

The Future of Philology

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Proceedings of the 11th Annual
Columbia University German
Graduate Student Conference

Edited by

Hannes Bajohr, Benjamin Dorvel,
Vincent Hessling, and Tabea Weitz

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P U B L I S H I N G

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Introduction

The conference whose proceedings are collected in this volume was initiated by a rather simple observation and a rather simple question. The observation was that probably no other discipline in the vast spectrum of academic fields has undergone as sweeping a transformation as philology has during its history. Since the days of Karl Lachmann, it seems that nearly every aspect of it has changed radically, be it the subject, scope, or methodology. The question, then, is whether it still makes sense to speak institutionally and epistemologically of ‘philology.’ Does this venerable title still signify a truly coherent field, and not rather a multitude of scattered currents and competing genealogies, differing national characteristics and inconsistent methodologies? And if we ask what philology is and what it can be, must we not also ask ourselves what it is that we do? And how, more importantly, we can continue to do it?¹

In posing these questions, we follow a number of assumptions. We use the term ‘philology’—not literary studies, criticism, or *Germanistik*—because, historically, ‘philology’ is the root from which all these other disciplines stem. ‘Philology’ might then well mean something that, in one way or another, exceeds these disciplines. This intentional vagueness is what could be called the *broad* sense of the term ‘philology’—an umbrella term that both betrays a certain distance and acts as a generic surface onto which one can project utopian ideals. Yet at the same time, philology can also mean, in the narrow or emphatic sense, something more specific, something that embodies what we call the ‘core competencies’ of literary studies. Traditionally, these ‘core competencies’ entail the constitution of texts and textual criticism; stemmatics and the edition of manuscripts; the delineation of the transcript history of

¹ While we do not share all of Sheldon Pollock’s assumptions or conclusions, we must acknowledge that from the very start our questions were stimulated by his sweeping argument for the legitimacy of philology: Sheldon Pollock, “Future Philology? The Fate of a Soft Science in a Hard World,” *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009): 931-961.

documents and their provenance; identifying fragments and writing commentaries; and taking care of the text in general—whether that care be of an immaterial nature, as with the corpus of a work, or of a material nature, as the subject of archival ministration and scrutiny.

To ask about the future of philology is, at least in part, to ask about the relation of its broad and empathic implications. We have observed a significant rupture in this relation on both sides of the Atlantic in recent years. Three tendencies seem to stand out: (1) a movement *away from the text* that is connected to thematic and methodological expansion; (2) an antithetical movement back *towards the text* that is connected with a reevaluation of the competencies of textual work as the discipline reworks itself; (3) and an increasingly elaborate *self-reflection* on the history and practice of philology. These three tendencies bespeak the sense that philology is either at an impasse or that its perpetual crisis may be part of its general character. It also reveals a newly-found confidence in the possibility not only of philology's survival, but also of its continuing usefulness, whether as a broad or an emphatic discipline. Asking about the future of philology, then, entails the hope of making sense of its present and its past.

I.

Philologists find their discipline's past, with its political misuses, a constant source of worry, and that feeling of crisis is accompanied by a feeling of illegitimacy. For a long time, philology seemed not only "epistemologically naive or speculative," but also "politically charged."² Any look into the future of philology must, therefore, also confront its history, even where it is one of academic decline, moral dubiousness, and institutional marginalization. The current crisis of philology can, at least in the European tradition, be traced back to a number of historical watershed events that caused the field to gradually lose its former status as a master discipline, or *Leitdisziplin*, which it had, at least in the German context, achieved in the nineteenth century.

² Lutz Ellrich and Nikolaus Wegmann, "Theorie als Verteidigung der Literatur? Eine Fallgeschichte: Paul de Man," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 64, no. 3 (1990): 470. All translations from foreign-language sources are ours, unless otherwise noted.

One of the most recent of these breaking points is surely the rise of (French) ‘theory,’ which has enjoyed currency in debates throughout academia since the 1960s.³ The post-structuralist turn within the humanities fueled by thinkers of mostly French and North American origin did not just strip down some of philology’s core concepts, such as the unity of a (literary) work and the idea of authorship. It also cast serious doubts on the necessity and possibility of scientific rigor and exactitude in the humanities, the very things upon which philology had based its great success and the better part of its epistemological authority during the nineteenth century.

While post-structuralism no doubt carried out its attack on philology’s conceptual domains with strong arguments,⁴ its interventions found smooth sailing where the discipline’s credibility had already been undermined by nationalist and reactionary ideology. Nationalist ideas had often served as a primary source of identity during the emancipation of the field in the nineteenth century.⁵ In the wake of fascism, such nationalist ideas kept philologists entangled with Nazi and fascist politics, thus turning the field into a stronghold of reactionary thinking.⁶ This widespread corruption of scholarly ideas with political ideology was responsible for philology’s great loss of credibility. It thus accounted for another grave cut in its history.

³ François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

⁴ One of the most prominent of these arguments, for instance, traces philology’s previous preoccupation with authors and their works to a false positivist epistemology and, hence, to capitalist ideology (Roland Barthes, “La mort de l’auteur,” in *Le bruissement de la langue: Essays critiques IV*, Paris: Seuil, 1984). The proponents of this argument claim that conventional philology amounts to a mere deciphering of literary works as meaningful utterances made by an author, and thus limits the epistemic value of literature and writing. In contrast to this, post-structuralism advocates the analysis of an unlimited, multi-origin, and plurivalent *text* that allows for a productive and subversive engagement with the cultural material.

⁵ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, “Roots, Races, and the Return to Philology,” in *The Humanities and the Dream of America* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 43-79.

⁶ Helmut Müller-Sievers, “Reading without Interpreting: German Textual Criticism and the Case of Georg Büchner,” *Modern Philology* 103, no. 4 (2012): 504.

The academic field, however, which had been instrumentalized by fascism and whose central concepts were then later jeopardized by deconstruction, was anything but a well-founded discipline with a clearly formulated scholarly mission. Instead, the two great cuts that the past century had left in the institutional corpus of philology were predated by an even graver setback that had been already looming on the horizon when the discipline had hardly reached the zenith of its influence during the nineteenth century.

Friedrich August Wolf, the founding figure of Western philology as a modern discipline, was supported by the Prussian state, which saw “in philology a tool for promoting a movement of cultural solidarity and renovation.”⁷ Wolf and his followers took this task upon themselves, combining scientific rigor in the comparative study of ancient languages with a search for one proto-language (*Ursprache*), a project already guided by value judgments. The rigor of philology’s comparative and genealogical approach thus revealed its fatal drawback in the attribution of structural primordially (*Ursprünglichkeit*) to some languages. Such attributions were, then, easily recast as claims for the racial superiority of certain linguistic communities over others.

Apart from this moral-political enmeshment, the discipline also had serious difficulties positioning itself vis-à-vis other academic fields. Wolf’s influential disciple, August Böckh, had hardly extended the subject area from the narrower realm of language and literature to a broader horizon of all cultural phenomena when his colleague, Gottfried Hermann, criticized him for a lack of accuracy. The ensuing dispute between Böckh and Hermann remained unresolved and eventually caused a schism in the field: grammatical critical text philology (*Wortphilologie*) was pitted against a rather reality-oriented philology (*Sachphilologie*). As a result, philologists never managed to reconcile their “humanistic educational mission”⁸ with the positivist ideal of objectivity that had been introduced by the historical critical method.

In the second half of the century, the dormant conflict once again erupted on a more fundamental level and with greater force between

⁷ Harpham, “Roots, Races, and the Return to Philology,” 49.

⁸ Claudia Ungefehr-Kortus, “Böckh-Hermann Dispute (CT),” in *Brill’s New Pauly*. Brill Online, 2013.—Accessed December 30, 2013, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-new-pauly/bockh-hermann-dispute-ct-e1305720>.

two young classical philologists, Friedrich Nietzsche and Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff. Nietzsche was up in arms about the “rigor mortis”⁹ of a field that had, in his opinion, bartered its life-serving mission for a false ideal of scientific objectivity.¹⁰ His adversary, Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, criticized him for his irrational approach, claiming that he did not command the core competencies of a proper philologist such as objectivity and the historical critical method.¹¹ The conflict ended prematurely when Nietzsche refused to reply to Wilamowitz’s harsh critique and, in 1879, ultimately withdrew from the discipline – ostensibly for medical reasons, but really in favor of pursuing a philosophical career. However, the problems to which Nietzsche had drawn attention persisted, which ultimately caused the increasing marginalization of philology that has lasted until this very day. Just as Nietzsche prophesized, the discipline failed in the long run to uphold its humanistic mission vis-à-vis the self-imposed demands for scientific rigor and objectivity.

That damage was all the more severe as the natural sciences seemed to excel at negotiating the balancing act between maintaining scientific rigor and providing a service to humanity. While physicists, chemists, and biologists could boast daily of groundbreaking discoveries influencing the future of humankind, philologists saw themselves reduced to inconsiderable bookworms dabbling in outdated wisdoms. While the increasing precision of scientific methods backed up by mathematics seemed a self-evident tool in the quest to gain new insights into the workings of nature, the ever-growing critical apparatuses often appeared to be gratuitous proliferations of what was already known.

Parallel to gradually losing its status as *prima scientia*, or paradigm science, philology also changed its shape and content in a way that we

⁹ Claudia Ungefehr-Kortus, “Nietzsche-Wilamowitz Controversy (CT),” in *Brill’s New Pauly*. Brill Online, 2013.—Accessed December 30, 2013, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-new-pauly/nietzsche-wilamowitz-controversy-ct-e1508910>.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* [1872], vol. 1 of *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1972), 5-152.

¹¹ Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, “Zukunftsphilologie!,” in *Der Streit um Nietzsches ‘Geburt der Tragödie,’* ed. Karlfried Gründer (Hildesheim: Olms, 1969), 27-55.

have described as a continuous movement away from the text as its central object of research. This structural change, which occurred partly in reaction to the aforementioned watershed events, was driven mainly by two tendencies.

Firstly, philology gave up, to some extent, its privileged access to textual objects by excluding or alienating certain key philological practices from the field. Arguments for this exclusion came from two sides. While linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Benjamin Lee Whorf, and Noam Chomsky argued that a form of properly scientific linguistics ought to replace philology, “New Critics” such as Austin Warren or René Wellek contended that empirical philology ought to be excluded from solely interpretive literary studies.¹² In addition to this exclusionary tendency, philology lost its textual focus by subsuming many new subjects into the field. Media and cultural studies, in addition to the above-mentioned ‘theory,’ sought to extend the concept of the text beyond the realm of written natural language. This included new technical media as well as other forms of expression previously neglected by research, ultimately amounting to a new positivity in the humanities. In the light of this change, philology’s traditional methods, which had been developed over centuries through scholarly engagement with written corpuses, appeared obsolete.

Apart from factors rooted in historical contingency (the loss of its status as a master discipline and the move away from the text), the tendency towards decline can be explained by a number of structural deficiencies that have from the beginning precipitated, if not ensured, the field’s present crisis. From its initial glory through the present day, philology has failed to provide a coherent definition of its own field and object of research. The usage of the word ‘philology’ has no common denominator shared by different academic cultures. In the United States, for example, the term (if it is even used, let alone understood¹³) typically refers to the language-oriented part of Classics, whereas the German realm of *Philologie* is mainly concerned with textual criticism. But even within one academic culture the use of the

¹² Harpham, “Roots, Races, and the Return to Philology,” 74.

¹³ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology: Dynamics of Textual Scholarship* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 1.

name can be highly contested.¹⁴ In the American humanities, Paul de Man, Edward Said, and Sheldon Pollock do not simply stand for different theories of the scholarly investigation of literature. They also distinguish themselves as to their respective use of the word philology, even though they all claim to be *returning* to it. German-speaking scholars often find themselves at pains to distinguish between the broad and the emphatic senses of “philology” as already mentioned in order to prevent or eliminate confusion between a general practice of literary studies and the sophisticated methodology and exercise of textual criticism.

This inconsistency in the use of the term “philology” reflects an even graver incoherence in the discipline itself. As a result of the movement away from the text, philology lacks a uniform set of methods or a clearly delineated scope of research. At the same time, philology’s ancestral domain of written literacy appears increasingly hazy as new forms of media proliferate and the insight that “philological material is by definition unstable” becomes more and more evident.¹⁵ Similar to the indeterminacy of its object realm, scope and methods, modern philology has also failed to establish—or re-establish—a unified institutional structure. It may only be a question of time before such an unfounded construction collapses—torn between the newer trends of media and cultural studies and the dusty relics of textual criticism.

II.

When one considers philology’s historic weight, structural shortcomings, and the talk of its “collapse,”¹⁶ one must wonder why we can still speak of philology as if it were perfectly clear what we mean by

¹⁴ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, “Returning to Philology: The Past and Future of Literary Study,” in *New Prospects in Literary Research*, ed. Geoffrey Galt Harpham, Ansgar Nünning, and Koen Hilberdink (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2005), 9-26; Nikolaus Wegmann, “Im Reich der Philologie: Vom Sammeln und Urteilen,” in *Konkurrenten in der Fakultät: Kultur, Wissen und Universität um 1900. Tagung des Marbacher Arbeitskreises für Geschichte der Germanistik* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer, 1999), 260-61.

¹⁵ Müller-Sievers, “Reading without Interpreting,” 516.

¹⁶ Pollock, “Future Philology?,” 933.

the term. Why has philology not yet vanished completely, either made redundant by its self-inflicted moral wounds, or forced from academic discourse by hegemonic neighboring fields? And why has the ongoing crisis of philology in the last three to four decades been so conspicuously accompanied by repeated calls for a “Return to Philology”¹⁷ and a surge of literature on philology’s “Promises” or “Powers”?¹⁸

The answer is that at least one of philology’s powers lies in the magic of its name. This is the consolidating function of philology in the broad sense. Even the proponents of ‘theory,’ who initially presented themselves as great iconoclasts, were drawn to claim the cultural capital and scientific authenticity attached to this appellation. The case of the battle cry ‘Return to Philology’ is especially telling. Paul de Man’s intervention came at a time when ‘theory’s’ recently established predominance in North American literature departments had just begun to frighten the proponents of more traditional approaches. De Man responded to the Harvard critic Walter J. Bate, who had bemoaned the destructive influx of ‘nihilistic’ French philosophy into the American humanities by claiming that “the turn to theory occurred as a return to philology,” and that “mere reading [...] prior to any theory” had a profoundly subversive power.¹⁹ If deconstructive ‘theory’ accomplished the same task as philology, it was, as he seemed to imply, only sensible that it take its place: theory was the better “defense of literature.”²⁰ The rhetorical double maneuver that lay in the claim to the “return to philology” was at

¹⁷ Paul de Man, “The Return to Philology,” in *The Resistance to Theory*, 1986, 21-26; Lee Patterson, “The Return to Philology,” in *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 231-4; Jonathan Culler, “The Return to Philology,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 36, no. 3 (2002): 12-16; Edward W. Said, “The Return to Philology,” in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 57-84; Martin G. Eisner, “The Return to Philology and the Future of Literary Criticism: Reading the Temporality of Literature in Auerbach, Benjamin, and Dante,” *California Italian Studies* 2, no. 1 (2011), <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/4gq644zp>.

¹⁸ Peter-André Alt, *Die Verheißungen der Philologie* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007); Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology*.

¹⁹ de Man, “The Return to Philology,” 24.

²⁰ Ellrich and Wegmann, “Theorie als Verteidigung der Literatur?”

once an evocation of a “dream or myth of origins,”²¹ granting legitimacy by association, and an imperative speech act aimed at ushering in an absolute departure. It was a strategy to validate de Man’s own project both as the truer gospel, and as a radically new beginning. And we do indeed find a certain philological Lutheranism in the rhetoric of ‘return as departure’ as it has been used time and again: in preaching the *sola scriptura* and chastising the decadence of an institutionalized “Alexandrinism,”²² to “remember”²³ origins can lay claim to greater intellectual purity and sanction the current heir of the tradition.

This strategy of turning something deemed conservative into a progressive, emancipatory, or radical program continues to attract scholars influenced by de Man. To give only two examples, Sean Gurd’s attempt at a “radical philology”²⁴ (a heading whose sweeping claims cannot hide the fact that it was first used in 1970s Germany²⁵) tries to theorize the inherent absence of an original and the productive plurality of variants in philological practice. Michelle Warren proposed a “post-philology,” which is to confront the wound of philology’s hegemonic past with a rejuvenation through theory, and rhetorically asked whether “philology can reach the next ‘post’ along with the ‘modern’ and the ‘colonial.’”²⁶ And when she states that “‘mere reading’ at the lexical level can disturb critical and historical assumptions,”²⁷ she invokes de Man almost verbatim.

In equating ‘philology’ with a slow, close reading containing phenomenological pretensions, de Man in fact himself echoed the philological renegade Nietzsche, who called philologists “teachers of reading

²¹ Harpham, “Roots, Races, and the Return to Philology,” 76.

²² Wegmann, “Im Reich der Philologie,” 266.

²³ Michael Holquist, “Why We Should Remember Philology,” *Profession* (2002): 72-79.

²⁴ Sean Alexander Gurd, “For a Radical Philology,” in *Iphigenias at Aulis: Textual Multiplicity, Radical Philology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 36-55.

²⁵ Müller-Sievers, “Reading without Interpreting,” 506.

²⁶ Michelle R. Warren, “Post-Philology,” in *Postcolonial Moves: Medieval Through Modern*, ed. Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 19.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

slowly”²⁸ and philology the art “to read well, [...] to read facts *without* falsifying them through interpretation.”²⁹ Just like Nietzsche in his time, however, de Man’s reception by ‘actual’ philologists was—and continues to be—anything but enthusiastic. In what one recent critic calls his “purposively perverse appropriation of the term,”³⁰ another sees philology reduced to “a shriveled, wrinkled thing unrecognizable to anyone who considers himself a philologist.”³¹ But even those who did not were surprised, as Jonathan Culler recalled, reflecting on the state of American academia in the 1980s: “Philologists, after all, were the enemy.”³²

Yet if the conflict between de Man and Bate happens to bear any resemblance to that of Nietzsche and Wilamowitz-Moellendorff,³³ one should not mistake it for a struggle between philology and literary theory. If we look at the afterlife of de Man’s semantic revaluation, we find that while he might have intended to include the opposite of theory into theory, it turned out that philology was able to absorb everything into itself. When Edward Said, another iconoclast, took up de Man’s call to arms under the banner of philology, he understood ‘philological’ close reading not as something anti-hermeneutic, but rather as a divinatory act, directly penetrating the mind and times of the author, and as a tool for achieving the “powerful immediacy”³⁴ of the aesthetic. Appropriating the appropriation, he reversed de Man’s intentions without returning to a more traditional definition of philology.³⁵ And even if the point has been made that this approach was simply “novel,”³⁶ its supposed novelty meant the expansion of an

²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Morgenröthe*, vol. 3 of *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, (Munich: dtv, 1999), 17.

²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, vol. 3 of *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, (Munich: dtv, 1999), 233.

³⁰ Eisner, “The Return to Philology,” 7.

³¹ Pollock, “Future Philology?,” 947.

³² Culler, “The Return to Philology,” 14.

³³ Jan M. Ziolkowski, “‘What is Philology?’: Introduction,” in *On Philology*, ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 4.

³⁴ Said, “The Return to Philology,” 63.

³⁵ Harpham, “Returning to Philology: The Past and Future of Literary Study,” 13.

³⁶ Frances Ferguson, “Philology, Literature, Style,” *ELH* 80, no. 2 (2013): 323.

old discipline, rather than its replacement with something entirely new. De Man and Said decided, in other words, to remain in the tribe instead of founding a new one.

What this means is that philology may be the great unifier in the face of its own lost unity. Martin G. Eisner remarks how lately “the term ‘philology’ has come to be modified by a proliferation of adjectives.”³⁷ His list, comprising only the most recent occurrences, is of impressive breadth. In alphabetical order, philology has been said to be antifoundational, counter, critical-, cultural, disjunctive, ecstatic, exilic, extraterritorial, oppositional, post-, postdisciplinary, radical, recycled, revitalized, skeptical, thick, and worldly.³⁸ This menagerie of vagrant modifiers bespeaks a profound bedevilment about the scope, topic, and task of philology; yet, at the same time, the persistence of the noun philology evidences the conviction that the discipline is capable of encompassing a multitude that is as wide as the sum of these attributes. There might be a justifiable place for this breadth, despite the proponents of emphatic philology who demand that it be “narrow, because it must be so deep.”³⁹ Crisis and the evocative power of the term ‘philology’ have thus been intertwined in the last thirty to forty years: philology was at once able to serve as an ideal of scholarly integrity, echoing its nineteenth-century reputation as the scientifically rigorous master discipline, and as a marker of identity that could encompass all kinds of sub-strands and even competing approaches. Thus, the main symptom of the crisis of philology, the academic subject, heightened the binding power of ‘philology,’ the invocation.

³⁷ Eisner, “The Return to Philology,” 6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁹ Michael Holquist, “The Place of Philology in an Age of World Literature,” *Neohelicon* 38, no. 2 (July 31, 2011): 284.—Sean Gurd, for instance, makes a point for broadening the meaning of philology, especially in the wake of calls for its return: “But when philology is recovered, the dynamics of its recovery often involve an element of forgetting, so that what is revived is only a fragment of the much larger assemblage of practices, epistemic orientations, and gestures of recovery associated with the term over its millennia-long history. A kind of narrowing and focusing takes place, one whose ultimate aim is often to buttress the meaning and value of the project currently called ‘philology,’ whatever that project might be.” Sean Alexander Gurd, “Introduction,” in *Philology and its Histories*, ed. Sean Gurd (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010), 2.

III.

That the discipline of philology is methodically promiscuous does not render insignificant its specific types of knowledge. While it has been remarked that “philology never developed into a discrete, conceptually coherent, and institutionally unified field of knowledge,”⁴⁰ and that “it is questionable if *the* philological method exists at all,”⁴¹ it would be altogether wrong to state that one could not formulate a set of certain approaches, nuclei, and questions that take the shape of the core competencies of philology. Werner Hamacher might go a little too far in suggesting that “the dilemma of never knowing and maybe never being able to know what it does *is* philology itself.”⁴² What we mean by emphatic philology is exactly the set of practices and types of knowledge philology *does* recognize as its own. In many ways, philology has in recent years simply remembered them; we have listed some of these practices above. And even though the proliferation of broad philologies is, as Eisner notes, sometimes just a way of hijacking a name, it has also coincided with new research paradigms that shift academic discourse towards epistemological fields and objects that have always fallen within the tradition of emphatic philology.⁴³

This mobilization of philology’s competencies is occurring inside and outside of the field. For example, since the 1990s there has been an increasing interest in materiality across all disciplines. For all things literary, this meant not only taking into account the representational aspects of objecthood,⁴⁴ but the material character of the textual carrier

⁴⁰ Pollock, “Future Philology?,” 945.

⁴¹ Uwe Wirth and Kai Bremer, “Konjektur und Krux: Methodentheoretische und begriffsgeschichtliche Vorüberlegungen,” in *Konjektur und Krux: Zur Methodenpolitik der Philologie*, ed. Anne Bohnenkamp et al. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010), 13.

⁴² Werner Hamacher, “Für – die Philologie,” in *Was ist eine philologische Frage?*, ed. Jürgen Paul Schwindt (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2009), 27.

⁴³ This is not to reverse Michael Holquist’s statement that philology “in future can best be employed only in cooperation with scholars having other competencies,” but rather to shift our perspective: the competencies of philology might be extended to other disciplines in the future. Holquist, “The Place of Philology,” 267.

⁴⁴ Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” in *Things*, ed. Bill Brown (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1-22.

itself. This is, in fact, an old mainstay of philology. If Karl Lachmann already stressed “the care for the ‘solid letter,’”⁴⁵ then this attention to the actual textual matter “seeks to provide the material base upon which interpretation can soar.”⁴⁶ A field overflowing with material-oriented sub-disciplines such as paleography or papyrology, in the case of classical philology, and the practices of bibliography or *Überlieferungsbeschreibung* (description of the carrier medium) in modern philology is more than others are able to contribute to this new research interest. Elevated to the status of a program first in mediaeval philology,⁴⁷ it appears as if philology had recalled its—in point of fact old—expertise in dealing with textual materiality once again. Along similar lines, the disciplines of bibliography and book history have come into focus recently as new ways of looking at the production, reception and dissemination of literature.⁴⁸ If this comprised literature’s “relationship to print capitalism,”⁴⁹ and included “translations and adaptations,” philology as “the material record of a work’s transmission”⁵⁰ would not necessarily mean choosing historicist (materialist) over formalist (interpretative) methods, as Martin Eisner stresses, because a fruitful exchange between the two is easily thinkable. That the book is actually a medium with its own internal epistemology allows us to see media studies, often proposed as philology’s demise, as its ally.

Apart from particular practices, there is indeed a certain philological sensibility that can attach itself easily to other disciplines. Taking seriously the repeated praise for the philological attention to detail and putting it into scholarly practice might indeed, as Jan Ziolkowski phrased it, lead “to achiev[ing] if not a return to philology then at least

⁴⁵ Müller-Sievers, “Reading without Interpreting,” 498.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 502.

⁴⁷ Bernard Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology* [1989], trans. Betsy Wing (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Stephen G. Nichols, “Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture,” *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (1990): 1-10.

⁴⁸ Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Leah Price, “Introduction: Reading Matter,” *PMLA* 121, no. 1 (2006): 9-16.

⁴⁹ Pollock, “Future Philology?,” 949.

⁵⁰ Eisner, “The Return to Philology,” 9.

a renewed commitment to care in scholarship.”⁵¹ Moreover, the philological restraint (certainly an ideal, albeit a normatively effective one) that endeavors to weigh a vast range of differing data on equal terms makes philology useful to descriptivist approaches of any kind, not only the anti-hermeneutic “surface reading” championed by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus.⁵² This sensibility makes “philology [...] the center of a methodically grounded interest in the phenomenality of the everyday world.”⁵³

Not least, philology’s competencies in the search for and retracing of sources and differing versions of the same text are useful to other fields. This suggests the status of a paradigm science for investigating what Helmut Müller-Sievers called the “citationality” of texts.⁵⁴ That ‘e-philology’ is not far from this idea of identifiable, referring sources is evident, whereas the approaches range from simple computer aid in edition projects, to the as yet vaguely defined digital humanities, to the hope that digital philology will someday include a “cultural informatics.”⁵⁵ And that a cultural philology might be necessary in order to *read* a culture, almost a cliché of hermeneutic anthropology, does not just follow from the logic of the metaphor applied to the digital. In keeping with Böckh’s dictum, philology ought to be *die Erkenntnis des Erkannten*, the knowledge of what has been known, Claude Lévi-Strauss, in one of his last interviews before his death, predicted that actual “anthropology will be transformed into philology,”⁵⁶ bound to expand its temporal horizon, and make recourse to philology’s expertise in yet another field.

Since Friedrich Schlegel, self-reflexivity has been understood to be an integral part of the philological sensibility, and in recent years, it has

⁵¹ Jan M. Ziolkowski, “Metaphilology,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 104, no. 2 (2005): 271.

⁵² Holquist, “The Place of Philology,” 283.

⁵³ Jürgen Paul Schwindt, “Vorwort,” in *Was ist eine philologische Frage?*, ed. Jürgen Paul Schwindt (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2009), 7.

⁵⁴ Müller-Sievers, “Reading without Interpreting,” 517.

⁵⁵ Gregory Crane, David Bamman, and Alison Jones, “ePhilology: When the Books Talk to their Readers,” in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, ed. Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (Malden et al.: Blackwell, 2013), 52.

⁵⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Setting Sun,” *New Left Review* 79, no. 1 (2013): 80.

once again come to the fore—only this time around in an historical and a praxeological guise. Among others, Sean Gurd has called for a deeper investigation into the history and historiography of classical philology, for the “changed awareness of the historical contingency of humanistic study [...] means that philology is no longer just a mode of scholarship, but has become one of its objects.”⁵⁷ This self-awareness, however, is not just a question of the insight that “there is no philology without the history of philology,”⁵⁸ and at least in Germany the historiography of *Germanistik* has itself already a certain history.⁵⁹ It also means investigating the modes of how practitioners of a certain competence not only describe what they should do (*Regelwissen*), but actually *do* what they do (*Anwendungswissen*).⁶⁰ The insights gained from the examination of praxis can both be fed back into theory and used to readjust or widen philological practices. This type of praxeology thus goes beyond intellectual history and borders on both sociology and applied epistemology. If “We cannot erase ourselves from the philological act,” then “A double historicization is required, that of the philologist [...] no less than of the text.”⁶¹

IV.

Given this revival of philology and its increasing historical and praxeological self-reflection, one would still do well to curb one’s enthusiasm. While it seems that philology, be it in a broad or emphatic form, has the potential to stick around for a while, there remain great tensions that we have not even begun to address. If philology is haunted by its past political abuses, yet effective for radical approaches, we must wonder whether philology has a specific politics. Edward Said certainly thought so when he claimed that philology was in itself resistance, “an act of perhaps modest human emancipation and enlightenment,” both

⁵⁷ Gurd, “Introduction,” 5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁹ Institutionally attached to the German Literary Archive in Marbach, the *Arbeitsstelle für die Erforschung der Geschichte der Germanistik* has been undertaking research into the history of German Studies since 1972.

⁶⁰ Steffen Martus and Carlos Spoerhase, “Praxeologie der Literaturwissenschaft,” *Geschichte der Germanistik* no. 35/36 (2009): 89-96.

⁶¹ Pollock, “Future Philology?,” 957-8.

in its critical impetus and its specific temporality.⁶² Sheldon Pollock, otherwise not uncritical of Said, backed him up on this assertion, contending, on the basis of Marx, that to pursue philology today is “to reject [...] scholarship’s commodification and capitulation to the constant ‘revolutionising [of] the instruments of production,’ the ‘everlasting uncertainty and agitation’ that is capitalism.”⁶³

Yet there are two arguments here: that philology has an inherent tendency towards emancipatory politics, and that it eschews capitalist structures in a certain institutional and historical situation. The latter is certainly true, as Pollock describes vividly: “In a chief financial officer’s view of things, philology is a budget-busting nightmare, a labor-intensive, preindustrial, artisanal craft that stands in the starkest contrast to the Fordist method and mass marketing of most of the human sciences.”⁶⁴ But as a look back to the nineteenth century shows, it is far from certain that the subversive potential of philology is indeed an inherent substance and not rather a sign of its current untimeliness that, by chance, turns out to be incongruent with present-day modes of production. It is not at all clear that there is something inherent to philology that enables it to resist ideology. And we already get a glimpse of philology’s political malleability in Pollock’s lofty, universalist claim that “philology is the language of the book of humanity.”⁶⁵

Another, more subtle problem arises from the fact that national research cultures persist and all too often form self-sufficient environments, easily ignored by the outside world. What is seen as an increasing academic internationalization is often simply the hegemonization of one dominating research culture. This applies not only to the long traditions of textual scholarship in the Middle East and India, which would have to be included in any truly comprehensive conception of philology,⁶⁶ but also to the differences of similar

⁶² Said, “The Return to Philology,” 66, 73.

⁶³ Pollock, “Future Philology?,” 959, quoting the *Communist Manifesto*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 945.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 933.

⁶⁶ The historiography of philology itself can be divided into two camps: a Eurocentric one, dating its birth to “that fateful day in 1777 when young Friedrich August Wolf insisted he be identified in the Matriculation Book of Göttingen university as *studiosus philologiae*,” and one that is less so, stating

disciplines in Europe and the US. For instance, it is simply not true for the German context that, as Jan Ziolkowski has it, “the rubric philology is applied almost exclusively to the study of older literatures.”⁶⁷ But this ignorance of differences does not only apply to the broad and vague self-descriptions noted above. Even in its emphatic sense there is not one philology, but rather a multitude of schools, approaches, and techniques that are distinguished from each other not only by period (ancient, medieval, modern) or textual type (final work and ephemera, literature and philosophy), but also by the respective editorial tradition and prevailing theoretical atmosphere.⁶⁸ Just as modern language philology (*Neuphilologie*) was born out of an elevated sense of national identity (*Nationalphilologie*), contemporary textual criticism is deeply divided by the borders of national traditions of scholarship. *Lachmannsche Methode*, Greg-Bowers-Tanselle inspired intentionalism, or Louis Hay’s *critique génétique* are only the most well known editorial practices. Thus, we can only repeat Helmut Müller-Sievers’ recent call for “a comprehensive study of comparative editorial practices”⁶⁹ across the board of not only disciplines and languages, but also research cultures that are all too often oblivious of one another’s existence.

V.

This volume is itself already the product of the tension between two research cultures: the outcome of a conference organized at a German Department in the United States. The contributors are familiar with both the German and American academic worlds, the respective practices and competencies ascribed to the field, and the specific meanings that the term philology carries in each culture. The following essays shed light on a range of the topics that are mentioned in this introduction and that dominate the current philological

that it arose “in the Fertile Crescent thousands of years ago.” Holquist, “The Place of Philology,” 271, 269.

⁶⁷ Ziolkowski, “Metaphilology,” 247.

⁶⁸ Bodo Plachta, “Wie international ist die Editions-wissenschaft?,” *Editio* 26 (2012): 13-29.

⁶⁹ Müller-Sievers, “Reading without Interpreting,” 517.

discourse. The contributions are, therefore, also exercises in intra-disciplinary comparison.

Nikolaus Wegmann, who delivered the keynote lecture to the conference, puts the focus of such a comparison on the unparalleled and ‘improbable’ success that he observes in philology’s history within the larger realm of the humanities. According to Wegmann, philology has, in its confrontation with theory, not only gained the upper hand in the methodological debate of the recent decades, but has also incorporated theory into the set of its core competencies. Yet, Wegmann points out that philology can claim an even greater success if we do not simply use its name as an umbrella term for language and literary studies, but rather view it as a “complete parallel version” of those fields. In this vein, Wegmann starts off with acknowledging that philology’s long history was marked by the same—perhaps even greater—tendency of branching out as those younger disciplines, to which he considers his own field “Germanistische Literaturwissenschaft” one such part. But where the other fields have become ‘inflationary’ as a natural result of that tendency, philology seems to have converted its continuing crises into an ongoing success, and has thus earned the honorific *philologia perennis* or “everlasting philology”—an expression coined by the classical philologist Rudolf Pfeiffer. Taking this diagnosis as a point of departure, Wegmann sets out to investigate how the characteristics of this success can be used to reform, or cure, a crisis-stricken field like German studies. Wegmann uses Friedrich Schlegel’s notebooks as one example of how philological practice can guarantee its own success, hinting at where the future of philology may lie. Guided by the observations made on Schlegel’s miscellany, he suggests that German studies (as well as other academic fields whose primary subject is communication) may be guided by a media-theoretical approach to literary and cultural artifacts and carried out as a practice of scholarly communication between risk and security.

Like Nikolaus Wegmann’s keynote speech, the majority of the contributions in this volume use philological methods (such as stylistic analysis or the focus on the material substrate of literature) to contemplate primarily on the field itself rather than reflecting on the methods and tools through their application to other subject matters. An explanation of this self-reflexive tendency of philology can be found in *Johannes Stobbe’s* paper on “The Prospects of Philology.” In a critical examination of recent philological approaches, Stobbe identifies philology as “the academic discipline that permanently

perpetuates” the reflection of our own cultural environment. Itself a part of this environment, philology has, he infers, an immanent tendency towards self-reflection. Within this activity of cultural reflection, Stobbe acknowledges the practices of interpretation, textual experience, and literary knowledge as the three principal competencies of the field, represented by Günther Figal, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, and Peter-André Alt, respectively. He proposes not to favor one of these practices over the other, but to explore the “internal connections” of this conceptual triangle that go beyond a simple binary of surface reading versus symptomatic reading. Within this triangle, Stobbe sees the potential for current philology to design the future delineations of the field.

While Stobbe reads the potential future of philology from the vantage point of the discipline’s recent self-theorizing, *Kaleigh Bangor* offers a survey of its present editorial praxis. Her essay is an introduction to the historic shifts in a decidedly German tradition of edition philology and its underlying attitudes. As a direct heir to Lachmann’s application of *Altphilologie* to non-ancient texts, this strand of textual criticism has seen sweeping changes while retaining a surprising core consistency. Bangor explores the “radical editors” of 1970s Germany, who were bent on expurgating nationalist bias from existing editions, and on questioning the ‘total oeuvre’ and the ‘author-genius’ in *Editionsphilologie*. In the end, however, they faced fundamental methodological problems similar to the ones they set out to overcome. This gave rise to a new school of editorial self-reflexivity that dominates the current German discourse and that, in working to preserve the achievements of established editorial practices, finds itself also preserving their aporias. Bangor contrasts the work of Alexander Kluge and Heiner Müller, who have satirized the idea of the *Gesamtausgabe* by creating their own during their lifetimes, with new or reworked critical editions for Büchner, Hölderlin, Kafka, Benjamin, and Lasker-Schüler.

A direct engagement with one of these editorial aporias is *Clara Fisher’s* paper, which deals with the problem of how a work’s processual properties can be incorporated into an edition that, by definition, assumes a stable completion. Like Nikolaus Wegmann, Fisher takes a look at the status of the notebook, especially in the editions of Brecht’s *Notizbücher* and Nietzsche’s *Hefte*. She begins by comparing the highly manipulated first *Ausgabe* of Nietzsche’s works (which culminated in the creation of *Der Wille zur Macht*, a book never actually written by

Nietzsche) with the recent publication of the notebooks upon which this fabrication was based. Here, the fragmentary nature of the *Hefte* almost amounts to an exculpation of the earlier edition through its genre alone. The case with Brecht's journals is less ideologically charged, yet here too the works' inherent fluidity is problematic. Fisher opposes the reigning paradigm of the *Fassung letzter Hand* (last version authorized by the author) as useless fiction, and opts for an outlook that sees the fragment not as a version within a teleology of completion, suggesting we adopt a more flexible view that incorporates the workshop itself into our idea of a literary work—"the most legitimate version being the writing and thinking process itself."

That versions comprise not simply preliminaries to finished works and that the idea of version itself is more often than not contestable, is also a main concern of *Janina Reibold's* paper. Focusing on Johann Georg Hamann's last writing project, *Ein fliegender Brief*, Reibold observes that the conditions of the writing process of that extraordinary work pose a particular challenge to the endeavor of a critical edition, precisely because it resists a one-dimensional conception of a work's genesis. What Reibold carries out on a particularly challenging example could as well be applied to a broader scope of cultural artifacts. A future philology would, then, be guided by the phenomenological practice of obtaining the individual configuration of a given set of cultural material from the 'content' of that material itself in order to adequately edit it, distribute it, and hand it down to future generations.

Few writers have incorporated the methods and rigor of philology as radically into their own writing as Hamann did. It is, then, no great surprise that our volume contains another essay focusing on the work of Hamann, a thinker who has been otherwise marginalized as an 'academic outsider' or eccentric. While Reibold brings to bear Hamann's own ontology and philosophy of language as a rigorous guideline and strict benchmark for the philological engagement with his writings, *Kaspar Renner* locates Hamann's polemical use of philological means in the wider context of a specific scholarly discourse. Renner thus focuses on a chapter in philology's history from before it was established as a full-fledged modern discipline. In the spirit of the newly founded project of "polemics studies," Renner investigates Johann Georg Hamann's use of philology and of the genre of pasquil as weapons for 'polemic warfare' in his 1762 *Kreuzzüge des Philologen*. The debate following his publication consists of a number

of scholarly reviews of the text as well as the author's own reaction to them. In tracking this debate, Renner highlights how the rules and workings of Enlightenment discourse practices are played out, and how Hamann's intervention, opposing those rules with the aid of philological methods, marks a first step toward their self-reflection.

While Reibold and Renner derive guidelines of how to handle literary material from within the corpus of humanities, *Björn Ludger Märtin* consults scientific approaches to textual materiality and reading practices. In his paper he investigates the consequences of the second reading revolution, the sudden expansion of the reading public beyond the educated classes around 1900, for both literary production as well as for scholarly engagement with literature in general. As Märtin observes, this change of media implies a reference problem as to the address of the public and the expectation of expectations (*Erwartungserwartung*, Niklas Luhmann). One strategy of coping with this situation of high contingency is the attempt to educate the new "unknown readership" in the sense of a classical canon. Leaving the prospects of such endeavors undecided, Märtin points at a quite different approach to the problem. In consideration of late nineteenth century experimental psychology he brings to bear new approaches to typography, book design and literary authorship at that time as endeavors to "affect readers based on their perceptive abilities." Against this backdrop, Märtin illustrates the potentials of a new understanding of reading with an in-depth analysis of Stefan George's poetry book *Der Teppich des Lebens* (1899). He thus shows how a re-contextualization of literary practices can prepare the ground for a philology that considers the surface and the material substrate of literature, reintegrating the field into a larger context of modern investigation of art and cultural forms.

Like Märtin, *Jacob Haubenreich* offers a close look at the material aspect of literature around 1900. His analysis of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Berner Taschenbuch*, a manuscript fragment from his *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), focuses, however, on the materiality of the manuscript itself rather than on the published product. Instead of writing media history, he offers a detailed analysis of the corporal residue in textual production. This micro-hermeneutics of a single fragment is a test case for an expanded notion of materiality—one in which "the materiality of the signifier, the materiality of the body, and the materiality of the manuscript" are intertwined in such a way that "the physical space of writing and the fictional space of the text merge

into one another.” By looking at the process of writing, self-editing, and crossing out in direct comparison to the produced text, Haubenreich shows how an “implied manuscript” haunts the finished outcome even down to individual word choices. Philology here becomes a way of giving both the material as well as the corporeal basis of textual production its due.

Marco Heiles’s paper, while dealing with medieval philology, can serve as a connection between Märtin and Haubenreich in that he reads the question of manuscript materiality through the lens of media theory. Re-describing edition philology as a “technique of transferring data from one (the initial) medium to another (the target medium),” Heiles traces shifts in medial determination from the collection of *sententiae* to the book to the digital text, and shows how philology was able only in hindsight to construct “manuscript culture” as an epoch, which meant “that edition philology has become aware of the medial determination of its subject.” In other words, the “New” or “Material Philology” that took shape in the 1990s is itself already a product of a media-theoretical historization. Besides sketching the changes in the initial medium, Heiles attempts to predict the changes of the target medium, and thus the prerequisites for the digital future of philology.

The final paper in this volume is by *Gaëtan Pégny* and explores how philology (also in an electronic incarnation) can assist other disciplines. Pégny shows how, with the edition of Heidegger’s works, and thus his text corpus, almost complete, a more thorough assessment of its internal development through digital linguistic analysis is possible. Situated within the ongoing debate on Heidegger’s involvement with National Socialism, which in France and Germany unleashed a heated controversy after the recent publication of the anti-Semitic *Schwarze Hefte*, Pégny traces the use of the term *Dasein* through Heidegger’s works and shows that in his recently published writings it cannot be understood as individual but rather collective being, ultimately envisioned as *Volk*. Returning to the early Heidegger, Pégny shows how already before the dominance of the *lingua tertii imperii* (language of the ‘Third Reich’), Heidegger makes use of the vocabulary and even syntax of Hitlerian language, and outlines a detailed study of Heidegger’s politico-academic linguistic strategy. Pégny, thus, calls for something that is uncommon among philosophers—to approach their subjects with a philological sensibility.

VI.

If the title of this book seems grand, it is only because we are taking up challenges that extend far beyond mere reference to the Nietzsche-Wilamowitz dispute. We chose it because we believe that to ask about the future of philology is neither to pose an empty rhetorical question nor to indulge in academic navel-gazing. In these times of budget cuts and the subsequent closure of entire departments one does not need to be a pessimist to wonder about the future of the whole field. More importantly, however, we chose this title because this book is the result of a conference that was organized by the graduate students of Columbia University's German Department in the spring of 2012. To some degree, the presenters had much in common with the audience of this book; those who spoke were not too different from the ones this volume wants to speak to. For who, after all, cares more about the future of philology than future philologists?

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