another instance of scientism. Instead, the currency of these cultures of formalization calls for a fundamental reconsideration of formalisms. The concept of complexity is appropriated to provide a telos to this reconstruction of the formalist project. The thesis shows that formalisms in literature draw from the power of mathematical thought as a source of both metaphysics and method. There is an extended engagement with three thinkers: Albert Lautman for defining the notion of the 'mathematical' with which to interpret formalisms, René Thom for exemplifying a mathematically oriented metaphysics of literary form and Alfred North Whitehead for developing a critique of the mathematical and yet retaining the idea of formal thought. Starting from furnishing a basis for how formalisms engage with mathematical thought, the thesis progresses to detect the limitations of the mathematical in grasping the complexity of literary form.