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Philology in Motion: The Future of Classical Studies and the 'Philological Turn'

Abstract: The 'philological turn', the turn of philology upon itself, is the prerequisite for the survival of the discipline in the future. Far from losing sight of its object in the process of self-reflective immersion, philology will ensconce itself at the nerve center of all societal struggles for the sovereignty of interpretation in the relevant discourses: at the roots of language and thought. Herein, and nowhere else, lies philology's political force — that it gives a voice to the preparation of politics in language and text. Hence, philology functions as the 'perpetuum mobile' in the formation of tradition. In an emphatic sense, it is what ensures future, what makes it.

Keywords: athematic *vs.* thematic readings, basic philological research or (philology's) foundational research, figures of thinking/figures of thought, gesturality, interdisciplinarity, philological turn, radical politics, theory of philology.

1 Preliminary remarks

In recent days, Classical Studies has developed a number of strategies for securing its survival in a time of extreme ideological upheavals. It has pulled out many a stop — apologetics, affectations of significance, and overaccommodation among them — in order to safeguard its position within the canon of disciplines considered relevant for the present. Yet the more zealously it aims at asserting itself against the assaults from without, the deeper does it sink into the murky muck of a debate which is in danger of losing all orientation regarding the purpose(s) of the Liberal Arts and Humanities.

It is Classical Philology, in particular, that has resigned itself to filling the role of a useful idiot at far too many universities. One translates, comments, mediates — and provides a present oblivious to history and tradition with arguments for no longer dealing with the foundations of 'all that'. By now, the result of this subjugation under the needs of the present may be observed on all sides. Classical Philology

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ekes out a vestigial existence as an annex of the omnicompetent Cultural Studies; or else, as '*ancilla historiae sive philosophiae*' (difficult to decide which is worse). It is a long time since it was in a position to autonomously set the topics that the contemporary academic world would want to discuss with passion. With neurotic zeal, it continues to obey the fatal logic of the 'findings', the incessant unearthing of material hitherto unknown. Territorial gains rather than the gaining of a self — for Classical Philology remains incapable of reflecting and meditating on the challenges that are involved when an attentive Modern eye falls on the written remnants of a bygone epoch. Still, it does not realize what it means when one mind recognizes another *qua* language.

Philology is not a science dealing with objects, but a form of scholarship concerned with their relationship to words: with their genesis, their history, their 'sublation' (*Aufhebung*) in words; and with the fact that all of this may only be had in the prism or mirror of a philology that *dia-* and, if you will, *epi*logues with the texts. In this manner, philology *qua* scholarship of words also embodies the leap from the 'then' to the 'now'. There is no future but where the present is experienced emphatically. The safeguarding of the future does not depend on the discipline's 'building of bridges', or its trying to connect with this or that debate; it only attains to form in the here and now. Consequently, and paradoxically, it is precisely its disregarding any prospect of a future — a total turn *ad se ipsam* — which enables *philologia* to not forfeit its right to the future. This is also how I define the 'philological turn'.

2 The 'Cultural Turns' and the turn of philology towards itself

Not so long ago, Germanophone Classical Studies gathered at the 35th *Große Mommsen-Tagung* at Freie Universität Berlin. "Die Altertumswissenschaften und die *Cultural Turns*" ("Classical Studies and the Cultural Turns") was the topic of this collective of researchers, visibly resolved to press forward and ahead.[1] One may well call it a curiosity that — initially, at any rate — the 'philological turn' had not been mentioned in the program announcing the conference; and it may have been better that way. For in this manner, we might escape the unfortunate end that (so it would seem) befalls all of those 'turns' sooner or later — or so I thought to myself, who had been called upon to develop prospects for the future position of Latin Philology

1 "Die Altertumswissenschaften und die *Cultural Turns*. Forschungen zur Klassischen Antike im (inter)disziplinären Dialog" (May 3 to 5, 2019 at FU Berlin).

within academia, culture, and society in a keynote lecture. Very few of us will be prepared to bet all that much on our continuing to celebrate, with messianic fervency, all of these 'turns' as scholarly or scientific crossroads in one or two hundred years. In distant times, we shall surely still be thinking about spaces and images, bodies and souls, genders and identities, the forming of nations and modes of colonizing. Yet the political zeal will surely subside eventually.

The fact that philology provoked so little interest will undoubtedly have to do with its capability to diminish itself beyond recognition before each and all that arouses its own attention. It is the art of disappearing, of methodical self-belittlement. It vanishes in and behind the objects, which it aims at putting in the picture as texts. To describe the form of its presence will immediately require something that I wish to promote with some emphasis also in the framework of this international volume.[2] For one would indeed hope that what one may justifiably maintain with regard to so many things of everyday life does not hold true for our discipline: namely that one need not understand what is at work, and how — so long as it does work. Even in Classical Philology, I think, the word has spread that certain procedures of self-elucidation, of accountability are altogether indispensable for philology as part of its engagement with its objects, lest the handling of objects not turn into an arbitrary action among others. For the sake of what is at stake, there is thus a need for reflecting on 'what' philology is capable of, and 'how'. Such reflection on the own activity is itself a 'turn'; and this is how we used the phrase 'philological turn' when Philology and Philosophy, Linguistics, Literary Studies, and the Arts first met at Heidelberg University in 2002 to pose the question of the 'philological question'. Later commentators noted that this 'turn' had occurred along with a turning away from the 'cultural turns' flourishing at the time. While this may not be entirely wrong, it does not address the matter at heart.

To elucidate the latter, it may seem permissible to briefly recall the prehistory of the 'philological turn', and to explicate our notion of disciplinary collaboration. In so doing, certain peculiarities of philology — including its temporal regimen, hence also a notion of the future — will come into view.

3 The prehistory of the 'philological turn'

The theory of philology belongs to the great unfinished projects of the Classicistic and Romanticist epochs in German intellectual history. In lectures, programmatic

2 Cf. Schwindt 2017b.

writings, essays, and aphorisms, Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich August Wolf, and August Böckh laid the foundation for the work on the theoretical fundamentals of philological 'sciences'. Curiously enough, philology's foundational research has never become a recognized branch of Literary and Linguistic Studies in the two hundred (and some) years since. By reducing the reflexive apparatus of (for instance) literary history — tuning it down to the needs of teaching linguistics and literature — the theoretical impulses were already pragmatized by the generation following immediately upon Schlegel, Wolf, and Böckh. After the theoretically minded Wolf came the literary historian Gottfried Bernhardy; after the programmatically ingenious Böckh — in Heidelberg — the polyhistor Christian Felix Bähr. Nietzsche's 'untimely meditation' "Wir Philologen" ("We Philologists", of 1875/1876) remained fragmentary.

Evidently, the theory of philology is in demand only during phases of upheaval and crisis in the discipline's history. The success of the philological paradigm in the 19th and during the first half of the 20th century has not been advantageous for the theoretical profiling of the discipline. Success stories are not called into question — or only by way of exception. Since the end of the 1980s one may observe, in both Germanophone and international philology, something like a gradual reconsideration — or else, a renewed consideration — of the necessity to be concerning oneself with the foundations of philology. Scarcely published, Paul de Man's "Return to Philology" was overshadowed by the author's involvement in the (Belgian) collaboration with the Nazi occupiers, which came to light at the same time.[3] Thus it was a little book by Heinz Schlaffer — *Poesie und Wissen* (*Poesy and Knowledge*), published soon after — which offered wholesome food for thought.[4] Unsurprisingly, the edition of Friedrich Nietzsche's philological *Nachlaß* also revivified the thinking about philology. Glenn W. Most dedicated an entire series of international conferences and ensuing volumes to the professional profile of philological activity: central segments and functions of philology were examined, such as the collecting of fragments, the editing of texts, and the writing of commentaries (*Aporemata. Kritische Studien zur Philologiegeschichte*).[5] Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht collected his contributions to Most's enterprise in the volume *The Powers of Philology* — first published in the United States, then also in German.[6]

3 De Man 1982.
4 Schlaffer 1990.
5 Most 1997–2002.
6 Gumbrecht 2003.

4 Internal interdisciplinarity

The aforesaid works were already organized along the lines of a thoroughgoing division of labor. Yet the interdisciplinarity of the 'philological turn' — as I understand it — means not so much a merely functional collaboration of the various disciplines, differentiated according to purposes and areas of application, but rather a readiness and capacity to already unfold an object in its (intra-)disciplinary treatment in such a way that its complexity — that is, in this particular case: the object's (genuine) interdisciplinarity — may become manifest. Put differently: during the object's philological treatment, one will sooner or later reach a point, where recourse to expertise from other disciplines becomes indispensable. To discern that point — and to accurately mark out the site of a respective recourse — is part and parcel of the philological art. Interdisciplinarity can only be achieved by those who work on their own object with a certain profundity. A superficial contact with each and all may yield some degree of gratification for the aficionados of research clustering; but an intensive assessment of the object is more important by far.

Consequently, what we see in the announced philological turn is not so much the resistance to other models found, as the case may be, unsatisfactory, but rather an encouragement to concentrate on the core business of our discipline, which — may times and circumstances change or not — does remain the prerequisite for any specialist and transdisciplinary discussion. Our sights should be set on how one might increase the attractiveness of philological approaches for the study of antiquity (and, as will go without saying, not *only* thereof).

5 *Terrae incognitae*

Should there have been grounds for doubting the productivity of philological procedures, then these were certainly not lying in the challenge posed by the 'cultural turns'. (Represented by Walter Haug and Gerhart von Graevenitz, this debate was conducted in the 1990s).[7] The actual reason was the dwindling conviction that — after centuries of their interpretation and reinterpretation — one might still extricate a new thought from the texts.

Now, it is not only becoming increasingly difficult to persuade people even of that which has been discerned as correct long ago; but by no means is it also the case that everything knowable is already known. I could easily reference a dozen

7 See Haug 1999 as well as the rejoinder by Graevenitz 1999.

of examples for '*terrae incognitae*' even in the literatures we call classical. While we do cultivate the presumption of being well-informed about what an expert was considered to be during the time of Augustus, we still do not deem it needful to study the slender repertoire of technical texts handed down to us alongside Livy's historical work with greater intensity than hitherto the case. For instance: what has been performed philologically with regard to Hyginus' *Astronomy* (considered to be Augustan by some scholars, and still by the *Budé* editor, André Le Bœuffle)[8] is just enough for taxing the extent of that which (still) remains in need of clarification. From the viewpoint of literary studies, we might say the same with respect to Vitruvius.[9] Beyond its routine exploitation (being carried out on all sides), entire continents of knowledge lie dormant and unknown even in the seemingly well-known — or else, were once known and then lost again.

6 The new in the old, the foreign in the familiar

Graver than the carelessness in dealing with allegedly second-rate authors — even of the Classical phase of Latin literature — is the negligence, wherewith we read the better-known authors. Understandably concerned with recommending them to posterity as worth reading, we all too often reduce the texts to diverse 'messages', the topicality of which ought to be manifest even to the least knowledgeable. Nor would this be objectionable at all, so long as we did not earnestly believe that the authors themselves had worked with a view to such a distribution of attention. In their consideration for systematics and rounding off, thematic readings destroy any interest in the willful peculiarities of these works.[10] This is how habits of reading, routines of perception come about, which are to immunize against a confrontation with the unexpected. Conventions and traditions, reading groups, circles, and schools develop as a result; and it is a fact well-known: where a school has emerged, free thinking is in danger. As Cicero puts it so beautifully in his introduction to *De natura deorum*:

8 *L'Astronomie d'Hygin*. Texte établi et traduit par A. Le Bœuffle, Paris 1983.

9 Yet see now the nuanced and profound works by Giovanna Laterza (currently at the *ETENA* [*Étudiants Entrepreneurs en Alsace*], Strasbourg); most recently: Laterza 2018a and Laterza 2018b.

10 Cf. my reflections in Schwindt 2012; and therein spec. the section "Wer schützt die athematische Literatur?", 296–298.

> Indeed the authority of those who profess to teach is often a positive hindrance to those who desire to learn; they cease to employ their own judgement, and take what they perceive to be the verdict of their chosen master as settling the question. (1, 10, transl. Rackham)[11]

The only thing more dangerous than a school is the success of interpreters, inasmuch as it spoils them, rendering them indolent and unresponsive to the impertinence of the texts. Yet the self-assurance and arrogance of the educational elite in Classical philology also happens to be the good fortune of those who read for pleasure.

For what can be seized by a swift attack is conquered; but the cumbersome remains unwieldy and may only be opened up by reiterated attempts — if at all. Hence it was the encounter with cumbrous texts that — in the past thirty years — recurrently pushed the boundaries also of the philological method, which we had adopted in our engagement with the texts. Only in the confrontation with the complex and the most difficult may one have an experience that causes philology to render itself thematic; and (as I shall add) it must do so, lest the inquiry into the texts — in all its noetic and procedural steps — come to conspicuous harm. It was this experience that — by tying in with Paul de Man's 1982 slogan (the "Return to Philology") — called upon us to proclaim the 'philological turn' in 2002.[12]

7 Philology as a fundamental science or: Mathematics also speaks in sentences

We inquired into the peculiarity of philological inquiry, into a '*proprium*' of philological activity graspable in terms of the theory of science.[13] In 2004, within the structural and developmental plan of our university, we demanded the foundation of an "Institute for Basic Philological Research" ("Institut für Philologische Grundlagenforschung"), for the first time. In our proposal, we wrote that the task were "to explore the categorial groundwork of our philological, i.e. linguistic and literary, activity". Developing a theory of categories was, we submitted, not only the prerequisite for a decision on the scientificity of philological *modi operandi*, but also the condition of possibility for well-founded interdisciplinary exchange. As per our proposal, such a morphology of the philological understanding of texts and literature

11 (*Q*)*uin etiam obest plerumque iis qui discere volunt auctoritas eorum qui se docere profitentur; desinunt enim suum iudicium adhibere, id habent ratum quod ab eo quem probant iudicatum vident* (Cicero, *De natura deorum*, post O. Plasberg ed. W. Ax, Leipzig ^{2}1933 [reprint: Stuttgart 1980]).

12 See above, p. 236 with n. 3.

13 See Schwindt 2009.

could not be developed in any other way than on a broad, interdisciplinary basis. Hence one would also have to enter into conversations with other faculties, insofar as they also work with sentences and could not get by without advanced hermeneutics, logistics, and heuristics. The philological, philosophical, historical, theological disciplines should thus be joined by the mathematical, natural, and medical sciences. We pointed out that anamnesis, diagnostics, aetiology, therapy were not only key concepts in medicine, but also in textual criticism. No less evident are the connections with juridical hermeneutics.

Back then, we were thinking about very specific projects — the work on which was to demonstrate the characteristics of a philological approach in the respective sciences and forms of scholarship. Let me only mention the notions and concepts of 'the subject': that is to say, the configuration and representation of subjects in sentences and texts; also, the question concerning the role played by their treatment in philosophy, law, mathematics, and the natural sciences; as well as the examination of premodern hermeneutics — in collaboration with Classical, Near and Middle Eastern Studies, with Legal, Natural, and Medical History.

Needless to say, a theoretical treatment of philology is *not* literary theory — at least not *prima specie*.[14] The theory of philology keeps in sight the entirety of approaches and perceptions, the preparations and operations in the field of textual investigations. Accordingly, we soon began to assess the philological field in more fundamental ways, and to seek out the peculiarities of philological activity in their specific relations to time and space, fiction and factuality, history and politics, theology and art. Religious studies (the rituals of philology), ethnology, and cultural anthropology also became relevant points of reference.

8 Foundational research: inverted

Well, in 2004 we were not successful. Back then, the term "*Philologische Grundlagenforschung*" ("Basic Philological Research") had — and still has — a different connotation in large swaths of our discipline: one conceives of this word as referring to the finding, preparing, editing of, and commenting on, texts (*vulgo*: sources) — ideally hitherto un- or little known. Rarely has a concept been abused to such an extent. In medicine, for instance, it has always signified research into the molecular-biological (especially the human-genetic) fundamentals. Yet in Linguistics and Literary Studies, it has become a cover concept for all those indubitably respectable

14 Concerning the difference of these disciplines, see Bohle/Krauss/Neutzler 2018, 9–11.

activities, without the unpretentiously diligent preliminary work of which every theoretical exertion would be grasping at nothing. Yet that small conceptual manipulation has led to a metaplasm of the research environment, wherein, all at once, there is no (longer any) room for theoretical performances in the language, (that is) the language of the administrative elites at our universities. Since the national and transnational institutions providing funding for research have been focusing on promoting editorial and commentarial projects under this header, it has been even harder to counter that exclusivist understanding of 'basic research'.

9 Foundational research: set right

Evidently, the basic philological research envisioned by *us* is not one that would exalt itself beyond the many other conceivable activities in the field of philology. Neither does it have an advantage over them, nor does it trail them. It is not metaphilology, but philology. The 'turn', or movement, which we are here referring to, opened up in the interaction with the objects themselves. Even in the tiniest rhetorical operations — for instance, in the discernment of an anacoluthon, of a figure of displacement, in the filling of a gap, in the supplementation of a noetic step — something is necessary, which cannot be sufficiently legitimized by referring simply to this or that device of poetics or rhetoric, i.e. of literary theory. Pointedly put: philology's *vis imaginandi* or *supplendi* is always already part of the deal; and this requires that good grounds be given — at least, so long as philology claims a certain scholarly dignity.[15]

In this perspective, the 'philological turn' signifies the avoidance of evasive movements. We confront the texts, as well as what we do with (regard to) them. This is not a heroical image. One ought not to mock it, but for once actually expose oneself to the experience of the object. Consequently, it is the 'object', its withstanding impetus — in other words: that which is 'thrown against' us, the sheer factuality of what seems to face, and come towards, us as what is thematic in the text — which leads philology to where its own activity or inactivity are grasped as something that corresponds to the *intentio textus* as counter-tension.[16]

15 Splendid preparations in the field of what she calls a "poetics of research" may be found in Tardin Cardoso 2009 and 2011.

16 Cf. my considerations concerning the problem of epistemic reading in Schwindt 2017a, 39–40.

10 "*Zukunftsphilologie*" ("future philology")

One may see how easily, but also how necessarily, something else results from the set pieces of literary theory — such as the doctrine of motifs and themes, or of the objects and their epistemological treatment — in the horizon of philology. Now we are contemplating the text in the realm of possibility of an experience, which might not begin with the text, nor end with us. By way of example, we are considering our philological activity as something that, by encountering the resistive, the withstanding text, enables the emergence of something new — and of a future.

Taught by an eye attentive to the manifold limits staked out for the philological activity, the 'philological turn' sets modesty against the self-assurance of traditional basic philological research (*Grundlagenforschung*). We are still approaching the issue. Yet we have *already* touched upon certain topics, which may render manifest the difficulty of the task. We have referred to the form of presence or absence ("the art of disappearing"), and mentioned the way and manner of philology's relation to the object, when it unfolds the latter's (genuine) interdisciplinarity; or when it aims at answering to the object's resistance (i.e. its sheer positivity) by virtue of a counter-tension. We have also briefly touched upon the need for justification regarding its bridging effect qua *vis imaginandi* or *supplendi*. On these grounds, questions arise — such as that of philology's figurative powers, or concerning its treatment of space. These questions are inseparable from the text, and may only be excluded from philological practice at the cost of its no longer counting as scholarly — a price I consider too high.

Yet the 'philological turn' may also whet our attention for all the small and sizeable decisions, which must be made when dealing with texts. It may broaden the view to include the grand and modest dramas, which take place in the shadow of the texts.

At once, a reconsideration of the capacities of philology enables us to gain an impression of the magnitude and significance of the task posed by every text. One may edit, and comment on, Sophocles and Plato, Propertius and Horace, even without being on a par with their texts. There are countless examples, which demonstrate how easily an unwieldy text may be turned into one that flows undisturbedly. It pertains to the stupidities in the history of philology that — by means of rectifications — precisely the most unpoetic heads attempted to lecture authors, who had happily eluded ordinary linguistic usage.

11 Machine philology

Even so, reflecting on the philological method and the specificity of its relation to objects may contribute to the development of reading methods, which take into account all the little and great problems linked to philological practice. In this way, it may simultaneously face the pressing challenges of the present: the lack of a challenge inherent in ingratiating oneself, giving in to the opportunism and the service mentality of research institutions funding outsized projects; and the excessive challenge posed by the realm of the intelligent machines for our philological cerebrum.

Under the pressure of having to deliver results quickly, a certain attitude and method of reading have established themselves, which are geared towards skimming and exhausting texts. We habitually read with a view to contents. The same aim is shared by cursory reading, which promises to deliver facts, information, data in the shortest time possible. It seems that the methods of the Digital Humanities point in a similar direction. Machines are now taking over the optimization of the process. What millions of individual readers could not reap in the grand harvest, they perform consummately. Yet are they also capable of taking up — and on — the cumbersome?

The problem of the machine would seem to be that it reminisces too much, where the *memoria* of man is quickly stretched to its limits. It overextends the concept of literary-historical recollection, when the Ancient *kat' anthrópinon* — 'that which is appropriate to man' — no longer comes into consideration as a yardstick of literary criticism. It may open up new possibilities, where it reveals the grimace of the ordinary behind the façades of a seemingly 'original' diction. Yet machines reproduce a human, all-too-human positivism, which consists in identifying, in transferring the peculiar into the general, the characteristic into the generic, the idea into the system. Accordingly, the criticism of the machine should be connected to a criticism of the (ordinary) philological mindset.

12 The temporal regime of philology

Yet philology is more than the mere methodic comprehension of sentences and thoughts. Rather, its practice of reading opens up paths into otherwise impassable terrain. It does not resolve the aporiae of language, but points them out and maintains them, wherever possible, in a condition of productivity. It discerns — not so much notions and ideas, but — figures of thought (*Gedankenfiguren*), which, put into the perspective of intellectual history, may become figures of thinking

(*Denkfiguren*).[17] Philology is the medium, wherein the text may well maintain its claims to continuing influence, even in distant times. I hope that the distinction, which I am trying to make here, will be clear. What distinguishes the philological from the historical treatment is that: philology preserves the claim to continued significance of all the interpretations and readings, which is not actualized in a historical approach — for reasons that would have to be detailed at another occasion (for instance, at a conference concerned with the differences of philological and historical interpretation).[18]

According to this view, there would be a peculiarity — I would say, a strength — of philology in the fact that its temporal regime is such that it does not aim at the signposting of topical effects and contemporary proprieties, but — and in this it resembles its objects, or at least the literary ones among them — at the manifoldness of potential interpretations, which are to be preserved unconditionally. Lest I be misunderstood: this is not a commentary on the ill-fated debate, recently (re)kindled between the Cologne Romanist Andreas Kablitz and my Heidelberg colleague, the Romanist Gerhard Poppenberg. By no means do I plead the case for an epistemology that puts postmodern arbitrariness in the place of firm knowledge (a position Kablitz imputes to Poppenberg).[19] Instead, I argue for recognizing the affluence of well-founded, scholarly assumptions about the constitution of texts.

What is at stake here is a specific temporal form of philological activity, which evidently will not service a concern for politico-topical opportunities as well as it does indeed serve the need to exhaust the whole realm of potential interpretations. It is not within the purview of philology to decide, which of these possibilities might attain to what sort of evidence at a given (or some other) time. It shares this abstention from judgment with its object, literature.

13 In the *nucleus*: the political aspect of philology

Inquiries into the form of literary knowledge and cognition as well as into the structure of the philological judgment have demonstrated that the similarities are greater than one had been willing to acknowledge for the longest time. This renders an acknowledgment of philological activity in terms of the philosophy of science a precarious endeavor. Accordingly, our Anglophone colleagues do not speak of the

17 See Schwindt 2008.

18 See the more extensive considerations in Schwindt 2011.

19 See Kablitz 2018 and the reply by Poppenberg 2019.

science (of literature), when they mean 'philology', but subsume it under the header of the 'Arts and Humanities'. From this, my colleague in Bloomington, Michel Chaouli, has drawn the consequence that we — meaning, the philologies — would have to "unlearn criticism", in order to be state-of-the-art.[20] I would rather say that criticism must be kept open for the self-criticism of literature to such an extent that the philological method may draw a profit therefrom, specifically with a view to furthering its self-elucidation — now also in the closest contact with its object, the texts. Yet be that as it may. For the moment, it is only of import that this much be put on record: what happens to be untimely about philology is nothing as would be detrimental to scientificity (so-called). Today, as the faculties in the Humanities have run into what may well be their most difficult crisis yet (not only in Germany, but also in France, in Italy, in Great Britain, and in the United States), we will not win the struggle for the scientific dignity of the Arts and Literary Studies by copying the popular jargon of the cultural sociologists deemed conceptually more satisfactory, nor by working with theoretical frameworks borrowed from other disciplines, which appear as mere appliqués on the body of philology — both being practices that have become customary everywhere. Rather, we must gain a foothold and establish ourselves at the neuralgic point of the societal debates, struggling for interpretational sovereignty in the discourses of relevance: at the roots of language and thought. Granting that (philological) criticism is not a form of scholarship characterized by ordering and decision-making (not a *téchne epitaktiké*, as Plato puts it in the *Politikos*), it still does not let itself be relegated into districts, in which the essential decisions have already been made. Rather, it attempts to reach the place(s), where these decisions are (still) in the making, and where their disciplinary unfolding may not even be in sight yet. Incidentally, herein, and nowhere else, lies philology's political force — that it gives a voice to the preparation of politics in language and text.[21]

14 Philology *in actu* I

Hence it is by concentrating on its core business that the 'philological turn' aims at establishing new and different ties with other fields. I would like to show by way of an example, how philological reading(s) may unfold implications that cannot but challenge and stimulate interdisciplinary discussions. Until very recently, the *Lives*

20 Comment during the *workshop* "Philologie und Kritik", organized by Chaouli on June 21 and 22, 2018 at the *Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School of Literary Studies* at FU Berlin.

21 Cf. Schwindt 2016.

of the Caesars by Suetonius had been treated in a historical vein, for the most part (or else, in terms of generic and literary history). The main concern was the credibility (and the disposition) of what is (re)presented. One roamed in said *œuvre* as if it were naught but a gigantic storage of information. Initially and primarily, one sought a method for classifying that data — naturally, along the lines of 'false' or 'correct'; and with a view to interests of knowledge, status, and (political) factions. A mere glance at the same work's history of reception in the arts and literature of the 19th century could have drawn attention to the fact that — aside from factual or verisimilar knowledge — something else is also being transported and stored, here. It was always also about the form of statements, momentary impressions, chains of images, occasional stories, scenarios, gestures. Since all of this does not immediately disclose itself to a mind focused on the processing of information, much remained in the dead angle of a cast of attention proceeding excerptively. It is only a longer, second look at (and consideration of) the text, which reveals the tiny and tiniest patterns pertaining to the structure of something political that, at first, has little in common with its seasoned sibling, even as it turns out to be a gamete for greater stimuli, upon closer inspection.

Thus — and by virtue of a consistently philological reading — Chiara Cavazzani's as yet unpublished master's thesis entitled "Caligulas Raum. Eine kurze Pathographie" ("Caligula's Space. A Short Pathography") unfolds a whole cosmos of submerged impulses and movements in time and space. In obsessively detailed explorations of the 'mad' Caesar's motoric activity, she outlines the network of correspondences relating to bodies and spaces, individuals and society, to the center and the peripheries of power. She elicits, how the epilepsy of the emperor is turned into the structural simile of his unconnectedly nervous politics. Of course, Cavazzani does not present causalities, but offers us the phenomena in parataxes. The ruler's experience — and employment — of time also follow the swings of a discontinuity, which articulates itself physico-physiognomically and politically in the forms of asyndesis.

The spatio-political gestures, too, are read back onto the emperor's body: be it the bridge of Baiae, or that between the Palatine and the Capitol; be it the forceful appropriation of foreign, cultic and religious spaces, or the accumulation of names and cognomina — everything obeys the centrifugal movement of disintegration and decentering. The long-standing center of power is shifted, displaced, emptied. A form of "interspatiality" emerges, which is described as the congenial locus for that strangely unruly ruler. By recourse to this pregnant and succinct example, Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia' comes to be justified in philological terms — quasi *en parergo*.

Said (way of) reading develops a considerable dynamics, when confronted with Cavazzani's interpretation of the portrait of Germanicus, which inaugurates the *Life of Caligula*. The space and time of Caligula's father ever follow a conservative (in Cavazzani's wording: "*cum*-servative") impulse. The character and politics of Germanicus are consistently geared towards soundness and calculability, towards continuity and a safeguarding of the tradition(s). In Caligula's politics, by contrast, the old Augustan model of an integrative imperial order disintegrates. Its place is taken by a gloomy space of a politics guided by creative instincts, which loses itself in the unconnected, delirious images of an autocracy that constantly switches between putting itself into play, and removing itself therefrom.

The philological way of reading operates very close to the turf. It nists in the tiny and the tiniest waymarks, the particles and prepositions. It is a reading for pleasure — whose meaning emerges gradually, if at all. Yet then it may pose a serious challenge to the historico-identificatory mode. Another, a last example: once more, I am having recourse to a text from the *Lives of the Caesars* by Suetonius, since it is here that the rivalry between the reading methods competing within the Classical Studies is almost palpable.

15 Philology *in actu* II

By recourse to the narrative concerned with the death of Augustus, an intensive reading may also gain a structural image of the Augustan principate's poetics — or, more simply put, of its make; or, perhaps more to the point: of its gait; and indeed, the latter is rather apt.[22] How did the emperor move during his last days? Which paths did he take, which did he avoid? How did he see the world (in the eyes of his biographer)? In which ways did he turn towards, or away from, it? How did he speak to it? What did he comment on — and when, how, on which occasions? Is it even possible for there to be 'occasions' in the life of an emperor — or does he, in fact, just create them? He, the center of significance … Indeed, what could be the meaning of significance in a human life which is significant *par excellence*; and how does one speak about it, if everything is significant? What constitutes a 'narrative', in *this* case?

22 The following two subsections ("Philology *in actu* II", and "Gestures, not deeds! Or: The field of radical politics") have been taken from a text, which was published in a volume edited by Grandl/Möller 2020, 31–37, here: 32–33 and 36–37. They have been revised for the present purpose.

Besides, how did he relate to himself? Was he body or spirit? How did the latter interact? How did he die — if die he did! (A question that also poses itself with regard to the cases of Tiberius and Caligula, in particular). Assuming that he died: what happened to his corpse, his body, his words, his decrees; and what is the biographer's view of said spirit, said body? What does a writer say or do, when his client's *bíos* has ended? How does he mark out the transition — and is there such? What is required for such a changeover; and when or how does a movement across something take place — questions, and still more questions. Yet there are also some preliminary answers. We saw that the emperor's movements in space had already obeyed the laws of the theatre, of stage and spectacle — long before we find his life condensed into the pointed *bon mot* of the mime of life. We also saw how he prepared himself for the last grand exchange … As the narrative comes to a close, this begins with the scene in which he hands over his duties to Tiberius during the censorial sacrifice of purification (§97.1). Later, he gives each of his companions forty pieces of gold, so that they may buy Alexandrian goods exclusively — thereby responding to the friendly gesture(s) of homage (§98.2).

> More than that, for the several remaining days of his stay, among little presents of various kinds, he distributed togas and cloaks as well, stipulating that the Romans should use the Greek dress and language and the Greeks the Roman. (§98.3, transl. Rolfe)[23]

One will perceive that the anecdote is the congenial medium for preparing the change of spheres and *status* — once the subject matter of biography has been shifted into the light of death, once a biography becomes a narrative of passing.[24] The anecdote is the form, in which trivialities — I do not wish to say: are treated as something great, but, for once (relieved of the pressure to produce significance), they are looked upon as something that potentially represents — or replaces, or is — that which is great. This is no trifle! The anecdote partakes of the significativeness of its characters, while transforming it into something other than what is expected. For it does not gain significance by way of narrative contextualization, but — counterintuitively — by rendering thematic the exception. Consequently, the anecdote does not initially provide anything that would suggest a connection with general knowledge; rather, it offers something that runs counter to this connection,

23 (*S*)*ed et ceteros continuos dies inter varia munuscula togas insuper ac pallia distribuit, lege proposita ut Romani Graeco, Graeci Romani habitu et sermone uterentur* (C. Suetoni Tranquilli *De vita Caesarum* libros VIII rec. R.A. Kaster, Oxford 2016).

24 A detailed interpretation is soon to be published in Schwindt 2024 (opening lecture at the annual conference of the research group "La poésie augustéenne", June 2014 at Trinity College of Dublin University).

in that it insists on the disconnectedness of its object. Its name protects the anecdote, because that which it states is neither specifically authenticated, nor indeed intended for being disseminated further. The anecdote ensures that knowledge (otherwise) unvouched for is transmitted even so. Qua literary form, it plays with the epistemic status of its object: it shifts the latter into the precariousness of unauthenticated science, and simultaneously keeps alive its claim to be influencing the images and the kind of faith, which grow so well-precisely on this ground. Anecdotes are the advocates of nescience — being the unknown life, otherwise overshadowed by the discourses concerned with significance.

Earlier, I declared something similar with respect to philology. It is the advocate of all those forms of reading, which — for now, and for whichever reason — are not having their day …

16 Gestures, not deeds! or: The field of radical politics

In philological readings, the historiography of Suetonius may therefore be revealed as a field of gestures, or (as I call it in my research on the poetic texts of Augustan literature) of "radical politics"; and, if the impression does not deceive, the anecdote is that form of communication, which commemorates the *acta* as *gesta* — to make use of a distinction, which my Heidelberg assistant Maximilian Haas has called to mind with reference to Varro's definition (*De lingua Latina* 6.77).[25] Should it be

25 Within the framework of a talk entitled "Zur Gestualität der Texte" on December 19, 2016, given before the *SFB* 933 "Materiale Textkulturen", at the German Department of Heidelberg University. See Varro: *Tertium gradum agendi esse dicunt, ubi quid faciant; in eo propter similitudinem agendi et faciendi et gerendi quidam error his qui putant esse unum. Potest enim aliquid facere et non agere, ut poeta facit fabulam et non agit, contra actor agit et ‹non› facit, et sic a poeta fabula fit, non agitur, ab actore agitur, non fit. Contra imperator quod dicitur res gerere, in eo neque facit neque agit, sed gerit, id est sustinet, tralatum ab his qui onera gerunt, quod hi sustinent* ("The third stage of action is, they say, that in which they *faciunt* 'make' something: in this, on account of the likeness among *agere* 'to act' and *facere* 'to make' and *gerere* 'to carry or carry on', a certain error is committed by those who think that it is only one thing. For a person can *facere* something and not *agere* it, as a poet *facit* 'makes' a play and does not act it, and on the other hand the actor *agit* 'acts' it and does not make it, and so a play *fit* 'is made' by the poet, not acted, and *agitur* 'is acted' by the actor, not made. On the other hand, the general, in that he is said to *gerere* 'carry on' affairs, in this neither *facit* 'makes' nor *agit* 'acts', but *gerit* 'carries on', that is, supports, a meaning transferred from those who *gerunt* 'carry' burdens, because they support them" [*On the Latin Language. Books V–VII*, transl. by R.G. Kent, Cambridge, MA/London 1938, ²1951]).

permissible freely to outline the problem here at issue, I would say that gestures are a form of action, which is suited to establishing a politics sans (or prior to its) ratification. It is without responsibility and unsynchronized. It is the daguerreotype of man at the moment, where it gives itself a (particular) constitution — without consideration for consequences. The compatibility with a (given) social environment is entirely irrelevant for the quality of the constitution or institution, which this action is capable of enacting/representing/effecting. In gestures, the actions of the protagonists are conceived (of) in a radical manner. (At this point, we would have to treat of the paradox that 'pure' history enunciates itself in the tumultuous and tainted form of the anecdote). For this reason, historical scholarship is not attentive thereto (or else, not specifically). History is not–at least not particularly — interested in pure forms. Without a struggle, it thus cedes to us philologists and literary scholars the entirety of that wide field, where history expresses itself in the forms of literature. I would not dare to call 'Ancient History' what I have here briefly sketched as a form of reading after, and according to, the 'philological turn'. Yet without a doubt, the wide field of gesturality — which opens up in philologically radical readings preferably — does border on the 'actual' history and 'actual' politics of Ancient History. Its object would be the kind of politics that articulates itself within, aside from, or prior to, the politics sanctioned by centuries of calibration and compromise. It is distinguished from Freud's and C.G. Jung's diving expeditions into the abysses of individual and collective consciousness by a disinterest in codes and encryption, in the language of symbols and communication. It is distinguished from the games of New Historicism by its disinclination to engaging in the pathos of rehabilitating the subcultural and sub-literary.

17 Postlude

At the end, it may seem permissible to throw a glance at how the story continued in Heidelberg! The projected "Institut für Philologische Grundlagenforschung" ("Institute for Basic Philological Research") was not established in 2004. It took twelve years indeed, until — after many intermediate steps (some small, others big), among them the endowment of an advancement award for 'basic philological research' in 2005 — the "International Coordination Center 'Theory of Philology'" was inaugurated at Heidelberg University's Department of Classical Philology in 2016. Together with our partner institution — the "Centro de Teoria da Filologia" in Campinas, São Paulo — we have been coordinating a number of activities in the field of foundational research with respect to philology. Once a year, the representatives of the most diverse approaches to the study of philology come together in Heidelberg:

the core of our group is made up of colleagues from universities and other research institutions in Basel, Berlin (AdK, BBAW, FU, HU, ZfL), Bielefeld, Budapest (ELTE), Campinas, Gießen, Frankfurt a.M., Halle, Copenhagen, Marbach, Munich (LMU), Osnabrück, Paris, Santiago de Chile, São Paulo (UNIFESP), Weimar, Wuppertal, and Zurich. The members of this work group represent focuses as various as the philology of editing and textual criticism, archive studies and librarianship, the history of cultures and ideas, the philosophy of science, the study and theory of literature, as well as the theory of philology.

All of us share the conviction that a methodically comparative view of our object — philology — will necessarily enrich our dealings with the texts. In the fall of 2019 (hence prior to a longer break caused by the pandemic), Melanie Möller and I — in cooperation with Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, a professor of Ancient Near Easter Studies, and Bernd Roling, a professor of Medieval and New Latin — invited the group to the newly established 'Einstein Center Chronoi', in order to discuss the relationship of "Philology and Time". Of late, research into the epistemology of time and its experience in premodern societies is being performed at that center. An analysis of the experience and consciousness of time, as transmitted in the respective texts, cannot be separated from a reflection on the philological method being used. The question of the time of philology — the temporality of its dispositions and activities, of its terms and concepts — took center stage during the (as yet unpublished) presentations of the aforementioned workshop. Hence the temporal statutes of philological work were being examined. Inquiry into the temporal constitution of philology implied intriguing queries — such as that concerning the temporality of its categories; but also regarding the rank, which it concedes to the past and the future in its operations. 'Philology and Nostalgia', as well as the concept of "Zukunftsphilologie" ("Future Philology") — recently revivified by the Sanskritist Sheldon Pollock, and intermittently rendered programmatic at FU Berlin — were topical at our conference.

In the meantime, the reprocessing of the early history of (professional) philology in Germany has also been provided for. In cooperation with the colleagues of Halle University and its "*Interdisziplinäres Zentrum für die Erforschung der Europäischen Aufklärung*" ("Interdisciplinary Center for the Research on the European Enlightenment", IZEA), the members of the "International Coordination Center, 'Theory of Philology'" have recently begun to investigate the "Genealogy of Philology", and specifically the "formative phase of the Classical, Biblical, and Modern Philologies (1777–1818)" — a project funded by the DFG.

Not long ago, we also obtained an excellent research library: the collection of more than 7000 books from the literary estate of the Frankfurt Comparatist Werner Hamacher, who left us far too early, and was closely connected to our endeavor,

right from its start. Hamacher is an important link between German, French, and US American approaches to the task of tying back in with a theoretically founded discussion about philology.[26] His estate contains a number of letters and other texts penned by the most important advocates of a 'return to philology': Maurice Blanchot, Peter Szondi, Jacques Derrida, and (of course, and above all) Paul de Man. We are aiming at accessing Hamacher's *Nachlaß* in connection with the *Deutsches Literaturarchiv* (German Literature Archive, DLA) in Marbach.

18 *Ad posteros*

In conclusion, I would like to voice a desire (if I may). It is my wish that–at some point during their qualification, and quite irrespective of the attractiveness and significance of the objects, for the sake of which they resolved to study in this field–each and all, who decided on studying philology, would arrive at (or be led to) the point, where, for once, they would come to terms with what they are actually doing, when they ponder and evaluate letters, syllables, words, *kola*, and sentences; when they work with — seek and collect, survey and order, read and interpret, edit, explicate, understand, assess and compare, recommend and reject, read and reread, forget and remember — passages, texts, and books. There will be no harm in knowing, on which terrain they are moving — no harm in knowing the times and spaces; the modes of approaching; the disciplinary ceremonial; the questions of power and a lack thereof; the roles, masks, and theatrical props; the instruments of scholarship and science; that whole drama of dealing with something, whereof we still do not know, whether it must overcome us, so that we may overcome it; or whether we must manage and master it, so that it will not overwhelm and overpower us. They will then also be more capable of comprehending philology as an integral study of understanding. For, along with philology, they will have learned the general science of exchange and interaction — meaning, criticism and hermeneutics. In the end, after having performed really well, they will not even be all that melancholy about having only studied philology (and, perchance, also Ancient History and Archeology).

In the process of methodical self-elucidation — and in no danger of losing the object due to its having immersed itself into its own doings — philology recognizes itself as the art of obtaining the object. Yet it gains the latter by developing a stance against, or countering, the 'object' — even as it always remains in touch with that very object. Said sort of resistance would seem to be the most consummate

26 To only mention two of the most important writings in our context: Hamacher 2009 and 2010.

expression of its strangely refracted sovereignty. Resistive, as it should be, philology is thus both creative and precise, an art and a science. This is *my* way of interpreting the balance of power between philology and its texts. The point is not to overwhelm or master, but to sustain and withstand the conflict — to keep open the game or match — as long as possible. Hence philology is the '*perpetuum mobile*' of forming traditions. In an emphatic sense, it is what crafts and ensures a future. The disquiet it institutes in this way we should not deem a vexation, but a methodical godsend (and probably also one of intellectual history). The unrest is the best gift philology may give us. It shows us that the philological question has not been decided yet; and thus the 'philological turn' is also not a singular and unique occurrence. It describes the possibility of an experience, which is always open to — and free for — all, who have not ceased to ask questions.

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