correspondents at large

From "95 Theses on Philology"

WERNER HAMACHER

1

Language is archiphilology.

2

There is not *one* language but a multiplicity, not a stable multiplicity but a permanent multiplication of languages. The relation that the many languages within each individual language, and all individual languages, entertain to one another—their restrained inclination toward repetition, advocacy, contestation, supplementation—is philology. Philology is the continued extension of the elements of linguistic existence.

3

The fact that languages must be clarified philologically indicates that they remain obscure and reliant upon further clarifications. The fact that they must be extended philologically indicates that they never suffice. Philology is repetition, explication, and multiplication of impenetrably obscure languages.

8

Aristotle distinguishes another *logos*, one that does not say something about something and therefore can be neither "true" nor "false," from the *logos apophantikos*, the language of propositions relating to finite objects in sentences capable of truth. His only example of this nonapophantic language is the *euchē*: the plea, the prayer, the desire ("De interpretatione" 26). Propositional language is the object and medium of philosophy—more precisely, of ontology—as well as of the epistemic disciplines directed by it. The meaningful but nonpropositional language of plea, wish, and poetry is studied by rhetoric, poetics, and (although not in Aristotle) philology.

9

Unlike the sciences (onto*logy*, bio*logy*, geo*logy*) that belong to the order of the *logos apophantikos*, *philo*logy belongs to the order of the

WERNER HAMACHER, professor of comparative literature at Goethe University in Frankfurt, is the author of *Pleroma: Reading in Hegel* (Stanford UP, 1998); *Premises: Essays on Philosophy and Literature from Kant to Celan* (Stanford UP, 1999); *Anataxe, virgule, balance: Notes pour* W *de Jean Daive* (Pesty, 2009); *Für: Die Philologie* (Engeler, 2009); and numerous essays on literature, philosophy, law, and politics. He is also editor of the Meridian series at Stanford University Press. The full text of "95 Theses on Philology" will appear in *Diacritics* 39.1.

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euchē. Its name signifies affection for, friendship with, inclination to the *logos* (speech, language, relation). The *philia* in this appellation was forgotten early on, so that philology was increasingly understood as logology, the study of language, then as erudition, and finally as the scientific method of dealing with linguistic, in particular literary, documents. Still, philology has remained the zone in which attention shifts between the language of wish and that of knowledge.

10a

In contrast to philosophy, which makes propositional statements about that which itself has the structure of a statement, poetics and rhetoric do not, for Aristotle, speak the language of the phenomena they investigate. Taken strictly, the principle affirmed by Aristotle that knowledge be of like by like is thereby damaged ("De anima" 682–87). A part of philology (which Aristotle, however, never considers as such) is thus deployed as a form of knowledge about the practices of nonknowledge and defined as a mediating instance of nonknowledge for knowledge. This prepares the way for the hegemony of the epistemic order over every other.

10b

The historical privilege of predication over plea, of propositional knowledge over wish, of topical language over the atopical, can be reversed neither by a violent act of knowing better nor by utopian wishes. However, it can be shown that the gap between wish and knowledge in philology opens wider than is comprehensible in the form of knowledge and, in particular, in its formalization in logic and linguistics.

11

If all propositions are not only capable of addition but also in need of it—be it only in their demand to be heard, understood, answered—then propositional language is founded in a language that cannot be characterized as propositional but only as claim, plea, wish, or desire.

12

The languages of knowledge are grounded in languages of nonknowledge, epistemic practices in those of the *euchē*, ontology in philology. Even though it participates in the practices of knowledge and may advance them, philology is founded in the language of longing.

13

Poetry is the language of *euchē*. It is the eminent, explicit, exposed language going out into the other, departing from the other—the language of *philein*.

14

Poetry is *prima philologia*.

16

Philology is a double agent for at least two incompatible ways of speaking. Through it runs the fissure between the language of longing and the language of knowledge.

17

Philology is not a theory in the sense of an insight into that which is, an insight that could be formulated in assertions. Nor is it a praxis, if by "praxis" is understood an activity that is led or determined by a theory. Philology is rather the movement of attending to that which offers itself to this attending, slips away from it, encounters or misses it, attracts it, and, attracting it, withdraws from it. It is the experience of drawing into withdrawal.

19

The formula of the human being as a living being having language—*zōon logon echon*—

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can be clarified: he or she is a *zōon logon euchomenon*—a living being appealing for language, longing for it, vowing it. The human being is thereby characterized as philologist, as *zōon philologon*. The human being's philology is inclination to, friendship and love for language, even desire for it: a desire beyond every given language.

20

Where knowledge is missing, affect stirs. Where ontology stalls, philology moves.

28

Since philology has no power over language and no power over itself, it cannot be structured as the reflexive self-consciousness of language. It is from the outset beside itself. It forgets itself. Since it gives itself over to its cause, language, it must allow itself to be forgotten.

29

As the forgetting of language belongs to language, so the forgetting of philology belongs to philology.

32

Narration proceeds sequentially. It combines discourses on events, actions, and states of affairs through an express or implicit "and then." Even if a sequence adopts the form of addition—if it turns the "and" into a "plus," the virtually infinite series into a finite sequence and this, in turn, into an aggregate or an ordered totality—"and then" always remains the minimal formula for the combination of assertions, the temporal copula for the generation of a story line. It is the task of philology to exhibit this construction; thus, its task is also to exhibit in this "and then" a "thereafter," in the "thereafter" a "no longer," and in the "no longer" a "not." Connectives are not so much placeholders as place openers for a "not." Only this "not"—be it as "no longer" or as "not yet"—allows for the possibility of a story by preventing the sequence (*Folge*) from withering into an inference (*Folgerung*). Before every and *in* every "therefore," which maintains the causality of actions and the motivation of decisions, stands an "and then" and a "not" that provide neither a *causa* nor a cause and thereby indicate that history is only that which takes a "not" as its point of departure.

33

What touches a "not" is contingent. Thus, history can be called contingent. It takes place where something breaks off and starts (*aussetzt*).

34

What happens is parting. (*Was geschieht, ist Abschied*.)

35

The inner law of language is history. Philology is the guardian of this law and of this one alone.

36

It is the task of philology to perceive, realize, and actualize in every "and so on" a "not so on," an "and not," and an "other than thus." That is the smallest gesture of its politics.

41

Alois Riegl noticed a change in the construction of space in late Roman art, decisive for history ever since; he characterized this change as the "emancipation of the interval" (229). This phrase is also the formula of philology. Philology emancipates the interval from its border phenomena and, going a step farther, opens up phenomena out of the interval between them, phenomenal movements out of the aphenomenal in their space in between, space out of a fourth dimension: in the end, every dimension out of the nondimensional.

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50

Hölderlin's "Giebt es auf Erden ein Maaß? Es gibt keines" 'Is there a measure on earth? There is none' refuses Protagoras's claim that this measure is man (250–51). Anthropology cannot ask about man because it already thinks it knows that man is the unshakable certainty of the subjectivity of the subject and as such the measure of all things. But *asking* about man exposes this certainty to a language that offers no measure of man and thus no measure of anything at all. The sorrows of Oedipus are said to be *indescribable, unspeakable, inexpressible*. The answer to the measureless disparity between language and the unspeakable, between expression and the inexpressible, is a language without measure, without *metron*. This answer is given by Hölderlin's "free rhythms." To this language—which is not attuned to itself and is therefore not "correct" (*stimmt*)—can only correspond a philology that does not set a measure and does not accord to one, whether traditional or contemporary. A philology in "free rhythms."

51

There is no metalanguage that could not be disavowed by a further one. This disavowal is one of the gestures of philology.

54

When Roman Jakobson opposes the "poetic function," as substitution on the axis of equivalences, to another—one could say "prosaic"—function, realized through combination on the axis of contiguities, the geometry of their relation implies that both axes cross at a zero point at which they follow a logic both of substitution and of contiguity, of poetic as well as of prosaic function—and also of neither of the two (69–71). The rhetoric of metaphor and metonymy, which for a century has occupied philological work in poetological, anthropological, and psychoanalytic studies, relies upon a zero rhetoric with a zero function of which not even the figure of catachresis can render account, since catachresis consists in a positing rather than in no positing. Zero rhetoric would be that which marks the empty place (*Leerstelle*)—and, more precisely, the opening for a place (*Stellenleere*)—in the crossing of the axes of all tropes, which is necessary in order to guard the possibility of language at all. Only the philology of the zero would be the *origo* of philology.

56

Topoi also have their time. Philology—which pays as much heed to the usury of tropes in the baroque and in Romanticism as it does to the disappearance of tropes in the twentieth century—will notice that the drainage of language, on the one hand, allows predication to emerge as the (ideological) central topos and, on the other hand, multiplies a gap, an interval, into gaps (and intervals) that cannot be contained by any *topos* but hold open an *a*-topy or *u*-topy. The time of space is suffused with the time of spacing; time spacing is no longer a condition of phenomenality but its withdrawal into the aphenomenal. Time also has its time: it is *ana*-chronistic.

57

What belongs to philology—besides the inclination to that which is said—is the courage for what is not said.

58

The fact that philology applies itself to detail, to the nuances of a detail, to the *intermundia* between these nuances, slows its movement in language and in the world.

60

Philology is slow, however quick it may be. Essentially slow. It is lateness.

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62

"For philology is that venerable art which demands of its followers one thing above all: to step aside, to take time, to become still, to become slow . . ." (Nietzsche, *Daybreak* 5).

63

Where philology encounters utterances, texts, or works that are entirely understandable, it will shudder as if it were in front of something already digested, become polemical in order to keep it away, or turn aside and remain silent. Obviousness excludes understanding and even the inclination to it. Only what is disconcerting can be loved; only the beloved that remains disconcerting while growing closer can be loved lastingly. Only what is incomprehensible, only what is unanalyzable—not just *prima facie* but *ultima facie*—is a possible object of philology. But it is not an "object"; it is the area in which philology moves and changes itself.

65

"Et tout le reste est littérature" 'And all the rest is literature.' Philology has to do with this rest named by Paul Verlaine (327), as well as with that other rest of which it is said in Shakespeare, "The rest is silence" (5.2.310). To distinguish between these rests, these silences—their difference is sometimes infinitesimal—philology becomes critique.

66

Philology is letting something—and itself—become strange (*Befremden*). For this reason, it becomes slow and silent; for this reason, it slowly hardens its counterpart to stone. But who here is the Gorgon?

67

Philology indeed asks, "Qui parle?" and does not only ask about a speaker but also about a perhaps incalculable plurality of speakers—speakers for, speakers with, and speakers after—it thus asks about "itself." But it asks, and since every question is posed in the absence of an answer and since this absence can be infinite, it must also ask, "Who is silent?" and "What is silent?" and it must disclose itself in silence (*erschweigen*).

71

Philology is *nekyia*, descent to the dead, *ad plures ire*. It joins the largest, strangest, always growing collective and gives something of the life of its own language to the collective, to bring the underground ones to speech. It dies—philology dies, every philologist dies—in order to restore to some of those many an afterlife, for a while, through its language. Without philology, which socializes with the dead, the living would become asocial. But the society of philology is the society of those who belong to no society; their life is lived together with death, their language disclosed by silence.

74

Orpheus is a philologist when he sings.

76

Philology, a love story. Freud, in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess on 29 December 1897: "Herr E, whom you know, suffered an attack of anxiety at the age of ten years when he attempted to capture a black beetle [*Käfer*], which did not allow it to happen. The interpretation of this attack has until now remained obscure. . . . Then we broke off the session and next time, he told me before the session that an interpretation of the beetle has occurred to him. Namely: *Que faire?*" What Freud, the philologist, calls "interpretation" is not the translation of a word into a representation of the thing associated with it but a dislocation, a displacement of attention from the possible meanings to the idiom

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of their naming. Only through separation from meaning does an idea (*Einfall*) take the place of an attack (*Anfall*): in place of anxiety, its articulation; in place of the animal or the name of the animal, a question. And indeed in another language, French, for—so Freud narrates further—E's "governess and first beloved was French" (290). The way to "interpretation" is not the way to meaning. It is the way to a repetition of a language or to a return *into* a language that is kept hidden by another. The movement of philology is the movement to the language of the first beloved, to the beloved language. The question "Que faire?" and that which is asked by it are allowed to happen this time, in the repetition, by the beloved. For in "Que faire?" that which is still asked about is already done.

Philology: to bring it about that the first love can be repeated.

80

Philology is the name for a future of language *other* than the *intended* one.

Since it answers for that in language—and in itself—which remains intentionless, unposited, and unknown, philology is the name for the secret of language, for its *secretum*, its *pudendum*, its home, the wound, for that which does not belong to it and which it itself is not.

81

Current theories of media presume there could be media even if there were no language; language would be a medium among others. This is not so. If there were no language, there could not be a single medium. Language is the medium of all media.

Media are languages, because media attempt to anticipate their own collapse and even play with the collapse of this attempt. They operate *a limine sui*. That is to say, they operate with their nonoperationality; they mediate their immediality.

Whenever "media studies" begins to make transparent this di-structure of its objects and itself, it becomes philology.

83

A passion is a trauma. An insight a stitch. Since philology is the first passion of those who speak, it is no wonder that they do not like it, that they do not like liking it. But in order not to like something, one must like this nonliking. Philology is—ad infinitum—the liking of the nonliking of language.

85

The Christianity of philology took an embarrassing turn with its reform in the sixteenth century, which to this day has not ceased in its effects. The divine *Logos* of John the Evangelist, at one with love, became a God that hated creation and condemned his believers to spend their lives in "hatred of self" (Luther, thesis 4). What is said in the phrase "hatred of self" is that language hates us, condemns, persecutes us, and we hate, condemn, and persecute ourselves and, in ourselves, language, whenever we seek to make ourselves understood in it and about it. . . . Since the reformatory about-face, long prepared for, intensified interest in the letter that kills; since then, propagation of the "book" that chastens; since then, the reproductive technologies of the word; since then, the credo of capital, credit; since then, the economy of guilt (*Schuld*) and debts (*Schulden*), every word a crime that repeats another in order to hide it. One of the most pressing tasks of psychohistorical philology lies in analyzing this world-historical turn to a sadistic language and to a structurally suicidal philology.

86

The relegation of philology to an ancillary discipline of dogmatic theology, jurisprudence,

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historiography; its shrinking into a disciplinary technique in pedagogical institutions; its contraction to literary studies; and above all the attempt to force it under the norms of an epistemic discipline: however destructive these institutions of repression were and remain for the experience and clarification of linguistic existence, they have not yet been able to destroy the philological impulse. But it is destructible. The nationalisms in whose service the national philologies have placed themselves, the juridicism, classism, racism, and sexism that they serve, support, and often uphold are assaults on linguistic and philological existence, from which the most gruesome ravagings proceed day by day. These philologies are destructive and self-destructive. A *different* philology has to fight with the means of analysis and invention—with *all* means—against this work of destruction.

88

Philology follows the pleasure principle as little as language does. There is no *plaisir du texte* that would not start with repetitions and strive for repetitions. Yet every repetition of an experience also repeats the pain of separation from it—and repeats at the same time the separation from repetition. Repetition thus not only repeats; it releases itself from repetition and dissolves it. It turns to *another* beginning, that is to say, back to something *other* than a beginning. It—philology, repetition—does not turn back. It begins, without principle.

89

There are philologies that treat the world as if it allowed itself to be *behandelt* (treated like a sick person), as if it allowed itself to be *verhandelt* (negotiated with like an enemy), as if it allowed itself to be *handelt* (traded like a commodity or traded with like a business partner or an instrument), as if it allowed itself to be *abhandelt* (handled like a theme). They forget that philology is not simply a part of the world that can trade with or act on another part. It is the movement of its becoming a world: the coming to the world of this world. The nonnegotiability of this coming (of the world) is the experience that another philology has to elucidate. To the *epochē* of the world of action and transaction, to the *epochē* that allows for this coming, another action is indispensable, which has this coming and its suspension as an end.

90

Philology fights in a world civil war for language and for the world against the industrial manufacture of language and of the world: it fights against muteness. It must therefore be prepared to fight against its own tendencies toward industrialization. One of the most fatal, because most soporific, most disaffecting, forms of this tendency is journalism.

91

Philology is the Trojan horse in the walls of our sleeping languages. If they awaken,

92

Hölderlin's philosophical and poetic attention is condensed in a philological remark that is related from the time of his misery. It says, "Look, my dear sir, a comma!" (Waiblinger 66). One could call this remark a philolographic one if it were certain that every comma adopts a graphic shape and that "comma" in fact means comma. If one considers the weight that the future, the arrival, the coming claimed in Hölderlin's language, then this "comma" may also hint at that which is not asserted but is called and invited to come. Philology would then be attention to that which interpunctuates, brings to a hold, creates caesuras, because within it

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something that comes—or its coming—becomes noticeable.

93

If philology were conducted by all and with unlimited candor—so one could think—then murder and manslaughter would rule and soon there would be no more language and no more philology. This is false. Language places distances between speakers and into their worlds; in a conversation between two, it always refers to a third and fourth; it is given to language, and if it allows "persons" to come to speech, they do so as those who stay in language and hold themselves back within it.

95

"To write"—thus, philology—"as a form of prayer" (Kafka 354). It is only possible to pray if there is no God. Only the prayer yields a God. The permanent bifurcation between none and one is the path of philology. It is a permanent aporia, a diaporia.

Translated by Catharine Diehl

Translator's Note

Citations refer to published English translations when available. I have silently modified these translations throughout.

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