THE PERSISTENCE OF THE HOMERIC QUESTION

THESE DE DOCTORAT

présentée par

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PREFACE

Work directly related to this thesis started, I think, when I read the first of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, during my post-graduate studies in Comparative Literature, in Montreal. My M.A. dissertation compared Pound's translation and Heidegger's transposition of the figure of Odyssean return (*Pound et Heidegger, lecteurs d'Homère,* Université de Montréal, 1992). I subsequently requested and was granted permission to pursue doctoral work focusing on Homer's *Odyssey* – which involved transferring to the University of Geneva. The turn to the field of Homeric studies brought along the inevitable: not only the systematic reading of the original in canonical modern editions, but also an inquiry into the history of these editions and of the correlative *Homeric Question*. This led me to Wolf's *Prolegomena* – and to the question of the manuscript tradition. A first draft of the doctoral dissertation comprised two relatively distinct parts: an overview of the philological debate on Homer, and a re-reading of selected passages of the *Odyssey,* especially those that poetise figures of language, humanity and memory. There only seemed to lack a brief middle part, bridging what was sensed as a gap between the two. Paul de Man provided that bridge – more specifically, his approach to reading and history, as evinced in his lecture on Walter Benjamin's "Aufgabe des Übersetzers". A careful re-reading of other related writings by Benjamin was soon called for – a brief excursus, so I thought. However, Benjamin's late and, on retracing my steps, earlier work introduced me to a field hitherto unsuspected, obscured rather than explored under de Man's guidance. Wolf persisted, but the "middle part" of the thesis extended to what is now the main body, displacing my reading of the *Odyssey*. I thus remain, for the time being, with more prolegomena to yet another return to Homer – on grounds far more slippery than the ones that sustained and suspended my initial return. The deManian bridge did its job.

I have great difficulty envisaging how I could ever adequately acknowledge the debts I was fortunate enough to have accrued throughout this process, expressing my gratefulness in return. I only wish that the result were better, so that my thanks would not seem to fall so ironically short of doing justice to on-going relations that, I am afraid, do, fortunately, exceed words.

The presence of Wlad Godzich, supervisor of the thesis, has marked my work and intellectual development. He has been, for me, a figure worth both following and resisting – with effects, in both cases, as unexpected as they were welcome. He accepted, to begin with, my Master's and Doctoral projects, in Montreal and Geneva. He further supported my work by offering me research and teaching positions at the University of Geneva. His lectures and seminars, which first attracted me to the field of comparative literature, I have attended avidly;

and I do not recall myself reacting to their ideas otherwise than with enthusiasm or exasperation. Everything always had to be thought all over again. Our discussions, usually over beer or coffee, never missed a point without gaining another. The conditions of our institutional affiliation were coupled with that feeling of engaging intellectual independence which is, in itself, a challenge both practical and theoretical. I have tried to cope with it, measuring my limits.

My gratitude also goes to the government of Quebec, which offered me a two-year FCAR scholarship, along with a supplement that enabled me to travel from Montreal to Geneva in order to continue my work – from Pine Avenue to *Pension Saint-Victor* and then to *Petit Castel,* before landing in Valeria's neighbourhood.

Rick Waswo kindly accepted to preside over the thesis committee. Moreover, he has offered help and encouragement most effective.

I also thank Jenaro Talens and Jeff Opland for accepting, on a short notice, to be members of the committee – thus making it possible for me to defend in July.

The *Département de Littérature Comparée* of the *Université de Montréal,* provided me with an institutional setting in which, as a belated student of literature exhausting his youth, I found intellectual stimulation as well as the warmest human surroundings. I mean to keep on addressing to my fellow-students the same thanks I have already expressed elsewhere – while cherishing, with them, the memory of Bill Readings, whom I had the chance to meet, debate with and learn from, in Montreal.

My life and studies in Montreal depended a lot on the support and company of my Greek-Canadian relatives – especially of Sophia Florakas-Petsalis, who has always been, for me, an inexhaustible source of inspiration.

The English Department and the Comparative Literature Program of the *Université de Genève* offered me the possibility to engage in further apprenticeship, as well as in that other form of learning we call teaching. The experience was invaluable and determinant in many respects, owing both to the students that attended my seminars and to the colleagues with whom I shared privileges and responsibilities.

Christine Bétrisey, whose *mémoire de Licence* on Benjamin's *Aufgabe* I supervised, helped me to realise, through her excellent work, how much better one can indeed come to know a text one thinks one has learned by heart.

The doctoral seminar on old and new Humanisms allowed me to enjoy clashes and reunions of viewpoints in an engaging academic forum – dovetailing into talk over soup at *Chausse-Coqs.*

André de Muralt's courses on ancient and medieval philosophy showed me what it means to work with texts whose historical remove makes their reading inescapably close. The course on *papyrologie* that I attended, in the Classics department, has been strikingly enlightening.

Valeria Wagner is the closest neighbour I have had in my life. I have discussed with her – and need to go on discussing – almost everything relating to our academic life, as well as to what lies beyond its confines. Together we coped with the thesis, in many respects, including its practice, its theory, its politics – as well as its part on philology, which Valeria carefully read.

Brian Neville, whose knowledge of Benjamin well precedes my own, has sustained our connection from Montreal to London, in a way that made innumerable instances of intellectual offering and exchange resound with friendship unbelievable. He read the first version on *Aufgabe* – and no subsequent version went untouched by his comments. My introduction would sound very different without his corrections. He keeps me real company during these difficult few days of final editing work.

Simone Oettli knows well how to combine intellectual and moral support, with the wholehearted hospitality that I enjoyed so much.

The fellowship of Agnieszca Soltysik, coupled with her smiling initiatives for work-in-progress meetings, has been precious.

To Saba Bahar, I owe things as important as the roof over my head – and lots of useful advice that were always more than accurate.

Agnese Fidecaro, Lorenza Coray, and Ward Tietz were important parts of many of the most animated moments of my life and thought in Geneva.

Beba Sasiç has made all things, in and out of the Department, familiar and real unforgettably so.

Family and friends in Greece have been withstanding comings and goings, unfulfilled promises and deferred restarts, distances unbearable and closeness overwhelming. It would be vain to talk of gratefulness towards those whose names are practically indistinguishable from mine, in many respects.

Since old Parisian days, Anna Tabaki has tenaciously insisted that I can and must have a thesis – doing all she could, to keep me on track. She did it with that reassuring smile of complicity, which could not help suggesting that, after all, it's not the thesis that *really* matters.

Post scriptum

For Thanassis Tsimekas. In Greece, it was to Thanassis, rather to the library, that I ran for bibliography – and chat. I have known no one who can discuss interest of books better than him.

ABBREVIATIONS

The abbreviations listed bellow stand for works that constitute the primary sources of my work and are thus most often quoted (in the original and in English or French translation). This list provides, for each abbreviation, the title of the corresponding work; in parentheses, it refers to the relevant entry of the bibliography presented at the end of the thesis. All the abbreviations listed here occur in my text in italicised format.

<u>By Friedrich -August Wolf:</u>

PRE   *Prolegomena to Homer* (Wolf 1985)

PRL   *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (Wolf 1963)

<u>By Wilhelm von Humboldt:</u>

Considérations   *Considérations sur l'histoire mondiale; Considérations sur les causes motrices dans l'histoire mondiale ; La tâche de l'historien* (Humboldt 1985)

Language   *On Language: The diversity of human language-structure and its influence on the mental development of mankind* (Humboldt 1988)

WRK   *Werke in fünf Bänden* (Humboldt 1980)

Sprachbau   *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwickelung des Menschengeschlechts* (Humboldt 1880)

<u>By Walter Benjamin:</u>

Aufgabe   "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" (Benjamin 1989, IV, 1: 9–21)

Begriff   "Über den Begriff der Geschichte" (Benjamin 1989, vol. I, 2: 691–704)

GS   *Gesammelte Schriften* (Benjamin 1989)

Kunstwerk   "L'oeuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction mécanisée" including "Paralipomènes et variantes" (Benjamin 1991, 118–192)

Mimesis   "Über das mimetische Vermögen" (Benjamin 1989, vol. II, 1: 210–213)

OE   *Oeuvres* (Benjamin 2000)

Passagen   *Das Passagen-Werk* (Benjamin 1989, V, 1)

Préface   "Préface épistémo-critique" (Benjamin 1985, 23–57)

Programm   "Über das Programm der Kommenden Philosophie" (Benjamin 1989, II, 1: 157–168)

Sprache   "Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen" (Benjamin 1989, II, 1: 140–157)

Vorrede   "Erkenntniskritische Vorrede" (Benjamin 1989, I, 1: 207–237)

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<u>By Paul de Man</u>:

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Conclusions   "Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's *The Task of the Translator*" (De Man 1986)

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<u>On the oral tradition</u>:

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Lord   *The singer of tales* (Lord 1960)

Peabody   *The winged word: A study in the technique of ancient Greek oral composition as seen primarily through Hesiod's* Works and Days (Peabody, 1975)

INTRODUCTION

Old questions persist in those newly raised. This thesis rests on the assumption that it would be useful to revisit sites and modalities of this persistence. Very fast, new formulations become habitual or overly familiar; in their very strangeness, older ones can acquire a rejuvenating actuality. The more preposterous old questions sound to modern ears, the stronger their shock may be, to the degree that *preposterus* means untimely: age questioning time. Pre-posterity can thus have puzzling epistemological effects – it may upset reason, pure or practical, and even the possibility of judgement, in ways comparable to those of the sublime.

I am thinking primarily of questions arising in the field of this thesis. Amongst the names that this field usually bears, my own preference is for "theory of literature" rather than for "comparative literature". The latter does little more than restate an obvious methodological principle. The former better indicates the stakes: theorising from the study of literature at large, that is, in relative independence from the established theoretical frameworks and divisions of intellectual labour. By *literature*, I understand not only "the writings of a country or period or of the world in general" (OED) but all formations of language that persist, in any medium of verbal production or reproduction. More precisely, literature would be what calls for attempts to reckon with a persistence that defies explanation by current categories of use or value, whether practical or speculative, individual or collective. Literature, in fact, is a lasting presence that risks being deemed philosophically trivial, ethically dubious, aesthetically distasteful and even indifferent to knowledge. There would be some unaccountable residue, which defines the specificity of the theoretical challenge proper to literature. In that sense, literature confronts theory with the enigma of the *preposterus*.

In the notion of literary *persistence* there resonates the question of the temporality of ageing – the temporality of things that are and will have been

what age has made them. It is the question otherwise known as that of *history*. It has very little to do with life as measurable duration. Its potential emerges most tellingly, in fact, only when the threshold of death has been crossed. This would be very much the same way as the dead emerge for Odysseus – utterly dead, yet invoked, addressed, conversant. In the first Canto, Pound has well exposed the riddle. He translates the "`ajmenhna; kavrhna`" of "`nekuvwn katateqnhwvtwn`" (*Odyssey* 1: 29, 37, 49) by the redundancies of his "sickly… cadaverous … impetuous impotent dead". These would be the dead long-gone. Yet, first to come and uncalled-for, is Elpenor, the companion most recently lost and forgotten "since toils urged other". He is the one who stakes the claim to persistence most explicitly and, as the scholiasts observed, most unjustifiably so. He asks for a tomb – literally, for a `sh``ma`: a sign. "*A man of no fortune and with a name to come*" stresses Pound in place of the Homeric "`ajndro;ß dusthvnoio kai; ejssomevnoisi puqevsqai`"(1, 76) [`ejssomevnoisi`: those who will be; `puqevsqai`: to overhear, as with tidings, to hear and tell of news or things going on, mostly about persons]. In Homer, Odysseus reassures Elpenor: "`teleuthvsw te kai; e[rxw`"(1, 80): I will do and accomplish. Pound cuts. Rather, he transposes. The *Canto* does reassure its own Elpenor: "Lie quiet Divus" – meaning Andreas Divus, translator of Homer.

History is a characteristic concern of the larger field that we call *humanities* or *sciences humaines,* and to which the study of literature is affiliated. Science, in the strict sense of the term, deals with time as a co-ordinate, under a perspective very different from that of the temporality of ageing. Of course, there have long existed philosophical or otherwise speculative currents, which dispute the all-encompassing significance of historical temporality for the humanities. They do so on various grounds – rationalist, aestheticist or mystical. Correlatively, there have been standpoints, largely predominant, which affirm the importance of history by relying on premises we can broadly call *historicist.* These approaches concentrate on factors or attributes that assume a determinant role in time,

through causal relations between beginnings and endings, foundational origins and accomplished dynamics.

My thesis intends to toil a theoretical site that refutes the very choice between the negation of historicity and the reduction of history to its historicist configuration. Indeed, *persistence* posits the question of history as irreducible to the one of becoming. To use an (admittedly awkward) terminological convention that I adopt in my work: one can venture to understand temporality as *historic* rather than *historical.*

Work in this direction is neither recent nor scarce, and it encompasses a variety of theoretical positions – like those of Nietzsche and Heidegger, to mention only the most influential. Connected, in varying degrees and ways, to the legacy of these two names, is an awareness that has gained critical momentum since the end of the 1960s. Language (especially writing) is seen as exercising a destabilising function with respect to problematics of ontological determination and causality, as well as with respect to assumptions concerning the dialectics of signification and communication. The workings of historical temporality may retain some significance, but only on the dubious grounds of the pervasive traces of linguistic indeterminacy and textual defacement. There would be stories, but not histories – much less *a* history. Rather than enacting the presumed historical dynamics, story-telling would undo the potential of historicisation.

Exemplified in the work of Jacques Derrida, this awareness could be identified as that of *deconstruction.* Its insights are an acquisition in the present moment of literary theory; whether implicitly or explicitly, we are being measured by their intelligence. Nonetheless, I intend to test their adequacy and contest what I sense is a proclivity to rest upon their accomplished breakthrough. In many respects, what was critically deployed in the 1970s and 1980s can now be seen as having anticipated and even dovetailed into the broader political and social developments, which establish the order of a new modernity. Like all modernities, the present one also invariably raises the Lyotardian question of the

post-modern. Current theories of the post-modern, however, tend to overlook the fact that the question is aporetic. One can never tell which are the elements that work for the sake of preserving a dominant order of things, and which are those that signal its critical re-appraisal and eventual change. The theoretical implications and political bearing of recurrent old figures, outworn and outdated as they may sound, in their relations to the figural outbursts of experimentation and novelty, are highly uncertain.

More often than not, we tend to consider that metaphysics is a sort of credo or world-view that globally characterises an era of Western civilisation that has exhausted its historical potential. In this, we follow Heidegger and Derrida (more than Nietzsche, I believe), especially aspects of their writing and thought which echo historicist tendencies. We thus forget that the term *metaphysics* names a field of theoretical speculation, which resists anthropological and phenomenological premises, such as those sustained by intellectual traditions predominant in Western modernity. *Form*, in the sense of *essence* (juxtaposed to and combined with *matter*, rather than with *content*) would be an intellectual device crucial to this resistance.

Let us briefly survey how old questions of metaphysics persist today. The deconstruction of the institutional and epistemological order of the humanities is coeval with the dismissal of Humanism and of the latter's way of understanding man as subject of history, be it collective or individual. This gesture of displacement does not always seem to be fully cognizant of the fact that Humanism itself occurred as an analogous gesture with respect to non-anthropocentric approaches to the question of the human. Religious experience and its theological theory, were the immediate target of Humanist criticism, but metaphysics at large were at stake. An effective critique of Humanism, today, cannot overlook this gesture – or its epistemological presuppositions. Unless one is more Hegelian than Hegel himself (as Paul de Man has put it), one cannot pretend to overcome the Humanist tradition, through some new, presumably

post-modern awareness, without also confronting what the latter has constructed as its outdated alternative. Indeed, the writings of Derrida and Lyotard address problems, develop arguments and enact rhetorical devices which are, more often than not, much too reminiscent of metaphysical and even theological debates, to be seen as inaugurating a fundamentally non-metaphysical or even a-theological perspective.

Within academia, one could also consider cultural studies, so often seen as an alternative to the Humanist tradition. We tend to understand the term *cultural* as critically replacing the term *literary.* The most significant opposition, however, is rather to the two main attributes that dialectically qualify literature within the modern tradition of the humanities: namely, *national* and *universal*. Cultural studies insist on the deconstructive light that anthropological attributes ideologically neutralised by Humanism, may shed on conventionally modern ways of understanding the human. They thus enable the effective critique of the thriving and demise of the modern nation-state and its international order[1]. The notion of *culture*, however, is typically historicist. Michel Foucault's *archéologie du savoir* and Hayden White's *meta-history* were intended, perhaps, as signposts to guard against this fact; but rather than solve the problem, they indexed it. Along with the interrogation of the attributes of state-national particulars and international universals, one should question the very logic of their attribution, including the basic gesture of reducing human practices to the anthropological characteristics that define the culture in question and the interests of its agents.

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[1] It appears that the notion of culture has always maintained a critical thrust. This was largely the case, for instance, with the *ethos* of the Athenian *sophistike*, whose conception provoked Platonic critique and Aristotelian compromise. It was also the case with the rediscovery of culture as *Bildung* in an intellectual setting (developing throughout the 19th century) which favoured the crystallisation of the modern political order: German historicism, implies a critique of the universal *ratio* and of the concomitant notion of *civilisation.*

Problematics along these lines must address metaphysical considerations – which is indeed what happens in the case of gender studies.

I understand *gender* as critically referring not only to grammatical distinctions but also to the notions of *genus* and *generic* in their articulation with *species* and *individual*. These notions can lead us back to the old *topoi* of Aristotle's *Categories,* which have been the subject of intense debate in both medieval theology and early modern philosophy. Aristotle's treatise concerns the way in which categories of "essence" or "substance" – in juxtaposition to categories elsewhere qualified as "contingent" or "accidental" – are attributable to that which *lies-there* as their *sub-ject*. The problem has often been identified (misleadingly, I might add) with the question of how different kinds of abstract *universalia* are related to, and perhaps even exist through, the particular *res* which they qualify. A long-standing (and equally misleading) related query has been raised over the very status of the corresponding problematics: nominalist or realist, ontological or logico-semantic? In its typically Aristotelian, elliptical rhetoric, the treatise, as I understand it, designates metaphysics as a primal domain of thought, which cannot take for granted the current distinctions between being, thought and word. Later, through the excursus of Neo-Platonic and, more specifically, Plotinian writings, the idea of temporality became metaphysically indistinguishable from that of essence. Essences would not be a-temporal abstractions; rather, they are modes of being temporal while remaining irreducible to phenomena of duration and change.

In what sense would something temporal *be* of one or the other gender or genus? Could there *be* a thing independently from and prior to the attribution of such categories? Would the very fact of *being* anything, depend on how things are *said to be* of one or the other kind? Clearly referring to such metaphysical questions, Judith Butler responds as follows:

> What is the metaphysics of <u>substance</u>, and how does it inform thinking about the categories of sex? In the first instance, <u>humanist conceptions</u> of the subject tend to assume a <u>substantive person</u> who is the bearer of various <u>essential and nonessential</u> attributes. A humanist feminist position

might understand gender as an *attribute* of a person who is characterised essentially as a pregendered substance or 'core', called the person, denoting a universal capacity for reason and moral deliberation, or language. The universal conception of the person, however, is displaced as a point of departure for a <u>social theory</u> of gender by those historical and anthropological positions that understand gender as a relation among <u>socially constituted</u> subjects in specifiable contexts. This <u>relational or contextual</u> point of view suggests that what the person 'is,' and, indeed, what gender 'is,' is always relative to the <u>constructed relations</u> in which it is determined. (1999, 14-15)

I have two reservations with respect to the above. The first, which could be considered theoretical, concerns the status attributed to the notion of *construction*. It seems to beg the question. There is a circularity of argumentation in juxtaposing relational to ontological problematics; the premises of the latter remain untouched, rhetorically veiled rather than critically undone. The question that remains pending is that of the instances operating the construction, usually designated as agencies of particular interests and poles of antagonism. How does one account for the fact that some sets of attributes, and not others, emerge as long-standing bones of contention in struggles or tensions of identity construction? My other reservation is, in some sense, methodological. I do not see how words that have themselves long been objects of ideological and theoretical construction and deconstruction, can be reduced to their eventual "conception" by such entities as "humanism" or "social theory". I am referring, in particular, to *substance* and *essence*, as well as to *person* – all of which relate directly or indirectly to *form*. They existed well before and outside the confines of Humanist and socio-anthropological scholarship, as crucial knots in an extremely wide range of theoretical and ideological controversies, often incommensurable to each other, concerning, directly or indirectly, the relations between language, humanness and temporality. Rather than impose closure on such issues, in one or the other direction, these words have, instead, sustained the openness of the corresponding debates. We would learn more by attending to their oldness, than by curtailing it according to the dimensions of our novelty.

Metaphysics retain an epistemological bearing, precisely because they contend with the very distinction between ontology and phenomenology. Metaphysical speculative endeavours can, of course, only be undertaken in and through language. Now, what if language is *essentially* both human and historic? One could then no more extricate oneself from humanity or history, than one could from language. The problem would be, not how to stand on any one of these three vantage-points, pretending to survey the other two, but how to cope with their inescapable nexus. For literature, this would imply investigating whether and how persistent literary formations can be essentially linguistic, human and historic, without entirely depending on the characteristics of those human lives that put them into semiotic circulation and temporal use.

Stories, indeed, are not histories. Persisting in and through their endless metamorphoses, they may, however, tell the unending history of their own story-telling. They would, accordingly, run through the cultural perspectives and relational practices of tellers and listeners, authors and readers – carrying them, rather than being carried by them.

There is literature that we call ancient. Its reading brings most perspicuously to the fore the problem of literary persistence. It is, in other words, a paradigmatically *preposterus* literature. Its value has never gone without saying, notwithstanding the impression that centuries of invoked sayings may create to latecomers. What is often felt as a novel crisis affecting the discipline of classics perpetuates tensions that have resounded ceaselessly, throughout the long process of the institutional domestication of poignantly old literatures – from the times of the European *res publica literaria et christiana* to those of the national disciplines of philology. Both the neo-classicist images of perennial antique models and the historicist figures of distant foundational origins, may have been timely, and thus exhaustible, devices of rhetorical hyperbole, offered as means to explain and contain what might otherwise defy understanding. Historicist philology has ventured to account with critical reasoning for what neo-classicist

aesthetics kept designating as co-extensive with the very limits of modern scholarly rationality.

Cutting through modern dialectics, Nietzsche provides us with a suggestive characterisation of the interest that old literature presents, as it persists, outliving the settings of the institutional and political management of its challenge. "L'éminente valeur de l'Antiquité tient à ce que ses oeuvres écrites sont les seules que les hommes d'aujourd'hui lisent encore avec exactitude" [1]. As is customary with Nietzsche, the term left suspended in the aphorism indicates where the theoretical challenge lies: what kind of *exactitude* is at stake in the case of this literature? Nietzsche still speaks, here, as a philologist – one, however, bent on circumventing philological problematics regarding textual history and criticism. This literature encourages exactitude in its capacity as language, rather than text. Exactitude comes not from its being historically situated, but from it situating the very problem of historicity – including the use of notions such as *past* and *present*, *antiquity* and *modernity*. As the post-philological Nietzsche put it a few years later, "je ne sais quel sens la philologie classique pourrait avoir aujourd'hui, sinon celui d'exercer une influence inactuelle, c'est-à-dire d'agir contre le temps, donc sur le temps et, espérons-le, au bénéfice d'un temps à venir"[2]. The kind of exactitude earlier invoked would thus be one proper to the idiosyncratic distances across which a Nietzschean reading may effectively connect to literary pre-posterity. Could old literatures present a challenge equivalent to the one implied, for instance, by how we qualify certain languages as dead? In which case, how would this challenge compare to that of living languages foreign to one's own? The untimely is also the outlandish: it has as

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sur la personalité d'Homère* suivi de *Nous autres philologues*, trad. Guy Fillion, Nantes, Le Passeur, 1992: 52.

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, "De l'utilité et des inconvénients de l'histoire pour la vie", in *Considérations inactuelles I et II*, trans. Pierre Rusch, Paris, Gallimard-Folio, 1990: 94.

little to do with a geographically identifiable foreign country as it does with a historically circumscribed antiquity.

In many respects, this thesis is the result of groping around Homer. Much has changed since I first began trying out different ways. One thing, however, has been there since the beginning, underlying the quest even in its present, otherwise quite removed, form: the feeling that, along with reading, Homer confronts us today with a particularly acute issue of readability. *Readability* pertains to the enabling conditions of reading: to the interest that sustains the impetus to read. This includes translatability.

Raising questions of readability and translatability implies that one is uneasy about or unhappy with current readings and translations; one does not find them convincing enough, considering their avowed definitions of the stakes; there is something missing between the reading or the translation, and the rhetoric that configures their rationale. To put it more bluntly, I find that Homer in translation lags, in many respects, behind its purported interest or value for the contemporary reader. On the other hand, I find that Homer, in the original, is enigmatic in ways and degrees that constantly exceed the range of problems that philology raises and resolves. Would this not be the case for any literary formation, whenever the imagery of some more or less distant original stands behind the closeness of a recent edition or translation? Indeed, it would. Homeric literatures, moreover, expose with particular vigour how the concomitant problems must not simply be taken for granted, as facts of literary life; their theoretical implications need to be addressed. Exceptional translations of such literatures work very much in the same direction[1].

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[1] This is the case, to my mind, with Pound's "Canto I", and its poetisisation not so much of Homer as of the conundrum of Homeric persistence. The fact that this Canto translates only parts or fragments of passages that are, what is more, philologically dubious, only adds to the significance of the endeavour. Likewise, adding to our interest, are the multiple ways in which, explicitly or implicitly, the Canto exposes or even enacts the mediation of a previous, Latin translation.

The task, then, is first to revisit how Homer has persisted in readable and translatable form. Correlatively, one should venture to envisage how one might deal with the prospect of this persistence in one's own moment, distinctions between past and present, antiquity and novelty, notwithstanding. One could thus try to understand this moment as indistinguishable from prospects of literary persistence.

The thesis does not advance a reading of Homer. It presents, instead, a comparison between two characteristically divergent approaches to the issue of the readability of old literature. Only the first approach concerns Homer directly, as it is the one of modern philology and its historicist reformulation of the Homeric Question, inaugurated by Friedrich August Wolf's neo-Latin *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (Prolegomena to Homer), first published in 1795 (Part A of the thesis). This text has been little read outside the field of philology, with respect to which it has assumed a paradigmatic role: its German translation came long after the original Latin, while an English edition has only recently been available. It attracted my attention, as being far more interesting and insightful than our current idea of philological trivia allows us to suspect. The other approach that I discuss in detail, is Walter Benjamin's critique of the historicist configuration of art and literature, as developed in his relatively early writings (Part B). Benjamin deals with the issue of readability of literature from a general theoretical perspective, the focus of which is no longer the philological reformation of originals, but the translatability of their given formations. The perspective, which has been qualified by Benjamin as that of a "metaphysics of form", explicitly connects to metaphysical notions and problematics, in a way that not only undoes historicist premises, but also resists deconstructionist alternatives. The comparison between Wolf and Benjamin takes place on grounds partly delimited by the role that the notion of form comes to play in both. I

follow the emphatically different ways in which this notion is configured in each case. This leads me to the formulation of a number of propositions and remarks concerning the readability and translatability of Homeric literatures in our present moment (Parts C and D).

The first part of the thesis begins with a close reading of Wolf's *Prolegomena*. Chapter A.1 discusses the role of this work as paradigmatically historicist: how it anticipates and exemplifies *avant la lettre* the development of nineteenth-century German historicism, inviting us to rethink the corresponding theoretical and methodological premises. These premises concern the relations between *historical* and *textual* form, under a quasi-normative perspective, which might justify my recurrence to the term *formness*. In chapter A.2, I read *Prolegomena* more closely. Human life, as historical, would essentially be *cultural form*, enacted in readable literature as (and only as) *textual* form. This does not entail a positivist quest for facts as they occurred in the past. As opposed to the recovery of presumably oral originals, Wolf claims the perspective of a present sense of historicity, under which quasi-formless scriptural remains can be reformed into validly readable textual constructs. Historical knowledge would thus presuppose a critique of the deficient operations of memory, which are at work in pre-textual writing practices. Chapter A.3 turns to a selection from Wilhelm von Humboldt's essays on history and language, situated around 1820. The essays provide us with more explicitly theoretical and typically historicist formulations of how essentially *national* cultural forms are enacted through the *inner forms* of equally national languages. My discussion of the philological paradigm closes with an overview, in chapter A.4, of the philological debate on the Homeric Question throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I concentrate on the issues that have proven most tenacious: the establishment and transmission of a relatively standardised text through manuscript traditions; the extent and significance of its variants; the problem of the status and the learning of the Homeric language in its relations to more recent forms of Greek.

The second part of the thesis centres on Benjamin's essay on translation: "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers [The task of the translator]", originally published in 1923. Systematic attention is also given to other essays, the writing of which is situated within the same early period of Benjamin's work. I closely examine, in particular, "Erkenntniskritische Vorrede", the epistemological-critical preface to his work on the origins of the German drama (*Die Ursprung des Deutschen Trauerspiels*). I also insist on the posthumously published "Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen [On language in general and on the language of the human]". I read these essays as conjoined and multifaceted attempts to rethink the historical outside historicism, the human outside anthropology, and the linguistic outside linguistics – that is to say, essence outside ontology and phenomena outside phenomenology[1]. I thus understand them as precariously dovetailing into Benjamin's more widely read later work. I try to follow Benjamin's characteristic, indeed singular, way of thinking through historically and conceptually incongruous intellectual traditions – such that it forbids identification with any of these traditions, much less with the religious or mystical ones with which Benjamin's early concerns have often been associated[2].

I read Benjamin's essay on translation in close connection with de Man's reading of the same: his 1983 lecture titled "Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's 'The task of the Translator'". I draw on de Man's text for the way it exemplifies, through the blind spots of its very insights, how Benjaminian problematics resist their domestication by deconstruction. Benjamin inquires on the kind of

[1] One of the threads on which this thesis does not elaborate, are the implications of Benjamin's divergence from philology, with respect to the tradition of hermeneutics. The extremely interesting question of both the kinship and the conflict between Benjaminian and Heideggerian rhetoric and problematics, is only addressed in passing footnote remarks.

[2] Benjamin's rhetoric and way of thinking should actually drive us to rethink a notion, which this thesis insists on, namely, that of "criticism". One should rethink the enabling conditions as well as the very possibility of "critical" standpoints. Valeria Wagner has brought up this point in our most recent discussions.

Introduction

theoretical pertinence borne by notions such as those of *history* and *humanness* – figures that de Man is too eager to contain on the grounds of his all-encompassing configuration of language.

An excursus through Aristotle's *Categories* intends to expose, against a supplementary background, the specificity of Benjamin's problematics about form. I underscore, in this respect, Benjamin's notion of literary *formation* (*Gebilde*), which he seems to prefer systematically to that of text, and which displaces historicist problematics of cultural form (*Bildung*).

I establish the framework of the above in chapter B.1. I then investigate, in chapter B.2, how Benjamin reconfigures basic aspects of current problematics about history, including notions central to historicist rhetoric. I examine Benjamin's understanding of historic *life* and *survival* (*Überleben*) taking place through the *recollection* of temporally perfected or *aeonic* forms. I further inquire how his notion of humanness disputes the confines of phenomenological anthropology. I then turn, in chapter B.3, to the Benjaminian notion of a *purely human language* (*reine Sprache*) which bespeaks the very *communicability* of human essence. On the grounds of this notion, human language-wholes can be seen as irreducible to phenomena of linguistic semiosis and cultural specificity – and thus as effectively connectable to each other in history. Literary formations would be *modes of indexing* human-linguistic essence, surviving as original *ideas*. This entails an understanding of how a literary original persists as readable and translatable *through* the change and variance of reproducible semiotic constructs. This is clearly at odds with the philological understanding of transmission and restoration of textual formness. Chapter B.4 passes from the question of the original to the one of translation. Translative occurrences would involve the recollection of the formational ideas of original literary works, and would thus be paradigmatic of historic events of human-linguistic life and survival.

For Benjamin, the persisting original establishes the law of its translatability. The temporally perfected (*Gewesene*) thus assumes a somewhat over-determining role with respect to the translative gestures of the on-going

moment (*Jeztzseit*). In other words, the current tendency to regard the past as the offspring of relational gestures of social construction, governed by the perspectives of the present, would be closer to Wolf than it is to Benjamin. At stake, obviously, is not a rehabilitation of the past with respect to the present but, rather, the reconfiguration of temporality as historic, beyond the historicist dialectics of pastness and presentness.

The third part of the thesis begins by presenting, in chapter C.1, the epistemological implications of Benjaminian problematics, especially with respect to the question of categories designating essential and non-essential attributes of literary formations. *Ideational form* would be standing between the formational substance of a literary work and its purely human-linguistic essence – no further categories being pertinent as to the essence of the formation in question. The problem is how to identify and describe an idea through reading – or, in other terms, how to turn concepts into ideas. Conventional historical and aesthetic categories, when not used to name ideas, would pertain to *contingencies* that mark the semiotic instantiations, through which ideational forms emerge and survive as such. In other words, concepts such as those of *antiquity* and *modernity* would not be necessarily essential to literature. This does not erase entirely the importance of such categories; it puts them under a different perspective, historic rather than historical.

In chapter C.2, I return to some basic aspects of the Homeric Question. The assumption is that *Homer* names the idea of a formation that persists through the socio-historical conditions of the production and reception of variable semiotic constructs, to which it would be essentially irreducible. I suggest, in other words, that the Homeric Question be somewhat reformulated. Instead of asking what text would be properly Homeric, one could ask what kind of thing Homer could be, given the entire range of the written constructs that enact its formation. I survey the conditions under which Homer has been connected to different living languages entertaining drastically different relations to the Homeric language-

whole. I then address the question of the extent and variance of the semiotic material through which Homer persists, today, as a readable original.

Chapter C.3 discusses two different cases of non-Wolfian approaches to the readability and translatability of the Homeric formation. The first, cursorily addressed, is that of the twelfth-century Byzantine exegesis of Eustathius of Thessaloniki. The second is the somewhat post-philological reading of what has come to be called the "oral theory" of Homer and has somewhat displaced the Wolfian paradigm since the 1960s. Albert Lord's *Singer of Tales* and Berkeley Peabody's *Winged Word* posit the readability of Homer beyond the confines of Wolfian principles of textual formness. Their insights, I suggest, pertain less to the historical or pseudo-historical question of the oral and traditional nature of original Homeric poetry, than to the specific challenge presented to the contemporary reader by the kind of writing that makes up our Homeric vulgate. I subsequently consider certain theoretical implications of this approach with respect to the very notion of textuality and to the concomitant distinction between scribal and vocal semiotic media, written and oral traditions.

The last part of the thesis drives the question of theological problematics in an additional direction. After an initial discussion of de Man's resistance to Benjamin's position on the issue of theology, chapter D.1 turns to a text by Vladimir Lossky, concerning the use of the theological notion of *prosopon* for an understanding of the human[1]. I probe the pertinence of this notion with respect to the theoretical problem of literary form and readability. The closing chapter D.2 ventures to conclude on the specificity of the Homeric *prosopon*: the heroic epos would be a mode of indexing humanness as linguistic and historic – a mode surviving and always remaining to recollect.

One should not view the last two parts of the thesis as *applying* Benjamin's mode of thought to the Homeric Question: I transpose rather than apply. Nor should they be understood as an attempt to determine the principles of a

putative post-philological approach to Homer: the critique of philology exposes the fallacy of schemas of historical overcoming.

How does Homer persist as readable and translatable, engaging *our own* present moment? I understand the first person plural to be relatively independent from communal frameworks, whether national, social or professional. It refers to languages in their living multiplicity, stimulated by the recollection of Homeric literatures. Editions or translations of Homer today must be expected to foreground the variety of linguistic lives and perspectives that are at work in such toils. They have done so when they affected Greek or Latin at the times of their respective oecumenicities. They will continue to do so in the present setting of the marching globalisation of English, thereby exposing how a global linguistic field is as little a neutral medium of academic communication as it is a nationally homogeneous language.

Let me also add the following final remark. Homer, or, more generally, literatures of the Homeric type, acquire their current actuality not because of their historical position in the past of specific languages, but by virtue of their potential recollection by any living language. The correlative events of recollective connection would be emergences out of constantly changing fields of linguistic connectability, coping with varying modes of distance or closeness, kinship or foreignness. They would not be phenomena generated by more or less orderly and predictable dynamics of historical development. As such, they have, in certain respects, less to do with a Wolfian *Altertumswissenschaft,* than with the field of study that the relatively recent notion of *emergent* literatures strives to configure. These, as Wlad Godzich has suggested, are literatures emerging and claiming persistence under conditions of changing modes of literacy. The understanding of emergent literatures may profit more, I believe, from the recollection of old scriptures, than from the recycling of modern textual

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[1] Around the notion of the *prosopon* we have discussed a lot with Apostolis Diamantis

traditions[1]. The reading of old languages that retain our interest the way one's dead do, may be an exercise that enhances our capacity to respond to living linguistic formations that solicit interest even though ill-fitting any pre-established historical or textual paradigm. Indeed, the problem of *emergence* presents us with the same kinds of challenging aporia as does the problem of *persistence*. In both cases, one has to break through tightly woven networks of conceptual and textual configurations, in order to reach sites and moments of humanity yet to mourn or to predict. This also holds for the persistence of scholarly works, the actuality of which lies buried under mounds of historicist categories – taxonomies that turn these works into objects of an antiquarian rather than historic interest, by situating them in epochal and intellectual contexts purportedly irrelevant to our own moment. A historic return to the traditions of neo-Platonism and scholasticism, for instance, could be as theoretically challenging, today, as the virtual actuality of advanced sites of contemporary science and technology.

My thesis cannot pretend to have made great strides in the direction of these suggestions. It only testifies to a gradually heightened but still preliminary awareness of a condition of illiteracy (or of overly conceptualised literacy, which could amount to the same) inhibiting our relations to languages that are poignantly topical precisely because of their preposterous persistence. I have gone not much further than underscoring Benjamin's signposts in this respect – without yet fully assuming the consequences of the endeavour.

The presentation and methodology of my work express, I presume, the meanders of its problematics. Each of the four parts of the thesis is divided into chapters comprising a series of relatively short sections, which constitute the elementary components of the thesis. Parts, chapters and sections stand, with

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and Lena Prokopiou.

[1] My discussions with Brian Neville have often addressed notions such as the ones of *recycling* and *waste,* in their relations to *history* and *recollection.*

respect to each other, as relatively autonomous units. Usually, however, they build on elements previously exposed or discussed, interlacing threads of argumentative progression, even if only tentatively or precariously.

My close reading does not always follow the original articulation of the texts. Rather than describing semiotic structures, I have preferred to index language-wholes, highlighting particularly telling or (as Benjamin puts it) *extreme* instances of the corresponding ideas. I quote extensively[1]. Quoting passages that are thus resituated outside their initial context is a constituent part of my work[2]. My reading takes the form of commentary, which could be characterised as exegetical: conceptual, figural and argumentative *topoi* are exposed and discussed, particular stress being laid on rhetorical modes that reconfigure theoretical notions or statements. To what degree can different rhetorical devices be read as configurations of the same notion or idea? What do such differences in configuration tell us about the very self-sameness of what thus appears to be persistently at stake? In this respect, I try not to forget the lessons of Paul de Man.

The multilingual character of the material with which I have dealt was a major determinant of my overall work. I have worked jointly on Latin, German and old Greek originals – as well as on available English and French translations. The distances through which I connect to these languages vary, but are considerable for all of them. They are largely conditioned by Modern Greek, which stubbornly assumes the function of an exclusive mother-tongue in my linguistic life, on the grounds of which I learn, read and work with foreign or dead languages. My relationship to English and French, being stronger than a

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[1] When I add emphasis myself, I do it by underlining.

[2] The large number of quotations of original and translated versions necessitated a system of parenthetical references and abbreviations, which I hope is functional and helpful to the reader.

learning one, also intervenes in ways quite determinant. This relatively multi-focused perspective marks the way I connect to the rest of the tongues that this thesis ventures to cope with. It also marks, I presume, the English into which I transpose the corresponding experience.

Keeping this in mind, I use different means or strategies to present my quoted material and expose the implied translative challenge. I had to take into consideration the translations I worked with, as well as the linguistic economy of the discipline I address. In the case of Wolfian Latin or Eustathian Greek, I quote in English translation, interpolating limited parts of the original. The systematic juxtaposition of the original and the translation was deemed indispensable only for German. With few exceptions, then, I quote the German original as well as translated editions, often adding my own translation in the commentary that follows the quotation. For Benjamin and Humboldt, the translation and the original face each other in a tabular form that emphasises the transposition at work. I have allowed myself to quote from French translations – especially for Benjamin. These translations have greatly influenced my own reading. The tense exactitude with which French follows Benjamin's German is extremely suggestive, I think, both for its insights and eventual blind spots. As my work is partly on translation, this mediation might not be detrimental to how the thesis says what it intends to say.

The thesis was put together when I decided to cut the trails of successive deployments and regressions, ventures and relapses – toils that even the figure of "trial and error" fails to account for, as the certainty of error was a luxury. Consequently, this introduction does *not* expose some overall conception further elaborated in what follows. It only tries to identify sites to which my trails seem to have led, for the time being.

PART A. *THE PHILOLOGICAL PARADIGM*

A.1. PHILOLOGICAL HISTORICISM

A.1.1. Antique Homer

The name of Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff is well known to scholars of classical antiquity as a major and highly innovative intellectual figure. It is close to a metonymy for the very institution of German academic philology, in the phase of its growth and maturity, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. To philosophers or theorists of literature, the name, if ever encountered, has quite different connotations. It stands for the obscure philologist who, in defence of academic orthodoxy, issued two pamphlets of polemical criticism against Friedrich Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (*The Birth of Tragedy*), soon after its publication in 1872. Nietzsche was, at the time, professor of philology at Basle – twenty-six years old, four years Wilamowitz's elder. A sustained debate over his work ensued, which may have significantly contributed to Nietzsche's abandonment of an academic career and turn to eccentric philosophical writing[1]. The different fortunes of the protagonists exemplify how classical philology, in its early development, involved crucial theoretical and ideological issues, against the tensions of which it was eventually sheltered.

At stake was, amongst others, the very notion of *antiquity*. In close connection to 19th century historicism, *antiquity* gradually established its status as a properly modern historical category, attributable, to begin with, to Homeric

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[1] Material from this debate (mainly dating from the years 1872-73 and including correspondence and articles or pamphlets by Nietzsche, Wilamowitz, Rhode and Wagner) has been collected and published in German (Nietzsche 1989) and French (Nietzsche 1995).

and classical Greece[1]. According to Wilamowitz, in his canonical *Geschichte der Philologie* (*History of philology*[2]), philology[3] aims at bringing back to life a bygone culture forming an essential historical unity. Studied by philology would be:

> […] die griechisch-römische <u>Kultur in ihrem Wesen</u> und allen Äußerungen ihres Lebens. Dies Kultur ist <u>eine Einheit</u>, mag sie sich auch an ihrem Anfang und ihrem Ende nicht scharf abgrenzen lassen. Die Aufgabe der Philologie ist, jenes <u>vergangene Leben</u> durch die Kraft der Wissenschaft <u>wieder lebendig zu machen</u> […] Weil das Leben, um dessen Verständnis wir ringen, <u>eine Einheit</u> ist, ist unsere Wissenschaft eine Einheit. (Wilamowitz 1959, 1)[4]

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[1] The notion of *antiquity* had, of course, already acquired its conceptual weight as a correlative of *modernity*, through the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes,* which marked French and English intelligentsia in late 17th and early 18th centuries. The development of philology and the debates over its status operated, however, a significant reconfiguration of such historical categories. One could relate this process to the emergence of what Foucault (1966) designates as the epistemic or discursive formation of the characteristically modern *âge de l'hstoire* in the understanding of the human. The perspective of temporal depth, implying the notion of historical origins, breaks with earlier formations of representational and exchange order. For a general historical approach to German historicism, see Iggers (1968). For a rhetorically informed epistemological analysis of its premises, within the wider setting of 19th century conceptions of history, see White (1973).

[2] First published in 1921 (but translated into English only in 1982), Wilamowitz's *Geschichte* has been characterised as "the great history of classical scholarship by the one man most competent to write it" and "still the best history available in English by far" (Calder 1992, 58). Its main predecessor was the bio-bibliographical: J.E. Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship*, Cambridge, 1903-1908.

[3] "Classical scholarship", according to the English translation.

[4] The English translation reads:

"Graeco-Roman civilisation [culture] <u>in its essence</u> and in every facet of its existence. This civilisation is <u>a unity</u>, though we are unable to state precisely when it began and ended: and the task of scholarship is to <u>bring that dead world to life</u> by the power of science […] Because the life we strive to fathom is<u> a single whole,</u> our science too is a single whole." (Wilamowitz 1982, 1)

A.1. Philological Historicism

The notion of such a cultural entity was closely connected to the idea of *Renaissance* and to the correlative tradition of *Humanist* scholarship, of which modern historical science would be the critical heir and culmination[1]. Wilamowitz's *Geschichte* narrates the "marching" development of a modern historical approach to antiquity. This mature approach would enable the re-evaluation of a "cultural heritage", uncritically received by previous heirs:

> Die Geschichte der Philologie hat die Aufgabe darzustellen, wie auch aus der griechischen Grammatik, die wissenschaftlich, aber noch <u>keine geschichtliche Wissenschaft</u> war, und wie auch immer verkümmert in Rom und Byzanz fortlebte, unsere Wissenschaft herausgebildet hat, die sich jetzt ihres Wesens und ihrer Aufgabe bewußt ist. Vollzogen hat sich diese Entwicklung gemäß dem <u>Gange der modernen Geistesgeschichte</u>, auf den die Aneignung von <u>Kulturschätzen</u> des Altertums sehr stark eingewirkt hat, fördernd, zuweilen auch Hemmend. (Wilamowitz 1959, 1)[2]

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[1] The term *Renaissance*, designating the revival of the study of antiquity after the obscure interregnum of *middle-ages*, was not systematically used as a historical concept before the 19th century (Jules Michelet enacted it in his *Histoire de la France*, which started appearing in Paris, 1933; the concept was further used and canonised by Jacob Burckhart in *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italia,* Basel, 1860). The term *Humanism* was first applied as a historical concept by Georg von Voigt in his *Die wiederbelebung des classischen Alterthums oder das erste Jahrhundert des Humanismus*, 1859). Recall that Petrarchan scholarship had redefined the field of the old *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, didactic) in terms of a *studia humanitatis* (*umanista,* in the Italian student slang of the period). The Romans (Cicero in particular) had qualified the Greeks as a *genus humanissimum,* excelling, that is, in *humanitas* – human nature or, in a sense, humanness, but also philanthropy and education or moral cultivation (Pfeiffer 1976, 15-16; Reynolds &Wilson 1968, 122).

[2] The English translation reads:

"The business of the history of scholarship is to show how the science, which now is aware of its true nature and function, developed out of the *grammatike* of the Greeks which, though scientific, was <u>not yet a historical science</u> but lived on in Rome and Byzantium, in however atrophied a form. This development has kept in step with the <u>modern march of mind [spiritual history or history of ideas]</u> on which the assimilation of the <u>cultural heritage</u> of antiquity has had a powerful influence – beneficial, but also at times inhibiting." (Wilamowitz 1982, 1)

The stakes of the modern philological conception of historical knowledge had already been significantly exposed in the debate over Nietzsche's *Geburt*. They were signalled with particular clarity by Wilamowitz in remarks and comments concerning the Nietzschean approach to Homer. Homeric poetry, in fact, enters the discussion only incidentally, but quite tellingly. It assumes the role of an early emergence anticipating essential characteristics of the spirit that would be proper to Greek antiquity at large[1]. According to E. Rhode, friend and supporter of Nietzsche, philologist himself, *Geburt* intended to show "den frohen Glanz der homerischen Welt als einen nicht über Nacht vom Himmel gefallenen sondern als einen schwer errungenen Sieg über ganz anders geartete, schrecklich finstere Vorstellungen alter Vorzeiten" (Nietzsche et al. 1989, 80)[2]. Under this turbulent representational perspective, the Homeric poems broke with Wilamowitz's idea of what should stand at the origins of Greek antiquity and poetry. Wilamowitz insists that Homer, as an object of historical knowledge, can only be a figure of innocent and youthful inauguration of classical Greekness:

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[1] Nietzsche had excelled in academic philology as an offensive heir to Wolf's philological tradition. Note, in this respect, his 1869 lecture on *Homer und die classische philologie* (1906, I: 1-26). While praising the significance of Wolf's insights, he declares that "Homer als der Dichter der Ilias und Odyssee ist nicht eine historische Überlieferung, sondern ein ästhetisches Urteil [Homer, as the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, is not a historical tradition but an aesthetic judgement]" (20). The statement is double-edged. On the one hand, the properly historical philological sense rejects the idea of Homer as the individual author of the poetry that bears the name. On the other hand, the aesthetic idiosyncracy of Homeric poetry remains pending as an object of inquiry, in spite of its eventual historical irrelevance. See also Nietzsche's notes on the task and profession of philology, dating from the years 1874-75 and posthumously published under the title *Wir Philologen* (1906, II: 319-402).

[2] Rhode's defence of Nietzsche was originally published under the title *Afterphilologie*, Leipzig, 1872. The French translation reads:

> " […] que l' éclat du monde homérique n' était pas tombé du ciel d'un coup mais résultait d'une violence difficilement obtenue sur les représentations très différentes, effrayantes et sombres, des époques reculées qui les ont précédées […]." (Nietzsche et al. 1995, 189)

A.1. *Philological Historicism*

> […] denn kennte er ihn, wie wollte er wohl jener jugendfrischen, im überschwang des wonnigen lebensgenusses jauchzenden, eben durch ihre jugend und natürlichkeit jedes unverdorbne herz erquickenden homerischen welt, dem frühling des volkes, das wahrlich des lebens traum am schönsten geträumt, pessimistische sentimentalität, greisenhafte sehnsucht nach dem nischtsein, bewusstes selbstbetrügen zuschreiben. und was sind seine beweise für die leiden, die, nun gar in jener zeit, die griechen, die ewigen kinder, die harmlos und ahnungslos des schönen lichts sich freuenden gelitten, nein genossen, in impotenter wollust genossen haben sollen? (Nietzsche et al. 1989, 36-37)[1]

In the sequel to his first pamphlet, Wilamowitz sets the stakes even higher. He designates the danger inherent in Nietzsche's view (especially in his refusal to acknowledge the primacy of word over music in early Greek poetry) in indistinguishably existential and epistemological terms, ironically foretelling Nietzsche's fate. When reading antique texts, abyss is what the competent philologist should strive against, otherwise risking to follow Nietzsche's fall into it:

> […] die herren blicken eben *mit wolgefallen* in *abgründe*, nicht blofs *dionisische,* und wo alles eben und einfach ist, geraten sie in wut, und wühlen so lange in des gegners worten, bis ein abgrund da ist. Mir ist das zu gefärlich. Neben abgründen packt zu leicht der schwindel: des schwindels ende aber ist, dafz man tief, sehr tief hineinfällt. (Nietzsche et al. 1989, 126)[2]

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[1] Wilamowitz's first critique of Nietzsche's *Geburt* was published under the title *Zukunftphilologie!*, Berlin, 1872. The French translation reads:

"En effet, si [Monsieur Nietzsche] connaissait [Homère] comment pourrait-il attribuer au monde homérique éclatant de jeunesse, exultant dans l'exubérance et les délices du plaisir de vivre, et qui, précisément à cause de sa jeunesse et de son naturel, réconforte tout cœur innocent, comment pourrait-il attribuer à ce printemps d'un peuple, qui a vraiment rêvé de la plus belle manière le rêve de la vie, des sentiments pessimistes, une aspiration sénile à l'anéantissement et une volonté consciente de se tromper soi-même? Et quels sont les arguments qu'il avance pour justifier des souffrances que, à cette époque même, les Grecs, ces éternels enfants que la belle lumière emplissait d'une joie innocente et inconsciente, sont censés avoir éprouvées – non, dont ils sont censés avoir joui, et ce avec une volupté impuissante?" (Nietzsche et al. 1995, 35-36)

[2] Wilamowitz continued his critique with a sequel to his first pamphlet, also entitled Zukunftphilologie!, Berlin 1872. The French translation reads:

For Wilamowitz extracting form (and, more specifically, the essential form of a unified cultural entity) out of formlessness is a crucial task undertaken by the philological conception of antiquity – including its Homeric beginnings.

Later, in his *Geschichte,* Wilamowitz questions the neo-classicist idealisation of antiquity, overtones of which seem to persist in his attack on Nietzsche. He stresses the need for a historical "understanding" (in both an epistemic and a quasi-moral sense of the term) of otherwise deplorable idiosyncracies. He probes the very limits of the philological task, when he designates the "inner form" of antique texts as an open issue, remaining to be addressed beyond the accomplished restoration of the "external form" of textual material. We thus read, towards the end of his essay (concluding a section on methodological issues of textual criticism):

> Dabei lernt Man das Individuelle achten, statt ein absolutes ideal zu fordern, und daß statt der Forderung absoluter Vollkommenheit, die mit der kanonische Geltung der Antike gegeben war, die <u>historische Auffassung</u> alles durchdringt, führt zum Verstehen von vielem, was man vielleicht <u>nicht loben wird, aber verzeihen muß</u>. Auch wer meint, daß für die Textkritik nicht mehr viel zu machen sei, wird bei einiger Umschau gestehen, daß zu den <u>individuellen und geschichtlichen Verständnis</u> immer erst der Anfang gemacht ist, selbst bei den meistgelesenen Dichtern. Und wenn die äußere Form der Schriften auch leidlich festgestellt sein mag, die <u>innere Form</u> zu begreifen, haben sich erst ganz wenige als Aufgabe gestellt. (Wilamowitz 1959, 78)[1]

"Ces messieurs contemplent avec plaisir les abîmes, et pas seulement dionysiaques, et lorsque tout est plat et simple ils sont pris de colère et retournent en tout sens les paroles de leur adversaire jusqu' à ce qu' un abîme apparaisse. Je trouve cela trop dangereux. On est trop facilement pris de vertige devant les abîmes: mais la seule manière de mettre fin au vertige est de tomber profondément, très profondément, dedans." (Nietzsche et al. 1995, 261)

[1] The English translation reads:

"Moreover, the scholars are learning to respect individuality, instead of insisting on conformity to a fixed ideal, and as a demand for absolute perfection implicit in the canonical authority of antiquity has given way to the <u>historical approach</u>, an understanding has arisen of much that <u>one may deplore but must forgive</u>. Anybody who is inclined to think that textual criticism has little left to accomplish must admit, if he looks about him, that the attempt to understand the <u>idiosyncrasies and the historical significance</u> of even the most widely read authors has only just begun. And though the

The understanding of the very pastness of the past, in terms of form read into or out of linguistic remains, marks the epistemic distinctness of philology as it develops under the auspices of Wilamowitz, excluding the Nietzschean alternative. In fact, both Nietzsche and Wilamowitz were attached to the academic tradition of Friedrich-August Wolf (1759-1824), often considered as the first to have registered in a University curriculum as a *studiosus philologiae*. This would be at the University of Göttingen – which he left in order to become professor at Halle and, later, at Berlin. His career was practically co-extensive with the process through which classical philology acquired its institutionally autonomous and authoritative position within the emerging Prussian University system. This development was connected to the broader educational reforms affiliated to the figure of Wilhelm von Humboldt – an important link among circles of academic historicism, philosophical idealism and romantic criticism of early nineteenth-century German intelligentsia.

Wolf's pedagogical *Darstellung des Altertumswissenschaft,* first published in 1807, is often stated as having coined the German term for classical studies. His reputation, however, is mainly based on his earlier *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, first published in 1795 and often considered as having paradigmatically inaugurated the discipline of modern academic philology.

Judging from the debate over Nietzsche's *Geburt,* one can presume that Wolf's paradigm opened a field of possibilities, quite larger than the one ultimately delimited by its institutional development[1].

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external form of their works may be tolerably well established, few have set out to fathom their <u>inner form</u>." (Wilamowitz 1982, 174)

[1] Although hardly any history or survey of classical scholarship or Homeric studies ever fails to refer to Wolf and his Prolegomena, extended studies on his work are rather scarce. For basic and enlightening information, including bibliographical references, on Wolf's career and intellectual role, as well as on the impact of the Prolegomena, see Grafton (1985; 1991a). The earliest English work on the subject appears to be M. Pattison's, "F. A. Wolf", in Essays, Oxford, 1889. Recent contributions, other than Grafton's, are few. They include A. Horstmann's "Die

A.1.2. National Literatures

Modern philology is closely connected not only to the idea of Greek antiquity but also to the remapping of literature as an integral part of the national component of universal history[1].

F. Schlegel, in his opening lecture on the *Geschichte der alten und neuen Literatur* (On the History of antique and modern Literature), originally dating from 1814) discusses the "Einfluß der Literatur auf das Leben und den Wert der Nationen [Influence of literature on the life and character of nations]" (1961, 9). Literature, he states, stores "alte National-Erinnerungen [old national-remembrances]" that constitute "das ganze geistige Dasein einer Nation [the whole spiritual being of a nation]" (15). As such, it would not simply be subject to historical development. It would be co-extensive with national consciousness as historical and thus with history itself. "Dieses in betrachtenden und darstellenden Werken sich aussprechende Selbstbewußtsein einer Nation ist die Geschichte [This national self-consciousness expressing itself in works of contemplation and representation, is history]" (16). Under this perspective, Homeric poetry is acknowledged as extremely "wichtig für die griechische und für die ganze nachfolgende europäische Literatur [important for the Greek and the overall subsequent European literature]". It holds the crucial position of the

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'klassische Philologie' zwischen Humanismus und Historismus. Friedrich August Wolf und die Begründung der modernen Altertumswissenschaft", in *Berichte zur Wissenschaftgeschichte*, I, 1978.

[1] The connection between philology and problematics of national history is presented by Turner (1997) as follows:

> "By the middle of the [19th] century philology had become one of the most powerful and all-embracing humanist sciences. Philologists were actively involved in the establishment of national literatures which might or might not have had a genuinely long existence, and by implication with the process of nation-building." (141)

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"Hauptquelle der gesamten Geistesbildung der alten Völker [capital source or fountain head of the overall cultural formation of antique peoples]"(30).

Bildung is a key-concept of German historicism. Its etymology expresses the articulation between the idea of historical culture and the one of form. Literature, we can infer, acquires its historical significance precisely because it is the most telling enactment of this articulation. Philology assumes its own significance as a scholarly discipline to the degree that it addresses literary works as properly historical, that is, cultural forms. Schlegel's posthumously published fragments *Zur Philologie* (1981), express in terms quite enigmatic, if not perplexing, the epistemological conundrums of the philological task. Through a philosophy of history based on a philosophy of philology[1], the present moment would gain access to the classical antiquity it needs as a prototype for its own national literature[2]. The claim is thus advanced of a specifically philological philosophy. The "Theorie der historischen Kritik"[3] would be something close to a critique of historical reason, conditioning or even overcoming non-historical philosophy and aesthetics[4]. Aestheticism and aesthetic mysticism are targeted as the basic shortcomings of Winckelmann's neo-classical approach to antiquity – a crucial blindness marking the corresponding tradition[5]. So is the erudite concern for grammatical positivity, which would hamper the development of historical

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[1] "<Postulat: *es soll kl. [lassische]Werke geben*. Die ganze Fs [Philosophie] der Historie muß aus der Fs [Philosophie" der Fl [Philologie] postulirt und *deducirt* werden können". (Fr. 143)

[2] "Die Philologie besonders die alte ist gleichsam die Klassik, das Urbild für die Behandlung jeder besondern nazionalen, modernen Litteratur". (Fr. 155)

[3] See Fr. 9.

[4] "Herrschaft des Philosophischen über das Historische würde der Philologie ein Ende machen wie die des Aesthetischen". (From Fr. 18)

[5] See Fr. 35.

insights. Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum* are explicitly referred to, as entailing the novel critical-historical perspective of the philological spirit[1].

In fact, Wolf's *Prolegomena* has little place for concepts and arguments of a philosophical critique. It enacts its critical insights while examining methodological aspects of the age-old Homeric Question as an exemplary case of historically antique literature. Wolf's treatise is thus paradigmatic, both because of its estimated impact[2] and with respect to its epistemic status[3].

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[1] "Studium der *Prolegomena* in Rücksicht auf den philologischen Geist. – Wird das Historische vernachlässigt so wird die philologische Kunst *banaus*isch und grammatisch, wie sie es meistens ist." (Fr. 25)

[2] My use of the term *paradigm* is close to the meaning it has acquired within the field of history of science, especially through its elaboration in Kuhn (1970). Wolf's *Prolegomena* have, indeed, been acknowledged as "a model for future writers on the history of any ancient text" (Pfeiffer 1976, 214). Wilamowitz (1950) is rather reluctant to attribute prime importance to Wolf, but many recent studies insist on doing so. Grafton is even more emphatic, stating that "the *Prolegomena* became *the* model of philological criticism" (1991a, 42). It would have functioned both as the "manifesto of German historical spirit" and as a "model for historical investigations in other fields" (1985, 29). For Clarke (1981) *Prolegomena* has been "the preface to all books on Homer that would appear in the next 150 years" (160). Timpanaro expresses an equivalent opinion, in *La genesi del methodo del Lachmann,* Padua, 1981 – as cited by Grafton (1991a, 15). So does the relevant article in the recent *New Companion to Homer*, according to which *Prolegomena* "established the foundation of Homeric Question for the next century and transferred Homeric criticism into the expanding realm of professional scholarship" (Turner 1977, 125).

[3] According to Kuhn (1970), a scientific discipline emerges and develops on the grounds of exemplary approaches to reformulated old questions. Paradigmatic works would typically involve a strictly methodological or even technical breakthrough, without explicitly elaborating concepts or problematics at the level of theory or epistemology. These would be formulated later, within the process of development and institutionalisation of the corresponding intellectual field.

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A.1.3. Prolegomena to Philology

Like all old questions, the Homeric one has always mainly been about the problem of what it is about. One of its best general formulations is, perhaps, its most simple one: "this eternal problem, what are we to make of Homer" (Myres 1958, 73). The statement is very precise, to the degree that we read it as referring not to Homer, as an individual author, but to the very notion of *Homer*, in its rhetorical transpositions. The term can be a reference to a presumed poet or *aoidos* of pre-classical Greek times. The question would be: has Homer existed as a distinct individual – and what exactly are we to make of him as the author or singer of poems such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*? The term can also designate a scribal construct reproducing or transmitting a body of poetry. The question becomes: under what conditions were the corresponding poems initially written down, and how do their extant versions stand with respect to earlier ones, written or oral? A further transposition makes Homer into the figure of a whole era, historically preceding and immediately connected to classical Greece. We thus have the question: what is the value and significance of Homeric poetry within the overall setting of the literary tradition of Western modernity?

All three aspects of the Question were (and were known to have been) addressed and debated, in different ways and intensities, since classical Greek antiquity. Wolf's *Prolegomena* attributes to the second aspect, concerning the historicity of extant scribal material, a fundamental importance largely over-determining the other two. Let us be more specific about this.

According to Pfeiffer (1976), Wolf's gesture consisted in the historicisation of the Homeric Question:

> In tracing the history of the transmission of the Homeric text from the Hellenistic age back to the age of the epic poets for the first time, he had to raise the question of the origin of the epic poems, of their unity and genuineness. Wolf opened the eyes of his contemporaries and of posterity to the unique *historical* position of the Homeric poetry. (14)

However, most of the elements of the history of the Homeric text that Wolf brings to the fore were objects of inquiry and debate long before his treatise. Wolf's specificity has more to do with how the Homeric case entails a critique of the very notion of historical "unity and genuineness". Grafton (1985) stresses that *Prolegomena* tackles the issue of textual history as part of a wider approach to a history of scholarship and culture. It would constitute the "first methodical and firmly based attempt at a history of an ancient text", through which " the history of the Homeric text, the origins and the development of scholarship in the ancient world, and the general history of Greek culture were inextricably interwoven" (17). The approach that Wolf elaborates has, in fact, more to do with how this interlacing of historical perspectives affects the understanding of textuality as historical.

The crucial significance of the Wolfian enterprise resides, more specifically, in the reconfiguration of the notion of form, as properly historical. The title of *Prolegomena* presents us with the most accurate formulation of the specific turn that Wolf gave to the Homeric Question: *Prolegomena ad Homerum, sive de operum homericorum prisca et genuina forma variisque mutationibus et probabili ratione emendandi*[1]. *Forma* is the keyword. *Prisca et genuina* is translatable into *properly historical*.

The Homeric Question becomes the one of the criteria of form according to which the philological intellect can critically exercise an emendation (that is, a valid correction) of the scribal material that has been received as Homeric. *Prolegomena* thus turns the question of form into one of formness – if the coinage may be allowed. The immediate objects of this criticism were, more specifically, the Byzantine manuscript versions of Homeric poetry – that is, the oldest extant sources of Homer, which had served as a basis for the printed version of the text.

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[1] The English edition (Wolf 1985) translates: *Prolegomena to Homer, or Concerning the original and genuine form of the Homeric works and their various alterations and the proper method of emendation.*

The history of their production should enable the designation of their *prisca et genuina forma* and the correlative emendation of the received artefacts. The implicit postulate is that, prior to such an emendation, received documents are historically unreadable. With respect to the extant Homeric material Wolf raises, in other words, an issue of historical readability. This is not so much in the sense of how this material *should* be read, as in the sense of whether and under what conditions it *can* be read as properly Homeric.

The Wolfian question can also be formulated as the one of how *Textgeschichte*, or the history of a scribal material, can justify and guide *Textkritik*, or the philological criticism and eventual reformation of the material. Note that the term that Wolf uses more extensively is the one of *scripta* or *scripturae*. By this, he means, if I read him correctly, written constructs of any sort or validity. *Textus* is only occasionally used, often designating these same constructs but from the point of view of their form. There is, furthermore, a tendency for the term *textus* to connote, in Wolf, the specific kind of form that would be readable as a historically valid one. One can advance the hypothesis that *textus* or textual form becomes, in Wolf, the condition of the historical readability of scribal material. Textual form would be somehow active, as a potential of formness, in scribal or other remains of historical life; nonetheless, it would *not* be immediately or non-problematically present in the forms that they initially acquire and in which they are transmitted. It would be the task of the modern philological intellect to define, reconstruct and impose properly textual form on otherwise dubious *scripta*[1].

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[1] Cerquiglini (1989) configures as follows the relations between philology and a specifically modern notion of textuality:

> "La notion de texte ainsi constituée s' épanouit au XIXe s., régit les comportements intellectuels, et donne naissance à une science particulière et fondamentale, la philologie. Science moderne, à notre sense, quoique une jeune critique, impatiente et rétive, depuis les années 1950, ait tenté d'en secouer le joug, sience moderne du texte moderne, appliquée à des objets anciens." (28)

This approach invalidates a series of preceding approaches to the Homeric Question, which had been taking the received material more or less for granted. Long-standing debates over the value and interpretation of the poems are discredited, to the degree that they had not questioned the readability of what they were reading[1]. On the grounds of the Homeric Question, philology emerges

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[1] The following distinct (although not necessarily historically successive) modalities of reading or appreciating Homer, are identified by Clarke (1981). Romanticisation (medieval and later "novelistic" adaptations and imitations of Homer); allegorisation (from late antiquity, through middle-ages and Renaissance, to the present times); criticism (mainly ethical or aesthetic questioning of the value of the Homeric texts); textual analysis (culminating in the German philological tradition); interpretative anatomy (problematics of 20th century human sciences).

As this thesis is not about the history of the Homeric Question, I will not elaborate on the issue. I will only be briefly referring to some aspects of this history, whenever necessary, in order to highlight the specificity of the Wolfian reformulation of the Question.

For the history of antique and medieval readings of Homer see Lamberton (1997) and Lamberton and Keaney (1992). Bérard (1925), Mazon (1959) and Allen (1924;1931) are very informative with respect to older and more recent, especially editorial and philological aspects of the issue. Heubeck (1978) concentrates on contemporary developments. Myres (1958) and, especially, Clarke (1981) offers a broader view of different reading traditions of Homer. Collections of articles such as Platnauer (1954) and, especially, the two *Companions* to Homer (Wace and Stubbings 1962; Morris and Powell 1997) include numerous contributions on the history of the Question.

For more detailed approaches to specific periods of modern Homeric studies see R. Weiss, *The Renaissance discovery of Classical Antiquity*, Oxford, 1969; D.M. Foerster, *Homer in English Criticism: The Historical Approach in the Eighteenth Century, Yale Studies in English*, 105, 1947; K. Simonsuri, *Homer's Original Genius: Eighteenth-century notions of the early Greek epic, 1688-1798*, Cambridge, 1979.

For systematic bibliographical references to the field see Packard (1974) and, especially, Heubeck (1988).

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as the field through which the conditions of readability of antique literature are critically checked and established as the prerequisite of its reading[1].

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[1] Philology at large, in its historical development, is another major issue on which this thesis does not intend to elaborate. Aspects of it will be addressed in passing remarks, whenever particularly pertinent to Wolf's *Prolegomena*. The following elements could be noted here.

In histories of classical scholarship, a certain number of eras or moments of evolution and change are almost invariably distinguished, forming the following periodological schema. Carolingian revival of the 8th century A. D. and "first renaissance" of the 12th century (with concomitant developments in the Byzantine East); Italian Renaissance proper, followed by the expansion of early Humanist philology, especially in France (14-16th centuries); distinctly scientific but also religiously animated philological sensibility moving from France to the Netherlands and England (16-17th centuries); generalisation and flourishing of Humanist scholarly traditions, during the age of the Enlightenment, combining neo-classicism with early romantic insights, especially in Italy and Germany (18th century); German historicism and philology, applied to classical and Biblical studies, setting the model of a distinctly modern academic profile (19th century).

Each historian underscores a different socio-intellectual aspect or agency as particularly significant throughout the process – thus exposing particular components of the tensions which have run through the field, within the setting of the epistemic and discursive formation of modernity. Reynolds and Wilson (1991) is the most technical and informative, emphasising developing aspects of editorial and grammatological experience. For Pfeiffer (1968; 1976), classical scholarship emerges out of a gradual heightening of critical awareness of poets and literary writers (1976, 4), while developing in relative distance from the rather secluded field of religious hermeneutics (1976, 90 and 130). Diverging from the former, Gusdorf (1988) retains polemical overtones in stressing the direct connection between the advancement of textual criticism and the Protestant hermeneutic tradition. Wolf would, more specifically, be inaugurating an era of "athéisme homérique" particularly critical with respect to the tradition of catholic or counter-reformational Humanism. Myres (1958) also connects the beginnings of modern scholarly philology to the "essential Protestantism" of English and German intellectual traditions (38 and 69) but is far from Gusdorf's polemical tones. Grafton (1991) also relates Wolf's methodology to 18th century Biblical textual criticism, but views German philology as the outcome of a much wider tradition of modern scientific sensibility. Humanist scholarship would have gradually broken with scholasticist and allegorical practices or religious polemics, developing, especially since the 16th century, as an expression of a properly scientific culture, elaborating its "fundamentally historical approach". For a concise analysis and historical

A.1.4. The Wolfian Paradigm

As I have already noted, Wolf's *Prolegomena*, although explicitly programmatic and often polemical, is not theoretical in scope and character. We do not have an elaboration of ideas or concepts immediately pertaining to a philosophy of history or theory of literature. We are closer to a tentative enactment of implicit epistemological suggestions.

The reading of *Prolegomena* should, in this respect, seriously take into account two closely interconnected components of its language, which have attributed to it a largely esoteric status – namely, its Latin idiom and its acutely ironic rhetoric[1]. Both these characteristics draw Wolf's treatise close to the

presentation of the more general role of early Humanist intelligentsia and scholarship in the formation of Europe, see also Pomian (1990).

One could also recall the relatively recent debate (of a political rather than theoretical interest) launched by Bernal (1987) and his critique against the "eurocentric" or "racist" ideological premises of classical scholarship and philology, especially during the 19th century. See the reactions recorded in Lefkowitz and MacLean Rogers (1996).

For a particularly interesting and theoretically pertinent epistemological critique of traditional philological premises, centred on the notion of *text*, see Cerquiglini (1989).

Foucault (1966) remains, in my opinion, the most insightful and imposing general approach to an "archaeological" history of the modern Humanist episteme, up to the emergence of what we know as "human sciences".

For an annotated bibliography of the history classical scholarship see Calder and Kraner (1992). See also Hummel (2000), in which the history of philology as a field in itself becomes the object of an informed bibliographical and historical approach.

[1] According to Turner (1997, 125), *Prolegomena* was the "last major work of European intellectual history to be composed and published in learned Latin". Philology, it should be recalled, is the scholarly field that has retained the most lasting working knowledge of the Humanist neo-Latin idiom. Wolf's text circulated for use by philology scholars and students only in Latin for more than a century. Its first German translation, to my knowledge, was the one published by Herman Muchlau in Leipzig, 1908. Its first translation in English is as recent as 1985.

A.1. *Philological Historicism*

Humanist tradition, against which it mostly directs its critique. They also distance it from the academic field that subsequently drew on its paradigm – as well as from more explicitly theoretical statements of German historicism.

Wolf's Latin, it should be remarked, is not easily translatable into notions formed by modern national and academic languages. Wolf's *gens* or *populus* relate to but are not the exact equivalent of *Nation*. His *cultus vitae* or *habitus* are vaguer than *Kultur*. His *forma* may resist the passage from *Bild* to *Bildung*. The terms *writing* and *text* interconnect differently than *scripta* and *textus* do.

The neo-Latin rhetoric of *Prolegomena* also accounts, at least in part, for the "sort of unresolved internal dialogue" (Grafton 1985, 35), which has been seen as characteristic of Wolf's discourse. This is not simply a matter of style. It amounts to a mode of open-ended or inconclusive argumentation which marks Wolf's writing. Note that Wolf's *Prolegomena* adds one more title to the list of paradigmatic works that remain "unfinished". Closing the introductory section of his treatise, Wolf announces an "inquiry, by which the internal critical history [*interior historia critica*] of these poems will be brought down to our own time through the study of six stages of uneven length and character" (VII)[1]. Wolf's *Prolegomena,* however, stops at the middle of the third stage, forgetting the times from Longinus to "the last three centuries". In the same introductory section, a "second part" of the whole work is announced. It would deal "with the principles on which the emendation of Homer rests, and with its most important and peculiar rules, and with giving an account of our project" (VII). The treatise, concludes, indeed, with the indication "End of volume I" – but no further

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[1] I will be referring to *Prolegomena* by citing the Latin numeral used as a title of each of the relatively short LI chapters that comprise its first edition. I will be adding page references, whenever necessary or useful, to its 1985 English translation (abbreviated as *PRE*) and to the 1963 Latin edition I have used (abbreviated as *PRL*) .

volume ever appeared or even seems to have been prepared after its 1795 first edition[1].

What we have, can thus be described as the prolegomena to the landscape of a task, the general horizon of which remains a question as open as the Homeric one[2]. The connection of *Prolegomena* to the theoretical and methodological premises of historicist thought, as subsequently elaborated within the field of German idealism and historical sciences, cannot be doubted – and we can safely qualify, I think, the Wolfian paradigm as "historicist". This, implies that the corresponding connections, often including tensions, or even incompatibilities, need further investigation[3].

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[1] From the anticipated "second part" of *Prolegomena*, we only have two fragments, posthumously published for the first time in the 1876 Bekker edition – and included in *PRE* but not in *PRL*.

[2] Grafton (1985) remarks:

"The Prolegomena, a partial and fragmentary treatise demonstrating the partial and fragmentary nature of a classical text whose canonical unity and perfection have not ceased to dominate our imagination, opened up a discipline that has not yet been entirely closed off in our time: classical philology." (35)

[3] Here is a short outline of the whole, in groups of chapters – which I present so that the reader can better situate the different points I will be raising or passages I will be quoting:

- on the state of the standardised printed version of the Homeric "vulgate" and the significance of the edition of recently discovered Homeric manuscripts (I-VII);

- preliminary methodological remarks and exposition of basic hypotheses concerning the original oral form and subsequent writing-down of the Homeric poems (VIII-XI);

- external evidence, from the history writing in pre-classical Greece, corroborating the hypothesis of an originally oral form of the Homeric poems (XII-XXVI);

- internal evidence, from the received Homeric text, suggesting that the poems as wholes are the result of post-Homeric compilation and transmission processes based on originally smaller orally composed songs (XXVII-XXXI);

- "critical history" of the Homeric manuscript tradition; first age: from Solon to the first written synthesis of a Homeric corpus in Pisistratidean Athens (XXXII-XXXV);

A.1. *Philological Historicism*

A.1.5. Byzantine Vulgate

What was the state of the scribal material to which Wolf addressed his criticism?

During the middle-ages, the western part of the old Roman Empire knew and possessed only a few Greek manuscripts, mostly of ecclesiastical nature[1] – amongst which there was no Homer. It is only with the "manuscript hunt", undertaken by early Humanist scholars[2], that manuscripts of poems known as Homeric arrived in the West[3]. They came from Byzantine monasteries and

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- second age: from Pisistratus to Hellenistic Alexandria, an age of proliferation of variant copies and early exegetical readings of Homer (XXXVI-XL);

- third age: Alexandrian criticism as an antecedent of modern philology; detailed examination of the extent and general spirit of the contribution of each of the three major Alexandrian critics, namely Zenodotus, Aristophanes and especially Aristarchus; brief remarks on the regression of genuine critical spirit in the school of Pergamus (XLI-LII);

- "Second Part": two chapters containing mainly methodological remarks, including a comparison of the Homeric case to that of the Masoretic text of the Old Testament.

[1] For more details see Reynolds and Wilson (1991).

[2] The "manuscript hunt" (just as often referred to as the "rescuing" of manuscripts of Greek texts from the decaying Byzantine Empire) begun around the middle of the 14th century and continued for more than a century, involving different methods and mediators of transfer. Cardinal Bessarion, neo-platonist scholar originating from Byzantine Trapezounda, contributed about 500 Greek manuscripts to the Republic of Venice around 1468; Janus Lascaris, as agent of Lorenzo di Medici, transferred another 200 from Mount Athos to Florence (Reynolds and Wilson 1991, 48-49).

[3] Histories of philology often name the man who, in 1354, is recorded as having received, from the hands of Nikolas Sigeros, envoy of the Byzantine empire to the papal court at Avignon, the first (relatively recent) manuscript of a Homeric text, in its original language. Not surprisingly, the man was Petrarch, the very prototype and initiator of renaissance Humanist

libraries; they were known to be a relatively recent offspring of a long process of copying and annotating. Each manuscript or group of manuscripts has since followed its own trajectory, usually leading to a major Western European library, in which it can still be found today.

The Byzantine manuscripts are quite idiosyncratic scriptural constructs. Some manuscripts contain the whole of either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, but others are fragmentary. Many appear to have been composed by a multiplicity of hands. Their material support is predominantly paper or parchment, in the form of a codex (which started replacing the papyrus or parchment scroll after the second century A.D.). The script is of a minuscule type (an invention of the ninth century A.D., both for the Latin West and the Greek East, replacing older uncial scripts and drastically altering and facilitating copying work). The poetic corpus is written in verse-lines (which was not necessarily the case in antiquity). The words are separated and systematic accentuation and punctuation is the rule (foreign to older writing and copying practices). The overall corpus of each poem is usually divided into 24 books or rhapsodies, numbered and entitled by each of the letters of the Greek attic alphabet (a division which remains, today, of uncertain origin). In some cases, further titles or summaries (also of uncertain origin) occur at the beginning of each rhapsody. Occasionally, interlinear translation into Byzantine Greek is added.

At the margins of the poetic corpus, annotations are often adjoined, concerning passages occasionally repeated in a lemma. These scholia are mainly comments grammatical, pragmatic or exegetic; they may also include recorded or suggested alternative versions of passages – that is, variant readings. Some of those comments or variants are ascribed to scholars of Hellenistic or early Roman times, occasionally cited by name. Most of them are drawn from older manuscripts, which had drawn them, in turn, from various sources, such as

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scholarship – to whom Greek was still unreadable and who encouraged a Latin translation of the text (Pfeiffer 1976, 14).

Roman compilations of older commentaries or grammatical treatises, recording the work of such scholars[1].

Humanist scholars were actively engaged in the task of editing and printing Greek manuscripts, including Homer – in co-operation, often tense, with typographers. The *editio princeps* of the Homeric poems appeared in Florence, in 1488[2]. Editions of Homer proliferated, based on what was later criticised as a rather hasty and little informed collation of most recent manuscripts. They often accompanied the poetic corpus with commentaries attributed to older scholiasts of Homer. More recent commentaries on Homer, such as the one of Eustathius, Archbishop of Thessaloniki (1193-1197), were also published autonomously. In 1566, Henry Estienne (Stephanus) established a new editorial standard for Homer, based on the collation of a 13th century manuscript of the *Iliad*[3]. In 1656, the edition of Schrevelius set the model of printing the Greek text with a parallel Latin translation and a set of systematic editorial notes. In 1707 the edition of Barnes inaugurated the practice of a more or less organised recension and collation of a relatively large number of manuscripts[4]. An important editorial event occurred in 1788, when the French scholar J. B. d' Ansse de Villoison edited the oldest extant manuscripts of the *Iliad*, known as *Venetus A* and *Venetus B*,

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[1] For a recent overview of the Homeric scholia, their origins and characteristics, as well as their editions and significance, see Nagy (1997).

[2] The edition was composed by Demetrius Chalcondyles and printed by Demetrius Damilas, both of Byzantine origin. It was based on a manuscript, probably destroyed by the editors, which Allen identifies as a practically contemporary one, belonging to a family the earliest extant exemplar of which dates from the 13th century (Allen 1931, 249).

[3] This manuscript was later identified as the *Genevensis 44.* It is stored, today, in the *Bibliothèque Publique Universitaire* of Geneva – where I have had the chance to consult it.

[4] For more details on early editions of Homer see Allen (1931, chap. VI).

discovered in the library of St. Mark in Venice. *Venetus A* dates from the 10th century of our era and had been probably transferred to Venice at the beginning of the 15th century (Pfeiffer 1976, 48).

Villoison's edition included the long-awaited marginal scholia of the two manuscripts, especially *Venetus A*. These marginalia are unique in their quantity, detail and citation of sources[1]. They transmit information on how scholarly authorities of Hellenistic Alexandria (mainly of the third and second centuries B. C.) had critically evaluated the Homeric text they had received and collected from different, albeit never unambiguously identified, sources. The information suggested that Alexandrian scholars – such as Zenodotus, Aristophanes and, ultimately, Aristarchus – could be acknowledged as the first systematic editors of Homer, although much remained unknown as to the exact extent and status of their editorial work.

The hypothesis of an Alexandrian editorial intervention offered a historically plausible explanation of a phenomenon that would otherwise be quite paradoxical, given the uncertainty and complexity through which the Homeric *scripta* were known to have been produced. I am referring to the fact that the Byzantine copying tradition carries a relatively uniform poetic corpus, in spite of occasional variant readings adopted or marginally recorded in different manuscripts or groups of manuscripts. The exact extent and significance, as well as the authority of each of these variants are, of course, a major issue of editorial contention. Nevertheless, Byzantine manuscripts as a whole have been presenting the modern reader and editor with what has long been considered as a Homeric *vulgate*[2]. All modern editions of Homer have been reproducing (with minor lexical and grammatical variations, depending on specific manuscript

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[1] One of the specificities of the *Venetus A* is that its scribes cite, in endnotes, by name of author and title of work, the sources from which they drew the information they record.

[2] The term is also used extensively, although mostly ironically, in Wolf.

A.1. *Philological Historicism*

sources and editorial choices) this vulgate, with its given sequence of lines, according to a numbering established in early editions of Homer. Modernity has always had to deal with the same 27803 verses for the two major Homeric poems, of which 15693 for the *Iliad*[1].

The term *vulgate* alludes, of course, to the kind of authority enjoyed by the Latin *vulgata* of the Bible. Wolfian philology questioned this authority on the grounds of its historical sense of textual form. The manuscript construct does, perhaps, transmit a unitary poetic corpus, but does it also provide us with a text readable as historically one and a valid one?

Prolegomena is largely based on a systematic investigation of the *Venetus* scholia. Wolf does not read them, though, as a confirmation of the authority of the Byzantine vulgate. On the contrary, the scholia could prove that its corpus is the outcome of a long and varied process of recording and copying, different phases and components of which are deprived of historical validity. Consequently, its offspring would be historically questionable, in need of further and definitive textual reformation, as a condition of its readability.

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[1] The figures for the total sum of verses are from Clarke (1981, 264) and for the *Iliad* from Mazon (1959, 62).

A.2. TEXTUAL FORM

A.2.1. The Modern Voice of History

The following passage states a basic hypothesis of *Prolegomena* and names its authority: *historia* is the instance that sustains the Wolfian discourse.

> The Homer that we have in our hands now is not the one that flourished in the mouths of the Greeks of his own day, but one variously altered, interpolated, corrected and emended from the times of Solon down to those of the Alexandrians. Learned and clever men have long felt their way to this conclusion by using various scattered bits of evidence; but now the voices of all periods joined together bear witness, and history speaks [*in anima coniuctae voces omnium temporum testantur et loquitur historia*] *.* (XLIX; *PRE,* 209; *PRL,* 204-205)

The voice of Wolfian history does not repeat or echo older, equally historical voices. It is the voice of the *ratio* referred to in the sub-title of the treatise: a new kind of scholarly judgement, through which older voices are reworked and reactivated assuming the status of useful or insurmountable, yet dubious testimonies. It emerges against and out of a background of chaotic darkness that marks all historical origins:

> One who seeks ancient authority in the midst of all this uncertainty confronts the obscurity [*tenebrae originibus*] that often crops up around the origins of ancient arts. But antiquity saw the origins and slow progress of many more things, the slender beginnings of which were witnessed by few and the utility of which to posterity was of concern to none [*nemo curaret*]. (XIII; *PRE,* 75; *PRL,* 35)

Historical *ratio* is explicitly qualified as distinctly modern. Modern historians break out of a pre-modern realm of rudimentary memory, which has been generating invalid opinion or fable-like stories. They re-arrange its *tenebrae* into a field of historically developing national cultures. These cultures Wolfian Latin names *habitus* or *cultus vitae* – and the corresponding nations *gentes* or *populi*:

> The mature race [*gens adulta*] examined its origins only at a late date, when the memory of the first inventions had been obscured by the long time that had elapsed, and divergent reports had given rise to different

opinions and new stories [*variis opinionibus et novis fabulis*]. Nor did historians employ that philosophical ingenuity [*sollerti philosophandi*] with which we have investigated the progress and capacity of the human mind in inventing things, now that we have learned to take a wider view of the world [*post quam orbem terrae latius circumspicere*] and to compare the habits and customs [*habitus et consuetudines comparare*] of different peoples [*plurium populorum*]that enjoy a similar level of material culture [*simili cultu vitae utentium*]. After all, this is the new light of our times [*nova lux nostrorum temporum*], which was denied to or of little interest to the Greeks. (XIII; *PRE,* 75; *PRL,* 36)

Greek antiquity would be the very example of a state of mind characterised by a defective, if not lacking, sense of historical judgement. Greek `ajkrisiva` (*akrisia,* XIII) governs the initial stages of production and circulation of Homeric poetry (or of antique Greek culture as a whole)[1]. This postulate is as important to *Prolegomena* as the hypothesis of original Homeric orality.

Historical **akrisia** would mark a people "oblivious of its own infancy [*infantiam suam obilti populi*]" (XVII). Its main symptom would be the incapacity to think of the past in terms of a distinction "between stages of development [*progressus non distinguerent*]" (XIV). It lacks the propensity to raise questions over the authentic ascription of books, as opposed to those of their off-hand usability:

> I refer especially to the times when Greece was free, when the conditions of studies [*studiorum conditio*] was very different from that which followed with the rise of the Alexandrian polymathy [`polumaqeiva`]. Those earlier men lived in the forum, not in literary retreats; they were busy smelling out the deceptions involved in false records and forged wills, and more or less ignored the need to deal with forged books. For in the texts of this kind that had appeared they investigated less whether they belonged to those to whom they were commonly ascribed than whether they offered anything useful and worth reading. (XIII, n. 12)

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[1] Herodotus would provide the prototype of a characteristically non-historical telling of stories, in spite of an eventual concern for a kind of truth. Wolf considers him as an "equally zealous lover of truth and eager teller of falsehoods [*veri amanintissimus et fictorum cupidus narrator*]" (XIV).

Alexandrian polymathy marks, for Wolf, the first instance of a novel intellectual concern over the historical appreciation of old book material. The juxtaposition between modesty and creativity, which serves to describe it in the following passage, retains a distinctly Wolfian ironic twist. Modest would be a sense of measure and order – that is, of formness – of which creative beginnings would be deprived. Apart from the excesses of its decorum, this sense would involve the emergence of interpretative concerns, directly connected to those of formational emendation:

> In place of the agora, the speaker's platform, the stage and the public festival appeared museums and libraries; in place of genius rich in its own resources appeared timid imitation which undertook only modest tasks; in place of a very elevated spirit of poetry and elegance appeared sober and sometimes chilled erudition [*sobria, saepe frigida eruditio*], reading spread over all areas of learning [*in omnesque partes doctrinarum diffusa lectio*]; in place of original ideas appeared thoughtness, care, and a certain polish of arrangement and poetic diction [*pro inventionis sollertia sedulitas et cura et nitor quidam dispositionis poeticique sermonis*]; in place, finally, of the magnificent native bloom of all the arts appeared garlands composed of the blossoms from everywhere. Among the studies aroused at just this time by the desire to imitate antiquity was the *art of interpretation and emendation* [*ars fuit interpretandi et emendandi*], a subject that had heretofore been sluggish – and none of the ancient poets supplied greater fodder for it than Homer. (XLI; *PRE,* 167; *PRL,* 167)

At stake, in Wolf, is a critique of historical reason, as the faculty that sustains judgement over the properly historical form of the past.

A.2.2. A Sense of Reading

It would be wrong to identify Wolfian historicism with a naive or positivist quest of facts telling, as such, what has actually happened. The following quotation (with which Wolf passes to the distinctly philological part of his essay) tells us that the crucial task is the elaboration of conjectures or inferences on the grounds of general principles of historical reasoning. Historical *ratio* sustains a conjectural, rather than simply hypothetical reconstruction of the

past as properly historical. The historical *res* is a case to be made, not a fact to be recorded:

> This whole detailed investigation about the time when writing was first received among the Greeks, about the way in which poems were composed and made public in the most ancient times, about the rhapsodes, their sole guardians is, as it were, a preliminary [*protevleia*] to a different and deeper investigation [*diversae et altioris questionis*]. Here suddenly the whole field of arguments changes [*omnis campus disputationis mutatur*], historical evidence [*vestigia historica*] practically vanishes, and conjecture and inference [*conjectura et ratiocinatio*] tremblingly [*trepide*] take its place. These do not seek after the testimony [*quid … afferat*] of Herodotus, Plato or Aristotle himself, but rather follow out [*efficiatur*] with rigorous judgement [*severo iudicio*] and compare with nature itself [*ipsa natura comparans*] the conclusions that can be drawn from carefully thought-out principles [*quid ex principiis bene provisis cogatur*]. Conjectures [*coniecturas*] of this sort the mob nowadays tends to defame by calling them hypotheses [*hypothesium*]. A sad fate: but after much hesitation, having waited for someone else, more confident than we, to make the attempt, we need no longer be apprehensive of outgrown reputation. Instead, let us say at once, in all clarity [*planissime*], what the case is [*quod res est*]. (XXVI; *PRE,* 114; *PRL,* 83)

Conditional is the rhetorical mode of existence of the Wolfian *res.* Note the oxymoronic twists of the following formulation – in its original and English versions. What is *beyond doubt* is that things *could* have happened as historical rationale *proves* they *have* happened:

> All these considerations, based upon the genius and character of those times [*ex illorum temporum ingeniis ac moribus existimata*] leave no room or doubt about how what historical arguments prove to have happened could indeed have happened [*fieri potuerit illud, quod factum esse historicae rationes pervicerunt*]. (XXIV; *PRE,* 111; *PRL,* 79)

Historical *ratio* thus functions as a mechanism of a complex epistemic control and correction exercised on common-sense intellectual operations such as those of memory – often supposed to sustain uncertain knowledge of what has actually happened. At the same time, the exact epistemological status of the historical *ratio* is presented by Wolf as quite ambiguous and, in a sense, non-definable. Its intellectual authority is said to stem from a "certain kind of sense" that transcends argumentative conviction or certainty: "for these matters one

needs a certain sensibility [*sensu quodam*] which arguments do not provide"
(XXXV). A series of tropes shed more light on the Wolfian notion of philological
sensus. There is, for instance, *eruare*. The figure metonymically refers to
archaeological excavation; it also connects, metaphorically, to an act of digging
out with a certain degree of violence, as when tearing or plucking away. The
philological sense excavates historical form out of a-historical story-telling. It
entails a methodical deconstruction of memorial *fabula*:

> We, who think that we know the difference between fable and history
> [*quid inter fabulam et historiam intersit*], recognize here the history which is
> hidden under the fable [*historiam sub fabula occultatam*] and which has to be
> excavated by a method similar [*simili eruendam modo*] to that used by
> scholars for Jewish inventions about the seventy-two translators. (XXXIII;
> *PRE,* 141; *PRL,* 114)

Equivalent tropes mark the rhetoric of the first chapter of *Prolegomena*, which is
on the inadequacy of older practices of recension and emendation of
manuscripts. The metaphor of the "good doctor", but also the synecdoche of a
"conscientious judge" configure the philologist in his task. Implied, in both
figures, is the legitimate questioning of the obvious – the authority to designate
what stands in need of cure or regulation, even and especially when everything
seems to be in perfect health or order:

> Not uncommonly then, when the witnesses require it, a true recension
> replaces attractive readings with less attractive ones. It takes off bandages
> and lays bare the sores [*emplastris solutis ulcera nudat*]. Finally, it cures not
> only manifest ills, as bad doctors do, but hidden ones too. […] we must
> strive above all […] to judge each of the various witnesses, once they are
> set out by classes and families, by its character; and to learn to follow their
> voices and gestures [*voces et nutus excipere*], so to speak, with cunning, but
> without bias [*calliditate … nec … cupida*]. Indeed, in many cases both the
> critic and anyone who would undertake an historical investigation, must
> emulate the prudent custom of a good judge [*boni judicis consuetudo et
> prudentia*], who slowly examines the testimony of the witnesses, and
> gathers all the evidence for their truthfulness before he ventures to put
> forward his own conjecture about the case. (I; *PRE,* 44-45; *PRL,* 2-3)

Readability is at stake: the conditions under which any reading would
address a historically valid scribal object. *Prolegomena* concerns, not the methods

or techniques of interpretative understanding but their epistemic prerequisite. Indeed, the philological *sensus* questions the validity of transmitted *scripta* even and perhaps especially when their language and scripture are perfectly accessible to current reading practices:

> But what sort of book do we call "pure" [*integrum librum*] in the critical sense [*critico sensu*] of the word? Clearly not one which can be read without displeasure, and in which nothing violates elegant usage and the other laws of correct writing. Granted that there is nothing of that sort on the vulgate text, it should not on that account be considered pure and *correct* throughout. On the contrary, sometimes the very fact that it contains nothing of that sort may make it appear all the more devoid of genuine purity [*germana integritate sua fraudatus*]. (VIII; *PRE,* 59; *PRL,* 18)

Historical reason does not solve old problems of reading: it creates novel ones, which posit reading as an act of historical knowledge. In other words, the Wolfian critique of historical reason is a critique of the conditions of reading. Wolf targets, most persistently, two main instances of non-historical or historically suspect reading, which he sees as commonly predominating. The first would be the sophisticated version of reading exemplified by earlier debates on the value and significance of Homer. It would stem from the aesthetic or philosophical problematics akin to the neo-classicist understanding of Aristotelian poetics. The philologist should take "Aristotle's laws and throw them into disorder" (XXIX) so that the issue of historical readability may be effectively addressed:

> […] the question is one which must be attacked not from the standpoint of what is in accordance with poetic laws [*poeticis legibus consentaneum*] or what we believe sheds honor upon the poet, but rather from what appears to be probable on historical and critical grounds [*ex historicis et criticis rationibus verisimile esse*]. (XXX; *PRE,* 127; *PRL,* 98)

Prior (but also parallel) to neo-classical approaches, there would be the more popular tradition of allegorical or otherwise figurative interpretation. The *allegorica et anagogica somnia* (XXXVI), as Wolf puts it, mistake problems of historical criticism for exegetical enigmas, especially in the case of particularly influential or sacred books.

It would be wrong to consider that Wolfian philology wholly erases concerns of interpretative understanding or aesthetic adequacy. It is, rather, a way of containing them and putting them under the new, over-determinant perspective of *historicae et criticae rationes*. Wolf can thus retain, even if only ironically so, the conventional figure of Homer as the "prince of poets":

> But what shall I say of the cases that reveal that 'literal inspiration of the Muses' [*illam* Mousopneustivan] is spoiled by human carelessness and ignorance [*produnt humana negligentia et inscitia vitiatam*], by barbarisms and solecisms [*barbarismis et soloecismis*], and by corruptions of thought and language [*depravationibus sententiae et orationis*] that no one could accept with equanimity in any writer, much less in the best of all writers [*in hoc omnium principe*]? (X; *PRE,* 65; *PRL,* 25).

A.2.3. Form: Historical

The main theoretical interest of *Prolegomena* lies, as I have already suggested, in the relations that it posits between history and form. These relations are treated in terms more complicated than we usually suspect when thinking of "historicism".

For Wolf, form would be necessarily historical in two distinct but interrelated ways. On the one hand, the *vestigia* of the past (especially linguistic remains) would be inherently connected to the form of their historical origin, that is, of the *cultus vitae* from which they spring. This connection would *not* entail relations of immediate or non-problematic expression or representation. It would be mediated and problematised by the evolution of historical awareness, which determines whether and how, the genuinely historical forms of life are readable through the constructs they have generated. An even stronger claim is implicitly made by Wolf in this respect. Properly historical forms can *only* emerge *a posteriori,* out of constructs that, however close to the reality that generated them, are necessarily deficient from a strictly formal-historical point of view. Wolfian history is a process of gradual but also painstaking affirmation of formness. The

accomplishment of this process would depend on the intellectual perspective and the formational capacity of the present, and, ultimately, on the historical sense of philological modernity.

The Homeric Question provides, for Wolf, the opportunity for an exemplary quest of principles of historical formness, in view of the imposition of properly historical form onto the formally deficient *scripta* of a manuscript and printed vulgate.

According to the historical *ratio*, the initial Homeric compositions *must* have been rudimentary in form, as compared to the constructs that recorded and transmitted them as poetry. There *must* have initially been compositions of limited scale, loosely connected amongst them, subsequently articulated into new lager wholes, of which they became integral parts. Historical *ratio* discards as an absurdity the idea of a sudden emergence of a formed whole, like the one that the transmitted Homeric *scripta* present us with:

> But as for me, whether I contemplate the progress of Greeks themselves or of other races [*gentium*], I find it impossible to accept [*illud minime credibile videtur*]the belief to which we have been accustomed: that these two works of a single genius burst forth suddenly from the darkness [*ex tenebris splendescere*] in all their brilliance, just as they are, with both the splendor of their parts [*nitore partium*] and the many great virtues of the connected whole [*summae perpetuae*]. (XXXV ; *PRE,* 148 ; *PRL,* 122)[1]

The origins of Greece, just as those of the *cultus vitae* of all *gentium*, are historical *tenebrae*. No forms of *summae perpetuae* can be assumed to have emerged all at once, under such conditions of almost pre-historical beginnings. According to historical sense, an inaugural *ingenium* cannot have been capable of producing forms of extended articulated wholes and to have thus already

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[1] cf. Pope who, almost a century before Wolf, was happy to acknowledge a quasi-miraculous offspring of Homeric poetic invention. Wolf sounds as if directly contradicting Pope's "Essay on Homer", especially the following statement: "Thus he [Homer] rose over the Poetical World, shining like a Sun all at once, which if it sometimes makes too faint an appearance, 'tis to be ascribed only to the unkindness of the Season that clouds and obscures it" (Pope 1967, VII: 67).

reached formational perfection (*limitissimus et omni arte perfectissimus*: XXVI). In the following passage, the same premise is formulated in terms of a philosophical, if not metaphysical, principle governing historical formness – ironically juxtaposed to instances of Godly creation:

> There once were philosophers who decreed that this universal framework of all things and bodies [*hanc omnium rerum ac corporum compagem et universatem*] was not made by a divine mind and will [*mente numineque*], but instead was born and developed by accident and chance [*forte et casu*]. I do not fear that anyone will accuse me of like temerity if I am led by the traces of an artistic framework [*vestigiis artificiosae compagis*] and by other serious considerations to think that Homer was not the creator of all his – so to speak – bodies [*quasi corporum suorum*], but rather that this artistic structure [*hanc artem et structuram*] was introduced by later ages. For we find that this was not done suddenly by chance [*neque enim id repente fortuite factum*], but that instead the energies [*studia*] of several ages and men were joined together in this activity. (XXXI; *PRE,* 131; *PRL,* 102)

There *must* have been a Homer, Wolf says, who created initial compositional units, singing "different songs separately and without regard for the uni-formation of the whole [*nulla spectatione universae formae*]" (XVIII). These songs *must* have been joined as parts of an artistic whole only later, through the studious travail of a different kind of creative genius. Wolf's ambiguous and ironic rhetoric enables him never to dimisss the value of either of the two states of form marking the evolution of Homeric poetry. Homer remains, as we have seen, the *princeps* of poets; but the artistry of those who have eventually formed his poems into wholes is persistently acknowledged as also admirable. Let us examine more closely the Wolfian figure of the original Homeric genius.

I will not insist on the rhetorical concessions Wolf grants to the neo-classicist appreciation of the Homeric talent. It suffices to note that Wolf's Homer is a youthful yet supreme natural genius whose praise-worthy poetry (*iuvenilier ludensi populo*) combines subtlety of judgement (*iudicii subtilitatem*), and divine intellectual power (*cum divina ingenii vi ac spiritu*)[1]. Cutting through such

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[1] See especially chap. XLIX.

rhetorical clichés, Wolf insists that the historical position of Homer disallowed, not genius as such, but the specific kind of artistry necessary to the formation of articulated compositional wholes:

> But I submit that it is not so much wisdom and preeminence in artistic skill [*sapientiam et praestantiam artis*] that are foreign to the historical position and inner talent of Homer [*ab Homeri loco et indole alienam esse*], but rather the planning of a continuous story which is so long and so varied in its episodes [*tante et tam varie epsodiis distinctae perpetuitatis cogitationem*]. (XXVIII; *PRE,* 123; *PRL,* 93-94)

Post-Homeric artistry, on the other hand, would have the skill to turn original poetic compositions into parts of a new *monumentum*:

> Later, in an age which was more polished and richer in the arts [*politiore et abundatiore artibus aevo*], someone noticed that by <u>forcing</u> these episodes into a single great continuus body [*ad unius magni corporis <u>redacta</u>*] by a few excisions, additions, and changes, they could be <u>made as it were into a new and more perfect and splendid monument</u> [*<u>novum quasi et perfectius splendiusque monumentum fore</u>*]. (XVIII; *PRE,* 122; *PRL,* 2)

The English "forcing", in the above quoted passage, is not in Wolf's *redacta*. In the same chapter, Wolf remarks that the initial songs were not necessarily deprived of a basic theme (*argumentum*) or plot (*ordina fabulae*). The overall narrative thread was already present in them, even if only as a potential: "the thread of the legend [*filum fabulae*] appears to have already been spun out [*ductum esse*] at some length by its first author". One can thus envisage that an individual named Homer produced the larger and earlier part of what we know as Homeric poetry. He would be "the man responsible for the larger part and the order of the earlier books [*priorum rhapsodiarum series*]" (XXXI).

This answer to one of the basic components of the Homeric Question does not close the issue that Wolf intends to raise: it opens it. Since this issue resides in the exact relations between the initial Homeric songs and their subsequent fate, the probing of these relations would reform our transmitted material in a way that renders it historically valid.

An important postulate in this respect is that the artistry that turned Homeric songs into articulate wholes is not historically alien to its precedents. It

would be connected to them, under a perspective of historical formness. The corresponding "redaction" would even be the condition under which the form of originally Homeric *cultus vitae* can be eventually addressed in its historical specificity. Turning Homer into a historical *monumentum* would be the first, albeit insufficient or even fallacious step towards forming Homer into an object of historical appreciation and knowledge.

There is a Wolfian sense in which the form of original Homeric songs is as defective or problematic, historically, as that of their initial articulation into larger wholes. Neither original Homer nor subsequent articulators should be expected to have provided history with the proper forms of the historical life they strove to express or represent. Historical formness presupposes the advent of philological sense, the lack of which marked, one way or the other, all linguistic expressions of antique *akrisia*.

Wolf's task consists in the critical reconstruction of the long historical process leading from original oral compositions to their first written recording as articulated wholes, and from there to the emergence of more mature scribal forms. Let us see how Wolf understands, from the perspective of historical formness, the relations between original orality, initial written recording and eventual textualisation.

A.2.4. Writing over Orality

Wolf's analysis from chapter XII to XXXI, presents evidence according to which Homeric works initially emerged as songs before the invention or extended use of writing. Wolf also examines evidence "internal" to the vulgate, corroborating the hypothesis that the vulgate results from a subsequent compilation of orally composed precedents. I will not elaborate on how Wolf endorses and re-valorises (not without reservations against older arguments) the current idea of a first writing down of Homeric poems under the reign of the

Pisistratidae (sixth century B.C.)[1]. I will concentrate on the claim that the articulation of larger poetic wholes, as we know them, presupposes writing.

This claim implies a more general theoretical postulate: historical formness would be connected to a historical passage from oral to written culture. We are dealing, in other terms, with the typically historicist standpoint, according to which history, as an object of valid knowledge, is co-extensive with writing. Orality assumes the problematic status of a pre- or a-historical condition of tenebrous formlessness. With the advent and expansion of written culture, the faculty of historical knowledge (more particularly, its formational sense) would control and over-determine the faculty of memory, which governs oral practices.

It would be within the very nature of original Homeric genius *not* to be able to articulate forms of large artistic wholes. This, as we have seen, is a basic postulate of historical reasoning. The hypothesis that corroborates the conjecture is that the oral-aoidic *cultus vitae* lacked an "artificial aid to memory". This aid acquires a crucially important weight, as it lays the very grounds on which forms of compositional whole can be envisaged:

> It seems to follow necessarily from what we said above that works which are so large and are drawn out in an unbroken sequence [*tam magnorum et perpetua serie deductorum operum* _formam_] could neither have been conceived mentally nor worked out [*nec designari animo nec elaborari potuisse*] by any poet without an artificial aid for the memory [_artificioso adminiculo memoriae_]. Say that Homer had a genius [*ingenium*] sent down from heaven, capable of the most lofty cogitations [*altissimarum cogitationum*] with which he could try the knowledge [*scientiam*] of all things, divine and human; say that he is for us, as Velleius says, the very greatest, without model and without rival – and surely the splendour of his light will never arise again, unless the globe should see a second Greece come to birth; say that he who surpassed all others in natural genius possessed at the same time – what is contrary to nature [*praeter

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[1] Homer as the composer of original songs is thus pushed back to a quite early date, while writing, together with book-culture and the written recording of the songs, are moved to a relatively recent one. The absence of reference to alphabetic writing in the Homeric texts would corroborate this schema.

naturam]– every art in its most polished and most perfect form [*limatissimus idem et omni arte prefectissimus*]. Not even to a man like this can we attribute something that quite exceeds the grasp of mankind [*prorsus humanitatis captum superat*] something for the mere conception [*mente complectendo*] of which the space, the material and the foundation [*locus et materia et fundamentum*] were all lacking." (XXVI; *PRE,* 114-115; *PRL,* 83-84)

Writing, as an *artificiosus adminiculum memoriae* opens and secures the space, material and foundation required for the conception and elaboration of historical form. *Prolegomena* also attributes to this "artifical aid" the status of a *necessary* supplement: a *necessarius subsidiu*s with which natural talent should be coupled, in order to produce articulate compositional wholes (XXVIII). Wolf thus brings to the foreground the famous and once more confirmed *supplément* of writing (Derrida 1967).

It should be noted that the status of writing, in Wolf, is not at all that of a subsidiary device, dominated by the figure of fundamentally oral *logos*. Wolf's *supplément* is a crucial occurrence that permits historical formness to deploy itself, eventually reaching a point in which forms of historical knowledge predominate over the quasi-formless products of memorial orality. In short, Wolfian logocentrism is not phonocentric in the rather simplistic way in which we often tend to think of modernity and its metaphysics. The referential connection between written forms and their oral precedents does not entail the reduction of the former to the latter. The opposite would be closer to Wolf. Orality, in order to be historically formed, would be largely dependent on the formational potential of writing. Writing, Wolf tells us, is what drives humans to explore and enact the possibility of forming articulate wholes:

One motive among others [*praeter alias causas*] for seeking out that uninterrupted sequence [*tenorem*] could have been the very activity of writing [*ipsa cura continua scriptionis*], in which each poem had to be assigned its place [*suus locus assignandus erat*]. (XXXIV; *PRE,* 142; *PRL,* 115)

The formation of articulate literary wholes is also seen as conditioned by the emergence of reading activity, which would stimulate the written use of language :

> Since Homer lacked readers [*lectores deerant*], then I certainly do not understand what in the world could have impelled him to plan and think out [*in consilium et cogitationem*] poems which were so long [*tam longorum*] and were strung together with an unbroken connection of parts [*continuo partium nexu consertorum*]. (XXVI; *PRE,* 116; *PRL,* 86)

The passage from orality to literacy would be co-extensive with the passage from a poetic to a prosaic culture[1]. This would be coupled with the establishment of the writing of books as a common custom (*vulgarem consuetudinem scribendi librorumque conficiendorum curam*) connected to the cultivation of prosaic discourse (*cultura prosae orationis*: XVII). We would have a book-culture, entailing the liberation from the constraints of poetic norms and from the corresponding limitations that memory imposes on linguistic form:

> For it seems clearly necessary that at the time when the Greeks seized the impulse to tear away the chains of meter and create prose [*vincula metrica revellendi et prosam condendi*] the art of writing [*scriptoria ars*] was sufficiently manageable, and a supply of instruments [*copia instrumentorum*] was ready which they could use for it without serious difficulty. [...} I do not understand how on earth it could occur to anyone to compose anything in prose, unless he had available some storehouse for his composition other than his own memory [*aliam custodiam compositi... quam memoriam suam*]. For <u>memory is overwhelmed [*obruitur*]</u> and the mind wanders and goes astray [*vagatur et erat*] in this free series of words [*libera continuatione verborun*], which is not bound by any fixed meter, nor set off, as it were, by any limits in which the speech must round itself off completely [*orbem suum conficiat*]. (XVII; *PRE,* 90-91; *PRL,* 54)

The figure of an "overwhelmed" memory is quite noteworthy and persistent in *Prolegomena*. Later (XXIV), the learning (*disciplina* or *discenda*) based on writing (*litteras*) is elaborately juxtaposed to the faculty of memory. The early times of

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[1] "To attempt writing and to fit it to common use seems clearly to have been one and the same thing as to attempt prose and to set oneself to refine it" (XVII).

limited knowledge, Wolf tells us, allowed room for talents related to memory (*brevior orbis duscendorum ingeniis quasi vacuitatem dabat*). In the times of the activities of a more cultivated life (*cultissima vita*), involving broad learning through reading (*multiplex doctrina, a lectiorum librorum revocata*), overwhelmed the domain of memory (*obruebant memoriam*). Alluding to *Phaedros*, Wolf recalls the Platonic conundrum:

> […] the discovery of letters had helped the branches of learning [*inventas litteras profuisse disciplinis*] but had hindered those who would learn them: in fact, the very invention that had been called the medicine of memory [*medicament memoriae*] might not unjustly be termed its injury and ruin [*noxa … et pernicies*] instead. (XXIV; *PRE,* 109; *PRL,* 77)

As it is usually the case with his rhetoric, Wolf here cites old authorities only to take measured distances from them. Nowhere in *Prolegomena* does he appear to regret, platonically, the *obruere* of memory by writing. On the contrary, he implicitly praises it. Instead, his criticism is directed against the persistence of poorly informed, memory-related habits preventing initial writing practices to fully accomplish their formative potential.

Memory (rather than orality as such) and knowledge (enacted through writing) would thus be distinct epistemic realms, entailing tensions between initial emergences of formally defective constructs and subsequent attempts to recover historical forms of the past. History would be the field of such tensions, in which the latter eventually predominates over the former. Philology would be an agency crucially contributing to the culmination of the process.

A.2.5. Scribal *Vestigia*

Wolf warns, from the very outset of his *Prolegomena*, against

> […] the wrong-headed view of those who even today seem to consider the text, which took its present shape little by little and as chance determined [*textum, qualis paullatim forte fortuna factus est*] as genuine and, almost, as

literally inspired by the Muses [*genuinum ac prope* `Mousovpneuston`]" (III; *PRE*, 49; *PRL,* 7).

The idea that the Homeric vulgate was formed *forte fortuna* seems to be contradicted later. Recall that Wolf defends his approach against those who would understand it as saying that things or bodies have been created *forte et casu*[1]. Irony is at work, here, rather than contradiction. On its grounds, a historical dialectic tends to be articulated, through which the relations between the historical forms of the past and the expression of these forms in linguistic remains, are far from simple.

As we have already seen, Wolf suggests that Homer's original singing had already "spun the thread" of the subsequent articulation of larger artistic wholes. Specific characteristics of its diction would corroborate this suggestion: purity of structure, rhetorical moderation, narrative control. Homeric orality would be historically mature enough to have somehow anticipated its own written form and, through it, prosaic formness in general (*quasi praenuncit pedestrem dictionem*: XVII). This anticipatory *praenuntiatio* would explain why and how the original Homeric compositions are inherently related to their written reformation. Homeric *scripta* would thus retain and preserve the very formula of their historical origins:

> Nor indeed are the poems so deformed and reshaped [*deformata et dificta*] that they seem excessively unlike their own original form [*suae formae*] in individual details. Indeed, almost everything in them seems to affirm the same mind [*ingenium*], the same customs [*mores*], the same manner of thinking and speaking [<u>*formulam* *sentiendi et loquendi*</u>]. (L; *PRE*, 210; *PRL,* 205)

Wolf questions the need of absolute representational similarity between originals and copies, as the guarantee of the validity of the latter. Differences of form between various oral or scribal versions of Homer are acknowledged by Wolf as an inevitable fact of historical life. Countering their disturbing mediation,

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[1] See quotation from chap. XXXI. of *Prolegomena*, in section A.2.3 above.

a genuine connection of historical knowledge can be established between the present moment and the remains of the past. The lurking threat of an overall chaos would be undone by the postulated advent of mature historical awareness, through which the dynamics of historical formness are accomplished, history ultimately affirming itself in its definitive and proper forms.

A further figure enacted in *Prolegomena* displays more clearly the Wolfian reasoning: writing is a trace, a *vestigium* of historical form. Still marked by the *akrisia* of its overwhelmed memory, the antique past has been there, through its written constructs and remains, only as a trace of its own historical self. Early *scripturae* contribute, somewhat, to the exposition of the genuinely historical forms of their origins. Nevertheless, they also obscure them. Between the flying words of original Homeric orality and the imminent prospect of an effective textualisation of the Homeric poems, Wolf detects a long process of preliminary gestures of formation, gradually but also *forte fortuna* evolving towards maturation. The Homeric vulgate presents the modern philologist with the accumulated offspring of the corresponding toils. In it, writing retains its primal status of a *vestigium,* a trace of a history still mumbling or even silenced, incapable of clearly voicing its forms:

> […] where history is silent or mumbles [*tecet vel mussitat*] [the true student] must be very willing to allow himself to be beaten by those who know how to interpret obscure report and uncertain traces of transmitted events [*obscuram famam et incerta rerum traditarum vestigia*] with more subtlety. (XI; PRE, 70; *PRL,* 31)

Cutting through the obscure uncertainty of early scribal traces, the philologist investigates underground historical currents, eventually flowing forth as readable, textually restored forms:

> […] it is necessary to investigate with the greater application the changes in the transmitted text, by examining those sources and currents [*fontibus et rivulis*] of them that either flowed forth in the past or are visible even today [*qui vel olim manaverunt, vel etiam hodie patent*]. (VII; *PRE,* 57; *PRL,* 16)

Traces do not have an interest in and for themselves. They are pertinent only insofar as they can help us trace our way back or forth (the two directions

being, in a sense, equivalent) to what they constantly risk obscuring by the very fact that they expose it only vestigially. In this sense, they are as provisionally necessary as they are necessarily imperfect – and ultimately dispensable, once re-formed by the modern philological sense of historical formness. The *prisca et genuina forma* of the past, indistinguishably textual and historical, would thus emerge in and from the perspective of a presently imminent future.

A.2.6. Tracing Textuality

The analysis of early writing practices with respect to the oral precedents of Homeric poetry, is the first step of the Wolfian approach to the historical form of Homericity. The second step, to which I now turn, is the analysis of the consecutive modes of composing written artistic wholes qualified as Homeric, each presupposing a specific degree, more or less limited, of philological sense and historical awareness. Chapters XXXI-LI of *Prolegomena* present a "critical history" of the received Homeric manuscripts, reaching up to the Hellenistic ages.

The Byzantine manuscripts were known, well before Wolf, to be relatively recent constructs, the production of which appeared to have entailed, for reasons unknown, the loss or destruction of all previous copies[1]. Wolf endorses, in this respect, the current view of four basic stages in the emergence and transmission of the Homeric poems[2]. The fundamental or foundational moment was the one of

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[1] Recall that Homer had constituted an object of indistinguishably aesthetic, moral and historical debate within the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes.* The debate had set the frame for Pope's historical "Essay on the Life, Writings and Learning of Homer" answering, in measured erudite tones, the radical claims of the *Modernes* (1967, VII: 26-80.)

[2] R. Bentley, the only modern scholar whom Wolf acknowledges as a philological authority and a forerunner, had already operated a breakthrough in this respect, by formulating

the original emergence of some poetic artefacts, often considered, at least since Cicero, to have been oral compositions[1]. This entailed a second crucial moment, situated in early classical Greece: the first written version(s) of a corpus, especially of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as two distinct poems by the same author[2]. The third moment was the one of the Alexandrian scholars, often assumed to have been the first to canonise and store in their Library (or Libraries) the ancient Greek written tradition as a whole. Finally, there would be a copying and circulation of a relatively standardised text, up to the Byzantine manuscripts themselves, as transferred to the West and eventually collated for printing.

Wolf's specificity lies in how he evaluates the contribution of each of these moments, under the perspective and criteria of modern philological sense and according to his problematics of textual formness. He innovates when, on the

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the hypothesis of the "lost" Greek letter, the *digamma.* This suggested that the process of writing down and transmission of the Homeric poems had involved drastic linguistic changes.

[1] According to F. d' Aubignac, in his 1715 *Conjectures Académiques ou Dissertation sur l' Iliade*, Homer never existed; the transmitted Homeric poems are compilations of "tragedies and street-songs of beggars and wanderers à la manière des chansons du Pont-Neuf", of around 300-500 verses each. Wolf feels obliged to refer to d'Aubignac's precedent, in spite of his indignation towards the "capricious temerity and ignorance of antiquity" of the French writer (XXVI, n. 84). G. Vico, R. Wood, J.-J. Rousseau were also well known to have raised, throughout the 18th century, the issue of a possibly oral original Homer having sung songs that bear a problematic relationship to the transmitted text.

[2] A multiplicity of hypotheses, based on different ancient witnesses, were advanced in this respect, mostly situating this moment in 6th century Athens. One such hypothesis is that the writing-down of Homer took place under the instigation of Solon (who is recorded to have determined the correct order in which the poems should be sung in official festivals). Another, more influential hypothesis is the one to which we have already referred, as Wolf partly endorses it. A first written compilation of Homer would have occurred under the reign of Pisistratus – who is recorded, by late Hellenistic and Roman witnesses, as having ordered the assembling of the poems, in view of what came to be known as the "Pisistratedean recension".

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grounds of his analysis, he postulates that the entire process has produced no historically valid offspring in any one of its stages[1]. Specific instances of the process (namely, the largely hypothetical Alexandrian intervention) might be more reliable than the rest, providing the modern philologist with the grounds on which he could eventually perform his own critique and emendation of a readable Homer.

The overall schema of Wolf's historicisation of the writing and transmission of Homeric *scripta*[2] is correlative with the elaboration of three kinds

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[1] On the divergence, in this respect, between Wolf and Villoison (who rather hoped for the discovery of a canonical antique original, though the investigation of the *Venetus* scholia) *see* Nagy (1997).

[2] Wolf distinguishes between the following phases:

- circulation, compilation and perhaps partial and occasional writing down of different variants of Homeric songs by epic performers capable of remembering, possibly with some help of writing, not only specific poems but also wholes into which they were joined [`raywdoiv`];

- some intervention on the part of political and cultural authorities, such as Solon and Lycurgos, imposing order or completeness on aoidic performances and thus implying a certain initial degree of canonization;

- first official written recording of the poems coinciding with the first attempt to assemble them in the form of narrative sequences, under the Pisistratidae, but not reaching the authority of a canonised single authoritative text;

- subsequent elaboration of a copying tradition parallel to the one of aoidic performance, involving systematic polishing but also corruption of the poems by revisers [`diaskeuastaiv`] whose work can be likened to the one of the repetitive staging and re-writing of plays);

- centuries during which "nothing remained certain and constant" and no standard vulgate can be assumed to have been established;

- critical correction or **diorthosis** if not edition in the modern sense of the term, operated by the Alexandrian scholars [`grammatikoiv` and `filovlogoi` who worked as `diorqwtaiv`], the first to have attributed to the texts an adequately historical form, substantially contributing to the eventual standardisation of a unified text;

- post-Hellenistic copying by scribes [`ajntigrafeivß`].

of distinct but firmly interrelated figures of scribal work. The figure of the poet as a primeval, almost a-historical genius, is preserved and well defended, rhetorically – no important faults ever being explicitly attributed to Homer himself, given the historical limitations of his natural genius. Formational deficiency or negativity is systematically charged to agencies of reproduction and transmission – from the antique *rhapsodoi* or *diaskevastai* to the Byzantine scribes or *antigrapheis*. Finally, there is the corrective authority of the informed scholar, from Alexandrian grammarians, *grammatikoi* or *philologoi,* to modern philologists, through which historical ties are eventually restored between the evolving human intellect and its poetic past.

The notion of authorship, although retaining its nuclear significance through all of the above, undergoes considerable mitigation or even transformation. The author himself does not suffice to make history. Philological criticism becomes a necessary component of authorship, restoring literary works to their historical forms, countering formational deficiencies, not excluding those naturally and justifiably marking the original act of authorial creation itself.

The overall process would include successive waves of progress and relapses of a tendency towards formative maturation. Wolf insists that between the initial writing-down of the poems and the Alexandrian intervention, starting no sooner than the third century B.C., "nothing remained certain and constant [*nihil certum et constans fuit*]" (XXV). As a result of the incompetence of early Greek compilations and recordings, the Alexandrians inherited, according to Wolf, a disparate and variable manuscript tradition composed of "several streams and different flavours" (XXXVIII). It is on the grounds of that hypothesis that the authority of the vulgate can effectively be circumvented by modern philology: there would simply be no identifiable Homeric original transmitted through writing.

The work of the Alexandrian scholars themselves is acknowledged by Wolf as having "long been the province of mildew and worms" of which "even the ruins have perished" (XLIX), leaving nothing but "scattered and wretchedly mutilated phrases" (XLV). Evidence concerning the reasoning or the rationale of the Alexandrian enterprise, or even its nature and extent, are, indeed, scarce and ambiguous[1]. Nevertheless, Wolf does risk the basic (and later much contested) conjecture that the Alexandrians drastically and positively affected the process of textualisation of the Homeric *scripta*. If no evidence or historical witnesses have survived to clearly prove it, this would be due to the fact that the Alexandrian heritage was transmitted to less competent hands, especially Byzantine ones. The *Venetus* marginal scholia, in their fragmentary status, would be of little essential value, precisely because they expose the incapacity of the medieval scribe to understand and appreciate his Hellenistic precedent.

Alexandrians are considered by Wolf as having worked "by cautery and surgery [*urendo, amputando*]" or "chopping and polishing [*exasciando et poliendo*]" (XLIX). They questioned verses (some of which have disappeared from the ensuing *scripta*, while others have persisted in some manuscripts) but never added anything to their received text (L).

According to Wolf, only through this first outburst, however immature, of philological sense, a Homeric text of a more consistent form (*constantior forma textus*: XLI) emerged in history. The Alexandrian philologists, in other words, would be the first to have worked according to an idea, even if only a rudimentary one, of genuine textual form, a *genuina forma textus,* which would suit the poet:

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[1] As Wolf remarks (XLVI) neither the scholia, nor any other source can help a modern reader to understand the exact nature of Alexandrian editorial work, or even the significance of the criticial signs, reproduced in manuscripts, which they had assigned to specific lines indexing a comment of some sort concerning their authenticity or validity.

I should not wish all this to be construed as a denial on my part that good and careful emenders made use of ancient and choice manuscripts, and that by collating them they sought the genuine form of the text [*genuinam formam textus*]. Rather, for them the genuine form was that which seemed most to suit the poet [*quae poetam maxime decere*], and no one can fail to observe that in this respect everything revolves around the talent and judgement [*ingenium et arbitrium*] of the Alexandrians. (XLVII; *PRE,* 193-194; *PRL,* 183)

The Alexandrian *audacia* and *temeritas* is seen as having operated an insightful breakthrough, in spite of its correlative juvenile blindness. The Roman sequel is not systematically referred to, in *Prolegomena*. References are persistent, instead, to the relapse of the Byzantine times, the manuscript tradition of which is pictured as unable to sustain and transmit the Alexandrian progression. Wolf insists that the Byzantine scholia are not to be trusted either in their language or in their silences (XLIV). They should be used with extreme caution, solely as sources of dubious information on the Alexandrian commentary and editing practices (IV). The poetic corpus they have transmitted would need to be freed from their interpolations, which Wolf finds perfectly comparable to awkward modern imitations of Homeric style:

Anyone would certainly find these verses and some others worthless, though by no means ridiculous, if Rhodoman had recently made them, or Barnes (for he now and then produces something *de ménage* [οἴκοθεν] as he says). But if they are the work of wits [*ingeniis*] buried centuries ago, will we not be permitted to reject them? (XVIII; *PRE,* 61; *PRL,* 20-21)

The erasure of the Byzantine component of the Homeric *scripturae* becomes a crucial step in the overall toil of the philological textualisation of Homer:

But we do not even have that pure form of the Aristarchean text [*Aristarchei exemplum integrum*], the one of which the ancients most approved for a long time, but one reedited and reworked according to the views of different critics in the generations just after Christ's birth, and finally smirched with new blotches by the barbarous times that soon broke in [*postremo novis maculis per inguentia barbara saecula adspersum*]. (XI; *PRE,* 68; *PRL,* 28)

The vulgate that the Byzantines transmitted to modernity would thus be valuable only to the degree that it has been inescapably conditioned by its Alexandrian precedent. In spite of Byzantine incompetence, the manuscript tradition would have preserved a *vulgatamque in eruditiore Graecia conformationem textus* (XI), much better than the material that Alexandrians had themselves received.

Wolfian philology thus undertakes the tracing of older threads of textually formative insights, while cutting through what it sees as the historically unreadable disarray of the Byzantine mediation.

A.2.7. Restoring Textual Form

Wolf implicitly questions both the possibility and the interest of a return to or recovery of originals in the form in which they initially emerged. He discredits, since the beginning of the *Prolegomena,* the possibility of re-composing (*redigere)* the truly integral texture (*veritatem et integritatem textus)* of Homeric compositions:

> This doubt [concerning the pertinence of recent manuscripts] may carry the implication that these sources cannot enable us to restore [*redigi*] Homer's work [*poeta nobis*] to the genuine, pure form [*ad veritatem et integritatem textus*] which first poured from his divine lips [*primum divino ejus ore fusi*]. If so, I shall say later how willingly I follow this school of thought and line of reasoning. (II; *PRE,* 45-46; *PRL,* 3-4)

The English translation corrects what it reads as a catachresis in Wolf's Latin: a form has poured out of Homeric lips, not a *textus*. The notion of *textus* in the *Prolegomena* is, however, interchangeable with *forma.* Wolf is saying that the *textus* which modern philology aims at reconstructing (the *prisca et genuina forma* to which the subtitle of *Prolegomena* refers), cannot be the same as the *veritatem et integritatem* texture that we can hypothetically attribute to the original Homeric

compositions. Historically genuine form would not rest on a strict compliance with the true and integral forms of original constructs.

One can still hope, Wolf elsewhere affirms, to restore or re-call (*revocare*) a true form (*vera forma*), extracted from the Homeric *scripturae* and making a historically readable text out of their *textus vulgaris*:

> And these specimens of corrections in the vulgate text [*vulgaris textus*], selected from a great quantity without special care and suggested not by genius but by better manuscripts, may persuade anyone that by consulting purer sources [*purioribus fontibus*] the true form [*vera forma*] of the Homeric text [*homericae scripturae*] can be reconstructed [*revocari*] even today. (XI; *PRE, 67; PRL, 27*)

The suggestion is only tentative. It is qualified and mitigated by what follows, where Wolf stresses the specificity of the Homeric *scripta* as juxtaposed to the manuscript traditions of other antique works. The early date of antique poetry, Wolf remarks, does not necessarily hamper the historical credibility or integrity of its scriptures (*scriptorum integritatem*). In fact, old manuscripts might be well preserved, provided copying is controlled and its offspring checked for inevitable mistakes. The initial conditions of the writing down of the Homeric *scripta,* however, were particularly uncertain and obscure. So much so that, if the notion of *vera forma* applies to Homer at all, it does so only in a sense that radically distinguishes its truthfulness from that of the works of Virgil, for instance. In the case of Homer, simple detection and correction of copying mistakes and forgeries would not be the main issue. The specificity of Homeric formness would reside in the fact that it compels the modern scholar to re-think what it means to restore historically a form *nitorem et germanam*:

> And if, finally, it can be shown by probable arguments and reasons [*verissimilibus argumentis et rationibus*] that this entire connected series of the two continuous poems [*totum hunc contextum ad seriem duorum perpetuorum Carminum*] is owed less to the genius of him to whom we have normally attributed it than to the zeal of a more polite age [*sollertiae politioris aevi*] and the collective efforts of many [*multorum conjuctis studiis*] and that therefore the very songs [*ajoidavß*] from which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were assembled [*compositae sunt*] do not all have one common author [*ne... unum omnes auctorem habere*]? If, I say, one must accept a view

different from the common one about all these things – what then will it mean to restore these poems to their original luster and genuine beauty [*quid tum erit, hic Carminibus pristinum nitorem et germanam formam suam restituere*]? (XI; *PRE,* 70; *PRL,* 30)

What can it mean, to restore the textual formness of textually non-determinate works? An answer is proposed in the posthumously published fragments of the unfinished "second part" of *Prolegomena.* The impossibility of restoring the original state of the poems is stressed, while the standards of "learned antiquity" are considered as setting the form philology should reproduce or imitate (*reddere*):

> For since it is <u>quite impossible to restore this poet to his original state</u> [*hunc poetam nullo modo talem restituere liceat, qualis ab initio fuit*], we must first relax to some extent the severe rule according to which, in other cases, we try to give nothing that did not come from the writers themselves [*nisi quod profectum sit ad ipsis*]; and <u>we must be content if we can restore him to the form of which learned antiquity most approved</u> [*eam formam ipsi reddere licebit, quam erudita antiquitas maxime probavit*]. (*PRE,* 220)[1]

The Wolfian philological task is faithful, above all, to its own sense of historical formness – not to the forms of extant remains of the past, nor to their presumed originals. The philologically reformed text would be more valid, historically, than all initially produced and reproduced linguistic artefacts. It would expose more faithfully to knowledge the form of the *cultus vitae*, the historically situated essence that the original poet could only have enacted by his limited means.

The objective of Wolfian philology would thus be to restore and continue the Alexandrian tradition of genuinely Homeric formness: not the original Homeric compositions but their textual potential.

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[1] The Latin version is drawn from the edition of *Prolegomena* by Bekker, Berlin, 1876, p. 173.

> And indeed, my single primary intention was to correct the text of Homer [*textum Homeris*] by the standards of learned antiquity [*ad normam eruditae antiquitatis emendarem*], and to display him in a text the wording, punctuation and accentuation of which, remade from the recensions that were once considered best, might – if one may properly hope for so much – satisfy some Longinus or other ancient critic who knew how to use the materials of the Alexandrians with skill and tact. (VI; *PRE,* 56-57; *PRL,* 15)

It is through problematics such as the above that the notion of *textus* tends to acquire, in Wolf, the sense of a specific kind of validly readable form, effectively complying with norms of historical formness. The formative historical process substituting writing for orality would be accomplished by the further step of the definitive textualisation of writing.

A.2.8. *Constantior forma textus*

Renaissance scholars are known to have been persistent and systematic learners of languages, including Greek, and active readers both of printed texts and of manuscripts, stored in their private libraries. Their reading, as suggested by their own annotations or comments, often marked at the margins of their copies, involved not only hermeneutic and grammatical problematics but also questions about the conditions of formation of the received text[1]. At work were already basic components of editing techniques: recension and collation of manuscripts (collection and comparative examination of a large number of manuscript variants); emendation (readings of the editor based on inferences and eventually correcting the manuscript ones)[2].

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[1] See Pfeiffer (1976), chap. 1 – and in particular p. 8 for the example of Petrarch's manuscript Livy. See also Reynolds & Wilson (1968), chap. 4.

[2] Poliziano (1454-1494) is often acknowledged as the first to have formulated the principle of the preference of older to newer manuscripts.

This early Humanist textual work appears, to modern philological *Textkritik* and *Textgeschichte,* to have been insufficiently critical and historical. Its practitioners are often regarded as "self-satisfied polymaths filling enormous volumes with collected antiquities and reproducing in their editions of texts the accumulated notes of the last two centuries" (Pfeiffer 1976, 143). The fault would lie not so much in the rudimentary application of techniques, as in the lack of a rationale. Their "philology" was, in other words, far from Schlegel's ideal of a philological philosophy and closer to his `banausisch und grammatisch.`

The main concerns of early Humanist editors seem to have been to detect the degrees and loci of corruption with respect to a presumably original and faultless archetype. This archetype was seen as the beginning of a copying chain governed by intended fidelity to previous copies. Temporal distance counted only as a factor favouring the two main sources of corruption to be detected and controlled. The one was the very mechanics of the copying work or the inadequate knowledge of the language by the scribe. It would lead to unintentional and largely inevitable copying mistakes, mainly grammatical. The second and most poignant one was deliberate falsification, that is, forgery. The correlative question of authenticity of the *textus receptus* (especially in cases of texts of great religious or intellectual authority) was the crucial issue[1].

Philological history and criticism is often seen as having gradually matured through a series of philological endeavours preceding Wolf[2]. A few

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On the history of textual criticism and editorial practices see: A. Dain, *Les manuscrits* Paris, 1964, 2d edition; B. A. Groningen, *Traité d' histoire et de critique des textes grecs,* Netherlands, 1963; G. Pasquali, *Storia della tradizione e critica del testo,* Florence, 1952, 2d edition.

[1] On authenticity and forgery in the field of modern Humanist scholarship, see in particular A. Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship,* Princeton, 1990.

[2] One could mention: R. Simon's *Critical History of the Old Testament,* published in 1678; R. Bentley's editorial work and historical inquiries into the history of the Greek language; J. G.

A.2. *Textual Form*

years before the publication of *Prolegomena*, J. G. Eichhorn (a contemporary of Wolf and, like him, student of Heyne) had stressed that manuscript traditions raise questions of historical validity unsuspected by traditional problematics of forgery and authenticity. Their offspring would involve the merging of distinct moments of compositional activity, independently from the capacities and intentions of the scribes. Philological criticism would have to disentangle these moments, in order to arrive at historically homogeneous textual wholes:

> Were it now resolved to describe as forgeries all books whose every part and passage fell short of congruity in point of time, then truly very few genuine writings of the Hebrews would survive such a sentence; but at the same time this would be a great blow to the classics of both Greek and Roman antiquity. As with regard to the latter so in the case of the former, it behooves the higher criticism only to exercise its office and pronounce sentence after separating, from internal evidence, what belongs to different authors and times.[1]

After a certain point of the transmission chain, the scribe would err not because of a lack of conformity to his originals but because of an excess of faithfulness to them – too unaware of their deceiving unity.

The probing of Homeric *scripta* for the exposition of the different layers or components of their redaction, is also a basic postulate of historical readability in Wolf. However unified the vulgate appears as a literary construct, it would not be historically one. For antique texts to become historically readable, the notion of a historically valid textual unity had to be re-defined, against the impression of homogeneity given by scribal artefacts such as the one of the Homeric vulgate.

It is a recurrent idea, in *Prolegomena*, that the Homeric *scripta* deceive by lending themselves to seemingly non-problematic reading as unified works by

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Eichhorn's *Einleitung ins Alte Testament,* published in 1787. Wolf's *Prolegomena* refers to Bentley as its sole precursor. It also includes references to Eichhorn's methodology (XXV and XXXIII). The case of Eichhorn as Wolf's predecessor is particularly stressed in Grafton (1985).

[1] J. G. Eichhorn, op. cit., as quoted in *PRE* (229).

the same author. Only the philological sense, in its most acute state, would cut through their deceiving uniformity:

> Ruhnken, indeed, said (having given the best verdict on the subject) that the point can be sensed by the expert but cannot be explained by the inexpert. Yet both of these [sensing and explaining] are much more difficult in those poems, separated as they are from one another by the space of only one or two centuries. They <u>deceive</u> us by their appearance, which is uniform in general and extremely similar to the rest [*aequalibi im universum et ceteris simillima facie <u>fallunt</u>*]. (XXXI; *PRE,* 133-134; *PRL,* 105)

In spite of the fact that textual inadequacies could ideally be plainly felt by any reader, the common-sense reading would, understandably or even naturally, be misled by the vulgate, into constructing what should, instead, be deconstructed:

> True, not even the most erudite readers have felt difficulties of this sort for many centuries, though I would think no one of even average intelligence could avoid encountering them. Perhaps one reason for this is that the poem's continuous sequence <u>deceived</u> [*perpetua series Carminum… <u>fallens</u>*] their readers, thanks in part to their high reputation and in part to their own beauty, and thus banished any mediation on this matter [*eius rei cogitationem longe amovebat*]; and that we are almost all naturally more eager to join things together which are disconnected than to disconnect things which are joined together [*dissoluta conjugere libentius quam juncta dissolvere*]. (XXX; *PRE,* 127-128; *PRL,* 99)

In a note to *Prolegomena*, concerning the famous "imperfect joints" detected in the vulgate, Wolf summarises his idea of historical or textual form as follows:

> […] different men can follow different traditions in these matters, or the same man can follow different traditions in different writings, but the same man cannot vary in the same one [*non idem in eadem variare*], and indeed within the brief space of a single work [*unius operis*]. (XXX, n. 99)

The main issue is the *kind* of wholeness and unity that the philological sense demands as a condition of validly readable textuality. For Wolf, relevant criteria stem from a culturally specific, historically situated authorial agency, the wholeness and unity of which sets the form that the text needs to comply with and to expose as an object of historical knowledge.

Specific rhetorical transpositions would thus be at work when constructs like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are named *Homeric* or, more simply, *Homer*. There is, at a first level, a metonymic transfer from an authorial agency of production to the linguistic constructs produced – and transmitted through the meanders of initial compositional events and subsequent textualisation practices. The author, though, is also a figure. Its individual or collective entity is a synecdoche for a broader *cultus* of historical life. The textual form of a philologically restored Homer would literally be that of Homer as an authorial agency, to the precise degree that the latter stands as an instance of a historically situated cultural form.

The above do not imply that the Wolfian idea of textuality *derives from* a notion of extra-textual formness. The opposite may very well be true. A specific idea of textual formness may be providing the paradigm for the philological understanding of cultural forms. In this sense, philology historicises textual form, only to the degree that it textualises historicity. The following passage from R. Bentley suggests as much. It comes from his *Boyle Lectures* and refers, not surprisingly, to Virgil – who may indeed have served as the prime example of philological textuality. Bentley's rhetoric advances the figure of a well-formed text as the prototype of the form of the human body *qua* divine creation:

> We have formerly demonstrated that the body of man, which consists in an incomprehensible variety of parts, all admirably fitted to their peculiar functions and the conservation of the whole, could no more be formed fortuitously than the *Aeneis* of Virgil, or any other longer poem with good sense and just measures, could be composed by the causal combination of letters. Now, to pursue this comparison, as it is utterly impossible to be believed, that such a poem may have been eternal, transcribed from copy to copy without any first author or original; so it is equally incredible and impossible that the fabric of human bodies, which has such excellent and divine artifice and, if I may so say, such good and a true syntax, and harmonious measures in its constitution, should be propagated and transcribed from father to son without a first parent or creator of it […][1]

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[1] Quoted from Bentley's *Works,* by Pfeiffer (1976, 146).

Homer would be divine to the degree that any creative intellect, including the Godly one, is archetypically textual[1]. Philological metaphysics would thus be texto-centric rather than phono-centric.

A.2.9. Textualising Homer

What are the characteristics of the Wolfian idea of textual form? Recall that Wolf's philological sense is practically non-definable: irreducible to concrete rules of thumb. Wolf's rhetoric does not permit the reader of *Prolegomena* to clearly discern rules or principles of textual formness, specific criteria of a historically valid form. This would be the object of the announced but never written "second part" of the treatise. What we have, instead, are Wolf's paradigmatic comments on more or less dubious aspects of the received Homeric *scripta*.

The overall perspective, under which the notion of textual form is posited, is that of the relations between a whole and its parts. Wolfian rhetoric states the argument in all the ambiguity it needs in order to launch a long-standing debate. Should one decompose the vulgate in its original parts, or accept it, instead, as a reliable basis, provided its parts are somehow clearly displayed as such?

> I know how hard it is to forget Aristotle and the other literary theorists who drew their precepts from these parts long after they had firmly coalesced [*quam partes hae firmiter coaluerant*], but would it not be pleasant to obtain an example of the most ancient poetry once in a while by contemplating the parts [*ex illarum contemplatione*]? I know that all agree no one produced a very long work of this sort before Homer. I confess that whenever I return in spirit, so far as I can, to that ancient age, I find that these poems are not in the least displeasing when read this way, nor do I miss the wisdom of old age in this extraordinarily talented youth. (XXVIII; *PRE,* 122-123; *PRL,* 93-94)

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[1] Recall my quotation from *Prolegomena* XXXI, in section A.2.3, also bringing up the figure of divine creation as compared to the historical formation of Homeric *scripta.*

The reference to Aristotle is, most probably, to *Poetics* 8, where Homer's *techne* and *physis* are praised for having attributed to the *Odyssey* the exemplary unity of *mythos* suitable for the poetic mimesis of a *praxis*[1]. Wolf, *contra* Aristotle, wants, as we have seen, a Homer excelling in the *physis* of a natural *ingenium* but wanting in the *techne* of an *artificium structurae.* More generally, Wolf postulates a notion of wholeness or unity and, ultimately, of form, very different from Aristotle's.

Through the ways in which the *Prolegomena* exemplify their critique to the extant Homeric *scripturae*, we can tentatively specify two main implicit principles of textual formness. We could name the one that concerns the integrity of *scripta* as a poetic composition, *compositional coherence*. The other would be *idiomatic conformity*, involving the norms of a historically identifiable language – from its vocabulary and morphology to its style and rhetoric[2]. Both principles, as paradigmatically exposed in *Prolegomena,* allow for an extremely wide range of judgements applied to the received *scripta*, controlling, but never totally erasing, aesthetic and, occasionally, socio-ethical problematics. Let us follow Wolf in how he detects and historically situates deficiencies of form in the vulgate – and how

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[1] Recall the following passage of the *Poetics,* where the mimetic unity is discusssed:

"Aussi, de même que, dans les autres parts de la représentation, l'unité de la représentation provient de l'unité de l'objet, de même l'histoire, qui est représentation d'action, doit l'être d'une action une et qui forme un tout; et les parties que constituent les faits doivent être agencées de telle sorte que, si l'une d'elles est déplacée ou supprimée, le tout soit disloqué ou bouleversé. Car ce dont l'adjonction ou la suppression n'a aucune conséquence visible n'est pas une partie du tout" [51a, 30-35, as translated in Aristotle (1980)].

[2] I will be using the term *idiom* to designate a specific language (or dialect) forming a historically situated system or structure of linguistic signs and mechanisms of signification. I will use *idiom* especially in contexts where it is necessary to clearly distinguish this meaning of the term *language* (close to the French *langue*) to its more general one (closer to the French *langage*).

he evaluates the hypothetical Alexandrian intervention as a first step in the right direction.

The principle of compositional coherence is at stake when Wolf depicts problematic aspects of the vulgate, which he explains as reflecting operations of compilation of originally shorter songs. These aspects were sensed and debated as possible deficiencies long before Wolf – and continued to be so, long after him. The basic story is rather awkwardly interwoven with a series of side-stories that interrupt the progress of the main narrative. There are long digressions continuously impeding the flow of the narrative. Plot inconsistencies keep disturbing the reader's sense of the story. Repetitions are a structural dominant that does little to sustain the modern reader's attention. Characters seem to be lacking psychological depth and their behaviour often appears to be poorly justified. Finally, both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are simply unnecessarily long.

The main sign suggesting that such deficiencies are mostly due to post-Homeric rhapsodic or scribal work, would be the passages that Wolf has qualified as "obvious and imperfectly fitted joints"[1]:

> […] a number of obviously and imperfectly fitted joints [*eminentes aliquot et hiantes commissurae*] which I believe that I have found, in the course of very frequent readings, to be both the same and in the same places: joints of such a sort that I think anyone would at once concede, or rather plainly feel, once I had demonstrated the point with a few examples, that they had not been cast in the same mould as the original work [*noncum primo opere fusas*], but had been imported into it by the efforts of a later period. (XXX; *PRE,* 127; *PRL,* 99)

Aristarchus would be the authority that contributed most decisively to the reformation of a Homeric textual construct complying, as much as possible, with the principle of narrative coherence:

> [Aristarchus] at length completed this polished and elegant redaction [*policam et concinnam* `diaskeuhvn ÔOmhrikhvn`] of Homer, in which the middle does not differ from the beginning, nor the end from the middle

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[1] These "joints" became most important objects of philological analytical criticism.

[*in qua nec medium prim, nec imum discrepat medio*], and it was perhaps he too who divided the two works into their present books. And therefore, if we are considering the general appearance and manner of the poems, there is no doubt that Giphanius [1572] rightly conjectured that our vulgate recension is the very one of Aristarchus. (XLIX; *PRE*, 205; *PRL*, 198)

Idiomatic conformity presupposes a historically identifiable linguistic and rhetorical *usus poetae*. It is also seen, by Wolf, as jeopardised by antique Greek *akrisia* and subsequent scribal labour. The vulgate would suffer gravely in this respect, in spite of the fact that "in general all the books have the same sound, the same quality of thought, language and meter [*in universam, idem sonus est omnibus libri, idem habitus sententiarum, orationis, numerorum*]" (XXXI). It would be the task of the philological sense, exercising its indistinguishably historical and aesthetic judgement, to investigate

what is the unusualness [*insolentia*] of words and phrases and of what sort (for even the first book of the *Iliad* has *hapax legomena*), what is different and of disparate color in thought and expression [*disparis coloris in sententiis et conformatione*], what traces of another poet's imitation lurk in the thing derived from Homer, but in such a way that the sinews [*nervi*] and the Homeric spirit [*spiritus*] are lacking, what is jejune and frigid [*ieiunum et frigidum*] in many passages […] (XXXI; *PRE*, 134; *PRL,* 105)

Alexandrian critics would also be the ones who initially imposed basic linguistic conformity on the Homeric *scripta*. Wolf attributes particular importance to Aristarchus' critique of expressions that needlessly reduce the emphasis of a thought (L). He praises Aristarchus for "choosing, from a group of discordant readings, that one which best suits the genius and custom [*ingenio et consuetidini*] of Homer and is also the most appropriate to a specific poetic passage [*ipsique loco optime conveniret*]" (XLVII). The Alexandrian concern for metrical and grammatical regularity would also be highly relevant to textual form at the level of linguistic expression (XLIX). Grammar and metrics are acknowledged by Wolf as basic tools of textualisation, even if foreign to Homer's times. The objective, as we have seen, is *not* the reproduction of hypothetical originals, but the extraction of form proper to historical reading.

If Aristarchus occasionally faltered, it would be in the direction of an excessive seriousness of mind or a formalistic frigidness of reasoning (*yucrologiva*, something close to a childhood disease of the philological *sensus*):

> For he [Aristarchus] sought out grammatical precision in more arid manner than was necessary, and he not infrequently corrupted the more daring and noble sentiments [*audaciores generosioresque sententias*] of his poet in order to bring them closer to nature and truth [*ad naturam et veritatem*]. We know few of his emendations and corrections of Homer and Pindar for certain, and even these include examples of a frigid logic [„˘¯ÚÔÏÔÁ›·] that is totally unacceptable in the emender of a poet. (XLVIII; *PRE,* 201; *PRL,* 193)

Summarising the above, we can venture to construct the following list of criteria defining the philological idea of historically valid textual form. Compositional coherence entails, more specifically:

- artistry of structure and composition – *artificium structurae et compositionis* (XXX);

- planned continuity strung together through connection of parts – *cogitationem longorum et continuo partium nexu* (XXVI);

- single basic plot interwoven with episodes – *unam vel primariam actionem, episodiis intertextam* (XXIX);

- treatment of subjects in full through the management of successive parts – *continenti tractatione partium* (XXIX, n. 95).

- non-ambiguity with respect to narrative flow (XXX, on *Odyssey* ᴅ.621-624). Conformity to the idiomatic *habitus* or a *usus poetae* would necessitate:

- diction in accordance with an identifiable idiom with respect for rules of grammatical and metrical regularity (XXX, n.99);

- avoidance of unnecessary repetition or of other kinds of redundancy, generating "discourse pertaining to nothing [*lovgouß pro;ß oujde;n sunteivnontaß*]" (XLVIII, n. 44);

- sustained clarity of thought – which I propose for *conformatio et tenor sententiae* (IX).

- moderation of style (as opposed to *insolentia*) coupled, in the case of Homer, with youthful vigour and vividness.

The above are, of course, among the common *topoi* of a more general, modern notion of formness applied to humanity as historical. Philology enacts an *episteme* on the grounds of which not only antique *scripta* but also literatures at large (including emergent practices of literary writing) are, correlatively, re-formed so as to enact forms readable as textual. Publication norms and literary criticism correct eventual deficiencies or negotiate legitimate deviations.

A.3. CULTURAL FORM

A.3.1. Form: Human

I turn now to Wilhelm von Humboldt, in order to revisit sites of a more theoretical elaboration of the historicist notion of historical form[1]. I will first concentrate, in the present section of my work, on two of Humboldt's short writings on history[2]. I will subsequently address, in my next section, his longer and more systematic essay on the structure of human languages.

How does Humboldt's notion of form (*Form* and, occasionally, *Bild,* in rather unspecified relations to *Gestalt*) relate to his notion of life in general, and human historical life in particular?

The following passage from Humboldt's *Weltgeschichte* essay tells how *Leben* (life) occurs in nature at large. It would emerge as *Form*, from the inside of individual wholes, against a background of formless masses of matter. "Organisation" and "character " would be two different modes in which life-

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[1] Recall that Humboldt, a pioneer of what evolved into the nineteenth-century tradition of historical linguistics, was also a most authoritative spokesman of German historicism, in its early idealist version. His work could be read as a conceptual elaboration of the basic premises which Wolf's treatise has paradigmatically enacted. The exact relations of his theoretical discourse to the Wolfian philological paradigm should remain an open question for further investigation.

[2] I am referring, more concretely, to "Betrachtungen über die Weltgeschichte [Considerations on world-history]" (cited as *Weltgeschichte*) and to "Über die Aufgabe des Geschichtschreibenders [On the task of the historiographer]" (cited as *Geschichtschreibender*), which are actually lecture-notes dating from around 1820. My quotations from the German original will be from the first volume of the 1980 edition of Humboldt's *Werke* (cited as *WRK*). Translation will be provided in French, from the 1985 edition I have had access to (cited as *Considérations*).

forms subsist – the latter accounting for the specificity of human life as intellectual and moral, that is, cultural:

Leben heisst durch eine geheimnissvolle Kraft eine Gedankenform in einer Masse von Materie, als Gesetz, hersschend erhalten. In der physischen Welt heisst diese Form und dies Gesetz Organisation, in der intellectuellen und moralischen Charakter. Zeigen heisst, jene geheimnissvolle Kraft beginnen lassen, oder mit andern Worten eine Kraft anzünden, die plötzlich eine gewisse Quantität von Materie in einer durchaus bestimmten Form von der Masse losreisst, und nun fortdauernd diese Form in ihrer Eigenthümlichkeit allen anderen Formen entgegenstellt. (*WRK*, 572-573)

Vivre signifie maintenir par une force mystérieuse la suprématie d'une forme de pensée, à titre de loi, dans une masse de matière. Dans le monde physique, cette forme et cette loi se nomment organisation, dans l'univers intellectuel et moral, caractère. Procréer signifie déclencher cette force mystérieuse, ou, en d'autres termes, allumer une force qui arrache soudainement de la masse une certaine quantité de matière sous une forme entièrement déterminée, et qui désormais oppose continuellement cette forme dans sa singularité à toutes les autres formes. (*Considérations*, 53)[1]

Form acquires, in Humboldt, a status often explicitly configured as *organisch* (organic). Forms would emerge and evolve in time through events and processes leading from (sudden or even inexplicable) genetic occurrences to (ordered and predictable) maturation and decay or death. The figure of organicity includes a distinction between form proper or internal, and shape or external contours. As the *Geschichtschreibender* essay tells us, the human intellect, especially in the case of works of art, intends to reach, through imitation, the *höhere Wahrheit* of internal forms of wholes, cutting through external *Umrisse*:

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[1] I remind the reader that, as already stated in my "Introduction", emphasis added in quotations by underlining is mine. In my eventual use of italics in quotations, I follow the original.

Die Nachahmung der <u>organischen Gestalt</u> kann auf einem doppelten Wege geschehen; durch unmittelbares Nachbilden der <u>äusseren Umrisse</u>, so genau Auge und Hand es vermögen, oder von innen heraus, durch vorhergängiges Studium der Art, wie die äusseren Umrisse aus dem <u>Begriff und der Form des Ganzen entstehen</u>, durch die Abstrahirung ihrer Verhältnisse, durch eine Arbeit, vermittelst welcher die Gestalt erst ganz anders, als der unkünstlerische Blick sie wahrnimmt, erkannt, dann von der Einbildungskraft dergestalt aufs neue gebohren wird, dass sie, neben der buchstäblichen Uebereinstimmung mit der Natur, noch eine andre <u>höhere Wahrheit</u> in sich trägt.

Denn der grösseste Vorzug des Kunstwerks ist, die in der wirklichen Erscheinung verdunkelte, <u>innere Wahrheit der Gestalten</u> offenbar zu machen. (*WRK*, 591)

Deux voies s'offrent à l'imitation de la <u>forme organique</u>: soit que l'on copie immédiatement les <u>contours extérieurs</u>, aussi précisément que l'oeil et la main en sont capables, soit que, en partant de l'intérieur, on étudie au préalable la manière dont les contours extérieurs naissent du <u>concept et de la forme du tout</u>, qu'on procède à l'abstraction des rapports et qu'on se livre à un travail grâce auquel la forme soit d'abord saisie tout autrement que le regard profane ne la perçoit, puis si profondément renouvelée par l'imagination que, par delà même son accord littéral avec la nature, elle porte en elle une <u>vérité plus haute</u>.

Car le plus grand avantage de l'oeuvre d'art est de révéler <u>la vérité intérieure des formes</u> obscurcies dans la manifestation réelle. (*Considérations*, 73-74)

Geschichtschreibender continues by specifying that inner form has to do with the *Wesen des Organismus* (essence of the organism). As such, it assumes the status of an *Idee* (idea) in the case of mathematics; it becomes *Begriff* (concept) in natural sciences; for human sciences it is "Ausdruck der Seele, des geistigen Lebens [expression of soul or spiritual life]" (*WRK,* 593).

Humans would emerge out of the larger setting of natural forces, as a particular form potential of spiritual life. As we read in the *Weltgeschichte* essay, humanity at large (or perhaps, humanness: *Menschheit*) enacts itself in time (*zur Wirklichkeit kommt)* as an overall *Geist* through a series of individual forms

emerging and evolving in incessant transformation. Observing such instances of the human spirit would be the most crucial task of the science of world-history:

Der Geist, der diese [Menschheit] beherrscht, überlebt den Einzelnen, und so ist das Wichtigste in der Weltgeschichte die Beobachtung dieses, sich forttragenden, anders gestaltenden, aber auch selbst manchmal wieder untergehenden Geistes. (*WRK*, 570-71)	L'esprit qui la domine survit à l'individu singulier, et le plus important dans l'histoire mondiale est donc l'observation de cet esprit qui perdure, prend des formes diverses, et disparaît souvent à nouveau. (*Considérations*, 51)

In the *Geschichtschreibender* essay, Humboldt affirms that "ist daher alle Geschichte nur Verwicklichung einer Idee, und in der Idee liegt zugleich die Kraft und das Zeil [so is all history enactment of an Idea and in the idea lies both the force and the objective]" (*WRK*, 604). Shapes or figures (*Gestalten*) of human life would be enacting the formational potential of the idea of humanity, towards the realisation of which history would invariably tend:

Das Ziel der Geschichte kann nur <u>die Verwicklichung der durch die Menschheit darzustellenden Idee</u> seyn, nach allen Seiten hin, und in allen <u>Gestalten</u>, in welchen sich die endliche <u>Form</u> mit der <u>Idee</u> zu verbinden vermag […] (*WRK*, 605)	Le but de l'histoire ne peut être que la <u>réalisation de l'Idée qu'il parvient à l'Humanité d'exposer</u> dans tous ses aspects et toutes les <u>figures</u> où la <u>forme</u> finie peut se lier avec l'<u>Idée</u> […] (*Considérations*, 86)

Very much like Wolf, Humboldt understands forms of humanity as necessarily historical. According to the essay on *Weltgeschichte,* these forms would not immediately and clearly emerge as components of human life. They would be brought to the fore through the historical life of human conscience, eventually countering obscurity and disfigurement:

<u>Die währe Individualität</u> entsteht also von innen heraus, plötzlich und auf Einmal, und wird so wenig durch das Leben hervorgebracht, dass sie <u>nur im Leben zum Bewusstseyn kommt, und oft noch verdunkelt, oder verdreht</u>. (*WRK*, 573)	<u>L'individualité vraie</u> surgit donc de l'intérieur, soudainement et tout d'un coup, et elle est si peu produite [brought to the fore] par la vie, qu'elle ne parvient à la conscience qu'au sein de la vie, et, en plus, <u>de manière souvent obscure et fausse »</u> (*Considérations*, 53)

The task of the historian, like that of the philologist, would thus consist in restoring forms of human life, historically enacting the idea of humanness.

The figure of organicity acquires a central importance in Humboldt's configuration of human formness. It tells how the overall idea of *Menschheit* connects to its particular national-cultural instantiations. Humans would be a natural species, constituting an organic body structured into distinct levels of individual sub-species, organised themselves as classes of further individuals. Successive levels of individuality would connect to each other as leaves connect to branches and branches to trees. Through language and freedom (in other words, cultural dynamics) the human species historically develops and displays itself – at the most comprehensive levels of its idea, but also at the levels of sub-species as well as of individual human beings:

<u>Das Menschengeschlecht ist eine Naturpflanze</u>, wie das Geschlecht der Löwen und Elephanten; seine verschiedenen <u>Stämme und Nationen Naturprodukte</u>, wie die Racen Arabischer und Isländischer Pferde, nur mit dem Unterschied, dass sich im Keim der <u>Bildung</u> selbst zu den Kräften, die sich in jenen, uns sichtbar, allein zeigen, die Idee der <u>Sprache</u> und <u>Freiheit</u> gesellt, und sich	<u>L'espèce humaine est une plante naturelle</u>, comme l'espèce des lions et des éléphants; ses différentes <u>éthnies et nations, des produits naturels,</u> comme des races de chevaux arabes et islandais, avec cette seule différence que, dans le germe même de leur <u>culture</u>, l'Idée de la langue et de la liberté s'unit aux forces qui seules se montrent visiblement à nous dans ces dernières et qu'elle y trouve un sol plus ou

besser oder schlechter besser. <u>Der Einzelne ist in Verhältniss zu seiner Nation nur in der Art ein Individuum, wie ein Blatt im Verhältniss zum Baum</u>, ebenso kann die <u>Stufenfolge der Individualität</u> weiter gehen, von der Nation zum Völkerstamm, von diesem zur Race, von ihr zum Menschengeschlecht. Nur innerhalb eines gewissen Kreises kann dann der Untergeordnete vorwärts gehen, zurückschreiten, oder anders seyn. (*WRK*, 568-569)

moins favorable. <u>Un individu singulier n'est par rapport à sa nation un individu qu' à la façon dont une feuille l'est par rapport à une arbre</u>; pareillement les <u>degrés d'individualité</u> peuvent s'étendre au-delà, de la nation jusqu'à la souche ethnique, de cette dernière jusqu'à la race, de celle-ci jusqu'à l'espèce humaine. Ce n'est qu'à l'intérieur d'un certain cercle que le terme subordonné peut alors progresser, régresser, ou différer. (*Considérations*, 49)

Note that all levels of the structure are ontologically equivalent *Stufenfolge*. They all define the essential identity of human entities, structured in bifurcating levels of individuality. At the same time, subspecies is an individual whole in its own right, and so are the parts that constitute it as such. Historicist reasoning does not fear logical paradoxes: "Die Nation ist also auch ein Individuum, und der Einzelne ein Individuum vom Individuum [The nation is thus an individual and the singular individual an individual of the individual]" (*WRK*, 569). Individual human beings may thus perish, but an important component of their lives as humanly historical would persist at the level of their respective national, ethnic or broader historical classes.

Under such a perspective, being essentially human means being, just as essentially, the subject of categories that name the different levels of organisation of the tree-organism of the human species. The leaf of Homer can only have been human as essentially as it has been part of an antique Greek branch of the evolving human spirit. This is the form that the historicist intellect can and must excavate out of the Homeric literary *vestigia*.

Within the overall tree of ontologically equivalent and logically structured levels of human formness, the category of nationhood assumes a privileged

status. National *Bildung* (cultural formation) would be a most crucial knot in the articulation between individual human beings and their historically evolving species. The way Humboldt deals with the issue of human language brings this most clearly to the fore.

A.3.2. Form: Linguistic

The Wolfian transposition from historically specific *cultus vitae* to *textus*, implies that language is a medium of exposition and enactment of historical forms of humanness. Humboldt's *Sprachbau* treatise[1] provides us with conceptual formulations most pertinent in this respect.

Humboldt understands human language in terms that we can qualify as indistinguishably anthropological and phenomenological[2]. Language originates in and enacts the intention of human consciousness; the latter receives and works on stimuli of phenomena standing as its objects.

In die Bildung und in der Gebrauch der │ But the whole mode of <u>perceiving things</u>

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[1] I am referring to *Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwickelung des Menschengeschlechts* (Humboldt 1880). Various versions of this long essay date from the years 1827-1835. I will be using the English translation of 1988 (On language: The diversity of human language structure and its influence on the mental development of mankind) here abbreviated as *Language*.

[2] I use these terms in the following, rather broad sense. *Anthropological* would be approaches in which the human is understood as reducible to figures of empirical human beings, as bodily (or corporeal) and intellectual (or spiritual) compounds, whether individual or collective. *Phenomenological* would be approaches based on the idea that human practices (in particular linguistic ones) depend on how instances of human thought or consciousness relate to phenonena as manifested stimuli.

Sprache geht aber nothwendig die ganze Art der <u>subjektiven Wahrnehmung der Gegenstände</u> über. Denn das Wort entsteht eben aus dieser Wahrnehmung, ist nicht ein Abdruck des Gegenstandes an sich, sondern des von diesem <u>in der Seele erzeugten Bildes</u>. (*Sprachbau*, 72)	<u>subjectively</u> necessarily passes over into the cultivation and use of language. The word arises from this very perceiving; it is a copy, not of the object itself, but of the <u>image thereof produced in consciousness</u>. (*Language*, 59)

The English translation does not misread Humboldt, when it interprets *Seele* as *consciousness*. Humboldt's text translates in phenomenological terms, indeed, the famous introductory passage of Aristotle's `Periv eJrmhneivaß` (*On interpretation,* 16a, 4-5), which Cooke's (1983) polyvalent reading renders as follows. "Words spoken [`taŸ ejn th/`` fwnh``/`] are symbols or signs [`suvmbola,` but later `shmei`a`] of affections or impressions [`paqhmavtwn`] of the soul [`ejn th/`` yuch``/`]" (114-115). The phenomenological twist consists in turning the Aristotelian *psyche* into the Humboldtian *subjektiven Wahrnehmung* – making *Seele* into a close synonym of *Bewußtsein.* Humboldt is followed in this, it should be noted, not only by nineteenth century historical linguistics but also, eventually, by the definition of *sign* in Saussurian semiology[1].

The intent of signification, entailing the *Darstellung* or primary presentation of a thought, is what, in Humboldt, accounts for the specificity of articulated sound as human and linguistic:

Denn die <u>Absicht und die Fähigkeit zur Bedeutsamkeit</u>, und zwar nicht zu dieser überhaupt, sondern zu der bestimmten	For <u>the intent and capacity</u> <u>to signify</u>, and not just in general but specifically by <u>presentation of a thought</u>, is the only thing

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[1] Recall that Saussure defines the "image acoustique" of the signifier as "pas le son matériel, chose purement physique, mais l'empreinte psychique de ce son, la représentation que nous en donne le témoignage de nos sens". The signified, would, in turn, be not an object but its mental or psychical "concept" (Saussure 1986, 98).

durch <u>Darstellung eines Gedachten</u>, macht allein den articuliert Laut aus, und es lässt sich nichts andres angeben, um seinen Unterschied auf der einem Seite vom *thierischen Geschrei, auf der andren vom* musikalischen Ton *zu bezeichnen.* (*Sprachbau,* 79-80)

that constitutes the articulated sound, and nothing else can be stated to describe its difference from the *animal cry*, on the one hand, and the musical tone *on the other* (*Language,* 65).

Other formulations, concerning the nature of human language, point to the same direction. Humboldt affirms, for instance:

Die unzertrennliche Verbindung des Gedanken, der *Stimmwerkzeuge* und des *Gehörs* zur Sprache liegt unabänderlich in der ursprünglichen, nicht weiter zu erklärenden Einrichtung der menschlichen Natur. (*Sprachbau,* 64-65)

The inseparable bonding of thought, vocal apparatus and hearing to language is unalterably rooted in the original constitution of human nature, which cannot be further explained. (*Language,* 55)

Humboldt's problematics are often more sophisticated than passages such as the above suggest at a first reading. Human language, in Humboldt, is far from a simple instrument of enactment of thought as *phone*. It assumes the function of a formative organ of thought (*bildende Organ des Gedanken*). Thought and language thus tend to merge[1]. Language would always already be present in the soul in its entirety (*der Seele in ihrer Totalität gegenwärtig*: 98). It would enact its potential regardless of communication between man and man (*Ohne daher irgend auf die Mitteilung zwischen Menschen und Menschen zu sehen*: 67). Ultimately, it would be the very soul's intention to utter it, containing only so much of the

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[1] "Sie [die intellectuelle Thätigkeit] und die Sprache sind daher Eins und unzertrennlich von einander" (*Sprachbau,* 64).

physical as external perception cannot do without[1]. If language consists in the outer manifestation of the spirit of a people, it is also identical to it:

Die Sprache ist gleichsam die äusserliche Erscheinung des Geistes der Völker; ihre Sprache ist ihr Geist und ihr Geist ihre Sprache; man kann sich beide nie identisch genug denken. (*Sprachbau,* 52)	Language is, as it were, the outer appearance of the spirit of a people; the language is their spirit and the spirit their language; we can never think of them sufficiently as identical. (*Language,* 46)

The *Sprachbau* essay systematically investigates the relation between human languages and historically situated national cultures. The organic figure of a tree-organisation of the human species is steadily in the background. Human language is seen as individualisable on all possible levels of humanity, from that of mankind to that of individual human beings. Nations, however, are the instances most significantly affiliated to historically specific human languages:

Denn so wundervoll ist in der Sprache die *Individualisierung* innerhalb der *allgemeinen Übereinstimmung*, dass man ebenso richtig sagen kann, dass das ganze Menschengeschlecht nur Eine Sprache, als dass jeder Mensch eine besondere besitzt. Unter den durch nähere Analogieen verbundenen Sprachähnlichkeiten aber zeichnet sich vor allen die aus *Stammverwandtschaft* der Nationen antstehende aus. (*Sprachbau,* 62)	For in language the *individualization* with a general *conformity* is so wonderful, that we may say with equal correcteness that the whole of mankind has but one language, and that every man has one of his own. But among the linguistic similarities connected by closer analogies, the most outstanding is that which arises form the *genetic relationship* of nations (*Language,* 53)

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[1] " […] nichts, als das *ansichtliche Verfahren* der Seele, ihn hervorzubringen, ist, und nur so viel Körper enthält, als die äussere Wahrnehmung nicht zu entbehren vermag" (*Sprachbau,* 80).

Greater or lesser family affinities and distances can thus be observed and studied between individual national languages[1]. Nonetheless, the notion of individuality of each national language as a historical whole is central to such scholarly research:

Das *vergleichende Sprachstudium*, die genaue Ergründung der Mannigfaltigkeit, in welcher zahllose Völker dieselbe in sie, als Menschen gelegte <u>Aufgabe der Sprachbildung</u> lösen, verliert alles höhere Interesse, wenn sie sich nicht an den Punkt anschliesst, in welchem <u>die Sprache mit der Gestaltung der nationellen Geisteskraft zusammenhängt</u> . . . (*Sprachbau,* 17)	The *comparative study of languages*, the exact establishment of the manifold ways in which innumerable peoples resolve the same <u>task of language formation</u> that is laid upon them, loses all higher interest if it does not cleave to the point at which <u>language is connected to the shaping of the nation's mental power</u>. . . (*Language,* 21)

Linguistic *Bildung* would be the most telling enactment of the form proper to a national culture. Deeply rooted in a national mentality, it would be the organ of each national inner being and even this being itself[2].

How exactly is the connection established between a national spirit and a language? Humboldt identifies linguistic form (the *Form* of a *Sprachbildung*) as an *innere Sprachform,* an inner language-form defining the essence of a given language as national and historical[3]. *Innere Sprachform* is not a static structure, but

[1] The figure governs, indeed, not only Humboldt's historical linguistics but the whole tradition of comparative linguistics of the 19th century, with its inquiry into the basic "families" of human languages – amongst which there would be the Indo-european one, to which Greek is attached.

[2] "Die Sprache […] ist das Organ der inneren Seins, dies Sein selbst […]. Sie schlägt daher alle feinste Fibern ihrer Wurzeln in die nationelle Geisteskraft" (*Sprachbau*, 17-18).

[3] See especially *Sprachbau,* chap. 11.

a mode of formational potential –an *energeia* rather than an *ergon,* as Humboldt specifies (*Sprachbau*, 56). It would be the nucleus that accounts for a specific mode in which sound turns into articulate language. It would be identifiable, as such, only by well informed historicist sense:

<u>Das</u> in dieser Arbeit des Geistes den articulierten Laut zum Gedankenausdruck zu erheben, <u>liegende Beständige und Gleichförmige</u>, so Vollständig, als möglich, in seinem Zusammenhange aufgefasst, und systematisch dargestellt, macht die *Form* der Sprache aus. (*Sprachbau,* 57)	<u>The constant and uniform element</u> in this mental labour of elevating articulated sound to expression of thought, when viewed in its fullest possible comprehension and systematically presented, constitutes the *form* of language (*Language,* 50)

Innere Sprachform would be characteristically at work in the *Bildung der Grundwörter*: the formation of the basic words of the corresponding language (*Sprachbau,* 59). This process would concern, to begin with, the basic biological mechanisms, through which vocal cords imitate and express thought-concepts, in onomatopoetically articulated sound. In the second half of the *Sprachbau* treatise, Humboldt ventures to classify different language-families from the point of view of their *innere Sprachform.* A series of different linguistic elements, well beyond the articulation of basic words, are taken into consideration. He investigates, for instance, grammatical structures, especially inflection rules; degrees and modes of formation and logical ordering of concepts; modes of integration into common speech of idioms as well as of poetic or philosophical traditions. The synthesis of the above would be the degree to which a language evolves according to a pure principle of regulated freedom (*aus reinem Principe in gesetzmässiger Freiheit kräftig*: 199), permitting subtlety and complexity in expression of thought.

At the same time, all languages would ultimately tend towards the historical realisation of the principle of their essence as national – delimiting the mode of freedom proper to each language. Dialectics of organic maturation and decay would govern the corresponding dynamics. Each individual language

would be enacting the principle of its own historical form (*Princip ihrer Bildung*) leading to the historical completion of its being (*Sprachvollendung Dasein*) (*Sprachbau,* 26). The case of languages functioning at a universal or oecumenic level are seen as expressing phases of either primitive emergence or final degeneration of national linguistic forms. Humboldt explicitly refers to Greek as the exemplary case of such a process of gradual formation, maturation and degeneration (27-28).

Connections between different linguistic forms would be events occurring through translation, furthering the overall process of historical evolution of languages. However, as each individual language is a structurally coherent whole, with its own world-view or *Weltansicht*, the effective crossing of the frontiers between different linguistic forms becomes somewhat problematic, if not impossible. As Humboldt remarks, the language that translates another, always tends to translate (*hin-überträgen*) its own self:

Die Erlernung einer *fremden Sprache* sollte daher die Gewinnung eines neuen Standpunktes in der bisherigen <u>Weltansicht</u> sein, und ist es der That bis auf einen gewissen Grad, da jede Sprache das ganze Gewebe der Begriffe und die Vorstellungsweise eines Theils der Menschheit anthält. Nur weil man in eine fremde Sprache immer, mehr oder weniger, seine eigne Welt-, ja seine eigne Sprachansicht <u>hinüberträgt</u>, so wird dieser Erfolg nicht rein und vollständig empfunden (*Sprachbau,* 73)	To learn a *foreign language* should therefore be to acquire a new standpoint in the <u>world-view</u> hitherto possessed, and in fact to a certain extent is so, since every language contains the whole conceptual fabric and mode of presentation of a portion of mankind. But because we always <u>carry over</u>, more or less, our own world-view, and even our own language-view, this outcome is not purely and completely experienced. (*Language,* 60)

Different languages, differently evolving towards the accomplishment of their respective formational principles, would have different ways and degrees

of effectively connecting to each other, conditioned by their respective historical positions. This standpoint implicitly posits an additional, typically Humboldtian, as well as Wolfian, postulate. Within the setting of world-history, human linguistic formness as such becomes transparent, as object of knowledge, to languages, and only to languages, formally advanced to a stage of mature historical awareness. The modern sense of history, overcoming the limitations and constraints of translative crossings, would eventually permit access to any human language as properly historical. Ideally, there would be no language either "dead" or "foreign" to an intellect that can bring back to life all human languages as objects of its knowledge. Historicism thus posits, in an apparent paradox, the overcoming of historical and linguistic differences otherwise postulated as incommensurable – such as those between antique or dead languages and modern or living ones.

The historicist intellect can thus be seen as creating and occupying a position over and beyond the field of history and its national-linguistic territories. Assuming the role of an agency of ultimate historicisation of history, it situates itself at the outer edge of the realm of history, overcoming its constraints and limitations. Philology can thus assume the authority to restore, as a corrective *sensus*, the formational deficiencies of scribal artefacts, according to principles of validly readable textual formness. Its Wolfian task, akin to the Humboldtian quest of the inner *Sprachbild* of national languages, would be prior to and over-determining any current reading tasks, including translative ones.

A.4. DEBATING THE QUESTION

A.4.1. Negotiating Homericity

The Wolfian paradigm established the grounds on which the Homeric Question has been debated by the modern academic discipline of philology. The debate concentrated on a series of particular problems that Wolf highlighted as most pertinent. How far do the transmitted *scripta* comply with principles such as those of narrative coherence and expressive conformity? If they are found to deviate, should one attribute the deviance to defective mechanisms of transmission and proceed to drastic emendation or reformation? Should one, on the contrary, resituate the moment of the Homeric *cultus vitae* or mitigate principles of textual formness, so that the deviance may be excused or justified, according to the conditions of the initial emergence of the poems? The debate has been invariably seen as organised around two poles[1]: the pole of the *analysts* and the pole of the *unitarians*. Analysts, often considered as expressing the new orthodoxy of the German philological tradition, are most critical with respect to the readability of the received vulgate. Unitarians, mostly affiliated to traditions situated outside the field of German historicism (such as British classical studies or extra-academic erudition), are resistant to the Wolfian breakthrough.

The analytic standpoint, particularly influential or even predominant during the 19th century, drives Wolfian criticism to its extremes by holding firmly to principles of textual formness and by regarding the received vulgate as highly questionable. The hypothesis of original compositions of limited extent, emerging relatively early in history (and, in any case, before the invention or expansion of alphabetic literacy), is retained with particular emphasis. At the

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[1] I have already indicated my main references on the history of the Homeric Question. Most interesting and informative, for a history of the post-Wolfian philological debate, are Dodds (1954), Lesky (1967), Heubeck (1988) and Turner (1997).

foundations of Western literary tradition there would be primeval expressions of inaugural poeticity, not all-encompassing literary artefacts. Homer would be a figure naming the idiosyncratic authorial agency of such beginnings. Initially short songs, gradually added around some initial common nucleus, were later joined into a whole, by the ingenious yet poetically problematic agency of a "bungling redactor" (Dodds 1954, 2). A tradition of diverse streams of copying and editing followed, on which Hellenistic scholarship imposed some homogeneity. The Byzantine vulgate would be the most recent offspring of the process. The most extreme instances of analytic criticism hold that the Homeric vulgate has to be decomposed into its different initial songs – starting, of course, with the dissociation of the older Iliadic songs from the most recent Odyssean ones[1].

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[1] The following contributions have been particularly influential within the analysts' field. G. Hermann's *De interpolationibus Omerici*, 1832, was the first to formulate a theory which eventually acquired a predominant position: gradual formation of the *Iliad* on the basis of an initial poetic nucleus identified as the song of the "wrath of Achilles". He was later considered, by more radical analytic tendencies, as aesthetically or linguistically conservative. K. Lachmann, advanced his "lay-theory" of the constitution of the Iliadic poem in his *Betrachtungen über Homers Ilias*, 1847. He precluded the existence of an identifiable unitary original song. According to models of folk-poetry, he distinguished up to 18 original *Kleinlieder* within the vulgate corpus of the *Iliad*. A. Kirchhoff was the first to have intensively applied analytical criticism to the *Odyssey*, in his *Die homerische Odyssee und ihre Entstehung*, 1859. The poem as we have it would be the rather awkward product of the toils of a *Bearbeiter*, compiled out of three distinct original songs (the one of *Odyssey* proper, the one of the voyage of Telemachos and the one of the Vengeance against the suitors). Wilamowitz could also be considered as initially endorsing analytic tendencies, especially in his *Homerische Untersuchungen*, 1881. An eccentric version of post-analytical criticism later emerged in France. V. Bérard, in his 1924-1925 edition of *Odyssée*, opts for a unified Homeric text faithfully expressing the reality of its historical times. However, only extensive emendation and reformation would allow the recovery of the original Homeric text – clearly exposing, amongst others, the exact trajectory and timing of Odyssean travels. Bérard (1925) rejects the Wolfian legacy in quite polemical terms.

A.4. *Debating the Question*

The unitarian position appears to have gained ground parallel to the development of English and American classical philology since the end of the 19th century. It has been particularly favoured by such events as Schliemann's archaeological findings and conjectures, which were initially seen as confirming the hypothesis of a historically identifiable Homer, having poetised historically verifiable events, to which he would be relatively close. An earlier dating of the invention and expansion of alphabetic literacy could corroborate the hypothesis that some form of writing may have been used by the poet. The basic claim is that the vulgate is adequately, if not perfectly, readable as the sequence of two compositional wholes, most probably by the same author. Problems of incoherence or inconsistency exposed by analysts would be dispelled through a deeper understanding of the overall structure of the poems – or, eventually, by mitigating and relaxing, although never radically questioning, the standards of textual formness themselves. The beginnings of modern literary tradition would thus reside in the extraordinary accomplishment of a poetic genius, however difficult it might be to account for its emergence.

An alternative unitarian solution to the Homeric problem has been to distance Homer from the Mycenean age and situate him well into the "dark" Iron Age, later than Wolf or the analysts suggested. Writing could thus have significantly contributed to the Homeric compositional breakthrough, while also enabling the early standardisation and relatively unbroken chain of transmission of a genuinely Homeric vulgate. The latter, not drastically affected by the Alexandrian intervention, would suffer only from minor defaults of instability, to be depicted and edited[1].

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[1] G. Hermann's "nucleus" theory has been seen, as we have said, as basically unitarian in its implications. G.W. Nitzch is considered as the first and most influential German advocate of a clearly unitarian refutation of Wolf, arguing for a synthetic Homeric genius – in his *De Historia Homeri,* 1830-37. The English extra-academic historian G. Grote, in his *History of Greece,* 1846, favours the quasi-unitarian view of a kernel of originally oral Homeric compositions. The canonical editions of A. Ludwich (Homer 1891; 1907) are grounded on research of analytical

The compromising "neo-analytic" standpoint is a re-formulation of the unitarian view of a relatively late Homer, in terms informed by analytic problematics[1]. The received texts are considered as Homeric but only under a

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fervour but endorse unitarian premises. W. Leaf, in his 1915 *Homer and history*, maintains a very influential unitarian standpoint. In combination with Schliemann's discoveries, Homer is redefined by Leaf as a bard of early aristocratic courts, having little to do with the analytical and romantic imagery of a *Volk* singer. Leaf's historical perspective also acknowledges and ponders on the problematic status of Homeric poetry with respect to modern readability criteria. G. Murray's *Rise of the Greek epic,* 1907, develops British unitarianism in a different direction. Murray opts for the idea of a Homeric "traditional book" integrating long-standing cultural traditions into poetically problematic but historically significant "monuments of the civilised humanity in the West" (Turner 1997, 144). Wilamowitz, in his *Die Heimkehr des Odysseus,* 1927, seems to be moving towards a unitarian compromise, including strong reservations with respect to the literary quality and value of the received Homeric poems. Th. W. Allen, with his work around the Oxford edition of Homer (Homer 1919) and the *Prolegomena* to his *editio major* of the *Iliad* (Allen 1931), has been the most influential and authoritative advocate of a highly sophisticated unitarian tradition. Strong unitarian statements have also marked the development of American philology. J. A. Scott's *The unity of Homer,* 1921, strongly criticises the Wolfian tradition. In France, Mazon's 1937-1938 edition of the *Iliad* remains on unitarian grounds, but is also poignantly aware of the complex and problematic nature of the manuscript tradition (see also Mazon 1959).

[1] Wilamowitz exemplifies, through his long and prolific career, the gradual passage from an extreme analytic position to a quasi-unitarian compromise. His *Homerische Untersuchungen* (op. cit.) restates and elaborates the analytic viewpoint of Lachmann and Kirchhoff, rejecting any idea of a coherent Homeric corpus in antiquity, although situating writing, together with Homer, very early in time. His *Die Ilias und Homer* (1916) moves Homer from the 10th century to the middle of the 8th, favouring the hypothesis of a basic initial Iliadic corpus, integrating earlier developments of the aoidic tradition. *Die Heimkehr des Odysseus* (op. cit.) situates the *Odyssey* at the closing of the tradition and allows for the possibility of a late Homer reassembling the chaos of discrepant branches of aoidic tradition. See, in this respect, Clarke (1981, 165) and Myres (1958, chap. 9).

J.H.O. Immisch, with his *Die innere Entwicklung de griechischen Epos,* 1904 and G. Murray (op. cit.), have contributed a lot to historical problematics over the processes and mechanisms of the emergence, subsistence and gradual extinction of the Greek epic tradition. More strictly

perspective that considerably mitigates the status of their compositional unity – as well as the nature of Homer's genius. Homer would be the culmination rather than the inauguration of an age-old aoidic tradition. He would have composed his poetry by integrating diverse and multiple elements of this tradition into a new synthesis of his own. The unitarian ideal of a foundational poetic instance is thus retained, but its role changes, taking into account analytic suspicion[1]. The object of philological inquiry is transposed accordingly: from the textual criticism of the received vulgate, to the investigation of its earlier sources and of the strategies that integrated them into the Homeric compositional whole.

The more recent and currently prevailing "oral theory" of Homer is a most fruitful attempt to combine the basic Wolfian postulate of originally oral Homeric compositions with a defence of the received *scripta* as historically readable documents[2]. Its most interesting aspect, for our purposes, resides in its

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philological, the work of D. Mülder is considered as the inaugural statement of the neo-analytic compromise, towards which the field of philology gradually evolved. *Die Ilias und ihre Quellen,* 1910, set the task of reading the transmitted text as properly Homeric, while systematically investigating its historical background and earlier poetic sources. W. Schadewaldt's *Von Homers Welt und Werk,* 1944, distinguishes within the Homeric corpus the basic or primitive trend of Iliadic grandeur and a second, more sophisticated tendency involving religious and moral problematics, of the type that predominate in the *Odyssey.* Also influential in a neo-analytical direction has been the work of I. Th. Kakridis.

[1] See for example the statement of Kakridis (1954):

"The image of Homer which thus gradually begins to be formed is exactly what one should expect from the genius of a Greek poet: he is tied to the long-standing tradition of his country, while rescuing the tradition by creating a world of his own." (195; my translation).

[2] The pioneering role in this respect is invariably attributed to Milman Parry. The posthumous publication of his collected works (1971) comprises a series of treatises and essays mainly published during the period 1928-1937. Systematic references to the "oral theory" of Homer as a new or even revolutionary tendency, joining philological research to anthropological

critique of the philological principles of textual formness and readability. The vulgate would be a valid document to the precise degree that it is an idiosyncratic linguistic construct, governed by non-textual principles of composition and necessitating different skills of reading. The "oral theory" of Homer could thus be considered as a largely post-philological development. As such, it will be discussed later in this thesis.

A.4.2. Variance

New manuscript Homeric material has been brought to light since Wolf – especially papyri, mostly fragmentary, dating from Hellenistic and Roman times. We can distinguish, today, the following categories of Homeric *scripta*[1]:

- Byzantine parchment or paper codices (the oldest extant integral one, still being the tenth-century *Venetus A* Iliad);

- papyri (mostly fragments of scrolls), discovered throughout the nineteenth and especially since the beginning of the twentieth century, dating from

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inquiry, appear in the 1960s – see for example Dodds (1954). A. Lord's *Singer of tales* (1960) is most often considered as the paradigmatic work in this respect, Lord being Parry's student and collaborator. A clear indication of the dominating position that this tendency has gradually acquired in the field of Homeric studies is the characteristic difference, in structure and overall orientation, between the old and the new *Companions* to Homer (Wace and Stubbings 1962; Morris and Powell 1997; see in particular the "Editor's Introduction" to the latter). The impression is analogous in the case of the most recent analytical commentaries on the *Iliad* and, especially, on the *Odyssey* (Kirk, 1993; Heubeck, 1992)

[1] Scattered information on the subject of this section can be found in many publications, especially introductions to philological editions of Homer. Most comprehensive and bibliographically informed is Halsam (1997) who estimates at around 1000 the overall number of extant Homeric documents (including fragments).

early third century B.C. to eighth century A.D. (most of them from the third and second centuries A.D., no more than 40 earlier than 150 B.C.)[1];

- citations of older authors (including Plato and Aristotle as well as minor authors, systematically recorded and investigated only after Wolf)[2].

The poetic corpus seen as carried by this material does not appear to have significantly changed since Wolf. Contemporary philologists still talk, however tentatively, of a Homeric "vulgate" [3]. Passing from late antique to medieval

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[1] Allen (1931) lists and classifies 188 manuscripts for the *Iliad.* Myres (1958, 13) gives the number of 76 for the *Odyssey.* Allen also lists 122 papyri fragments for the *Iliad,* a figure raised to 372 by Mazon (1959) – whose papyri contain a total of 13542 verses*.* Bérard (1925) lists a number of papyri close to 90 for his *Odyssey.* Reynolds and Wilson (1986, 192) raise the total figure of papyri fragments to 600, post-Ptolemaic in their majority, with 15 containing Alexandrian critical signs.

The first papyrological document, containing fragments of 19 books of the Iliad, was published as early as 1819 by Cardinal Angelo Mai. An impressively large number of them came to light during the years 1899-1902 in Oxyrynchus: they provided scholarship with early copies of extensive passages of antique texts. Since 1889 we have systematic annual publishing of papyrological material. For an introduction to papyrology see E. G. Turner, *Greek Papyri*, Oxford, 1980. For details on the Homeric papyri from the Ptolemaic Age (edited and commented with respect to their significance, as compared to the Byzantine manuscript tradition) see West (1967) as well as the more recent and comprehensive D.F. Sutton *Homer in the papyri,* Atlanta, 1991 (APA computer software).

[2] Byzantine codices and older papyri or parchment scroll fragments constitute the two basic sources of Homer up to now. Citations of lines referred to as Homeric found in other antique texts are a third and supplementary source. The cases of Plato and Aristotle are the most famous ones, but the field extends to lemmata cited in Byzantine lexicographic and scholiastic works, for instance. The authority of these witnesses is conditioned by our scant knowledge of the very norms governing citation practices in older times.

[3] Halsam (1997) remarks the following with respect to the reference of the term *vulgate*:

"Furthermore, the very term "vulgate" is a misnomer. It designates no particular version of the text; there is no vulgate of Homer as there is a vulgate of the Bible. It is convenient to be able to refer to any given reading of all or most of the medieval manuscripts as the vulgate reading. But that is no more than a form of shorthand. By an extension of this

manuscripts, we would have a multiplicity of variants of this corpus, retaining the perplexing status of a "rather Protean thing" (Halsam 1997, 56). Wolfian analytic philology raises, as we have seen, the question of the properly *historical* unity of the vulgate: recorded variants could be evidence of a multiplicity of corpi circulating before our oldest extant sources. Of what kind and range is the variance that marks the Homeric *scripta* as we have them?

Variance occurs on three relatively distinct levels: the materiality of the scribal artefacts (that is, the signifier in the strict sense of the term); the language of the poems (in the sense of the enacted idiom); the poetic corpus (in the sense of a compositional whole).

Philology has always seen the materiality of the scribal signifier as being of a minor, purely technical importance. Variance, in this respect, ranges from the vehicle of inscription and the technique of writing to the articulation of the corpus. Homeric documents start circulating as codices, replacing scrolls, around the third century of our era. Parchment replaces papyrus at a slower rate – and it is later replaced by paper. There is systematic separation of words at least since the third century before our era. Punctuation appears to be established after the fifth century A.D., while the use of accents continues to vary. The separation of different rhapsodies of the Homeric poems does not occur in papyri earlier than the second century A.D. – but it is often considered as a pre-Alexandrian convention. Scholiastic and other exegetical annotations, including interlinear

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shorthand the collectivity of such readings will be the vulgate text. But that is a construct which may never have had any existence in the real world, and it would be wrong to view any given manuscript as a more or less deformed version of it. What the manuscripts reflect is a host of concurrent variants jostling for preference, and there was no point in time at which this was not the case. Over time some variants dropped out, others came to the fore. The stabilisation of the 2nd century B.C., however drastic, was still only relative. Manuscripts continue to show a great deal of textual variation (more than is sometimes made out) but its range is narrower than seems to have been the case earlier. In this context the "vulgate" text may mean the collectivity not just of majority readings but of all readings in subsequent general circulation, as distinct from the different textual instantiations of the early Ptolemaic manuscripts. In this sense the vulgate text is a real thing, but far from a uniform entity." (63)

translation, only gradually acquire the extensive character that marks the Byzantine manuscript of the tenth century[1]. These changes were not seen as significantly affecting the literary construct at stake: techniques and methods of palaeographic decipherment and transcription would neutralise the corresponding differences.

The kind of variance that has mostly attracted the attention of philological editing concerns the linguistic-idiomatic and the compositional components of manuscript Homer. In both cases, a consensus seems to be firmly established on the following assumption. Variance is relatively limited, never reaching the point of suggesting that one or the other document carries a corpus, or fragments of a corpus radically different from that of the vulgate whole.

Within the Byzantine tradition, as recorded in the philological *apparatus*, morphological or syntactic variance is sporadic. Differences between manuscripts at the level of whole lines mainly concern the addition or omission of verses highly repetitious and formulaic. We do not have cases of differently composed larger compositional segments. One can thus wonder indeed over the "strikingly uniform medieval manuscript tradition" (Lamberton 1977, 33).

Papyrological findings also seem to corroborate the idea of a unitary, albeit varying, idiomatic and compositional whole[2]. Some fragments suggest the circulation of "wild" or "eccentric" corpi until the first century B.C: they include a number of "plus-verses" suggesting compositions longer than the vulgate[3].

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[1] For a concise summary of such changes and variations see Halsam (1997, 57-60); for a more general approach see Reynolds & Wilson (1991).

[2] Halsam (1997) talks of an early construct of "different physiognomy" than the medieval one (64) but also affirms that "ancient manuscripts vary among themselves in much the same way as the medieval, only more so" (97).

[3] According to Halsam (1997), such verses "slow the pace of the narrative without materially altering the action" (66).

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These verses, however, are mostly repetitions of lines also occurring in the vulgate, which do not significantly alter the compositional whole (West 1967, 13; Mazon 1957, 70). All papyri dating later than the first century B.C. reproduce parts of an overall corpus practically identical with the Byzantine vulgate, with variations mainly grammatical and orthographic[1]. We can thus safely talk of a poetic corpus highly standardised at least since the first century B.C. and persisting up to and through the medieval manuscript tradition. This moment comes shortly after the times of Hellenistic scholarship and may thus suggest that Alexandrian scholars significantly contributed to the standardisation.

Questions can be raised, of course, about the situation before the moment of a relative standardisation of Homer. Citations by old authors have been used as sources referring us to Homeric corpi circulating in times older than those of our oldest extant manuscripts. They do presents us, occasionally, with lines or small passages unknown to the vulgate. Nevertheless, he corresponding corpi would still not be radically different from the corpus of the medieval codices and Ptolemaic papyri (Mazon 1959, 66, n. 3)[2].

The discovery of older material, in other words, has accentuated the old paradox of the emergence and persistence of a relatively stable Homeric corpus.

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[1] See Allen (1931, 195) for a strong statement in this respect. West (1967) is more ambiguous but does not question those premises. See my next section for more details on the role of the Alexandrian critics with respect to the transmission of Homeric *scripta*.

[2] A. Ludwich in his *Die Homervulgata als voralexandrinisch erwiesen,* Leipzig, 1898, collects 259 citations adding up to 520 verses. He concludes with the suggestion that a Homeric vulgate, not radically different from the medieval one, was already established in early antiquity (Mazon 1959, 66, n. 3). Lamberton (1997, 33) illustrates how "there are formidable obstacles to answering these questions prior to the Hellenistic period".

The possibility that a multiplicity of versions of Homer were in circulation in pre-Alexandrian antiquity does not necessarily contradict the hypothesis that one of these versions enjoyed some kind of a higher canonical authority.

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It is, consequently, not surprising that modern philology did not manage to effectively break the authority of the medieval vulgate, in spite of the continuing debate. Wolf himself never went so far as to present an edition standing up to the *desiderata* of his *Prolegomena*[1]. Heyne, Wolf's teacher and antagonist, published, in 1802, an edition of the *Iliad* which has been qualified as a "second princeps" (Allen 1931, 267). It set the norm of the modern *apparatus criticus*, systematically recording variant manuscript readings. A series of editions followed, affiliated to different national or inter-national philological entreprises. Different editorial conventions have been used to mark suspected interpolations or repeated lines – most of which remain in the edited corpus[2], which varies mostly at the level of sporadic grammatical and orthographic choices[3].

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[1] His first educational edition of Homer had already appeared in 1784-1785 and his second, definitive edition appeared in 1804-1807, with a long preface on the history of the text, but without substantially differing on the level of the text itself.

[2] The 1895-1987 edition of Van Leewen and Da Costa is noticeable. It prints the "lost" digamma (first introduced in by Bekker in 1843) but also identifies and annotates all repeated passages. The Lipsiae editions of Ludwich (Homer 1891; 1907) take into consideration a larger number of manuscripts and set the norm for the collation of newly discovered papyri. The Oxford editions of T. W. Allen and D. B. Monro (Homer 1919), as well as Allen's 1931 *editio major* of *Iliad* have largely canonised the assumption of a pre-Alexandrian vulgate, relatively well preserved by the medieval tradition. More radical in its reference to pre-medieval corpi, is Bolling's 1950 *Ilias Atheniensium* (aiming at the reconstruction of the Pisistratedean original and its Attic forms while respecting Alexandrian critical signs, especially the *athetesis*). Von der Mühll's 1946 *Odyssey* is also marked by analogous preoccupations. For more information see Halsam (1997, 99-100).

Parallel to new editions of Homer, we have had autonomous editions of the Byzantine scholia and connected exegetical works. See in particular Dindorf (1855; 1888) and Erbse (1988). See also Eustathius (1960; 1971). For more information on the different editions of Homeric scholia and their methodological presuppositions see Nagy (1997).

[3] The choice of readings largely depends on the degree to which the editor conforms to variants of the Byzantine vulgate or opts, instead, for readings hypothetically closer to

The *apparatus criticus* could thus be considered as the most important innovation of modern philology as compared to older editorial traditions. It states the sources of the chosen readings and records discarded variants found in other sources: it controls the authority of the modern editor rather than that of the manuscript tradition. There is an ironic twist in this: modern philological criticism appears to have affected the authority of its vulgate much less than Wolf wanted his Alexandrian precursors to have affected their own received material.

The question that remains open is how to account for the exact conditions under which the Homeric corpus persisted as a relatively standardised one.

A.4.3. Transmission

The notion of *transmission* has been of a key-concept of modern philology at large, and of the debate over the Homeric case in particular. I am not sure that Wolf would use the notion any less ironically than he uses *vulgate*. His approach, as I have tried to show, questions the idea, implicit in *transmission*, that memory and its common technical supports, including early writing practices, could adequately carry genuine historical forms. The alternative or, at least, complementary idea of a gradual and largely irregular process of initial formation and textual reformation of scribal material, would be closer to Wolfian problematics. Modern philology has been persistently lagging behind Wolfian sophistication in this respect. This is perhaps especially true for the unitarian standpoint, but it also holds for the analytical one. Post-Wolfian philology has been marked by an overall tendency to understand the editorial task as driving

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Alexandrian suggestions or older versions of Homer. A most recent tendency in editorial norms (Thiel 1991; 1996) is to privilege the medieval vulgate at the expense of older readings while minimising the role of the *apparatus*.

us back to an original. This original would be recoverable through a sort of reversal or even erasure of the chain of transmission that mediates between antiquity and modernity.

T. W. Allen, a most authoritative advocate of British unitarian Homeric philology, has developed an influential body of arguments in favour of the pre-Alexandrian establishment and unhindered transmission of the Homeric vulgate (Allen 1924). The historical mechanisms sustaining such an emergence would consist in the relative autonomy of the field of book-production and circulation, with respect to scholarly practices and editorial concerns. The field was already in work, according to Allen, in Pisitratedean times. It entailed the institution of scriptorial agencies for which the "only law was the correct copying of their original" (327). The offspring of their work would have persisted in spite of or even against scholarly tendencies such as those enacted by Alexandrian critics and modern analytical philologists[1].

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[1] Allen (1924) presents a quantitative analysis of the percentage of readings of each of the major Alexandrian critics (as recorded by the scholia) that have passed onto the medieval vulgate. The conclusion reads: "There is nothing to show that the Alexandrians wrote commentaries otherwise than upon texts of practically the same bulk as those we possess; their comments assume a normal text and the same we possess" (319).

See also Reynolds & Wilson (1968, 13) for a discussion of analogous quantitative evidence. This position does not seem to be in any way contradicted by Fraser (1972, chap. 8) who summarises and elaborates updated historical research. Mazon (1959) holds a rather compromising view according to which "si nos manuscrits ne sont pas 'aristarchiens' ils ne continuent non plus la *koinhv*; ils ont subi une influence alexandrine et représentent une tradition mélangée." (27). The main impact of the Alexandrian intervention is seen by Mazon as residing in the definitive omission of a certain number of lines (see especially pp. 32-33). West (1967, 17 and 27) doubts the relevance of papyrological witnesses in this respect.

Analytical "aristarchomania" has also been criticized on broader, historical grounds. According to Pfeiffer (1968, 215 et seq.) Alexandrian critics mainly acted as "men of letters", immediate successors and students of poets, never actually assuming the role of philologists in the modern sense of the term.

However "conservative" this approach may be, its theoretical challenge is quite significant, although rarely, if ever, acknowledged or addressed as such by its advocates. It exposes the persistence of literary formations as a phenomenon irreducible to developments at the level of textual and historical awareness. It encourages research on the idiosyncrasy of the very activity of manuscript copying, countering the Wolfian sense of scribal negativity. This should include antique, but also medieval manuscript traditions, the history of which had been recently acknowledged as "uncharted territory" (Halsam 1997, 89).

The task of philological *Textkritik*[1] is often presented in terms that express a rather simplistic conception of the operations and workings of manuscript traditions. The objective of editorial criticism would be to discover or to hypothetically reconstruct a unique source lying at the beginning of copying the copying chain and its bifurcations. Ideally, this would be close to the archetypal *Urtext* of which all received manuscripts have derived. The corresponding

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More recently, van Thiel, in his edition of *Odyssey* (Homer 1991) insists that "Auch die Alexandriner kannten keinen anderen als unseren Text" (Halsam 1997, 87).

For older criticism of the Wolfian hypothesis of an editorial chaos reigning up to the Alexandrian times, see the study of Ludwich on the antique citations of Homer, already cited.

[1] The technicalities and terminology of philological *Textkritik* were elaborated and canonized not by Wolf, but by his successors in the field of German philology. Lachmann, in his edition of the *New Testament,* provided the paradigm for the "stemmatic theory", which we briefly discussed here.

A standard short manual has been P. Maas' *Textkritik,* Leipzig, 1927 (1st edition) updated, in English, by West (1973). Also basic is A. Dain's *Les Manuscrits,* Paris, 1964. For details on the constitution and evolution of the methodology of philological textual criticism see: R. Devreesse, *Introduction à l' étude des manuscrits grecs,* Paris, 1954; W. W. Greg, *The Calculus of variants,* Oxford, 1927; S. Timpanaro, *La genesi del metodo del Lachmann,* Padua 1981 (3rd revised edition). Particularly interesting accounts of problems concerning specific case-studies are offered by: R. Renehan, *Greek textual criticism: A Reader,* Cambridge Mass., 1969; A. Severyns, *Texte et apparat: Histoire critique d' une tradition imprimée,* Bruxelles, 1962.

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methodology (paradigmatically inaugurated by Lachmann, shortly after Wolf) reconstructs genealogical ties between manuscripts and groups of manuscripts, according to the arborescent figure of a *stemma codicum.* Stemmatic affinities would be betrayed by copying mistakes that different manuscripts display in common. The logic of the model implies the existence of a single archetype, usually situated early in the Middle Ages[1]. Allen (1931), for his major edition of *Iliad,* has elaborated and altered the model by proposing a highly influential, even if often contested (both in its application and its principles) classification of Homeric manuscripts in "families"[2].

A basically organic and, more specifically, biological configuration of the structure of manuscript traditions marks such approaches. Their regression with respect to Wolfian theoretical sophistication and methodological flexibility comes to the fore with particular emphasis when the philological task is pictured as a simple reversal of the process of textual transmission:

> The business of textual criticism is in a sense to <u>reverse this process</u>, to <u>follow back the threads</u> of transmission and try to <u>restore the texts</u> as closely as possible to the <u>form which they originally had</u>. Since no autograph manuscripts of the classical authors survive, we are dependent for our knowledge of what they wrote on manuscripts (and sometimes editions) which lie at an unknown <u>number of removes from originals</u>. These manuscripts vary in their trustworthiness as witnesses to the

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[1] Wilamowitz, in the last part of his *Geschichte der Philologie,* comments on the methodology of textual criticism. He insists on the complexities of the task, but also on the idea that emendation should lead as closely as possible back to the "original act of authorsrhip" (1982, 170). Nevertheless, he questions the hypothesis of a single archetype (171).

For a more detailed description of the stemmatic model see Reynolds and Wilson (1968, ch, 6, 208 et seq.) For a critical discussion of related issues see Cerquiglini (1989, 75-77).

[2] None of the families into which Allen classifies his 188 manuscripts presents substantial differences with respect to the rest, except for family "h". The unusual number of Aristarchean readings present in the latter is explained by Allen as the result of copying mistakes owed to "transference from the marginalia" (1931, 209 et seq.)

original texts; all of them have suffered to some degree in the process of transmission, whether physical damage, from the fallibility of the scribes, or from the effects of deliberate interpolation. An attempt to <u>restore the original text</u> will obviously involve the use of a difficult and complex process, and this process falls into two stages [recension & emendation]. (Reynolds and Wilson 1968, 207)

Mazon, in his French edition of the *Iliad,* although accepting the idea of a persistent vulgate, questions the consistency of Allen's "families" as well as the assumption of a single archetype standing at the origins of extant manuscripts. He proposes a more complex image for the transmission process:

> ll ressort déjà de ces indications que la tradition médiévale manuscrite de l' Iliade est <u>une des plus contaminées qui soit, ou, plus exactement, une des plus mélangées</u>. Ce fait s'explique par le caractère originel du texte: nous verrons que si haut que nous remontions, <u>nous avons toujours affaire à une vulgate</u>. Il s' explique aussi par l' histoire de ce texte au Moyen Age. L' Iliade a été transmise dans un grand nombre de manuscrits et nous constaterons qu'il n'y a <u>pas lieu d'essayer de restituer un archétype</u>. (Mazon 1959, 8-9)

A method of recension aiming at the reconstruction of a *codex optimum,* according to selected criteria by which extant manuscripts are appraised independently of their position in a stemma, is presented in Reynolds and Wilson (1968, 216 et seq.)

The idiosyncrasy, if not the enigmaticity, of the mechanisms and processes of the manuscript tradition, starting with the Byzantine copying practices and scriptorial institutions, remains to be theoretically addressed. An original that is not necessarily like its initial self could be persisting as such through copying practices that do not simply transmit a given archetypal construct.

A.4.4. Learning the Language

The language of Homer has borne no other name than "Homeric" – no further category having adequately qualified its historical specificity as a distinct

variation of antique Greek. It should be recalled that the Homeric poems are the only extant witnesses of their language. They thus enact it in its entirety – with the possible exception of their Hesiodic counterpart. A dimension that was only implicitly addressed by Wolf, but which greatly preoccupied early Humanist Homeric scholarship is that of the learning of this language.

"The nature and historical formation of the Homeric dialect" has been recently qualified as "the longest-standing of all Homeric problems" (Morris and Powell 1997, xvi). The term "dialect" itself is certainly part of the problem. It assumes that Homeric Greek complies with categories and problematics of historical and comparative linguistics applied to national languages and their families or branches. The use of the term thus begs the main question: the one of the very status of the Homeric language as a historically identifiable linguistic *idiom*[1].

Philology encounters, indeed, major difficulties when venturing to situate Homeric Greek in its relations to hypothetically reconstructed spoken Greek dialects at the age around which the poems are supposed to have been originally composed and initially circulating[2]. Note, for instance, how Horrocks, in his elaborate contribution to the *New Companion to Homer,* acknowledges the difficulty, if not aporia, of a historical linguistics of Homer:

> The language of the earliest Greek poetry therefore <u>displays a clear dialectal character, but interestingly one which never corresponds to the "official" dialect of any given city or region</u> (insofar as these are known to

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[1] Recall that I use the term *idiom* to refer to the lexically, morphologically and syntactically distinct fields of languages or dialects, to which we currently attribute names like *Greek, Latin, English* . I tend to use *language* as a more general term, closer to the French *langage.*

[2] Such are, mainly, the Ionic and Aeolic dialects (to which Homeric seems to be particularly akin, eclectically using morphological and syntactical features of both). Attic or properly classical Greek also comes in the picture, especially when alphabetic recording is concerned.

us). Instead each genre employs a form of language which exhibits certain distinctive "markers" of the dialect group to which the spoken and official varieties of its supposed region or origin belonged, but which conventionally eliminates narrow linguistic parochialism in favour of a more <u>stylised diction which conveys its dialectal affiliations in a rather neutral way</u> and which, in varying degrees, reflects authorial ambitions to reach a panhellenic audience. (Horrocks 1997, 195)

The reference to a "panhellenic" audience is one direction in which the solution to the problem has been sought. The other has been to consider the Homeric idiom as a *kunstsprache*: an idiom artistic or even artificial – in a way even more pronounced than in the case of other literary variants of antique Greek. Although the term has lost much of its older value and impact, the problem that it has exposed persists – namely, the resistance of Homeric Greek to historicist linguistic categorisations.

The phenomenon that I wish to emphasise (and trace back to Wolf's *Prolegomena* in its connection and juxtaposition to the Humanist tradition) may sound paradoxical: philology reads Homer by somewhat circumventing the problem of the learning of the Homeric language. The theoretical premises of such a standpoint are at work in how Humboldt posits the accessibility of linguistic forms to modern historicist intellect[1].

Philological modernity has been systematically working, of course, on the Homeric vocabulary, grammar and syntax[2]. We also know that innumerable philological studies probe the meaning and connotations of specific Homeric words, phrases or figures. I do not intend either to disregard such labour or to

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[1] See section A.3.2 above.

[2] Comprehensive manuals of Homeric grammar have appeared since the 19th century, claiming the application of a historical method breaking with traditional grammatical formalism: Monro's *A Grammar of the Homeric Dialect,* Oxford, 1882; van Leeuwen's *Enchiridium dictionis epicae,* Leyden, 1894. Chantraine (1988; 1st edition 1942-1953) reflects recent developments, informed by tendencies of structuralist linguistics.

doubt its authority. Nonetheless, I would like to ponder on how, in its scholarly approach to Homeric language, philology tends to erase or cut through the mediation of post-Homeric Greek lexicographic and exegetical material. Modern philology presupposes a somewhat direct access to Homeric Greek, circumventing or bracketing the translative task enacted by the latter. In this, modern philology differs significantly from earlier Humanist approaches to Homer.

It is a commonly accepted fact that "knowledge of Greek became an attainment of exceptional rarity throughout the Middles Ages" in the European West (Reynolds and Wilson 1968, 118). Petrarch is known to have regretted the fact that he could not read the Homeric manuscript he had sought and received[1] and to have prompted, together with Boccaccio, a translation of Homer into Latin prose by Leozio Pilato, in Florence[2]. Dante, before him, and Chaucer, after him, also read Greek authors only in Latin translation. So did Chapman, whose translation into rhymed iambic couplets of *The Whole Works of Homer, Prince of Poets,* published between 1611 and 1615, is the first entire *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* turned by a single hand into a modern European language (Clarke 1981, 57). Recall that the appending of a Latin translation to the edited Homeric original was an established norm for early modern editions of Homer.

Greek began to be systematically taught in the West around the end of the fourteenth century, by invited Byzantine scholars. Its academic or quasi-academic learning expanded, throughout Humanist Europe, in the grounds of its

[1] Note the following from Petrarch's *Familiarum Rerum Libri 18,* 19 January 1354: "Homer is mute to me, or rather, I am deaf to him. Still, I enjoy just looking at him and often, embracing him and sighing, I say 'Oh, great man, how eagerly would I listen to you" (Clarke 1981, 57; from Petrarch's *Opera,* Florence, 1975).

[2] See Pfeiffer (1976, pp. 8, 38, 43 et seq.) for information on the tentative or completed renaissance translations of Homer into Latin prose or hexameters by scholars such as Lorenzo Valla, Politian, Samxon.

neo-Latin oecumenicity. This was not a learning of "antique" or "classical" Greek. As the Erasmian model exemplifies, the learning of Greek included the language of pagan Greek literature but also that of the *Old* and *New Testament* – in conjunction with Hebrew. In other words, older versions of Greek, including the Homeric one, were learned under the perspective of, not only other old languages, but also more recent forms of Greek. However scant or spurious, Byzantine lexicographic material was among the "favourite queries for the Hellenists of the day" (Grafton 1991, 13)[1].

A different tendency emerged as the idea of the antique, if not archaic status of Homeric poetry gained ground. Consider, for instance, the following argument of Johnson, commenting on Pope's uncertain knowledge of Greek. The translation of Homer through the mediation of Latin would present no inconvenience, precisely because the poetic language of Homer, as an archaic one, is most easily and effectively translatable:

> <u>Minute inquiries into the force of words are less necessary in translating Homer than other poets</u>, because his positions are general and his representations natural, with very little dependence on local or temporary customs, on those changeable scenes of artificial life which, by mingling original with accidental notions, and crowning the mind with images which time effaces, produces ambiguity in diction and obscurity in books. To this open display of unadulterated nature it must be ascribed that Homer has fewer passages of doubtful meaning than any other poet either in the learned or in modern languages […] <u>Those literal Latin translations were always at hand, and from them he could easily obtain his author's sense with sufficient certainty</u>; and among the readers of Homer the

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[1] The French Humanist scholar Casaubon is recorded as having identified the Byzantine dictionary of Hesychius as "the greatest treasure of human learning now extant". The *editio princeps* of the extended Homeric twelfth-century commentary of Eustathius was appreciated as a major event for Homeric scholarship. Together with the interlinear translations of the poems into Byzantine Greek and the rest of the *marginalia* (occasionally and eclectically printed along with the poetic corpus), Eustathius must have functioned as a basic educational tool for the learning of the Homeric language.

number is very small of those who find much in the Greek more than in the Latin, except the music of numbers.[1]

Pope, in his introduction to his translation of Homer, insists, indeed, that the Homeric language, once envisaged in its antique status, is particularly accessible to an adequately disposed modern intellect. The poetically learned modern translator can cut through the mediation of accessory material accompanying the conventional ways of learning and reading Homer. This "fortification" of Homer by his antique and, especially, medieval Greek readers would be a burden from which the modern reader should free himself (and the poems):

> I must confess the Greek fortification does not appear so formidable as it did, upon a nearer approach; and I am almost apt to flatter myself, that Homer secretly seems inclined to correspond with me, in letting me into a good part of his designs. There are, indeed, a sort of underlying auxiliaries to the difficulty of the work, called commentators and critics, who could frighten many people by their number and bulk. These lie entrenched in the ditches, and are secure only in the dirt they have heaped about 'em with great pains in the collecting it. But I think we have found a method of coming at the main works by a more speedy and gallant way than by mining underground; that is, by using the poetical engines, wings, and flying thither over their heads. (Pope 1967, VII: 4)

The modern poetic intellect sees itself as entitled and able to reach its own antiquity by crossing over piles of poetically and historically indiscriminate trivia. Such trivia, it should be noted, Pope is otherwise eager to show that he has effectively visited and assimilated. He constantly refers, in his annotations, to the corresponding authorities, especially Eustathius.

For Wolf, the reading competence of a modern intellect is no longer that of poetic sensibility but, rather, that of historical awareness. In *Prolegomena*, he evaluates the contribution of post-Alexandrian lexicographers and grammarians with respect to the learning of Homer's language. He mainly refers to late Greek

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[1] Cited in Pope (1967, vol. VII, "Introduction", lxxxiii).

antiquity, but everything he says also concerns the Byzantines, through which much of the corresponding material circulated. Wolf talks, in other words, about Pope's "ditches" – and he drives his argument in a direction surprisingly akin to Pope's. The Homeric language would be effectively readable only when liberated from its own Greek and Latin *parerga*. The philological sense can cut through ultimately trifling, albeit initially indispensable mediations, and understand any language better than its native speakers:

> But I do not regret at all the effort I expended on the study of the old grammarians. On the contrary, I feel that it aided me enormously both for this work and for general mastery of the Greek language [*ad omnem facultatem lingae Graece*], and no one can do useful work on editing any Greek writer unless he has collected the grammarians' rules through a similar course of reading and tested them against <u>correct principles [*ad optimas rationes* examinaverit</u>. […] Of course those learned in that sort of reading are wearied by ignorant and trifling hair-splitting [*indoctarum quarundam et minutarum argutiarum*]. But first of all modesty forbids you to despise anything before you know it very well. And – not to mention how many things they alone have preserved for us from ancient memory [*quam multa illi nobis soli <u>ex vetusta memoria</u> servaverint*]– those same triflers often explain the literal sense of passages very well [*etiam sensum verborum opime expediunt*]. For native knowledge of the language, which they had not entirely yet lost [*usus linguae nondum penitus amissus tutos*], saved them from many errors which nowadays we wrongly shield with the pleasures afforded by novelty in interpretation [*nove interpretatione deliciis*]. In Homer, moreover, work of that sort possesses unique pleasure and value. For by mastering and criticizing the variant readings and technical rules [*variarum lectionum et canonum technicorum … conquisitione et censura*] offered by the grammatical books and scholia, we are summoned into old times, times more ancient than those of many ancient writers [*in vetus et plerisque antiquis scriptoribus antiquius aevum*] and, as it were, into the company [*in societam*] of those learned critics, whose judgments and teachings once nourished the young Cicero, Virgil and Horace<u>. We barbarians who have been so slow to learn [*nos barbari ojyimaqei`ß*] can, so it seems, thoroughly rework those [judgments and teachings] without absurdity [*passim non absurde refingere posse videamur*] even though they were written about the Greek – that is, their native – language [*de Graeca, id est patria ipsorum, lingua scriptas*</u>]. (VI; *PRE*, 55-56; *PRL*, 14-15)

Ironically barbarian late-learners know better: they can correct *ad optimas rationes* what has been handed to them *ex vetusta memoria*. Antiquity, as an object of

historical knowledge, would thus be snatched out of rudimentary memorial mechanisms. Clarity of form, as opposed to blurred confusion, is implicitly postulated as the necessary correlative of such knowledge. Compare and connect the above to the following passage, questioning the value, although not the occasional usefulness, of the *Venetus* scholia:

> They were not made with the method [*non eo instituto facta*] that one of us would now use when taking notes: sometimes they were rather full, sometimes rather short. They were stuffed with readings, but these were not taken from the earliest sources, and were not adequately equipped with explanations of the arguments in their support [*nec rationum explicatione satis munitis*]. They contained much that related to Homeric learning and literature; little that helps to <u>form a sense [*ad sensum … informandum*</u>] of poetic qualities; nothing at all that depicts [*nihil quod … repraesentet*] the poets' age in terms of its own opinions, customs, and general tenor of feeling and thinking – not to mention the further stock of learned and unlearned trivia, with which these scholia too reveal the date of their origin. (IV; *PRE,* 50; *PRL,*8)

Principles of textual formness are at work again: methodical arrangement or disposition, explication of a rationale, in-formation of sense, configuration of an era as historically specific. On their grounds, philology learns Homer's language anew – perhaps more like a competently mastered, living language, than like an insurmountably distant, dead one. The *vestigia* of all languages would be, in a way, directly accessible or transparent to the supra-historical *sensus* that restores their proper historical *forma*. The problem of readability is raised and resolved, for philology, beyond the constraints of current translative toils. Translation is displaced to the realm of literary or pedagogical endeavours – of little, if any, scholarly relevance[1].

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[1] The use of Latin, not only in *Prolegomena*, but also in modern philological editing practices at large, could be less a translative mediation of the kind early Humanism indulged in, than an index of linguistic affinity and transparency. An antique language, conserved as the living academic language of philology, would be siding with the revived antique language it approaches, over and above current historical borders.

PART B. *THE TRANSLATIVE PARADIGM*

B.1. THE CASE OF BENJAMIN

B.1.1. Translative History

Central to this second part of my thesis is an essay that has attracted considerable attention within the field of contemporary literary theory, namely, Walter Benjamin's relatively early "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers [The task of the translator]"[1]. My approach to it will be largely articulated around questions provoked by Paul de Man's reading of the same in his "Conclusions: The Task of the Translator"[2]. How would Benjamin's notion of translation involve issues comparable to those of the philological paradigm? Why would de Man's reading of Benjamin be particularly significant in this respect?

Both Benjamin's and de Man's intellectual enterprises involve a constant confrontation with an issue that often lurks behind contemporary literary theory: what are we to make of philology? For Benjamin, philology is a field of scholarship closely connected to the academic tradition of German historicist thought and research. This tradition constitutes an explicit target of Benjaminian critique. At the same time, part of Benjamin's work (especially in the case of the *Passagen* project) seems paradoxically philological in inspiration and scope – and is, as such, most perplexing for a contemporary student of literary theory and

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[1] The essay was initially published in Heidelberg, in 1923, as a preface to Benjamin's translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens.* I will be referring to it as *Aufgabe.*

[2] The text is an edited transcript of a 1983 oral presentation concluding a series of lectures at Cornell University. It includes an appendix with the ensuing discussion under the title "Questions". I will be referring to the whole as *Conclusions.*

criticism. Consider, for instance, the recording of minute and largely trivial linguistic material. Benjamin has suggested that his monadological perspective on history offers a *ligne de fuite,* not out of history or philology in general, but out of the mystical rigidity which marks modern philological tradition and, more particularly, its historicist concentration on presumably self-sufficient facts[1]. De Man has provocatively affiliated literary theory to a gesture of a "return to philology"[2]. He speaks, however, from a position very distanced, not only from German historicism, but from all historical approaches to literature. His use of the term *philology* denotes, in a distinctly ironic accordance with its current Anglo-saxon meaning, a minute concentration on exclusively linguistic dimensions of texts. There is thus a subtle difference between Benjamin's and de Man's relations to the philological challenge. It echoes the old difference between language and history – and it emerges very tellingly in how de Man reads Benjamin on translation.

Translation, having been overlooked, if not erased, by Wolfian philology, might be the blind spot through the illumination of which one may probe one's relations to the premises and limits of the philological paradigm. The term *Überszetsung*, in Benjamin's essay, is a quasi-catachrestic figure of speech. It is borrowed from every-day usage, in which it designates a current and constantly on-going activity, transposing verbal constructs formulated in a given language, to equivalent ones in a different language. Its use in *Aufgabe,* however, refers us to a field quite distinct from the one of translative practice as we know it. Benjamin says, for instance, that texts in which discourse stands as a vehicle of information and which common usage considers as the most easy to translate,

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[1] See Benjamin's letter to Adorno, as cited in Tiedemann (1987, 65), from *Correspondance,* vol. 2 , Aubier-Montaigne, 1979, pp. 277-278.

[2] See in particular "The return to philology" in *Resistance to Theory,* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1986: 21-26.

are of little translative significance – and even, in a sense, non-translatable. He proposes as translatable *par excellence* texts most problematic for current translation – namely, antique and sacred ones. He designates as translative archetypes Hölderlin's versions of Sophocles – which are well known to be unreadable to those interested either in an acquaintance with the original or in enjoying the literary potential of the German language.

For Benjamin, the activity of translation is only interesting when it reaches extreme and most problematic limits: not when it pretends to solve the problem of crossings and connections between different languages, but when it shockingly exposes it as a theoretical one. He is particularly interested in how writings of the past persist as readable beyond the linguistic setting of their initial emergence. Translative relations between temporally distanced linguistic fields involve the issue of history. I suggest translative occurrences are addressed by Benjamin as paradigmatic historic events[1].

The *Über-* of *Übersetzung* might hold significant keys to the matter. It also occurs in a term used by Benjamin in close connection and implicit juxtaposition to his idea of the translative task: *Übertragung*, connoting a trans*ference* perhaps more complete or integral than the trans*positioning* of *Übersetzung*. The preposition also has a broader use in Benjamin's text. Translation, for instance, is said to regard not the life, but the over-life (*Überleben*) of the original; not a historical but an over-historical (*überhistorisch*) kinship between different languages. *Transmission* and *tradition* are implictly at stake.

For Benjamin, the issue of history clearly persists along that of language. It only does so in a way that problematises the historicist configuration of a temporal succession of causally related entities or events. *Aufgabe* thus

[1] As Derrida remarks "loin que nous sachions d'abord ce que veut dire 'vie' ou 'famille' au moment ou nous nous servons de ces valeurs familières pour parler de langue et de traduction, c'est au contraire à partir d'une pensée de la langue et de sa 'survie' en traduction que nous accéderions à la pensée de ce que vie et famille veulent dire " (1985, 222).

anticipates the central importance that the concept of history, the *Begriff der Geschichte,* explicitly acquires in Benjamin's later work. In this thesis, I will be distinguishing between the Benjaminian and the historicist configurations of *history*, by juxtaposing *historic* to *historical*[1].

A certain number of questions arise with respect to the above, which are particularly conspicuous in *Aufgabe* – and on which de Man largely centres his own intervention. How can we still talk of *human history* when the historicist configuration of historical humanness is undone? Would an *über*-historical perspective involve metaphysical and even theological problematics?

De Man begins his own essay by implicitly juxtaposing *language* to *history*. He refers, more particularly, to Gadamer's quest of the specific characteristic that would have driven modern thought "beyond Hegel in Hegelian terms" (*Conclusions,* 76). According to Gadamer, as de Man reads him, this would consist in a dialectical overcoming of the theologically charged notion of *spirit* or *Geist* (and of its implications with respect to *subject*), operated through a distinctly critical and acute awareness of the issue of language. De Man agrees that *language* has recently been and should be firmly kept at the centre of attention. He adds that *language,* played against *spirit*, jeopardises all problematics of historical overcoming – problematics that, de Man suggests, are more theological than Hegelian. He subsequently takes this point in a relatively different direction: if history remains to be addressed at all, it would be only as a "purely

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[1] This terminological distinction is my own: it has no direct counterpart in Benjaminian German. I propose it as an operational rather than as a properly conceptual accommodation: a shorthand reference to my inquiry on how Benjamin's notion of history differs from the historicist one. One could surmise that we also need a different term for "history" itself (say "historia", drawing on the Herodotean paradigm rather than on the Heideggerian juxtaposition between "Geschichte" and "Historie"). I prefer to resist this rather positivistic tendency to change terms when a reconfiguration or transposition of their meaning is at work. Words are fields of changing and eventual diverging meanings – and, as such, should remain the same, as much as possible.

linguistic complication" (*Conclusions,* 92). He reads Benjamin as thinking along those lines. *Aufgabe* would be a quest for a theory of language, which undoes the validity of problematics over history[1]. Translation would acquire its crucial importance precisely because it highlights purely linguistic concerns:

> The relationship of the translator to the original is the relationship between language and language, wherein the problem of meaning or the desire to say something, the need to make a statement is entirely absent. Translation is a relation from language to language, not a relation to an extralinguistic meaning that could be copied, paraphrased, or imitated. (*Conclusions,* 81-82)

Anticipating typically deconstructive insights, de Man's Benjamin would be telling us why and how it is, consequently, "impossible to translate" (74).

This way of defining or summarising the Benjaminian task is, indeed, readable into Benjamin – but only as an insightful misreading. De Man is correct when he stresses how Benjamin probes the relationship between language and meaning. He is also correct when he underscores not only Benjamin's anti-historicism but also his distances with respect to mystical idealism or traditionally messianic concerns. He is wrong, however, when he assumes that Benjamin's concern for language implies that historical matters would be effects of (or secondary with respect to) linguistic figuration[2]. If he insightfully discards the idea of a dialectic overcoming of Hegelianism, he seems to be blindly endorsing, *contra* Benjamin, the figure of a rupture with respect to other intellectual traditions, especially those that place the issue of language under metaphysical or even theological perspectives.

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[1] See Handelman (1991, 37-39) for an overview of the more general tendency to read Benjamin's concentration on language only in order to disqualify historical problematics.

[2] The tendency to consider that early Benjaminian theory of language tends to view language as an end in itself, in a way comparable to theories of *art pour l'art* has been expressed by Tiedemann (1987, 50-51). Unlike de Man, who operates an analogous misreading in order to embrace its conclusions, Tiedemann, echoing Adorno, holds a critical standpoint in this respect.

Aufgabe inquires, in fact, why and how, under what conditions and to what degree, translative connections between languages *are* possible. In doing so, it presupposes that the notion of *history* retains its pertinence along with the question of *language*, on the grounds of an indistinguishably epistemological and metaphysical critique of *humanness*. Benjamin, in other words, is in quest of a way of thinking the historical beyond historicism and the human beyond anthropology. This implies thinking language beyond linguistics. It also means addressing metaphysical concerns that are prior to the conventional distinction between ontology and phenomenology. It accordingly entails the legitimacy, if not the need, of a critical return to problematics theological. The Benjaminian task would thus outdo not only historicist premises but also their deconstructive refutation.

B.1.2. Thinking Incompatibilities

As de Man insightfully remarks, one should read in Benjamin the subtle way in which he uses figures only in order to check their signifying consistency:

> But this is precisely the challenge of this particular text. Whenever Benjamin uses a trope which seems to convey a picture of total meaning, of complete adequacy between figure and meaning, a figure of perfect synecdoche in which the partial trope expresses the totality of a meaning, he manipulates the allusive context within his work in such a way that the traditional symbol is displaced in a manner that acts out the discrepancy between symbol and meaning, rather than the acquiescence between both. (*Conclusions*, 89)

The challenge is not only in *Aufgabe*; it is in Benjamin's writing in its entirety. It reaches well beyond the rhetorical discrepancy between figure and meaning. It concerns a distinctly Benjaminian mode of contemplative and idiosyncratically dialogical thought – the specificity of which is not adequately grasped by de Man's insight.

Benjamin's rhetoric upsets, but does not altogether erase, the significance of the terms and figures he eclectically concentrates on. If it exposes the tensions between the figures and their presumed meanings, it also signals the resistance of the corresponding terms or schemas as they constantly recur in changing argumentative arrangements. Figures retain, in Benjamin, a constancy that outlasts the exhaustion of their conceptual framing within historically identifiable bodies of intellectual traditions.

When Benjamin uses terms currently recognisable as signposts of a given intellectual tradition (scholarly discipline, school of thought, world-view), we should, of course, not infer that he endorses or iterates the corresponding tradition. The terms used do not enact, in Benjamin, the premises that one is taught, by histories of ideas, to associate them with. This, I suggest, goes further than the discrepancy between symbol and meaning, which de Man concentrates on. Benjaminian rhetoric undoes the acquiescence between terms or figures and the intellectual traditions to which they are supposed to be historically affiliated. Terms or figures, in other words, persist out of and against their presumed historical and intellectual context. The very identification between discursive practices and their contexts or classes as defined and delimited by historical taxonomies is thus ultimately at stake[1].

Accordingly, Benjamin trusts that a provocatively joined use of rhetorical tools categorised, by historical reasoning, as belonging to incompatible or incongruent traditions of thought, can lead to critical intellectual gestures. Such gestures would not exactly be new or old; neither would they stand as modern or pre-modern. They would rather cut through commonly accepted and typically historicist juxtapositions, such as the ones between traditional mysticism and

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[1] Note that de Man has himself been critical of historicist approaches that view Hegelianism or Romanticism as well demarcated intellectual traditions based on given beliefs or attitudes.

modern rationalism, collectivism and individualism, pseudo-historical nostalgia and positivist oblivion of history.

Benjamin thus investigates the possibility of a non-historicist way of thinking, while remaining intensely concentrated on the issue of history (which de Man discards). His literary criticism often outdoes the highly resistant polarity between a hermeneutics and a poetics of literature (on which de Man very strongly insists). He probes the theoretical pertinence of metaphysical or theological problematics, while questioning the current configuration of metaphysics and theology (which de Man seems to take for granted). He engages in his notorious combination of the presumably incommensurable traditions of theology and Marxism; his blending of contemplative thought and political engagement is one more instance of the same strategy (with respect to which de Man is particularly resistant[1]).

Benjaminian rhetoric enacts contemplative connections between figures, which transgress historically and conceptually set boundaries between fields of intellectual kinship or incompatibility. Reading Benjamin becomes an exercise in liberating words from their configuration as conceptual tools of historically situated systems of thought[2]. This also means that the Benjaminian "alternative"

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[1] A certain failure of this resistance could account for the emergence, in de Man's *Conclusions*, of notions drawn from and further provoking broader ideological debates and concerns, largely breaking with de Man's ascetic rhetoric. I am referring, more particularly, to the notion of *humanness* and to the correlative question of the inhuman or non-human nature of language – on which I will insist accordingly.

[2] Adorno (1999) has insisted on how Benjamin combines a tradition of mysticism with that of Enlightenment – and has expressed reservations in this respect. His "Preface" to Tiedemann (1987), originally dating from 1965, depicts such idiosyncrasies as those of: a philosophy enacted through literary criticism, a sociology centred on the concrete rather than on overall trends, a critique of both Kantian and historicist subjectivism, an idea of eternity inherent as a temporal nucleus in factual details. Adorno's reservations with respect to the above are

should not be understood as historically situated in the position of a post-philological or, more generally, post-modern emergence. As schemas of historical classification and arrangement are outdone, including their correlative problematics of historical overcoming or transgression, connections, rather than distances, between languages are brought to the fore as urgently at stake – connections historically translative.

One may refer to the Benjaminian task as an "alternative to historicism". I understand this alternative as diverging from the tendency to discard any cluster of terms or figures (including philological or even typically historicist ones) along with the critique of a historically situated and self-contained system of thought or intellectual tradition (such as philology or historicism). More generally, the Benjaminian critique of historicism excludes relations of historical overcoming between traditions of thought[1] – it posits, instead, relations of historic connection between languages. In this sense, it would be wrong to regard the Benjaminian paradigm as historically post-philological.

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echoed in Tiedemann's own observation according to which Benjamin would be anticipating or announcing a critical breakthrough that his "esoterism" would fail to enact:

> "Néanmoins, tous les travaux de sociologie de l'art qu'il a réalisés doivent être considérés comme des prolégomènes. Ils ne nous livrent pas une théorie sociale achevée explicitant le rapport entre art et société […] " (Tiedemann 1987, 128)

[1] Benjamin resists the historicist *tournure* that does mark Lyotardian problematics – in spite of Lyotard's own warnings and corrections against the understanding of his notions of the *modern* and the *post-modern* as historical concepts (Lyotard 1979; 1982).

B.1.3. Benjaminian Works[1]

The later works of Benjamin have attracted considerably more attention than his earlier ones[2]. *Begriff* [3] is, indeed, insurmountable as a fundamental anti-historicist statement, within the setting of which political problematics of historical materialism displace theological ones from the centre of the scene. Recall, in particular, the seventh section, concerning the critical distances (*distanzierten Betrachten*) that the historical materialist should take with respect to cultural goods (*Kulturgüter*) – such as the Homeric manuscript material. The veneration of the latter is seen as the result of an *akedia* entailing intellectual and political allegiance to those leading the procession of history and appropriating cultural remains as spoils (*Beute*). Barbarism would inhere, along with cultural value, in any document of culture (*Dokument der Kultur*), also marking the very process of its transmission from one victor to the other[4].

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[1] My quotations will mostly be from Benjamin's *Gesammelte Schriften* (abbreviated as *GS*). Block-quotations are accompanied, in table form, by French translation as recently published in *Oeuvres* (abbreviated as *OE*). Short in-text quotations from the German original are accompanied by an English translation, in brackets, which is my own – unless otherwise specified. It is based on the French one, as well as on Zohn's English translation published in *Illuminations* (Benjamin 1968).

[2] The turning point could be situated around 1933, when the posthumously published fragment on the faculty of linguistic mimesis ("Über das mimetische Vermögen [On the mimetic faculty]") was written – often understood as revising earlier approaches of Benjamin to language.

[3] This abbreviation refers to "Über den Begriff der Geschichte [On the Concept of History]", written around 1940 and published posthumously as the last completed work of Benjamin.

[4] "[…] wie es selbst nicht frei ist von Barbarei, so ist es auch der Prozeß der Überlieferung nicht, in der es von dem einen an den anderen gefallen ist." (*Begriff,* 698).

Another of Benjamin's later works, marked by a materialist perspective, is *Kunstwerk*[1]. The essay deals with the persistence of the original work of art through reproduction – that is, in philological terms, with the issue of transmission. In its *paralipomènes* or *Anmerkungen,* we find statements concerning the distances that Benjamin takes with respect to what he often considers as the counterpart of modern historicism – namely, aesthetics and, more specifically, the distinctly modern abstract-magical or mystical conceptions of beauty. Benjamin connects his own approach to a "Kritik des aus dem neunzehnten Jahrhundert uns überkommenen Begriffs der Kunst [critique of the concept of art that has been passed on to us by the nineteenth century]" (*GS,* I, 3:1050). This concept of art would be centred on a notion of beauty, the crisis of which (*Krisis der Schönheit*) would be triggered or accentuated by the expanding mechanical reproduction of the work of art. Intrinsic to the crisis would be an aesthetic ideology marked by a misleadingly mystical approach to the relations between art and its genuinely magical (that is, non-mystical) origins[2]:

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[1] This abbreviation refers to Benjamin's own French version of his essay on "L'oeuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction mécanisée", as published, with a selection of "paralipomènes et variantes" (translated by the editors) in *Ecrits Français* (Benjamin 1991). Three versions of this essay appear in Benjamin's *GS*, I, 2. The first is the German version, published in 1935 under the title "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit". The second is the French version, done by Benjamin himself and first published in 1936. The third is a re-working of the other two, written around 1939 and published posthumously. The differences between the versions do not affect the overall argument or its structure, although parts of it undergo changes entailing a different number and arrangement of sections in each case. For the paralipomena, I will be using, along with the French translation, the original German notes as published in *GS*, I, 3.

[2] Passages such as the one quoted here should guard us against the tendency to use the terrns "mysticism" and "magic" as interchangeable.

B.1. *The Case of Benjamin*

[…] die Auffassung der Kunst umso mystischer wird, je mehr die Kunst von echter magischer Brauchbarkeit sich entfernt; je größer dagegen diese magische Brauchbarkeit ist (und in der Urzeit ist sie am größten), desto unmystischer ist die Auffassung von der Kunst. (*GS*, I, 3: 1050)

[…] a conception de l'art devient d'autant plus mystique que l'art s'éloigne de la possibilité d'un usage vraiment magique; par contre, plus cet usage magique possible est grand (et c'est dans la préhistoire qu'il est des plus grands), moins la conception de l'art est mystique. (Benjamin 1991, 184)

The problem with Benjamin's later work is that it has been proven little resistant to readings indulging in the iteration of its overwhelming figural language. The past "flashing up at a moment of danger" to "blast open the continuum of history"[1] rings far too impressively to allow an investigation of the epistemological and theoretical premises of the corresponding figures. The "messianic element", in its tense cohabitation with "Marxism" or "materialism", has correlatively re-entered our discursive habits, as if referring to well-known and easily identifiable traditions of thought, and actually veiling our current oblivion of (or even illiteracy with respect to) the corresponding discursive fields[2].

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[1] The phrases are those used by Zohn in *Illuminations* (Benjamin 1968, pp. 255 and 262), for the translation of Benjamin's *Begriff* (VI and XVI). The German original reads, respectively "wie sie [einer Erinnerung] im Augenblick einer Gefahr aufblitzt" and "das Kontinuum der Geschichte aufzusprenden".

[2] The following remark of Jennings (1987) is not always the case:

"When we use Benjamin to a particular end or in the service of a particular cause, then we are proceeding in a Benjaminian way, not so much in that we use his ideas to construct our own critical constellations but in that we "mortify" Benjamin's own words, we rip them from their context and so expose Walter Benjamin's own pretensions to a higher knowledge." (213)

Not any kind of de-contextualisation of words or figures is Benjaminian – or fruitful in reading Benjamin.

We work, today, towards regaining access to terminological and figurative devices that Benjamin indexes for us. A first step in this direction would be to address questions of a metaphysical, if not theological status raised most explicitly and systematically in early works of Benjamin, while persisting, in his later writings, often in the guise of codified allusions. My thesis concentrates on some of Benjamin's earlier essays, the writing and eventual first publication of which situates them close to *Aufgabe*. In them, metaphysical concerns are combined with epistemological problematics essential to the notion of language. This does not imply that I endorse the distinction between substantially different periods or phases in the presumed development of Benjamin's work. The Benjaminian mode of thinking through conceptual or historical incompatibilities is a whole, which I chose to approach from its earliest and in many respects most perplexing extremes[1].

Benjamin's early writings do not present us with youth adventures in the direction of a naive Platonism, nor with expressions of mystical or religious beliefs. They are a systematic endeavour to investigate in what sense and under what conditions metaphysical problematics, not excluding their theological ramification, may prove useful for a theoretical, that is, philosophical approach to language[2].

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[1] Mosès (1992) organises his approach to Benjamin's overall work around the clear and highly influential general schema of a gradual evolution from theological, to aesthetic and, ultimately to political problematics. Mosès stresses, however, that the whole process would be one not of transposition of one field to the next but of rising levels of integration (100).

[2] Tiedemann (1987) is exemplary, I think, in how he systematically brings to the fore the epistemological dimensions of Benjamin's early writings. His tendency, however, to affiliate Benjaminian problematics to a "contexte sotériologique et anhistorique" blurring the perspective of socio-political dynamics (64-65), or to a "théologie traduite en termes profanes" (149), I find rather reductive. The same tendency, expressed in terms much less sophisticated, marks more recent approaches to Benjaminian thought, which connect it to the one of G. Scholem and understand it as reconfigured mysticism. Note, for instance, the position of Handelman (1991):

One should start with *Sprache*[1], which explicitly draws on theological problematics in its endeavour to tackle aspects of a general theory of language and humanness. *Aufgabe* can be seen as transposing the same issue to the field of history. Along with *Sprache*, a number of other writings have drawn my attention as deserving close reading with respect to the object of this thesis. The most important one is *Vorrede*[2], the epistemologial-critical preface to Benjamin's thesis on the literary form of the German Baroque drama, in which his relations to German academia are explicitly at stake. Benjamin insists on qualifying his approach as a "philosophy of art" (*im Sinn der kunstphilosophischen Abhandlung*: 218) aiming at seizing the "metaphysics of form" of its object (*Metaphysik dieser Form*: 228). His task would also be one of a "philosophical history" (*philosophische Geschichte*: 227). It would concern the "life of works and forms" (*Leben der Werke und Formen*) under the perspective of a history "natural rather than pure" (*nicht reine, sondern natürliche Geschichte*: 227).

"Benjamin and Scholem "secularised" a kabbalistic or mystical theory of language (as did other German romantic writers) then established it as a philosophical critical category, then applied that category as the criterion by which to interpret *all* other manifestations of language." (92)

[1] This abbreviation refers to the posthumously published "Über die Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen [On language in general and on the language of man]" addressed to G. Scholem in 1916. This essay is often seen as an initial inquiry on the question of human language. Its sequel, more detached from theological references and closer to historical concerns, would be "Über das mimetische Vermögen [On the mimetic faculty]" written in 1933, also in connection to Benjamin's correspondence with Scholem, and published posthumously. I will refer to the latter as *Mimesis*.

[2] I am referring to "Ekenntniskritische Vorrede [Epistemic-critical preface]" in Benjamin's *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (The origins of the German drama) first published in 1925 (*GS*, I, 1). Translation will be provided from the French edition of this work (Benjamin 1985), referred to as *Préface*.

It would be wrong to consider that we are thus being referred to "natural sciences" as juxtaposed to "humanities". At stake is, rather, the very idea of life as historic, dismissing the very juxtaposition of non- or a-historical nature and human-historical culture. History thus becomes the core-figure for a configuration of life in general, whether natural or cultural – including language and literature.

Benjaminian anti-historicist "natural history" puts language and humanity under a perspective of universality – even if only negatively defined, as the resistance of matters linguistic and human to historicist taxonomies. This perspective persists in *Begriff,* where Benjamin qualifies the present moment as an "abbreviation of the entire history of mankind" (*in einer Abbreviatur die Geschichte der Ganzen Menschheit zusammenfaßt*: 703).

The Benjaminian idea of the wholeness of humanity, implies a drastic critique of the modern idea of human subjectivity, whether individual or collective – and, more particularly, the undoing of its phenomenological and anthropological premises. These premises were elaborated, as we have seen, by historicist thinking. They were also involved in Kantian rationalism. Through his singularly programmatic and little read *Programm*[1], Benjamin connects, indeed, his overall critique of historicism to a revision of Kant. This gesture, which I will discuss in some detail, can be seen as a critique of Kant from a standpoint other than that of modern historicism. *Programm* would thus be an early counterpart of *Begriff*: the latter operates an analogous intellectual gesture as it revises Marxism from a non-idealist standpoint. The difference is that, in *Programm*, theology, the "hidden hunchback" of *Begriff,* assumes a central role on the stage of the "Prolegomena einer künftigen Metaphysik [prolegomena to future

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[1] This abbreviation refers to "Über das Programm der Kommenden Philosophie [On the program of the philosophy to come]". The writing of this posthumoulsy published text has been situated, by Scholem between the end of 1917 and the beginning of 1918 (which would make it one of the earliest Benjamin's known works, close to his *Sprache*).

metaphysics]" (*Programm,* 183). This would be metaphysics exposing the issue of language as the blind spot of Kantian criticism – if not of the very position of criticism assumed by modern philosophy.

B.1.4. Questions of Form

The relations between language and history, exposed in how the present addresses literary works of the past, is the issue with respect to which I compare Benjaminian and philological problematics. The comparison highlights a number of conceptual clusters, connected to old philosophical problems, central to both philological historicism and Benjaminian critique. One of the objectives of my work has been to inquire on how these clusters do not simply persist in Benjamin but are also drastically reconfigured. *Form* appears to be a basic knot.

Historicism sees the emergence and development of historical forms as a process of organic becoming, involving birth, growth and degeneration, as well as relations of kinship between genres and species of the same origins. The notion of form is thus co-extensive with that of culture or *Bildung* as a historically situated and evolving mode of human life. Human life would emerge and evolve, historically, through a multiplicity of cultural forms that gradually deploy and affirm their identity and specificity, before degenerating and dying out as such. Language, as a medium of communication, would express and enact cultural forms, in their modes or degrees of evolution. Every given language is presumed to correspond, through its *inner* form, to the culture it expresses. The correspondence is mediated by the degree to which a given language has reached the necessary level of maturity enabling it to adequately represent the historical specificity of the corresponding cultural form.

Parallel, but also relatively autonomously with respect to cultural entities, linguistic forms evolve from rudimentary to advanced degrees of representational validity. This process would be crowned by the advent of

modernity and its intellectual breakthrough, through which human language at large acquires the capacity to form itself, as well as other languages, according to principles of textual formness. Textual form would permit the valid linguistic representation of the historical specificity of every form of cultural life, bygone or ongoing. Textualised, linguistic artefacts can be made to validly expose to knowledge the cultural forms to which they inherently correspond.

In other words, textual form corrects languages from the standpoint of their historical-cultural essence. Text is language historically formed, to the precise degree that historical formness is cultural. Humanity itself would thus be restored as properly historical, as its two essential attributes, language and culture, become mutually transparent at the level of form.

It is on the above premises that one can better understand the complexities of Wolf's analysis of the relations between the Homeric *cultus vitae,* historically situated in archaic Greece, and the Homeric poems. Homeric language, whether orally enacted or transmitted in writing, would be marked by an inherent connection to the Homeric *cultus vitae*, as well as by its inadequacy as a medium of representation of its own historical form. It is only through the editorial intervention of modern philology that Homer would acquire a proper and properly historical textual expression, necessarily differing, in many crucial respects, from most of the previous linguistic enactments of Homericity.

The notion of form is also central to Benjaminian concerns. *Form* and *Bild* are conspicuous in his writing. This is not the case with *Bildung,* which is absent, or with *Text,* which is rare. In the *Aufgabe* essay, he mostly uses *Gebilde* (or *Geformte*) to refer to literary artefacts as forms. I consider this notion to be a crucial knot, through which Benjamin's approach to human language and history deploys its specificity with respect to historicist philology – and I translate it as *formation.* This part of my thesis ventures to investigate the epistemological and theoretical implications of the Benjaminian understanding of linguistic form as formation. Let me add, here, a number of preliminary remarks in this respect.

B.1. *The Case of Benjamin*

Formation, in English (as well as in French) has a disturbing semantic ambiguity. It designates a process as well as the product of the process. Both meanings are present in Benjamin's *Gebilde,* but the second one predominates, in a way that radically problematises the first one. *Gebilde* is linguistic form persisting or surviving in time through changes of semiotic constructs or artefacts[1] -lying, somehow, at the origins or *Ursprung* of variable oral or scribal manifestations.

Linguistic formations in Benjamin do not express forms of human life identified as historically situated cultural entities. Nonetheless, they involve human historicity – the human as historic. They do so by understanding linguistic and human *essence* as somewhat temporal – albeit not in the sense of the phenomenic temporality conditioning historical life. Let us further examine how *form* relates to *essence* or *Wesen* – a notion also central to Benjamin, perhaps even much more so than in the case of historicist discourse.

For historicism, historical form, as *Bildung*, corresponds to attributes (such as race, ethnicity and nationality) defining the essence of human entities according to their position in the evolving organism of their species. Textual forms transpose the same to human languages. Benjamin's use of *Gebilde*, with respect to linguistic things, implies a metaphysical critique, which suspends the validity of the ontological premises of historicist anthropology, as well as of the corresponding phenomenological problematics concerning language. In order to tackle such problems, one can have recourse to certain aspects or *topoi* of Aristotle's `Kathgorivai` (*Categories*)[2]*.* These *topoi* have long been haunting

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[1] In the rest of my thesis *construct* or *artefact* will be designating the semiotic instances in or through which *formation* persists.

[2] I use the edition of Cooke (Aristotle 1983)

discussions over notions such as those of essence and substance, subjects and individuals, genres and species, universals and particulars[1].

The Aristotelian treatise assigns to the notion of `uJpokeivmenon` (*hypokeimenon*) a highly ambiguous or enigmatic status, which jeopardises its modern translation as *subject*. The Aristotelian sub-ject would designate the reference of a deictic gesture indexing a sub-lying some-thing – an emergent `tovde ti` (*tode ti*). The emergence of a *hypokeimenon* would entail questions concerning properties or attributes named by categories. The treatise examines different possible kinds of categories, from the point of view of how exactly each kind relates to the *hypokeimenon* concerned – how it stands with respect to it. We have, to begin with, categories of first and second essence: `prwvth oujsiva` (*prote ousia*) and `deutevra oujsiva` (*deutera ousia*). These would be categories answering most basic questions about the *hypokeimenic* some-thing in its self. The attribution of the rest of the categories concern properties that, elsewhere in the Aristotelian *Organon*[2], are called accidental, contingent or, more accurately, of occurrence: `kata; to; sumbebhkovß` (*kata to sumvevikos*). They would answer questions concerning how the thing is situated, how much it is, with respect to what it stands.

I cannot engage, here, in a detailed reading of the *Categories* or in the discussion of the different philosophical and epistemological issues that have

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[1] These discussions have developed over an extremely wide range of epochs and fields or disciplines, starting with neo-platonic doctrines and Christian theology and gradually framed within the institution of modern philosophy. They have recently been taken up in a quite different setting, under the perspective of "gender studies" – the very denomination of which refers to the issue of the attribution of generic categories and the correlative constitution of "gendered subjects". See, in particular, Butler (1999, especially chap. 1, entitled "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire". My "Introduction" presents some additional remarks in this respect.

[2] See especially *Topica,* I, iv, v.

been raised with respect to it[1]. What interests me is to retain and ponder on the basic distinction between the two kinds of essence: *ousia prote* and *deutera*, essence primary and second[2].

Primary essence sets the conditions under which the rest of the categories become attributable to the *hypokeimenon* concerned. Aristotle enigmatically defines it as what can neither "be in a subject" nor be "said about a subject". It constitutes the subject as a given thing, liable to further categorial attribution[3]. It would involve, for the subject, no more than a proper name. We only have the rudimentary emergence of something *about to become* subject of attributes – including ones of second essence, defining its nature through categories such as those of species and genus.

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[1] Such issues (still open today) include the epistemological status of the treatise: it remains notoriously unclear whether or to what degree its problelmatics concern the ontology of existing entities or the phenomenology of logico-grammatical relations. A great number of exegetical problems are more or less directly connected to this question. Is the list of categories that Aristotle presents us with selective and indicative, or exhaustively structured? How does it relate to the logical distinction between genera or universals and species or particulars? Would genera or universals, as categories of essence, have a status of ontological autonomy with respect to the particular individuals to which they are attributed?

My own reading of *Categories* is closer to how Aubenque (1962) relates the treatise to a distinctly *aporetic* ontology, than to Ackrill's (1963) translation and commentary. Wedin (2000) underscores epistemological issues and reconsiders the very distinction between ontological and logico-linguistic interpretations of *Categories*. Particularly interesting for my approach is the way in which he establishes a direct connection between the notion of primary essence, as it occurs in *Categories*, and the one of form [morfhv (*morphe*) or ei\doß (*eidos*)] as it occurs in *Metaphysics Z.*

[2] The remarks that follow are mainly based on my reading of section V of *Categories*, especially 2a11-3b9 (Aristotle 1983, 18-28).

[3] A further way of configuring the attribution of a primary essence would be to identify its gesture as coinciding with the very passage from a condition of hypokeimenic *Darstellung* to the one of a conceptualised *Vorstellung*.

B.1. *The Case of Benjamin*

Substance is a further term that can be considered as synonymous with my understanding of *formation*. It should be recalled that *substance*, via the Latin *substantia*, is a close translation of the Greek *uJpovstasiß* (*hypostasis*). The latter does not occur in Aristotle's *Categories*: it is affiliated to neo-platonic problematics concerning different modes of enactment or manifestation of essences. Nevertheless, *substantia* and substance have been and are still currently used as translations of Aristotle's *ousia*, both in its primary and in its second sense. I suggest that we keep *substance* or, more accurately, *substantiation*, as designating the emergence of a *primary essence* – form in the primary state of *formation*. We could, accordingly, restrict the use of the term *essence* to categories of second essence.

Formation, as *primary essence* or *substance*, would not correspond to our current understanding of an identifiable individual entity, co-extensive with an empirically delimited particular[1]. Formational monadicity would be prior to the notions of particularity and universality, as well as to those of individuality and

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[1] Tiedemann (1987) formulates as follows the ontological question that he sees as addressed by Benjaminian metaphysics:

> "L'épistémologie benjaminienne reprend la polémique que la philosophie européenne fait remonter à Platon et à Aristote. Elle répond à la question, ouverte depuis ce temps, de savoir si les Idées, objets de la recherche philosophique, ont un caractère ontologique – s'il faut les interpréter de manière réaliste, ou si, comme dans l'idéalisme, elle sont les produits d'une conscience qui, selon le mot de Goethe, les apporte ; autrement dit à la question de savoir si la philosophie doit prendre pour *prw`ton* la matière ou la forme, la nature ou l'esprit […]" (19)

Although Tiedeamnn is very helpful in allowing us to address Benjaminian problematics on their proper level of theorisation, he is wrong, I think, in identifying the issue in such terms. The ontological question is actually suspended by Benjamin's approach in *Sprache*. With respect to essences, spiritual or linguistic, there can be no question of a "realist" as opposed to an "idealist" ontology, as distinguished by Tiedemann. With respect to the related question of whether and how *universale* exist *in re*, Tiedemann (1987, 83) presents an interesting note from an abandoned variant of Benjamin's work on the *Trauerspiel*. In it Benjamin characteristicaly remarks that one should talk of "res in universale" rather than of "universale in re" (83).

plurality. It would set the grounds on which further categories of second essence and of contingency are attributable to the corresponding *hypokeimenon*.

I suggest that the Aristotelian *prote ousia* is, in the case of linguistic things or *hypokeimena*, very close to Benjamin's *Gebilde*. *Formation* would be language standing there, persisting through changes in temporal duration: a monad with respect to which questions of secondary essential form, as well as of contingent attributes are about to be raised.

How can a given formation or set of formations be subject to the categories of language, humanness and historic life? Could it be bearing them as its sole essential attributes? If so, in what sense would other categories, attributable to the formation, be of a contingent status? Far from expressing cultural forms as the essence of human history, linguistic formations could essentially be idiosyncratic sites of historic humanity and life. An essential form of reproducible and translatable literary originals would thus run through the conditions of life and death of the human beings that reproduce and translate them.

B.2. HISTORIC LIFE

B.2.1. Regarding Life

The first paragraph of Benjamin's *Aufgabe* concludes by postulating that "kein Gedicht gilt dem Leser, kein Bild dem Beschauer, keine Symphonie der Hörerschaft [no poem addresses the reader, no image the beholder, no symphony the audience]" (9). De Man, in his *Conclusions*, notes the scandalous effect that the paragraph, in its aphoristic tone, has had amongst *Rezeptionsästhetik* theorists (77). Benjamin disputes, indeed, the connection of any artistic work to any kind of subjective hermeneutic horizon. It should be added that this is situated under a perspective further specified at the beginning of Benjamin's essay. It is with respect to a certain kind of knowledge of works of art, or art-forms, that reference to reception would not be fruitful: "Nirgends erweist sich einem Kunstwerk oder einer Kunstform gegenüber die Rücksicht auf den Aufnehmenden für deren Erkenntnis fruchtbar" (9). On equivalent epistemological grounds, Benjamin had postulated, in earlier writings, that the historical producer of a work of art, whether individual or collective, is an equally irrelevant reference. Recall his essay on *Zwei Gedichte von Frierdrich Hölderlin*:

Ist dieses Leben noch das des Griechentums? So wenig ist es das, wie das Leben eines reinen Kunstwerks überhaupt das eines Volkes sein kann, so wenig wie es das eines Individuums ist und keines als sein eignes, das wir im Gedichteten finden. (Benjamin 1989f, 125-6)	Cette vie est-elle encore celle de l'hellénisme ? Elle ne l'est pas plus que la vie d'un pure oeuvre d'art ne peut jamais être celle d'un peuple, pas plus qu'elle n'est celle d'un individu, ni autre chose que cette vie propre que nous trouvons dans le noyau poétique du poème. (*OE,* I: 123)

Poetic language would bear the attribute of life in a way very different from that of human subjects, such as "peoples" or "individuals". The problem of

the category of life and of the conditions of its attribution returns in the introductory part of the *Aufgabe* essay. It does so in a way that impels de Man to ask how, if at all, *humanness* retains its pertinence with respect to artistic works. My suggestion, in this respect, is that Benjamin's *Aufgabe* does not at all erase *humanness*: it entails its reconfiguration, along with the reconfiguration of *life*. The life of literary works could be human to the precise degree that the human is not limited to the anthropological constructs of "individuals" and "peoples".

De Man, in his enthusiastic approval of the opening aphorism, overlooks that *Aufgabe* also states, from the very outset, why exactly works of art cannot be fruitfully understood on the grounds of their reception. The reason would be that humanness is discussed in terms of "essence". Theory would thus dovetail into art itself, which "fore-poses" the issue of a "corporeal and spiritual essence" of the human:

[Alles kunsttheoritischen Erörterungen] lediglich gehalten sind, <u>Dasein und Wesen des Menschen überhaupt vorauszusetzen.</u> So setzt auch die Kunst selbst dessen leibliches und geistiges Wesen voraus – seine Aufmerkamseit aber in keinem ihre Werke. (*Aufgabe,* 9)	[les exposés théoriques sur l'art] ne sont tenus de <u>présupposer que l'existence et l'esssence de l'homme</u> en général. De même, l'art présuppose l'essence corporelle et intellectuelle de l'homme, mais dans aucun de ses oeuvres il ne présuppose son attention. (*OE,* I : 244)

Note the significance that *positioning* acquires here, anticipating the theme of translation. Benjaminian translation trans-poses (über-*setzen*) the question of human essence; literature and theoretical speculation fore-pose (voraus-*setzen*) this question. The attention or intention of "individuals" or "peoples", both as producers and as receivers, would be irrelevant, to the precise degree that human life should be regarded from the point of view of its fore-posed and transposable essence.

The ensuing paragraph specifies that the informational content (*Aussage*, *Mitteilung* or *Inhalt*) is an inessential (*Unwesentlich*) attribute of poetry, drawing

the translators to two equally misleading conceptions of their task. On the one hand, there is the idea of a translative mediation (*vermitteln*) aiming at the communication of information. On the other hand, we have the postulate of a mysterious, unfathomable or inaccessible "poeticity" (*das Unfaßbare, Geheimnisvolle, Dichterische*). Benjamin thus reaffirms his double distances from the premises of both phenomenological positivism and mystical aestheticism.

The notion of life is introduced in *Aufgabe* right after the above, as Benjamin ventures to delimit the domain in which a linguistic work of art, as translatable, can be situated. This domain would involve a notion of relationship (*Relationsbegriffe*) best understood when seen as not *exclusively* referring to human beings: "wenn sie nicht von vorne herein ausschließlich auf den Menschen bezogen werden" (*Aufgabe,* 10). De Man understands this as stating that literature does not regard humans (*Conclusions,* 70). Benjamin, however, discredits, not the notion of humanness, but the conceptual operations that attribute exclusive relevance to the anthropological realm of empirically identifiable human subjects. Not solely lives of empirical human individuals or collectivities, but life in a much more encompassing sense of the term would be somehow at stake.

Benjamin elaborates his statement with the following analogy. A life-moment (*Leben oder Augenblick*) can be unforgettable (*unvergesslichen*) even when all human beings have forgotten it. Accordingly, originals may persist as essentially translatable, even if they remain non-translated. At stake would be instances of a natural inter-connectedness of life: "Er darf ein natürlicher genannt werden und zwar genauer ein Zusammenhang des Lebens" (*Aufgabe,* 10). Benjamin specifies that the corresponding realm of life includes the *Überleben* of the original, or a *Stadium ihres Fortlebens.* A remark follows, which is, I think, one of the most crucial ones in the *Aufgabe* essay, from the point of view of its theoretical implications. "In völlig unmetaphorischer Sachlichkeit ist der Gedanke vom Leben und Fortleben der Kunstwerke zu erfassen [In entirely non-metaphorical reality one is to grasp the ideas of life and sur-vival of works of art]" (11). The notion of life, Benjamin explains, should be understood as

involving all natural life seen from the perspective of history: "alles natürlicher Leben aus dem umfassenderen der Geschichte zu verstehen" (11). Life, he insists, is inherently or necessarily historic – it is not simply the setting or scene within which history occurs. The idea of history would thus over-determine the one of nature itself.

The historic configuration of *life* is opposed, in Benjamin's *Aufgabe* (11), to a number of different conceptual approaches, that we could designate as follows:

- historicist organicity: reductions of life to some sort of organic corporeality ("man nicht der organischen Leiblichkeit allein Leben zusprechen dürfe");

- mechanistic empiricism: definitions of life on the grounds of basic animal sensations ("daß Leben aus den noch weniger maßgeblichen Momenten des Animalischen definiert werden könnte, wie aus Empfindung");

- mystical metaphysics: extensions of life under the auspices of a notion of soul ("nicht... unter dem schwachen Szepter der Seele dessen Herrschaft auszudehnen").

Understanding nature and life in general from the perspective of the enigma of history (instead of discarding the latter on the grounds of given figurations of the former) is the task of Benjamin's theory of translation. As de Man most insightfully points out:

> In what is the most difficult passage in this text, Benjamin says that it [translation] is like history to the extent that history is not to be understood by analogy with any kind of natural process. We are not supposed to think of history as ripening, as organic growth, or even as dialectic, as anything that resembles a natural process of growth and of movement. We are to think of history rather in a reverse way: we are to understand natural changes from the perspective of history, rather than understand history from the perspective of natural changes. If we want to understand what ripening is, we should understand it from the perspective of historical change. (*Conclusions*, 83)

History becomes the name of a theoretical or epistemological perspective, breaking not only with figures of organic cultivation or *Bildung* growth, but with all figuration based on principles of schematic analogy and similarity. De Man further asserts that "to understand this historical pattern would be the burden of

any reading of this particular text". The *Aufgabe* essay is, indeed, readable as an inquiry into a historic "pattern" of life exemplified by the life and survival of works of art.

The closing section of the introductory part of *Aufgabe* provides us with further clues in this respect. The distinctly abstract rhetoric of the relevant passage does more to problematise the pattern than to clarify it: it introduces concepts and notions that de Manian reading is firmly resistant to. Translation would be connected to the development (*Entfaltung*) of the original's life in an idiosyncratically higher sphere (*eigenmutlichen und hohen Lebens*) governed by its own kind of finality (*Zweckmäßigkeit*). More generally, phenomenic manifestations of life would acquire a higher finality in the expression of the very essence or the representation of the significance of life as such: "für den Ausdruck seines Wesens, für die Darstellung seiner Bedeutung" (*Aufgabe,* 11-12).

I will further investigate, here, two notions, crucial with respect to the Benjaminian notion of historic life: the one of the *Überleben* (survival) of an accomplished past, and the one of the recollection of its *Bild* (figure or form). We will thus be in a position to better understand a theory of language that concentrates on the connection between the *über-setzen* of literary works and the *voraus-setzen* of human essence.

B.2.2. Surviving *Gewesene*

Überleben or *Fortleben* would not be metaphors: they should be understood as theoretical notions. Historic life would involve, not only phenomena affiliated to temporal conditions of birth, growth and death, but also a dimension or sphere that, in a sense, transcends them. It would literally persist beyond phenomenic conditions of existence – beyond life-time. I use *beyond*, rather than *after,* as closer to ü*ber* or *fort. Überleben* (or *Fortleben*) would not be *after-life.* The latter implies temporal positioning, whereas the former does not. By disputing

the use of the notion of soul in this respect, Benjamin warns us that the relations between *Leben* and *Überleben* owe as little to the metaphysics of life-after-death as they do to the phenomenology of a life ending in death. *Überleben* or *Fortleben* would thus better correspond to the French *survie* or the English *survival*.

Temporal and spatial conditions of phenomenic existence would partake in life and be even presupposed by it, but *life* would not be reducible to them. History and metaphysics, as fields of knowledge, would, accordingly, entertain relations very different from those implied by conventionally modern premises. Theory would have to investigate the problem of their mutual pertinence. This theoretical challenge de Man refuses to address as such, when he understands *Überleben* as an "illusion of life which is only an after-life" (Conclusions, 92). Through this reading, de Man exposes the different grounds on which he constructs his own approach to the issue of history: he attributes to historic survival the defective ontological status of "illusion". Benjamin, on his part, refrains from an evaluation of ontological statuses or weights. He implicitly, yet persistently, brackets ontology.

How may one understand the historic connection between lifetime and survival? I suggest that Benjamin's later use of the concepts of *Gewesene* and *Jetztzeit* can be particularly useful in this respect. These two notions, systematically linked to each other, are very present in *Begriff* as well as in certain sections of *Passagen*[1]. The relation between the past as *Gewesene* and the present as *Jetzt* occurs as a *Bild* (an image, a figure or perhaps more generally a form) at standstill. As such, it would be dialectic (in my terms: historic) rather than temporal (in my terms: historical) in status. Under such a perspective, the past is no longer the archaic counterpart of the present moment:

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[1] This abbreviation refers to *Das Passagen-Werk* (literally: *The work of passages*) especially sections N and K. The French version I use is *Paris, Capitale du XIXe siècle* (Benjamin 1993).

Nicht so ist es, daß das Vergangene sei Licht auf das Gegenwärtige oder das Gegenwärtige sein Licht auf das Vergangene wirft, sondern Bild ist dasjenige, worin das Gewesene mit dem Jetzt blitzhaft zu einer Konstellation zusammentritt. Mit andern Worten: Bild ist die Dialektik im Still stand. Denn <u>während die Beziehung der Gegenwart zur Vergangenheit eine rein zeitliche ist, ist die des Gewesen zum Jetzt eine dialektische</u>: nicht zeitlicher sondern bildlicher Natur. Nur <u>dialektische Bilder sind echt geschichtliche, d.h. nicht archaische Bilder</u>. (*Passagen*, 578)	Il ne faut pas dire que le passé éclaire le présent ou le présent éclaire le passé. Une image, au contraire, est ce en quoi l'Autrefois rencontre le Maintenant dans un éclair pour former une constellation. En d'autres termes : l'image est la dialectique à l'arrêt. Car, <u>tandis que la relation du présent au passé est purement temporelle, la relation de l'Autrefois avec le maintenent est dialectique</u> : elle n'est pas de nature temporelle mais de nature figurative. Seules les images dialectiques sont des <u>images authentiquement historiques, c'est à dire non archaiques.</u> (Benjamin 1993, 479-480)

The past acquires an "authentically historic" status when it is understood as not "purely temporal". *Gewesene* is life surviving as *Überleben*. The term *Gewesene* implies a reference to the metaphysics of *Wesen* (essence). This would be essence unrelated to a quest of historically foundational modes of being[1]. At stake is, rather, the form of a life already accomplished – a past somehow rendered autonomous with respect to the present.

Benjamin's *Gewesene* would thus indicate the specificity of the *present perfect* as compared to the *simple past* tense. *Überleben* would be life persisting as presently perfected: life that *has been with respect* to what presently *is* – as opposed to life that *was before* it became what it is.

Simple past is the tense of narration. What *was,* leads to what *is*, often through chains of causal articulations. This is what would make all past

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[1] This could be a first important point on which Benjamin's notion of *Gewesene* differs from Heidegger's.

"archaic": it could only be the antiquity of modernity. *Present perfect* is the tense of the temporally perfected: something acknowledged as presently actual or topical, but in ways that narrative rhetoric cannot account for. The *Gewesene* has taken place and continues to do so, but the circumscription of its space and site remains an open issue. The same would hold from the point of view of the future. The corresponding tense bears the paradoxical names of *future perfect*, *futur antérieur* or `tetelesmevnoß mevllwn` (*tetelesmenos mellon*: accomplished future)[1].

Gewesene does not comply with *becoming*. The past would not be the seed from which present and future somehow spring, nor would the present or the future be standpoints on which the understanding of the past depends. Perfected past would connect to the present but not by determining it. The present would connect to the perfected past, but not by constructing it as its own projection. In this sense, both the historicist understanding of history, and its hermeneutic counterpart would be deprived of their epistemological grounds.

Terms such as *accomplished* or *perfected* should not be understood as implying organic or mechanistic completion or totalisation. They imply termination rather than ending, interruption rather than closure. *Gewesene* is thus the site or dimension of all *Jetztzeit*, in which persists everything that has not managed and will never manage to become anything more or less than what it has already been and will have been. In this sense, historic perfectedness is closer to catastrophe[2] than to achievement. Life surviving is closer to ruins piling up than to monuments perspicuous[1].

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[1] Recall from Szondi (1986):

"Unlike Proust, Benjamin does not want to free himself form temporality; he does not wish to see things in their ahistorcial essence. He strives instead for a historical experience and knowledge. Nevertheless, he is sent back into the past, as past, however, which is open, not completed, and which promises the future. Benjamin's tense is not the perfect, but the future perfect in the fullness of its paradox; being future and past at the same time" (153)

[2] This figure has been rendered particularly famous through Benjamin's *Begriff*.

History would be constantly (and eventually urgently) at stake in the connection of every *Jetzt* to the challenge of the perfected accomplishment of any *Gewesene*. No present life would be sheltered against its inhabitance or colonisation by perfected modes of having been alive. All perfected past would, indeed, persist with respect to any present moment – and all present moment would remain exposed to the survival of all perfected pasts. There would be no living formation immune to the challenge (not simply of the past that it recognises as its own but rather) of the survival of the entire "natural history of works and forms" – or the "entire history of mankind". On-going life would thus be historic, not because its past would provide it with the depth of temporal perspective, but because all accomplished past(s) risk breaking into its moment. The connection of *Jetzt* to its accomplished past(s) becomes an issue impossible to resolve on grounds of either anthropological certainty (claimed by the historicist sense) or phenomenological insights (claimed by hermeneutic reading)[2].

In his *Vorrede*, Benjamin provides us with further clues to the historic status of *Gewesene*, when he adopts the correlative notion of *Ursprung*[3]. Historic origins consist in the survival of the past as a *Gewesene*.

Benjamin explicitly keeps *Ursprung* away from problematics of temporal evolution or generation, although insisting on its historic status: "Ursprung, wiewohl durchaus historische Kategorie, hat mit Entstehung dennoch nichts

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[1] Recall the famous imagery of *Angelus Novus,* in *Begriff,* IX.

[2] *A-letheia* is thus, in a sense, the historical impossibility of complete oblivion. Benjaminian problematics outdo the Heideggerian notion of existential truth as an "un-covering", however tendential or problematic, of the foundations of one's essential historicity.

[3] It should be noted that the notion applies to the "idea" of an "essence" as "monad": I will return to these aspects of Benjamin's work later on, as they concern, more specifically, the reading of literary and, more generally, linguistic forms.

gemein"[1]. *Ursprung* would refer to pre- or post-history of observed facts, not to their historical development: "Also hebt sich der Ursprung aus dem tatsächlichen Befunde nicht heraus, sondern er betrifft dessen Vor- und Nachgeschichte". It indexes both the becoming and the decline of something constantly re-dying and re-emerging: "Im Ursprung wird kein Werden des Entsprungenen, vielmehr dem Werden und Vergehen Entspringendes gemeint"[2]. The recognition of such origins presupposes toils of restoration or re-production, but only in a sense that invalidates the philological perspective of textual completion: "Sie will als Restauration, als Wiederherstellung einerseits, als eben darin Unvollendetes, Unabgeschlossenes andererseits erkannt ist".

The task of the *Aufgabe* essay is to reflect on translation as entailing the occurrence of paradigmatic historic connections to surviving origins – or originals. *Aufgabe*, it should be remarked, does not hesitate to connect to the conventional rhetoric on the issue, including the initially discarded figures of reception. It specifies that the notion of an "eternal survival" has something to do with what is currently understood as the "glory" that "great" works of art enjoy through succeeding "generations" of readers:

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[1] All quotations in this paragraph are from *Vorrede,* 226.

[2] I do not think that this implies problematics of a messianic arrest of temporality or of a messianic redemption, as Tiedamann seems to infer when he remarks that Benjamin ventures to philosophically seize "une relation entre le monde historique et le monde messianique" (1987, 89). On the other hand, one cannot easily discard Heideggerian reminiscences. One should further probe into both the flagrant similarity and the subtle divergence between Benjamin's and Heidegger's figurations. Benjamin's *Gewesene* is not subject to the problematics of disclosure of historicity, that allow Heidegger to pass from an ontology of beingness to a history of destinies, explicitly configured in terms of national historical entities. A hint to this highly significant divergence is provided, perhaps, by the reference of the above-quoted passage to becoming *and* decline as fields of historic life. Death (or historical catastrophe) assumes, in Benjamin, a crucial historic significance *as such*, which Heideggerian problematics of foundational beingness tend to obscure.

Die Geschichte der großen Kunstwerke kennt ihre Deszendenz aus den Quellen, ihre Gestaltung im Zeitalter des Künstlers und die Periode ihres grundsätzlich ewigen Fortlebens bei den nachfolgenden Generationen. Dieses Letzte heißt, wo es zutage tritt, Ruhm. Übersetzungen, die mehr als Vermittlungen sind, entstehen, wenn im Fortleben ein Werk das Zeitalter seines Ruhmes erreicht hat. Sie dienen daher nicht sowohl diesem, wie schlechte Übersetzer es für ihre Arbeit zu beanspruchen pflegen, als daß sie ihm ihr Dasein verdanken. In Ihnen erreicht das Leben des Originals seine stets erneute späteste und umfassendste Entfaltung. (*Aufgabe*, 11)

L' histoire des grandes oeuvres d'art connaît leur filiation à partir des sources, leur création à l'époque de l'artiste, et la période de leur survie, en principe éternelle, dans les générations suivantes. Cette survie, lorsqu'elle a lieu, se nomme gloire. Des traductions qui sont plus que des transmissions naissent lorsque, dans sa survie, une oeuvre est arrivée à l'époque de sa gloire. Par conséquent elles doivent plus leur existence à cette gloire qu'elles ne sont elles-mêmes à son service, comme de mauvais traducteurs le revendiquent communément pour leur travail. En elles la vie de l'original, dans son constant renouveau, connaît son développement le plus tardif et le plus étendu. (*OE,* I : 247-248)

Aeonic I suggest as a further configuration of the historic status of Benjaminian lives. I understand the term as including its etymological history, passing from the old and rather obscure Greek notion of one's assigned life-span, to its Latin figuration of eternity. We can talk of moments, epochs or eternities indistinguishably, provided we understand them as aeonic instances of historic life.

Aeon occurs, indeed, in another of Benjamin's early essays[1]. Literary history would involve the "gesamter Lebens- und Wirkungskreis [the entire

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[1] "Literaturgeschichte und Literaturwissenschaft (Literary history and literary studies)", originally published in 1931.

circle of the life of works]", comprising "ihr Schicksal, ihre Aufnahme durch die Zeitgenossen, ihre Übersetzungen, ihr Ruhm [their destiny, their reception from contemporaries, their translations, their glory]". Reception (which the beginning of *Aufgabe* has excluded as irrelevant) is here explicitly retained, but is also reconfigured under a historic rather than a conventionally historical perspective. Literary works would be "micro-aeons" (rather than "micro-epochs", as the French translation suggests), active "organa" (rather than given objects or materials) of historical knowledge – or knowability:

Damit gestaltet sich das Werk im Inneren zu einem Mikrokosmos oder viel mehr: zu einem Mikroaeon. Denn es handelt sich ja nicht darum, die Werke des Schrifttums im Zusammenhang ihrer Zeit darzustellen, sondern in der Zeit, da sie entstanden, die Zeit, die sie erkennt – das ist unsere – zur Darstellung zu bringen. Damit wird die Literatur ein Organon der Geschichte und sie dazu – nicht das Schtifttum zum Stoffgebiet der Historie zu machen, ist die Aufgabe der Literaturgeschichte. (*GS,* III, 283)

Ainsi l'oeuvre se structure en elle-même pour former un microcosme, ou mieux : une microépoque. Car il ne s'agit pas de présenter les œuvres littéraires dans le contexte de leur temps, mais bien de donner à voir dans le temps où elles sont nées le temps qui les connaît – c'est à dire le nôtre. Ainsi la littérature devient un organon de l'histoire, et lui donner cette place – au lieu de faire de l'écrit un simple matériau pour l'historiographie – telle est la tâche de l'histoire littéraire. (*OE*, II: 283)

B.2.3. Recollecting Forms

Of what kind are the gestures or operations that allow historic connections to an original *Gewesene*? Translation, as we have said, could be paradigmatic in this respect.

The notion of translation is introduced, in Benjamin's *Aufgabe,* with a short statement, surprising in its simplicity and perplexing in its elliptical rhetoric:

"Übersetzung ist eine Form [Translation is a form]" (9). The statement is followed by remarks on *Übersetzbarkeit* (translatability): an essential attribute of certain original literary works, setting the law (*Gesetz*) of the form concerned. Translatability would be the potential with which the original work, on account of its essence, claims or calls for translation, given the significance of this form: "ob es seinem Wesen nach Übersetzung zulasse und demnach – der Bedeutung dieser Form gemäß – auch verlange" (10). In other words, the initial statement could read: translation regards and depends on the surviving original, to the degree that the latter addresses a claim (and can be addressed) as a translatable form.

In order to clarify the nature of the connection between the translatability of the original and the eventual occurrence of its translated form, Benjamin brings up the example of instances of life that remain essentially unforgettable, in spite of the fact that they may be currently little remembered:

So dürfte von einem unvergeßlichen Leben oder Augenblick gesprochen werden, auch wenn alle Menschen sie vergessen hätten. Wenn nämlich deren Wesen es forderte, nicht vergessen zu werden, so würde jenes Prädikat nichts Falsches, sondern nur eine <u>Forderung</u> der Menschen nicht entsprechen, und zugleich auch wohl den Verweis auf einen Bereich enthalten, in dem ihr entsprochen wäre: auf ein Gedanken Gottes. (*Aufgabe,* 10)	Ainsi pourrait-on parler d'une vie ou d'un instant inoubliables, même si tous les hommes les avaient oubliés. Car, si l'essence de cette vie ou de cet instant exigeait qu'on ne les oubliât pas, ce prédicat ne contiendrait rien de faux, mais seulement une <u>exigence</u> à laquelle les hommes ne peuvent répondre, et en même temps, sans doute, le renvoi à un domaine où cette exigence trouverait un répondant: la mémoire de Dieu. (*OE,* I : 246)

Translatability would be an instance of a more general characteristic of life surviving as form (which does *not* mean life conserved in given shapes or phenomenic contours). The claim for translation would be a claim to non-forgetfulness, addressed by an instance of accomplished or perfected life, on the

grounds of which historic connections may occur. The fact that the figure of Godly thought or memory closes the above-quoted passage implies that the notion of non-forgetfulness involves a metaphysics of *anamnesis,* rather than a phenomenology of memory[1]. Benjamin's *Unvergeßlich* does not depend on memory, but, rather, on the transcendence of the realm and constraints of phenomenological memory or knowledge (with respect to which philology, as we have seen, has articulated its critique). *Recollection* (rather than either *memory* or *knowledge*) is the term I suggest we use in order to designate the Benjaminian understanding of the nature of translative or other historic connections to perfected instances of life.

Let us turn to *Passagen* for further indications on how historic connections involve recollective toils. A dialectical *Bild* (image or figure or form) enacts its potential as a historic *Index* in distinct moments of *Lesbarkeit* (readability) or *Erkennbarkeit* (knowability, but with strong connotations of recognition or recollection. The notions of readability or knowability, as they occur in the following, already partly quoted passage, are highly akin to *translatability*. They all involve a capacity to recognise or recollect:

Der <u>historische Index</u> der Bilder sagt nämlich nicht nur, daß sie einer bestimmten Zeit angehören, er sagt vor allem, daß sie erst in einer bestimmten Zeit zur <u>Lesbarkeit</u> kommen. Und zwar ist dieses "zur Lesbarkeit" gelangen ein bestimmter kritischer Punkt der Bewegung in ihrem Innern. Jede Gegenwart ist durch diejenigen Bilder bestimmt, die mit ihr

La <u>marque historique</u> des images n'indique pas seulement qu'elles appartiennent à une époque déterminée, elle indique surtout qu'elles ne parviennent à la <u>lisibilité</u> qu'à une époque déterminée. Et le fait de parvenir «à la lisibilité» représente certes un point critique déterminé dans le mouvement qui les anime. Chaque présent est déterminé

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[1] Also note that the realm of God, as it occurs in this passage, has little to do with history as it happens but functions as a reference sustaining the possibility of its happening. I will elaborate on this aspect of Benjaminian theological references later.

synchronistisch sind; jedes Jetzt ist das Jetzt einer <u>bestimmter Erkennbarkeit</u>. (*Passagen*, 577-578)

par les images qui sont synchrones avec lui ; chaque Maintenant est le Maintenant d'une <u>connaissabilité déterminée</u>. (Benjamin 1993, 478)

My insistence on the notion of recollection is also corroborated by Benjamin's notion of *Erinnerung*, as it occurs elsewhere in *Passagen*, directly connected to *Gewesene*:

Die kopernikanische Wendung in der geschichtlichen Anschauung ist diese: man hielt für den fixen Punkt das „Gewesene" und sah die Gegenwart bemüht, an dieses Feste die Erkenntnis tastend heranzuführen. Nun soll sich dieses Verhältnis umkehren und <u>das Gewesene</u> zum dialektischen Umschlag, zum Einfall des erwachen Bewußtseins werden. Die Politik erhält den Primat über die Geschichte. Die Fakten werden etwas, was uns soeben erst zustieß, <u>sie festzustellen ist die Sache des Erinnerung.</u> Und in der Tat ist Erwachen der exemplarische Fall des Erinnerns: der Fall, in welchem es uns glückt, des Nächsten, Banalsten, Naheliengendsten uns zu erinnern. (*Passagen*, 490-491)

La révolution copernicienne dans la vision de l'histoire consiste en ceci: on considérait l' «Autrefois» comme le point fixe et l'on pensait que le présent s'efforçait en tâtonnant de rapprocher la connaissance de cet élément fixe. Désormais, ce rapport doit se renverser et <u>l'Autrefois</u> devenir renversement dialectique et irruption de la conscience éveillée. La politique prime désormais l'histoire. Les faits deviennent quelque chose qui vient seulement de nous frapper, à l'instant même, et <u>les établir est l'affaire du ressouvenir</u>. De fait, le réveil est le paradigme du ressouvenir, le cas où nous parvenons à nous ressouvenir de ce qui est le plus proche, le plus banal, le plus manifeste. (Benjamin 1993, 405-406)

There is an additional passage explicitly relating history to work of recollection. This time, the notion used by Benjamin is the one of *Eingedenken*, the epistemological implications of which are seen as indexing the inescapable, even if obscured, presence of theological problematics:

B.2. *Historic Life*

Das Korrektiv dieser Gedankengänge liegt in der Überlegung, daß <u>die Geschichte nicht allein eine Wissenschaft sondern nicht minder eine Form des Eingedenkens ist</u>. Was die Wissenschaft «festgestellt» hat, kann das Eigedenken modifizieren. Das Eingedenken kann das Unabgeschlossene (das Glück) zu einem Abgeschlossenen und das Abgeschlossene (das Leid) zu einem Unabgeschlossenen machen. Das ist Theologie; aber <u>im Eingedenken machen wir eine Erfahrung, die uns verbietet, die Geschichte grundsätzlich atheologisch zu begreifen</u>, so wenig wir sie in unmittelbar theologischen Begriffen zu schreiben versuchen dürfen. (*Passagen,* 589)

On apportera un correctif à ces reflexions en songeant que <u>l'histoire n'est pas seulement une science et qu'elle est tout autant une forme de remémoration.</u> Ce que la science a "constaté", la remémoration peut le modifier. La remémoration peut transformer ce qui est inachevé (le bonheur) en quelque chose d'achevé et ce qui est achevé (la souffrance) en quelque chose d'inachevé. C'est de la théologie; mais <u>nous faisons, dans la remémoration, une expérience qui nous interdit de concevoir l'histoire de façon fondamentalement athéologique</u>, même si nous n'avons pas, pour autant, le droit d'essayer de l'écrire avec des concepts immédiatement théologiques. (Benjamin 1993, 489)

Recollection does not comply with the model of cognitive relationships between subjects and objects of memory or knowledge. It counters the phenomenological conception of human consciousness as the field in which historical relations are brought to the light of awareness. It implies that the human, as historic, is not the same as the modern subject of experience – or of history. Note, in this respect, its etymological ties, through the Latin *colligere,* to a series of notions that could be significantly affiliated to Benjaminian problematics. There is *reading,* to begin with – or, more specifically, *enacting in recitation.* Through its modern Greek equivalent of `ajnavgnwsiß` (*anagnosis*), *reading* further leads us to *re-cognition* and to *Erkenntnis* – as juxtaposed to *knowledge* and *Wissenschaft.* There is also, in *colligo* or *lego* the idea of *gathering* what has been dispersed – selectively, instead of negligently, in gestures that

could range from coiling or winding up to spinning and tracing out. We are thus reminded of the Greek *levgw* and *lovgoß* – and its divergence from *ratio*. We are further driven to *intelligence* as an *inter-legere*. There would also be *conversation* or *Gespräch* – from *sun-levgw*, semantically close to *sun-om-iliva*. *Recollection* would thus come close to inter-discursive toils of configuration and reconfiguration. The recollective event would affect not only the recollected, but also the recollecting instance: by recollecting a *Gewesene* as readable, the *Jetzt* recollects itself as a reader.

De Man reads Benjamin differently when he comments on a passage in which Benjamin refers to tensions and dynamics of historical connections between languages. He considers that linguistic awareness does away with certain notions or concepts that, in my opinion, Benjamin insists on critically revising, instead of discarding:

> It is easy to say to some extent what this suffering is not. It is certainly <u>not subjective</u> pains, some kind of pathos of a self, a kind of manifestation of self-pathos which the poet would have expressed as his suffering. This is certainly not the case, because, says Benjamin, the sufferings that are here being mentioned are <u>not in any sense human</u>. They would not be sufferings of an individual or of a subject. (...) [This suffering] is <u>not the pathos of remembrance</u>, of this pathetic mixture of hope and catastrophe and apocalypse which Hartman captures, which is present in Benjamin's tone, but not so much in what he says. It is <u>not the pathos of history</u>, it is not the pathos of what Hölderlin has called the *dürftiger Zeit* between the disappearance of the Gods and the possible return of the Gods. It is not this kind of sacrificial, dialectical and elegiac gesture, by means of which one looks back on the past as a period that is lost, which then gives you the hope of another future which may occur. (*Conclusions,* 85-86)

Pathos, in Benjamin, is certainly very distinct– precisely because of the nature of the stakes. Remembrance is, indeed, displaced, but recollection takes its place – along with the notion of survival. Historicist temporality is also problematised, but history persists – in a way that could be very close to Hölderlin, in fact. The notion of human subject, either individual or collective, is bracketed, but only so that humanness may be rethought – in terms non-phenomenological and non-anthropological.

The task of thinking the human beyond the modern notion of individual or collective human subjectivity is, indeed, a central one. Who or what is it that recollects, if it is not a subjective human conscience? How can we have a recollective instance, if humanness is not enacted through phenomenological entities? I turn, for clues in this respect, to *Programm* – Benjamin's early programmatic essay on Kant.

B.2.4. Critical Metaphysics

Benjamin's *Programm,* in its eccentrically programmatic style and rhetoric, invites the reader to operate a critical return to the relations between Kantianism and modern Enlightenment, from a perspective other than the one of historicism. Benjamin's critique targets the very grounds on which the figure of the human is addressed by modern anthropological humanism at large. It is a quest for the standpoint "einer künftigen Metaphysik [of a future metaphysics]"(183[1]). Benjamin criticises, more particularly, what he designates as the empiricist or mechanistic conceptions of the human subject – which prove to be as questionable as the organic or historicist ones. It is quite noteworthy that, although Benjamin's essay investigates the conditions of metaphysics, it persists in connecting its concerns to history.

According to Benjamin, Kantianism may have done relatively well in criticising the autonomy or self-sufficiency of the object of knowledge as an empirical entity, but the notion of the subject as knowing conscience has resisted this breakthrough:

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[1] Benjamin explicitly refers here to Kant 's 1783 essay (Kant 1993). All German quotations in this section are from *Programm.*

[…] selbst soweit Kant und die Neukantianer die Objektnatur des Dinges an sich als der Ursache der Empfindungen überwunden haben bleibt immer noch <u>die Subjekt-Natur des erkennenden Bewußtseins zu eliminieren</u>. (*Programm,* 161)	[…] même si Kant et les néo-kantiens ont dans une certaine mesure dépassé la nature d'objet de la chose en soi comme cause de sensations, il reste toujours à <u>éliminer la nature subjective de la conscience connaissante</u>. (*OE,* I: 184)

An effective critique of Kantianism would have to start by critically addressing the modern "mythological" notion of the human subject of experience and knowledge as a construct of body and spirit, senses and intellect:

Es ist nämlich gar nicht zu bezweifeln daß in dem Kantischen Erkenntnisbegriff die wenn auch sublimierte Vorstellung eines individuellen leibgeistigen Ich welches mittelst der Sinne die Empfindungen empfängt und auf deren Grundlage sich seine Vorstellungen bildet die größte Rolle spielt. Diese Vorstellung ist jedoch Mythologie und was ihren Wahrheitsgehalt angeht jeder andern Erkenntnismythologie gleichwertig. (*Programm,* 161)	Car on ne peut douter du rôle primordial que joue dans le concept kantien de connaissance l'idée, fût-elle sublimée, d'un moi individuel, à la fois corporel et intellectuel, qui, au moyen des sens, reçoit des sensations à partir desquelles il constitue ses représentations. Or cette idée relève de la mythologie, et n'a pas plus de valeur, au point de vue de son contenu de vérité que n'importe quelle autre mythologie de la connaissance. (*OE,* I : 185)

The desideratum would be a critical philosophy of knowledge addressing "die Sphäre totaler Neutralität in Bezug auf die Begriffe Objekt und Subjekt [the sphere of total neutrality with respect to the concepts of object and subject]" (163). Benjamin's approach to the issue has typically dialectic overtones. The subject of modern *Aufklärung*, based on "eine Erfahrung deren Quintessenz deren Bestes gewisse Newton'sche Physik war [an experience of which the quintessential best was a certain Newtonian Physics]" (159) is seen by Benjamin

as having enabled a significant breakthrough, at the level of a critical theory of knowledge. The correlative paradigm of experience would also account for the crucial limitations and drawbacks of Kantianism. The problem, according to Benjamin, is that modern episteme fails to address a distinct kind of experience, indistinguishably religious and historical:

Was das Niedere und Tiefstehende der Erfahrung jener Zeit ausmacht, worin ihr erstaunlich geringes spezifisch metaphysisches Gewicht liegt wird sich nur andeuten lassen in der Wahrnehmung wie dieser niedere Erfahrungsbegriff auch das Kantische Denken beschränkend beeinflußt hat. Es handelt sich dabei selbstverständlich um denselben Tatbestand den man als die religiöse und historische Blindheit der Aufklärung oft hervorgehoben hat ohne zu erkennen in welchem Sinne diese Merkmale der Aufklärung der gesamten Neuzeit zukommen. (*Programm,* 159)

Pour suggérer ce qui fait la pauvreté et la médiocrité de l'expérience propre à cette époque [des Lumières], à qui tient son étonnante inconstance métaphysique, il suffit de mesurer l'influence restrictive que ce concept inférieur de d'expérience a exercée sur la pensée Kantienne elle-même. Nous voulons naturellement parler de cette cécité religieuse et historique que l'on a souvent reprochée aux Lumières, sans reconnaître en quel sens ces caractères sont imputables à l'ensemble des Temps modernes. (*OE,* I : 182)

Metaphysics and religion, in their interconnection, are, for Benjamin, in need of a critical rehabilitation countering their restrictive modern understanding. Religious experience would regard a "kommenden neuen und höheren Art der Erfahrung [new and more elevated mode of an Experience still to come]" (160), referring us to "eine tiefere metaphysische erfüllte Erfahrung [an experience of a more profound metaphysical plenitude]" (161). Metaphysics should thus be understood as involving a field of problematics questioning Kantian confines and delimitations. One of their tasks would be to account, not for religion in general, but for a specific kind of "Religion, nämlich als die wahre,

wobei weder Gott noch Mensch Objekt oder Subjekt der Erfahrung ist [religion, yet a true one, for which neither God nor man are either objects or subjects of experience]"(163).

The multiplicity and diversity of various modes of experience would be correlative to an equally multiple and diverse field of modes of conscience and knowledge. "Das wahre Kriterium des Wertunterschiedes der Bewußtseinsarten festzustellen wird eine der höchsten Aufgaben der kommenden Philosophie sein [To establish the true criterion of the value-difference between different modes of consciousness will be one of the highest tasks of the philosophy to come]" (163). Amongst these modes, there would be the one of the purely or authentically transcendental *consciousness* that modern Kantianism fails to address. The Benjaminian idea of purity or authenticity, in this respect, involves the discarding of the figures of biological, psychological or spiritual anthropological subjects – both as the agencies of experience and as instances of knowledge. The very notion of *consciousness* would ultimately be in doubt, given its phenomenological connotations:

Alle echte Erfahrung beruht auf dem reinen erkenntnis-theoretischen (transzendentalen) <u>Bewußtsein wenn dieser Terminus unter der Bedingung daß er alles Subjekthaften entkleidet sei noch verwendbar ist.</u> Das reine tranzendentale Bewußtsein ist artverschieden von jedem empirischen Bewußtsein und es ist daher die Frage ob die Anwendung des Terminus Bewußtsein hier statthaft ist. (*Programm,* 162-163)	Toute expérience authentique repose sur la pure conscience (transcendentale) définie au plan de la théorie de la connaissance, <u>pour autant que le terme de conscience soit encore utilisable lorsqu'on le dépouille de tout élément subjectif.</u> La pure conscience transcendentale est spécifiquement différente de toute conscience empirique, et c'est pourquoi l'on peut se demander si le terme est ici appropriée. (*OE,* I : 186)

The Benjaminian prolegomena to metaphysics also insist on the transgression of given conceptual categorisations and classifications of human

experience. Venturing "ein reines systematisches Erfahrungskontinuum zu bilden [to form a pure continuum of experience]" (164) would be the crucial task of the coming metaphysics. Philosophy would thus be confronted "auf ein Absolutes, als Dasein, und damit auf jene Kontinuität im Wesen der Erfahrung [to an absolute as human existence, hence to a continuity in the very essence of experience]" (170). It would address a field in which "würde überhaupt der Unterschied zwischen den Gebieten der Natur und der Freiheit aufgehoben wäre [all difference would disappear between the domain of nature and the one of freedom]" (165). A complete revision of the table of categories is postulated as the counterpart, if not precondition, of the task: "ist die Tafel der Kategorien wie es jetzt allgemeinen gefordert wird völlig zu revidieren" (166).

The issue is not how to substitute metaphysics for secular philosophy but how to resist the erasure of the former by safeguarding its specific site within the field of the latter – the site of the logical possibility of metaphysics:

Dieser neue Begriff der Erfahrung welcher gegründet wäre auf neue Bedingungen der Erkenntnis würde selbst <u>der logische Ort und die logische Möglichkeit der Metaphysik sein</u>. (*Programm,* 163)	Ce nouveau concept d'expérience qui serait fondé sur des nouvelles conditions de connaissance, constituerait lui-même <u>le lieu logique et la possibilité logique de la métaphysique</u>. (*OE,* I : 187)

In the "Addendum" to *Programm*, Benjamin examines the Kantian division of philosophy into a critical *Erkenntnistheorie* and a *dogmatische* metaphysics. The definition he suggests for metaphysics, within such a division, is quite telling. Metaphysics address the point at which the philosophical critique of knowledge leads to the doctrine of something, the knowledge of which presupposes the critique of the very concept of knowledge (169). This would join the philosophical critique of knowledge to the kind of knowledge that religion implies. Metaphysics would thus be answering the basic claim "der virtuellen Einheit von Religion und Philosophie [of the virtual unity between religion and

philosophy]" – or "der Einordnung der Erkenntnis der Religion in die Philosophie [of the insertion of the knowledge of religion in philosophy]" (171).

If metaphysics were thus to assume a new position in the overall system of a critical philosophy, it would have to address the issue of language. *Programm* does not elaborate on this point. It only indexes its crucial importance – implicitly referring us to the essay on *Sprache*, to which we will soon turn:

<u>Die große Umbildung und</u> Korrektur die an dem einseitig mathematisch-mechanisch orientierten Erkenntnisbegriff vorzunehmen ist, kann nur <u>durch eine Beziehung der Erkenntnis auf die Sprache</u> wie sie schon zu Kants Lebzeiten Hamann versucht hat gewonnen werden. (*Programm,* 168)	<u>La grande transformation, la grande correction</u> à laquelle convient des soumettre un concept de connaissance orienté de façon unilatérale vers les mathématiques et la mécanique n'est possible que si l'on met <u>la connaissance en relation avec le langage</u>, comme Hamann avait tenté de le faire du vivant même de Kant. (*OE,* I: 193)

Epistemologically, this would involve a kind of dialectics – a dialectics in which the Hegelian or, more generally, historicist objective of a synthetic overcoming of tensions or oppositions, would be cancelled:

Jedoch wird außer dem Begriff der Synthesis auch der einer gewissen <u>Nicht-Synthesis zweier Begriffe in einem andern systematisch hochst wichtig werden</u>, da außer der Synthesis noch eine andere Relation zwischen Thesis und Antithesis möglich ist. (*Programm,* 166)	Cependant, en dehors du concept de synthèse, celui d'une certaine <u>non-synthèse de deux concepts en un troisième prendra la plus haute importance systématique</u>, car une autre relation que la synthèse est possible entre la thèse et l'antithèse. (*OE,* I: 190-91)

History could be naming the very idea of non-synthetic connections accomplished under conditions of dialectic tensions.

B.2. *Historic Life*

B.2.5. Sites of Humanity

I now turn to two other essays of Benjamin, which are quite separated in time but raise in analogous terms the issue of humanness – and do so in direct connection to specific literary texts. They could be helpful for our understanding of how the notions of life and survival of works of art may be steps towards a post-Kantian theory of historic humanity. Both address the issue of humanness in terms that involve *immortality* through *recollection*. Both concern Russian literature and, if only implicitly, Christian Orthodox religious tradition.

As Benjamin puts it in his essay "Der Erzähler [The story-teller]"[1], human death lies at the very grounds of narrative authority: its occurrence transposes, so to speak, human life from the realm of its temporal conditioning to the one of its survival as an unforgettable form.

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[1] The essay was first published in 1936.

Nun ist es aber an dem, daß nicht etwa nur das Wissen oder die Weisheit des Menschen sondern vor allem sein gelebtes Leben – und das ist der Stoff, aus dem die Geschichten werden – tradierbare Form am ersten am Strebenden annimmt. So wie im Innern des Menschen mit dem Ablauf des Lebens eine Folge von Bildern sich in Bewegung setzt – bestehend aus den Ansichten der Eigenen Person[1], unter denen er, ohne es inne zu werden, sich selber begegnet ist – so geht mit einem Mal in seinen Mienen und Blicken das Unvergeßliche auf und teilt allem, was ihn betraf, die Autorität mit, die auch der ärmste Schächer im Streben für die Lebenden um ihn her besitzt. Am Ursprung des Erzählten steht diese Autorität. (Benjamin 1989a, 449-450)

Or il est de fait que non seulement la connaissance et la sagesse de l'homme mais surtout sa vie vécue – et c'est la matière dont sont faites les histoires – prend une forme dont la tradition peut s'emparer [forme communicable] avant tout chez le mourant. De même que certains images de sa vie se mettent à défiler devant celui qui meurt [-visions de sa propre personne, dans lesquelles, sans s'en rendre compte, il s'est lui-même rencontré-] de même se révèle soudain dans sa mimique et ses regards l'Inoubliable qui attribut à tout ce qui le concerne cette autorité dont dispose au regard des vivants en mourant, même le plus misérable larron. C'est cette autorité qui est à l'origine du récit. (Benjamin 1991, 215[2])

Human life, through the event of death, would pass on to literary language the authoritative form of a perfected and persisting *Gewesene.* Recollection is brought to the fore through the negative figure of an impossibility of forgetfulness – just as in the *Aufgabe* essay. This would not be remembrance

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[1] One cannot help wondering whether Benjamin's use of *Person* in the German original refers us to Christian and, more specifically, Russian-orthodox theology – rather than to the modern or personalist configuration of individual subjectivity. I will return to this issue in the last part of my thesis.

[2] I quote the translation published in *Ecrits Français,* which is by Benjamin himself. I add, in brackets, omitted parts as they occur in the translation of the German original in *OE* (III: 130).

operated by cognitive faculties of individual or collective human entities. Neither would it depend on the support provided to such faculties by the representational function assumed by literary discourse – or by institutions negotiating historical value in terms of momumental significance[1]. The very possibility of literary discourse would depend on the recollection of human life as *Gewesene*. In the following passage, the realm of human life-through-death (rather than life-after-death), within which literary authority emerges, involves "natural" history:

Der Tod ist die Sanktion von allem, was der Erzähler berichten kann. Vom Tode hat er seine Autorität geliehen. Mit andern Worten: es ist die Naturgeschichte, auf welche seine Geschichten zurückverweisen (Benjamin 1989a, 450)	La mort est la sanction de tout ce que le narrateur peut raconter. Son autorité, c'est à la mort qu'il l'emprunte. En d'autres termes : c'est à l'histoire naturelle que revoient toutes les histoires. (Benjamin 1991, 215)

The above could shed some light on enigmatic passages of Benjamin's earlier essay on Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*[2] – passages in which metaphysical problematics are more explicitly at work. Dostoyevsky's Prince would be a figure of humanness irreducible to empirical human entities, whether individual or collective. It would be wrong, Benjamin warns us, to address the novel "als ob es sich um die russische 'Psyche' oder die des Epileptikers handle [as if it was about the Russian or the epileptical «psyche»]" (1989b, 237). There is humanness (and even national humanness), but only in a way involving the metaphysics of the

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[1] I cannot elaborate here on how Benjamin juxtaposes the story-teller's recollective *passe-temps* to the authority of the historian, as well as of the modern novel in its teleological perspective.

[2] "'Der Idiot' von Dostojewskij", written in 1917, was first published in 1921 – and is thus situated between *Sprache* and *Aufgabe*.

corresponding identities. According to Benjamin, "Dagegen gilt es die metaphysische Identität des Nationellen wie des Humanen in der Idee der Schöpfung Distojewskijs zu erfassen [What matters here is to grasp the metaphysical identity of both the national and the human in the idea of the Dostoyevskian creation]" (238).

The Benjaminian metaphysics of Dostoyevskian humanity include the discussion of the issue of non-forgetfulness – this time in explicit connection to the one of immortality. The Prince would *be* immortal human life. The immortality of such a human life would have little to do with current conceptions of immortal entities depending on corporeal, psychological or spiritual components of human beings. It would be immortality *of life as such* – or, more specifically, of life as perfected form. In other words, immortality would be the very irreducibility of human life to its anthropological and phenomenological dimensions:

Das unsterbliche Leben, von dem dieser Roman das Zeugnis ablegt, ist nichts weniger als die Unsterblichkeit im gewöhnlichen Sinn. Denn in der ist gerade das Leben sterblich, unsterblich aber ist Fleisch, Kraft, Person, Geist in ihren verschiedenen Fassungen. […] Das alles ist weit entfernt von der Unsterblichkeit des Lebens, von dem Leben, das seine Unsterblichkeit im Sinne unendlich fortschwingt, und <u>dem die Unsterblichkeit die Gestalt gibt</u>. Denn hier ist von Dauer nicht die Rede. (Benjamin 1989b, 239)

La vie immortelle dont témoigne le roman n'est rien moins que l'immortalité dans le sens courant du terme. Car en celle-ci, la vie justement est mortelle, mais immortels sont la chair, la force, la personne, l'esprit sous leurs formes diverses. […] Tout cela est très éloigné de l'immortalité de la vie, très éloigné de cette vie qui répercute à l'infini son immortalité dans le sens, et <u>à laquelle l'immortalité donne forme</u>. Car il n'est pas question ici de durée. (*OE,* I: 169)

The notion of non-forgetfulness precludes the modern idea of a subject of phenomenological memory. As the immortality of *Leben* is its very irreducibility

to phenomenic conditions, *Überleben* cannot in any sense depend on a subject remembering objects of experience or knowledge. *Unforgetfulness*, along with *immortality*, tell that life is not temporally situated in a by-gone past, but persists as historic perfectedness. As such it can be either recollected or dispersed, but neither remembered nor forgotten:

Das unsterbliche Leben ist unvergeßlich, das ist das Zeichen, an dem wir es erkennen. Es ist das Leben, das ohne Denkmal und ohne Andenken, ja vielleicht ohne Zeugnis unvergessen sein müßte. Es kann nicht vergessen werden. Das Leben bleibt gleichsam ohne Gefäß und Form das unvergängliche. Und «unvergeßlich» sagt seinem Sinn nach mehr als daß wir es nicht vergessen können; es deutet auf etwas im Wesen des Unvergeßlichen selbst, wodurch es unvergeßlich ist. (Benjamin 1989b, 239)

La vie immortelle est inoubliable, tel est le signe auquel nous la reconnaissons. C'est la vie qui, sans monument commémoratif, sans souvenir, peut-être même sans témoignage, échapperait nécessairement à l'oubli. Il est impossible qu'elle soit oubliée. En quelque sorte sans contenant et sans forme, cette vie demeure ce qui ne passe point. Et la dire « inoubliable » ce n'est pas dire seulement que nous ne pouvons l'oublier ; c'est renvoyer à quelque chose dans l' essence de l'inoubliable, par quoi il est inoubliable. (*OE*, I : 170)

There would be aeonic life at stake in literary *scripta*, somehow involving their transmission and translation. This life would be immortal or inescapably recollectable, but it would be neither of an authorial agency, nor of historically situated cultural entities. It would still be human and historic life: to the precise degree that it is life of language.

B.3. LINGUISTIC HUMANNESS

B.3.1. On Language

According to *Programm,* language could be an element crucial to the "logical site" of a post-Kantian metaphysics of the human. The following passage from *Vorrede* presents us with basic figural knots through which the notion of language could be reconfigured accordingly:

Nicht als ein Meinen, welches durch die Empirie seine Bestimmung fände, sondern als die <u>das Wesen dieser Empirie erst prägende</u> Gewalt besteht die <u>Wahrheit</u>. <u>Das aller Phänomenalität entrückte Sein</u>, dem allein diese Gewalt eignet, ist das des <u>Namens</u>. Es bestimmt die Gegebenheit der <u>Ideen</u>. Gegeben aber sind sie nicht sowohl in einer Ursprache, denn in einem <u>Urvernehmen</u>, in welchem die Worte ihren benennenden Adel unverloren an die erkennende Bedeutung besitzen. (*Vorrede,* 216)	La <u>vérité</u> ne consiste pas dans une visée qui trouverait sa détermination à travers la réalité empirique, mais dans un pouvoir <u>qui donnerait d'abord sa forme caractéristique à l'essence de cette réalité</u>. <u>L'être détaché de toute phénomenalité</u> qui seul a ce pouvoir en propre, c'est celui du <u>nom</u>. C'est lui qui détermine le caractère donnée des <u>idées</u>. Mais celles-ci sont données moins dans une langue originelle que dans <u>une perception originelle</u>, ou les mots possèdent le noble privilège de nommer, sans l'avoir perdu dans la signification qui est liée à la connaissance. (*Préface ,* 33)

By slightly correcting the French translation, we read, in the beginning of the passage, a redefinition of truth (*Wahrheit*) as a force that stamps (and thus forms) the essence (*Wesen*) of empirical reality. Language would assume this force as name (*Name*) directly related to the realm of ideas (*Ideen*). Linguistic naming would be inherent in all linguistic manifestations. As a kind of *Urvernehmen* (primal hearing, rather than perceiving, as the French translation

has it) it would be free from the constraints of signification, and, more generally, detached from all phenomenicity. Benjamin's *Name* thus becomes the crucial site for the articulation of a theory of language contesting the anthropological and phenomenological premises of linguistics, whether historical or structuralist.

This chapter of my thesis addresses elements for such a theory provided by a number of early Benjaminian essays, especially *Sprache* and *Vorrede*. I will also take into consideration the later essay on *Mimesis,* where the distinction between semiotic and non-semiotic dimensions of human language is more explicitly at stake.

Sprache, is an essay "On language in general and on human language", which develops into a commentary on *Genesis.* The commentary reads the Bible as an allegory of theoretical problematics about language, centred on the figure of Adamic language and humanness. The allegorical reading of the Adamic figure involves no historical or pseudo-historical nostalgia or quest for an *Ur-language*, situated at a point of distant beginnings and remaining to regain or recover. The Bible is probed as a field on the grounds of which theory can dispute the premises of modern approaches to the notion of human language – starting with the one of language in general.

One of the main postulates of the Benjaminian theory of human language is that language should not be understood as limited to its semiotic dimension – or to the corresponding tensions between semiosis and semansis. It is by identifying humanness with a desired but impossible control over such tensions, that de Man postulates (not without tragic overtones) the non-human or in-human status of language. He comes closer to Benjamin towards the end of the following passage, when he sees a *difficulty* within the very notion of the human:

> […] a constant problem about the nature of language as being either human or inhuman. That there is a <u>nonhuman aspect of language</u> is a perennial awareness from which we cannot escape, because language does things which are so radically out of our control that they cannot be assimilated to the human at all, against which one fights constantly [...] Things happen in the world which cannot be accounted for in terms of the human conception of language. And they always happen in linguistic

terms, or the relation to language is always involved when they have happened [...] Philosophy originates in this difficulty about the nature of language which is as such... and which is <u>a difficulty about the definition of the human, or a difficulty within the human as such</u>. And I think there is no escape from that. (*Conclusions*, 101)

An idea of a properly human language, Benjamin tells us, is not inconceivable or *a priori* false. Both language and humanness, however, would have to be reconfigured outside the premises of their modern understanding.

B.3.2. A Language of Humanity

The following statement, from the introductory part of *Sprache*, is quite trivial, if read as a personifying metaphor; yet we are told that it is not metaphorical. Read as a theoretical suggestion, then, it becomes quite perplexing. Everything would partake in language, to the degree that it communicates its being as spiritual. Events or things are languaged, as non-metaphorically as linguistic works of art survive:

Es gibt kein Geschehen oder Ding in der belebten noch in der unbelebten Natur, das nicht in gewisser Weise an der Sprache teilhätte, denn es ist jedem wesentlich, seinen geistigen Inhalt mitzuteilen. Eine Metapher aber ist das Wort «Sprache» in solchem Gebrauche durchaus nicht. (*Sprache,* 140-141)

Ni dans la nature animée ni dans la nature inanimée, il n'existe événement ni chose qui, d'une certaine façon, n'ait part au langage, car à l'un comme à l'autre il est essentiel de communiquer son contenu spirituel. Ainsi utilisé le mot "langage" n'a rien d'une métaphore. (*OE,* I : 143)

The statement invites us to think of language independently of the figure of the human. The essay on *Sprache* is, indeed, an inquiry into the non-anthropomorphic configuration, not only of language, but also of the human itself.

The essay begins by concentrating on manifestations of human spiritual life (*Jede Äußerung menschlichen Geisteslebens*) such as sculpture, music or justice. Every such manifestation would involve a mode of language (*Art der Sprache*). Language, as a "Mitteilung geistiger Inhalt [communication of spiritual content]" would thus be irreducible to a "Mitteilung durch das Wort [communication through words]" (140)[1].

The term *Inhalt* is soon replaced, in the essay, by *Wesen* (essence). Before it engages in the analysis of *Genesis*, the *Sprache* essay discusses the relations between the *geistige Wesen* and the *sprachliche Wesen* of things – between a spiritual essence of things and the essence of a language that would correspond to it. These would be relations of expression (Ausdruck) and communication (Mitteilung). Language, Benjamin tells us, is what anything partakes of, to the degree that it communicates, in expression, its spiritual essence: "sein geistiges Wesen […] im Ausdruck mitteilt" (143). The expression of a spiritual essence is (and can only be understood as) language: "ist der Ausdruck seinem ganzen und innersten Wesen nach nur als Sprache zu verstehen" (141). Linguistic essence would, accordingly, be the unmediated expression of spiritual essence. Concerning the essence of any language, Benjamin suggests that we ask "für welches geistige Wesen es denn der unmittelbare Ausdruck sei [of which spiritual essence it is the unmediated expression]" (141). *Unmediated*: the mediation excluded is the one of human consciousness involved in current communicative and expressive practices. The task of a theory of language thus becomes part of a more general task of thinking life in general and human life in particular without being confined to phenomenological problematics.

Note that the German term for *language* is not a synonym of *tongue*; it is thus free of metonymic connections to the physical act of speaking. In this sense, the term *Sprache* is quite far from the French *langue* or its Greek equivalent, `glw`tta`, and rather close to the Greek `lovgoß`, in its own double meaning (spirit

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[1] All page-references of in-text quotations, in this chapter, are to the *Sprache* essay.

and language). In his essay, Benjamin specifies, indeed, that the term *lovgoß* designates the fundamental and, as such, insoluble paradox of the distinction *and* identity between spiritual and linguistic essence (141).

Would there be some other term equivalent to or even interchangeable with *language* in the perspective of such problematics? My suggestion is that *form* (the German *Form* but also, to a certain degree, *Bild*) may indeed be such a term. Benjamin would thus be saying that all things are *hypokeimena* of a primary essence, in a way that sustains further questions concerning their essential form. "All things partake of language" would mean: all things are formations (*Gebilden* or *Geformten*)[1].

The essence of any specific language, on this level of abstraction, would be identical to the corresponding spiritual essence, to the degree that the latter communicates itself as form – that is, according to my reading, presents itself as formation. As Benjamin repeatedly underscores, the propensity of a spiritual essence to communicate itself communicates itself *in* its language as a whole – not *through* or *by* it. Linguistic expression of spiritual essence would not be transmission by means (*Mittel*) of language but enactment or instantiation in the linguistic medium (*Medium*) itself: "Die Sprache eines Wesens ist das Medium, in dem sich sein geistiges Wesen mitteilt" (157). Languages would communicate nothing but the very communicability of the corresponding spiritual essences: "teilt die Sprache […] eine Mitteilbarkeit schlechthin mit" (145-146). The essence of a language would be the very communicability of the corresponding spiritual essence:

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[1] As I have previously stated, the notion of primary essence (or substance) should not be taken as necessarily implying individual empirical entities – or particulars as opposed to universals. Anything (from human individuals to civilisations, from texts or poems to whole genres, from specific machines to technology at large) could be a substantial formation, to the degree that it involves the question, not so much of its existence or being, as of its essence or form.

Das geistige Wesen teilt sich in einer Sprache und nicht durch eine Sprache mit – das heißt: es ist nicht von außen gleich dem sprachlichen Wesen. Das geistigen Wesen ist mit dem sprachlichen identisch, nur sofern es mitteilbar ist. Was einem geistigen Wesen mitteilbar ist, das ist sein sprachliches Wesen. (*Sprache,* 142)	Dire que l'essence spirituelle se communique dans un langage et non par lui, signifie que, du dehors, elle n'est pas identique à l'essence linguistique. Elle ne lui est identique que *dans la mesure* où elle *peut* être communiquée. Ce qui est communicable dans une essence spirituelle, c'est son essence linguistique. (*OE,* I : 144)

In this sense, languages would communicate nothing but their own selves as form: "Jede Sprache teilt sich selbst mit" (144). Since this self consists in the very communicability of a spiritual essence, we are not within the logic of a self-referential *mise-en-abyme* structure. Language entails, rather, the very impossibility of self-reference or even self-reflexivity. A basic law of language would be that expressing one's self and addressing everything else is the same: "nach dem sich selbst aussprechen und alles andere ansprechen dasselbe ist" (145). Language thus tells that the question of essence is the one of a persistent connection between "aussprechen" and "ansprechen", "Ausruf" and "Anruf".

Languages of things, Benjamin further specifies, constitute fields of infinities, incommensurable to each other: "wohnt jeder Sprache ihre inkommensurable einzigeartete Unendlichkeit inne" (143). The theoretical challenge of this suggestion lies in the idea that languages express or communicate spiritual essences in spite of or even through their mutual incommensurability.

The paradigm of *Genesis* acquires its allegorically theoretical significance with respect to the specificity of *human* language. This specificity resides in its mediating position – it stands between all other languages and Godly *logos.*

How would human language occupy such a position? Its linguistic essence would consist in its being the only language that names. It would be the naming of the spiritual essences of things as communicable – that is, their linguistic essences. Without it, essences would be non-recognisable as phenomenic formations; in other words, there would be no phenomena.

At the same time, human naming-language would express or communicate the communicability of the spiritual essence of the human thing: "Der Mensch teilt also sein eignes geistiges Wesen (so fern es mittelbar ist) mit, indem er alle anderen Dinge benennt" (145). Naming would be identical to the essence of the human as communicable. The communicable spiritual essence of the human would consist in naming the communicability of things as formations.

By naming, human language would invent nothing. It would be responding, according to Benjamin, to the essences of things communicating themselves to the human – thus crowning a network of mutual addressing of languages. "Der Name ist aber nicht allein der letzte Ausruf, er ist auch der eigentliche Anruf der Sprache [But the name is not only the last cry, it is also the proper appeal of language]" (145). Benjamin further qualifies the connection between the language of things and their human naming as translative. Human language would involve the "Übersetzung des Namenlosen in den Namen" (151). Recall that *claiming* or *addressing* are also crucial in how *Aufgabe* presents translative relations between different human languages.

Naming language is universally human (*universellen Benennung*: 141). This does not mean common to all human beings. It means: language of humanness – "ist allerdings, weil er in Namen spricht, der Mensch der Sprecher der Sprache, eben darum auch ihr einziger" (145). *Der Mensch* is no specific human being or collectivity, nor, for that matter, the human species as a whole. It is the spiritual essence, of which the communicable form is identical to the linguistic essence of naming-language.

The figure of God signals the absence of any actual addressee, as well as the presence of everything as a potential addressee of this human language: "im

Namen teilt das geistige Wesen des Menschen sich Gott mit [in name the spiritual essence of humans communicates itself to God]" (144). Godly *logos* would thus *not* be an original or an ultimate instance, inaugurating or crowning a process of dialectic synthesis. It would, rather, be closer to a figure that sustains the field of languages, in a state of motion that springs from nowhere and leads in no specific direction. In this sense, the following, closing statement of *Sprache* may be as little theocratic, in its implications, as it is anthropomorphic:

Der Mensch teilt sich zum Gott durch den Namen mit, den er der Natur und seinesgleichen (im Eigennamen) gibt, und der Natur gibt er den Namen nach der Mitteilung, die er von ihr empfängt […] Die Sprache der Natur ist einer geheimen Lösung zu vergleichen, die jeder Posten dem nächsten in seiner eigenen Sprache weitergibt, der Inhalt der Lösung aber ist die Sprache des Postens selbst. Alle höhere Sprache ist Übersetzung der niederen, bis in der letzten Klarheit sich das Wort Gottes entfaltet, das die Einheit dieser Sprachbewegung ist. (*Sprache*, 157)

L'homme se communique à Dieu par le nom qu'il donne à la nature et (dans le nom propre) à ses semblables, et s'il donne nom à la nature, c'est selon la communication qu'il reçoit d'elle […] Le langage de la nature doit être comparé à un secret mot d'ordre que chaque sentinelle transmet dans son propre langage, mais le contenu du mot d'ordre est le langage de la sentinelle même. Tout langage supérieur est traduction du langage inférieur, jusqu'à ce que se développe dans son ultime clarté le verbe du Dieu qui est l'unité de ce mouvement du langage. (*OE,* I : 165)

Let us now turn to the issue of the relations between human language, as a universal naming-language, and the multiplicity of human languages, as distinct modes of linguistic semiosis.

B.3.3. Between *Logos* and *Lexis*

The term *Wort*, in the *Sprache* essay, is a homonym for three relatively distinct notions. It can be the Godly *logos,* the purely human-linguistic *Name*, or the semiotic construct of a *lexis.* The relations between these three kinds of *Worten* constitute a crucial knot for the Benjaminian theory of language.

Wort as Godly *Logos* (which the French translation renders by *Verbe*) would be the principle or *arche* that underlies and sustains all languages of things as communicable essences. *Wort* as the *Name* of the specifically human language would be the medium enacting the relations of nameless languages of things to each other and to the realm of Godly *logos.* Benjamin talks, more specifically, of a "reflex des Wortes in Namen [reflex of Godly word in name]" (*Sprache,* 149).

The status of the name-word would be pre-semiotic – or, rather, non-semiotic: it is in this sense, I think, that Benjamin qualifies human naming-language as pure language, *reine Sprache* (*Sprache,* 144). This purity of the name does not involve sacredness. It consists in a detachment of the human from phenomenic conditions of current communicative practices. It thus qualifies naming language as purely human – running through the multiplicity and particularity of human languages as systems of signs. It should be noted that Benjamin, echoing Humboldtian premises, sees the specificity of human language as residing in sound as a principle of form. The languages of things, he says, "sind unvollkommen, und sie sind stumm [are unaccomplished, and they are mute]". He continues: "Den Dingen ist das reine sprachliche Formprinzip – der Laut – versagt [The purely linguistic principle of form, the sound, is denied to things]" (*Sprache,* 147) [1]. Sound, as a *principle* of linguistic form, could be

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[1] Note the difference *Sprache* sees between painting or sculpture and poetry or religion as languages. The former, while being human, would remain closely dependent on principles of form which are also those of the languages of things. The latter would involve elements of a language exclusively human – and still only partly so, in the case of poetry (*Sprache* 147 and 156).

understood as prior to voice, as a means of communication: its crucial significance, for Benjamin, lies in the fact that it tells forms in ways that transcend the shapes or contours that mark languages of things as empirically identifiable formations.

The relation between the name and the thing it names is, according to Benjamin, *not* arbitrary. This postulate distances him from Saussurian linguistics while linking him, again, to Humboldtian concerns. As opposed to Humboldt, however, Benjamin does not understand this as involving similarity or likeness of form[1]. We have already seen that the passage from the languages of things to human language involves translation. He also talks of *Symbol* – which I suggest we read in its Greek etymology (`sum-bolhv`, joining or coming together), having little to do with the notion of sign as carrier of signification. Sound would be the field of a juncture of essences of things as communicable:

Das Unvergleichliche der menschlichen Sprache ist, dass ihre magische Gemeinschaft mit den Dingen immateriell und rein geistig ist, und dafür ist der Laut das Symbol. (*Sprache,* 147)	Ce qui est incomparable dans le langage humain c'est que sa communauté magique avec les choses est immatérielle et purement spirituelle, et de ces caractères le son est le symbole. (*OE,* I : 152)

In the *Aufgabe* essay, the figure of *reine Sprache* reoccurs and occupies a central position. It would be the language of truth (*Wahrheit*) or essentiality (*Wesenheit*) (*Aufgabe,* 49 and 52). Although of theological origins, it would be of vital philosophical interest. It would designate something that retains an actual or active potential in all human languages: a "schöpferisches Wort [creative Word]", always "gegenwärtig in Leben [present or actual in life]", kernel or nucleus (*Kern*) of processes and dynamics of linguistic transformation (51-51). As

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[1] Benjamin further elaborates on this crucial point in his later essay on *Mimesis,* which will be discussed below.

such, *reine Sprache* entertains tense and ambiguous relations to the communicable meaning of statements or texts – but would remain distinct from it:

Allein wenn der Sinn eines Sprachgebildes identisch gesetzt werden darf mit dem seiner Mitteilung, so bleibt ihm ganz nah und doch unendlich fern, unter ihm verborgen oder deutlicher, durch ihn gebrochen oder machtvoller, über alle Mitteilung hinaus ein Letztes, Entscheidendes. (*Aufgabe,* 19).	Mais s'il est permis d'identifier le sens d'une oeuvre langagière à celui de sa communication, il reste, proche de lui, et pourtant infiniment loin, caché sous lui ou plus manifeste, brisé par lui ou s'imposant avec plus de force, au delà de toute communication, un élément ultime, décisif. (*OE,* I : 258))

The notion of communication (*Mitteilung*) is thus displaced, as we pass from the realm of essences, which the essay on *Sprache* addresses, to the one of history, which *Aufgabe* concentrates on. The same happens to the notion of expression (*Ausdruck)*. Purely human language is what is meant (*Gemeinte*) by all distinct human languages as wholes – and in this sense, it itself expresses nothing, except for the very communicability of human essence:

In dieser <u>reinen Sprache, die nichts mehr meint und nichts mehr ausdrückt</u>, sondern als ausdrucksloses und schöpferisches Wort das in alle Sprachen Gemeinte ist, trifft endlich alle Mitteilung, aller Sinn und alle Intention auf eine Schicht, in der sie zu erlöschen bestimmt wird. (*Aufgabe,* 19).	Dans ce <u>pur langage qui ne vise et n'exprime plus rien</u>, mais, parole inexpressive et créatrice, est ce qui est visé par toutes les langages, finalement toute communication, tout sens et toute intention se heurtent à une strate où leur destin est de s'effacer. (*OE,* I : 258))

Let us further examine, by returning to the *Sprache* essay, the relations between the word as *Name* and the word as sign – what I suggest we call *lexis*. Through the Biblical fall from the paradisiac state to that of knowledge, humanity passes from its purely human *reine Sprache* to the multiplicity of systems of linguistic signs. Human language turns from medium to means:

Indem der Mensch aus der reinen Sprache des Namens heraustritt, macht er die Sprache zum <u>Mittel</u> (nämlich einer unangemessenen Erkenntnis), damit auch an einem Teile jedenfalls zum *bloßen Zeichen*; und das hat später die Mehrheit der Sprachen zur Folge. (*Sprache,* 153)

En abandonnant le langage pur du nom, l'homme fait du langage un <u>moyen</u> (une connaissance qui ne lui convient pas), par là même aussi, pour une part en tout cas, un *simple* signe; et de là sortirons plus tard le plus grand nombre des langues. (*OE,* I : 160-161)

It is quite significant that Benjamin retains for the semiotic word the term that he also uses for Godly *logos* – that is, *Wort* (which the French translation renders as *mot*). Benjaminian dialectics are at work. The semiotic *lexis* would be a parody of the Godly *logos*. It would involve the tragic-ironic dimensions of a *hubris,* coextensive with the emergence of subject/object relations. Humans would tend to attribute to their *lexis* a creative force analogous to the one of *logos*. They would thus substitute a human agency (seen as subject) for the figure of the divine creator (the very paradigm of a non-subject). Correlatively, human language would acquire the function of a means of signification, signifying things or events as if they were its objects:

Das Wissen um gut und böse verläßt den Namen, es ist eine Erkenntnis von außen, die <u>unschöpferische Nachahmung des schaffenden Wortes.</u> Der Name tritt aus sich selbst in dieser Erkenntnis heraus: Der Sündenfall ist die Geburtsstunde des *menschlichen Wortes* in dem der Name nicht mehr unverletzt lebte, das aus der Namensprache, der erkennenden, man darf sagen: der immanenten eigenen Magie heraustrat, um ausdrücklich, von außen gleichsam, magisch zu werden. Das Wort soll *etwas* mitteilen (außer sich

Le savoir du bien et du mal abandonne le nom, c'est une connaissance extérieure, <u>l'imitation non-créatrice du verbe créateur.</u> Dans cette connaissance le nom sort de lui-même : le péché originel est l'heure natal du *verbe humain*, celui en qui le nom ne vivait plus intact, celui qui était sorti du langage qui nomme, du langage qui connaît, on peut dire sa propre magie immanente, pour se faire magique expressément, en quelque sorte du dehors. Le mot doit communiquer quelque chose (en dehors de lui-même). Tel est réellement

selbst). Das ist wirklich der Sündenfall des Sprachgeistes. Das Wort als äußerlich mitteilendes, gleichsam, eine <u>Parodie des ausdrücklich mittelbaren Wortes auf das ausdrücklich unmittelbare</u>, das schaffende Gott-Wortes, und der Verfall des seligen Sprachgeistes, des adamitischen, der zwischen ihnen steht. (*Sprache,* 152-153)	le péché originel de l'esprit linguistique. En tant qu'il communique à l'exterieur, la <u>parodie par le verbe expressément médiat du verbe expressément immédiat,</u> du verbe créateur, du verbe divin, et c'est la déchéance du bienheureux esprit linguistique, de l'esprit adamique, situé entre les deux. (*OE,* I : 159-160)

Although suffering an eclipse under the weight of semiotic figuration, purely human naming-language would persist as an *Erbteil des Menschensprache*: a common heritage for all historical human languages (*Sprache,* 144). The closest that current linguistic practices come to the human naming-language (or the instance in which they expose most clearly their common heritage) would be their use of proper names – in which humans address humans or, more accurately, languages name purely human communicability.

The misprision of modern linguistics – or, in Benjamin's terminology, of bourgeois theories of language – would be that it isolates the semiotic component of human languages as sole object of interest and eventual discord. Human language as a whole is thus seen as the organic ensemble of evolving national languages (for Humboldtian history) or as the field of structurally distinct sign-systems (for Saussurian semiology). Benjamin, from his perspective, insists that purely human naming-language, even if obscured or unnoticed, remains a vital dimension of all human languages – and needs to be theorised as such. No human-linguistic formation would be adequately understood if seen solely as a sign-system – whether entirely arbitrary and conventional or somewhat depending on the objects it signifies. Neither would the problem be solved by a presumably mystical access to transcendental meanings:

Das menschliche Wort ist der Name der Dinge. Damit kann die Vorstellung nicht	Le verbe humain est le nom des choses. Ce qui <u>exclut la conception bourgeoise selon</u>

mehr aufkommen, die der bürgerlichen Ansicht der Sprache entspricht, daß das Wort zur Sache sich zufällig verhalte, daß es ein durch irgendwelche Konvention gesetztes Zeichen der Dinge (oder ihrer Erkenntnis) sei. Die Sprache gibt niemals *bloße* Zeichen. Mißverständlich ist aber auch die Ablehnung der bürgerlichen durch die mystische Sprachtheorie. Nach ihr nämlich ist das Wort schlechthin das Wesen der Sache. (*Sprache,* 150)

laquelle le mot n'aurait avec la chose qu'un rapport accidentel et ne serait qu'un signe des choses (ou de leur connaissance) posée en vertu d'une quelconque convention. Le langage ne fournit jamais de signes *purs et simples*. Mais le refus de la théorie bourgeoise du langage par une théorie mystique est également équivoque. Car selon une telle théorie, le verbe [*the word as lexis*] est absolument l'essence de la chose. (*OE,* I : 156)

Benjaminian dialectics do assign a crucial importance to a theory of linguistic semiosis, including writing in its specificity, in connection not only to literature but also to art in general:

Anderseits ist gewiß, daß die Sprache der Kunst sich nur in tiefster Beziehung zur Lehre von den Zeichen verstehen läßt. Ohne diese bleibt überhaupt jede Sprachphilosophie gänzlich fragmentarisch, weil die Beziehung zwischen Sprache und Zeichen (wofür die zwischen Menschensprache und Schrift nur ein ganz besonderes Beispiel bildet) ursprüglich und fundamental ist. (*Sprache,* 156)

D'autre part il est certain que le langage de l'art ne peut être entendu que dans sa relation la plus profonde avec la théorie des signes. Sans elle toute philosophie du langage, quelle qu'elle soit, demeure tout à fait fragmentaire, car la relation est originaire et fondamentale entre langage et signe (la relation entre le langage humain et l'écriture n'étant qu'un exemple tout à fait particulier). (*OE,* I : 164).

A critical theory of linguistic signs would presuppose the awareness that no language is ever *only* a system of signs. In other words, a theory of signs (as well as a theory of their historical constitution and change) would be an indispensable part, but only a part, of the metaphysics of linguistic form. These metaphysics

would be epistemologically prior to the theory of language as semiosis. The relations between sign and signification (or figuration and meaning), on which deconstructive criticism insists, should be viewed under the more general perspective of the relations between the semiotic and the non-semiotic components of all *Wort.*

Elements of such a theory are also present in fragments posthumously published under the title "Zur Sprachphilosophie und Erkenntniskritik [On the philosophy of language and the criticism of knowledge]". Amongst them, there is the following passage, highlighted by Tiedemann:

Wenn nach der Theorie des Duns Scotus die Hindeutungen auf gewissen modi essendi nach Maßgabe dessen, was diese Hindeutungen bedeuten, fundiert sind, so entsteht natürlich die Frage, <u>wie sich von dem Bedeuteten irgendein Allgemeineres und Formaleres</u> als sein und also des Bedeutenden modus essendi irgendwie abspalten lasse, <u>um als Fundament des Bedeutenden zu Gelten</u>. (*GS,* VI: 22-23).	Si la théorie de Duns Scot a raison de dire que les signifiants se fondent sur certains *modi essendi* relatifs à ce que ces signifiants signifient, la question surgit évidemment de savoir comment on peut <u>isoler du signifié quelque chose de plus universel et de plus formel</u> que le *modus essendi* qui lui est propre et qui est donc propre au signifiant, <u>pouvant ainsi passer pour le fondement du signifiant</u>. (Tiedemann 1987, 45-46)

This *modus essendi* founding the relation between signifier and signified would be the essentially linguistic element that makes language into a *kritisches Medium*, articulating the very realms of the signifier and the signified. It would be the naming component of the *lexis*: the purely human dimension of every distinct human language. The same fragments identify, indeed, *Name* as the required linguistic mediation between signifying words and signified meanings – a mediation sustaining a mode of linguistic *intentio* proper to each human language as a whole, without which no relationship of phenomenological intention would be possible between signifier and signified:

| Das Zeichen bezieht sich niemals auf den Gegenstand, weil ihm keine Intention einwohnt, der Gegenstand aber nur der Intention erreichbar ist. […] Kraft des Namens haben die Wörter ihre Intention auf den Gegenstand; sie haben durch den Namen an ihm teil. (*GS,* VI: 14). | Le signe ne se rapporte jamais à l'objet, car il est sans intention, et l'objet ne peut être atteint que par l'intention. […] C'est par le nom que les mots visent l'objet ; c'est par le nom qu'ils en participent. (Tiedemann, 1987, n. 46) |

Purely human naming-language would be the *modus essendi* characterising all human languages as distinct and interrelated systems of semiotic signification.

B.3.4. Semiotic *Mimesis*

Benjamin's *Mimesis* essay is an elaborate comment on the relations between signifiers and signifieds in human languages: semiotic structures carry a non-semiotic dimension of purely human naming-language.

Benjamin suggests, more particularly, that linguistic semiosis can be understood, as the title suggests ("Über das mimetische Vermögen") as dependent on a faculty of mimesis. The reference to the antique use of the term in Aristotle and, especially, in Plato, is not gratuitous – and it corroborates the translation of the occasionally also used German *Nachahmung* into *mimesis*, rather than *imitation*[1]. The essay starts by assigning to mimesis a crucial role in nature[1]

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[1] We have already encountered, in the *Sprache* essay, the notion of *Nachahmung*. There, it concerned the semiotic *lexis* as a parody of Godly *logos.* In the *Mimesis* essay, attention, as I will try to explain, shifts to relations between semiotic words and purely human-linguistic names.

and, more specifically, in human life. Humans would possess the highest capacity to produce through likeness: "Die höchste Fähigkeit im Produzieren von Ähnlichkeiten aber hat der Mensch" (210)[2]. Human languages, in their historical evolution as systems of signs, would enact this faculty. This implies, of course, that linguistic signs are not entirely arbitrary. The essay on *Mimesis* raises two questions in this respect. What, in human languages, imitates what? What kind of likeness or resemblance joins the imitative offspring to the imitated prototype? The idiosyncrasy of Benjamin's answers to these questions can be better appreciated if we compare them to Humboldt's understanding of the non-arbitrariness of linguistic signs.

For Humboldt, words would be imitative copies of images or representations produced in human consciousness. Different possible ways of understanding the imitation of mental images by sound are examined in his *Sprachbau* treatise, all of which are based on the model of onomatopoetic similarities or analogies[3].

According to Benjamin's *Mimesis,* the capacity of human language to produce resemblances "sich im Wandel der Geschichte verändert hat [has been altered in the course of history]" (211). The most important alterations would involve the gradual emergence and preponderance of a specific mode of

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[1] The idea of a mimesis is also central to Benjamin's approach to art in general, as formulated in the paralipomena of his *Kunstwerk*. Art would be theoretically definable as a mode of mimetic connection to nature. As originally mimetic, artistic phenomena would thus be somewhat related to traditionally auratic cult practices. This relation, modern aesthetic ideology would misread as mystical rather than magical.

[2] All page citations in the present section refer to the essay the title of which I abbreviate as *Mimesis*.

[3] See section A.3.2 of this thesis – and, for more on this specific issue, Humboldt's *Sprachbau,* chap. 10 ("Verheilung jeder Laute unter die Begriffe").

linguistic mimesis, entailing non-sensuous resemblance (*unsinnlichen Ähnlichkeit*) between the linguistic sign and what it imitates:

Dergestalt wäre die Sprache die höchste Stufe des mimetischen Verhaltens und das vollkommenste Archiv der unsinnlichen Ähnlichkeit: ein Medium, in welches ohne Rest die früheren Kräfte mimetischer Hervorbringung und Auffassung hineingewandert sind, bis sie so weit gelangten, die der Magie zu liquidieren. (*Mimesis*, 213)	Ainsi le langage serait le degré le plus élevé du comportement mimétique et la plus parfaite archive de la ressemblance non –sensible: un médium dans lequel ont intégralement migré les anciennes forces de production et de conception mimétiques, au point de liquider les pouvoirs de la magie. (*OE,* II: 363)

Like Humboldt, Benjamin brings up the example of onomatopoeia (212). He does not elevate it, however, to a paradigm for his theory, since human-linguistic mimesis would not be reducible to onomatopoetic analogy or similarity. The linguistic sign would resemble what it imitates in a way that does not allow this resemblance to be directly perceived by the senses. Benjamin's example of dances imitating constellations of stars is quite telling in this respect. The mimetic relation at stake is not one of similarity between the contours of human movement and the shape of celestial figures but, rather, one of "vollendeter Anbildung an die kosmische Seinsgestalt [perfect conformity to the cosmic figure of being]" (211). The very nature of what is being imitated by linguistic semiosis would disallow relations of similarity to phenomenic shapes or contours.

I suggest that, for Benjamin, the mimetic relation occurs between linguistic semiosis and purely human-linguistic naming. The latter, as we have seen, has little, if anything, to do with individual consciousness and mental images. This would explain why linguistic mimesis can not involve analogical similarity to its prototype. If some kind of likeness or resemblance there is, between *lexis* and *Name,* it could only be, indeed, of a non-sensuous order.

We can thus better understand on what grounds we are invited, by Benjamin, to risk questions that would otherwise sound quite naive:

Ordnet man nämlich Wörter der verschiedenen Sprachen, die ein Gleiches bedeuten, um jenes Bedeutete als ihren Mittelpunkt, so wäre zu erforschen, wie sie alle – die miteinander oft nicht die geringste Ähnlichkeit besitzen mögen – <u>ähnlich jenem Bedeuteten in ihrer Mitte sind</u>. (*Mimesis,* 212)	En rassemblant les mots qui signifient la même chose en diverses langues et en les ordonnant autour de leur signifié comme autour d'un centre commun, on pourrait examiner en quoi ces mots – qui souvent ne présentent pas la moindre ressemblance entre eux – <u>sont tous semblables à ce signifié central</u>. (*OE*, II : 361-362)

The *Bedeutete* concerned would not be a mental image or a phenomenological representation of any sort. It would, rather, be the expression of an instance of human essence, expressed as communicable: non-semiotic *Naming*.

We have, in *Mimesis,* the following comprehensive statement on the semiotic component of human language as mimetic:

Alles Mimetische der Sprache kann vielmehr, der Flamme ähnlich, nur an einer Art von Träger, in Erscheinung treten. <u>Dieser Träger ist das Semiotische</u>. So ist der Sinnzusammenhang der Wörter oder Sätze der Träger, an dem erst, blitzartig, die Ähnlichkeit in Erscheinung tritt. (*Mimesis,* 213)	Comme la flamme, la part mimétique du langage ne peut se manifester que sur un certain support. <u>Ce support est l'élément sémiotique</u>. Le sens tissé par les mots ou les phrases constitue ainsi le support nécessaire pour qu'apparaisse, avec la soudaineté de l'éclair, la ressemblance. (*OE,* II : 362)

Semiosis, as a component of linguistic formations, would be the carrier through which non-sensuous resemblance to non-semiotic form may come to the

fore[1]. The realm of historical phenomena would thus entail the emergence of linguistic formations as substantiations of the double nature of human language: purely human-linguistic naming, telling the communicable essence of humanity, and semiotic constructs, enacting current communicative practices. The latter would be a non-imitative mimesis of the former. We could also understand this mimesis as a catastrophic fall to the condition of phenomenic existence. The catastrophe would be co-extensive with the emergence and persistence of formational remains, through which a perfected event of having named – that is of having been human – survives as a historic *Gewesene*.

Note that the idea of mimesis also applies, in Benjamin, to relations between distinct semiotic fields of the same human language. Linguistic mimesis would govern, for example, the relations between orality, writing and their common intended *Gemeinte*:

Kurtz, es ist unsinnliche Ähnlichkeit, die die Verspannungen nicht nur zwischen dem Gesprochenen und Gemeinten sondern auch zwischen dem Geschriebenen und Gemeinten und gleichfalls zwischen dem Gesprochenen und Geschriebenen stiftet. (*Mimesis,* 212)	Bref, c'est une ressemblance non sensible qui associe [en tension] non seulement le dit et le sens visé, mais aussi l'écrit et le sens visé et pareillement le dit et l'écrit. (*OE,* II : 362)

If there is mimetic relation between oral and written semiotic constructs, it is mediated by the relationship of both to purely human-linguistic non-semiotic naming.

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[1] The notion of carrier could very well be of theological origins. I am referring to early patristic Christian rhetoric configuring the relations between substances and essences. The figure of the flame carried by a torch has been used in connection to such problematics by Leontios Byzantios (1996, 62), for instance. I will return to the related issue of a *prosopic hypostasis* in the last chapter of my thesis.

The reading of literary formations would thus presuppose a deconstructive awareness of tensions between signifiers and signifieds, tropes and meanings. Yet it would not be limited to such insights. It would further consist in the recognition of a presently perfected instance of human life, surviving as linguistic formation through changing and variable semiotic constructs, understood as mimetic catastrophes of the same naming event. The reading task would thus be neither a nostalgic return to Adamic purity, nor a teleological quest of messianic redemption. It would concern the present moment, the historic status of which would be at stake.

Note that *Gemeinte*, in the above-quoted passage, is not necessarily *sens visé*. One should understand it, rather, in the sense that it acquires in *Aufgabe*: not a meaning intended by specific statements or words, but *reine Sprache* itself, intended by a given human language-whole. This is what, in linguistic semiosis, would be mimetic of linguistic naming. Let us further investigate this crucial point, by returning to the *Aufgabe* essay.

B.3.5. Language-wholes

A historic inquiry into linguistic human life should, accordingly, neither remain on the level of the universally human naming-language, nor directly investigate specific linguistic manifestations. It should address the intermediate level of the multiplicity of changing and variably interconnected human *language-wholes*. Benjamin, in *Aufgabe*, insists that translation pertains "auf die Sprache als solche, ihre Totalität" or "auf eine Sprache im ganzen" (*Aufgabe,* 16).

Benjamin's *language-whole* should not be confused with our current notion of a historical and semiotic system of linguistic signification. To avoid terminological confusion, I designate the latter as *idiom*. A Benjaminian language-whole may or may not be empirically co-extensive with a historical and semiotic idiom. Benjamin occasionally uses, for instance, the term *Muttersprache* (mother-

tongue) in order to designate the language of the translator. He also refers to English, French, German or Greek as distinct language-wholes. At the same time, Benjamin tends, in passages more theoretical or figurative, to regard as a language-whole the literary work itself -the *Wort* of the poet. We can assume that the grounds on which Benjamin understands human languages as wholes, are not the same as those on which historians or linguists delimit idioms.

Central to the Benjaminian conception of a language-whole is the notion of *Meinung,* used as synonymous with the German *Intention* or with the Latin *intentio.* This *visée*, as Gandillac interprets in his French translation, would be the fundamental characteristic of a human language as a whole. Human language-wholes would be distinct with respect to each other (as well as historically connectable to each other) because each involves a specific mode of intending: an *Art des Meinens* or *Art der intentio* [1]. What is it that language-wholes intend? It would be purely human-linguistic naming-language: the *reine Sprache.* The multiplicity of modes of intending *reine Sprache,* would lay the *überhistorische* grounds on which human language-wholes are complementary with respect to each other – and, as such, historically connectable to each other:

Vielmehr beruht alle überhistorische Verwandtschaft der Sprachen darin, daß <u>in ihrer jeden als ganzer jeweils eines, und zwar dasselbe gemeint ist,</u> das dennoch keiner einzelnen von ihnen, sondern nur der Allheit ihrer einander ergänzenden Intentionen erreichbar ist: <u>die reine Sprache</u>. Während nämlich alle einzelnen Elemente, sie Wörter, Sätze, Zusammenhänge von fremde Sprachen	Toute parenté transhistorique entre les langues repose bien plutôt sur le fait qu'<u>en chacune d'elles, prise comme un tout, une seule et même chose est visée</u> qui, néanmoins, ne peut être atteinte par aucune d'entre elles isolément, mais seulement par la totalité de leurs intentions complémentaires, autrement dit : <u>le pur langage</u>. En effet, alors que, dans les langues étrangères les unes aux autres,

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[1] The phrases *Art der intentio* and *Art des Meinens* are interchangeable (c.f. *Aufgabe,* 18).

sich ausschließen, <u>ergänzen die Sprachen in ihren Intentionen selbst</u>. Dieses Gesetz, eines der grundlegenden der Sprachphilosophie, genau zu fassen, ist <u>in der Intention,</u> vom <u>Gemeinte</u> die <u>Art des Meinens</u> zu unterschieden. (*Aufgabe,* 13-14)

tous les éléments singuliers, les mots, les phrases, les enchaînements s'excluent, ces <u>langues se complètent dans leurs intentions mêmes</u>. Pour saisir exactement cette loi, une des lois fondamentales de la philosophie du langage, il faut, à l'intérieur de <u>l'intention,</u> distinguer <u>ce qui est visé</u> de la <u>manière dont on le vise</u> . (*OE,* I : 250-251)

An overall *Art* of intending *reine Sprache* as a *Gemeinte,* makes a language-whole – a distinct linguistic formation (*Gebilde*) out of a field of linguistic manifestations. In the terms of the *Mimesis* essay, we would have a mode in which a given range of semiotic constructs mimetically connects to a universally human naming-language. In more Aristotelian terms, we would have a formational primary essence, the emergence of which raises the issue of its purely human-linguistic secondary form or essence.

Meinung and *Intention,* in this context, might be reconfigurations of *Zweck* (aim). The latter occurs in the introductory part of the *Aufgabe* essay: "aimed" was a "higher sphere" of life, beyond the realm of phenomena. The French translation of *Meinung* or *Intention* as *visée* or *visée intentionnelle* is thus not wholly out of place. Objections in this respect, raised by readers such as de Man, are only partly justified. *Aufgabe* is, indeed, markedly critical towards phenomenological approaches to language. De Man, though, is wrong when he altogether discards the notion of intention with respect to matters linguistic. Benjamin uses, as we have seen, both *Intention* and *intentio*. The Latin term suggests that he might be exploring conceptual tensions between the scholasticist and the phenomenological traditions: *intentio* would explain *Intention*. Note that the Latin etymology of *intentio* does not presuppose subjective consciousness at work: the

term denotes the exertion of force or effort in a certain direction, a tendency to reach some point of reference. *Indexation*[1] would thus be better than *visée.*

A field of semiotic manifestations would be a formational language-whole, to the degree that it is recognisable as a distinct mode of indexing *reine Sprache,* the language immediately expressing the communicable essence of the human. Through the multiplicity or even infinity of such human languages, perfected modes of having named, that is, of having been human, would lead their historic survival – *Überleben.*

We are thus invited to regard linguistic formations under a perspective that outdoes the historicist concentration on national linguistic idioms. According to the Benjaminian approach, national idioms could, of course, form language-wholes. The same holds, however, for different ensembles of linguistic or literary traditions, for diachronically identifiable genres, as well as for individual literary or other linguistic works. Linguistic differences connected to social usages and traditions could also lay the grounds for the emergence of language-wholes, cutting through idiomatic wholes and boundaries. It all depends on whether and how distinct modes of indexing purely human-linguistic communicability are at stake. The Benjaminian notion of a language-whole may thus comply with the Bakhtinian problematics of polyglottic linguistic practices: a Benjaminian language-whole may include manifestations of a multiplicity of languages defined according to historicist or formalist criteria[2].

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[1] Recall the use of this term in *Passagen* (N3, 1), concerning the readability of a *Bild* as a historic index. In this fragment, it should be noted, *intention* is abandoned – see section B.3.2 above.

[2] Bakhtine (1978), especially in his essay "Récit épique et roman", applies his problematics to a comparison between the epic and the novelistic genres. A Benjaminian approach could very well adopt the theoretical premises of Bakhtine, without necessarily endorsing the reading of all epic tradition as inherently and inescapably monoglottic.

If literary genres, individual literary works, or even fragments of works are formational language-wholes, it is because, in a sense, they form their own language. Rather than exemplifying the spirit of a national language or expressing individual or collective subjects of cultural history, literatures would index (and address to all present moments) idiosyncratic loci of humanity. Through their persisting remains, the very communicability of human essence would be at stake, independently of historical and aesthetic taxonomies and categorisations.

B.3.6. Ideational Form

Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* can be seen as a case-study in which a given literary formation (namely, the genre of German Baroque drama) is addressed as a language-whole – that is, from the point of view of its *Art* of indexing *reine Sprache*. The terms with which we are familiar from *Sprache* and *Aufgabe* are here displaced by those of a "metaphysics of form". This section of my thesis will concentrate on the relatively autonomous essay to which we have already briefly referred and which introduces the treatise on *Trauerspiel*: its "Erkenntniskritische Vorrede [Epistemo-critical prolegomena]"[1]. It re-stages the key-notions of *Wesen* (essence), *Form* (form) and *Phenomene* (phenomena), in connection to *Idee* (idea) and *Ursprung* (origins) and *Begriff* (concept).

"Das Trauerspiel […] ist eine Idee [The *Trauerspiel* is an idea]" (218[2]). The objective is to understand *Trauerspiel* as an idea – an idea that would also be, as

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[1] The title of *Vorrede* implicitly also refers us to the Benjaminian critique of the Kantian tradition.

[2] All page citations for German quotations in this section refer to *Vorrede*.

the title suggests, the origin or *Urpsrung* of the corresponding form. This presupposes the epistemological task that the *Vorrede* undertakes.

At stake is thought that copes "nicht mit der Feststellung von Regeln und Tendenzen, sondern mit der in ihrer Fülle und konkret erfaßten Metaphysik dieser Forme [not with the ascertaining of rules and tendencies, but with the Metaphysics of this form grasped in its fullness and concreteness]" (228). Benjamin revisits, more specifically, the "Bereich der Wahrheit, den die Sprachen meinen" [realm of truth which languages regard]" (207). He presents us with the following definition of the domain of linguistic truth: "Die Wahrheit ist ein aus Ideen gebildetes intentionsloses Sein [Truth is a intentionless beingness, formed from Ideas]" (216). He further specifies that "Als ein Ideenhaftes ist das Sein der Wahrheit verschieden von der Seinsart der Erscheinungen [As ideational, the mode of being of truth is different from that of phenomenic manifestations]" (216). Linguistic truth, in the *Vorrede* essay, is the naming-language of the *Sprache* essay. The notion of idea aims at presenting the irreducibility of human language to its semiotic manifestations:

Die Idee ist ein Sprachliches, und zwar <u>im Wesen des Wortes jeweils dasjenige Moment, in welchem es Symbol ist.</u> Im empirischen Vernehmen, in welchem die Worte sich zersetzt haben, eignet nun neben ihrer <u>mehr oder weniger verborgenen symbolischen Seite</u> ihnen eine offenkundige profane Bedeutung. Sache des Philosopher ist es, den symbolischen Charakter des Wortes, in welchem die Idee zur Selbstverständigung kommt, die das Gegenteil aller nach außen gerichteten Mitteilung ist, durch Darstellung in seinen Primat wieder einzusetzen. (*Vorrede,* 216-

L'idée est quelque chose qui relève de la langue et plus précisément, le <u>moment dans l'essence du mot où celui-ci est symbole</u>. Dans la perception empirique, où les mots se sont dégradés, ils ont un sens profane manifeste à côté de leur <u>aspect symbolique plus ou moins caché.</u> C'est l'affaire du philosophe que de rétablir dans sa primauté, par la présentation, le caractère symbolique du mot, dans lequel l'idée se rend intelligible à elle-même, ce qui est l'opposée de toute espèce de communication tournée vers l'extérieur. (*Préface,* 33)

217)

The term *Idee* renames what the *Aufgabe* essay configures as a mode of indexing *reine Sprache*, proper to a given language-whole. The quest for an idea probes the relations between the corresponding formation (as primary essence or emergent substance) and purely human language (as second essence[1]). The notion of idea is thus an epistemological device that sustains the critique of both historicist and formalist approaches to human language. It would be "falsch, die allgemeinsten Verweisungen der Sprache als Begriffe zu verstehen, anstatt sie als Ideen zu erkennen [false to understand the most universal references of language as concepts, instead of recognising them as Ideas]" (215).

The metaphysics of form would entail a particular discursive *Darstellung* (way of presentation or exposition). One would need to cut through areas or fields of conceptual knowledge distributed by positivist or empiricist epistemology into compact and homogeneous disciplines. The presentation of the "unumschreibliche Wesenheit des Wahren [insurmountable essentiality of truth]" and of the "Gesetz ihrer Form [law of its form]" (208) would be fragmentary or discontinuous, compared to the coherence of conventional academic and scientific discourse. Contemplative thought rather than conceptual understanding would be at work: "Während der Begriff aus der Spontaneität des Verstandes hervorgehet, sind die Ideen der Betrachtung gegeben [While the concept proceeds from the spontaneity of understanding, ideas are given to contemplation]" (210). The task is also seen as one of disclosure or re-cognition. An idea would be a "Gegenstand der Entdeckung, einer Entdeckung, die in einzigartiger Weise sich mit dem Wiedererkennen verbindet [object of a disclosure or discovery tied in a singular manner with recognition]" (227). The possibility of an intuitive approach to truth is thus ruled out along with the

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[1] Recall my reading of the Aristotelian categories of *prote* and *deutera ousia,* as presented in section B.1.4. and further elaborated in B.3.2 and B.3.4 above.

deductive or inductive principles of scholarly reasoning (215-216). *Platonische Anamnesis* or *Erinnern* (recollecting) is, instead, suggested as the characteristic paradigm of philosophical contemplation (217).

The Platonic tradition is thus a predominant reference for the *Vorrede* essay[1]. Benjamin investigates the prospect of a post-Platonic materialism, just as, in *Programm*, he investigated the prospect of a post-Kantian metaphysics of the human. When revisiting Kantianism, the quest was for a logical site that would save metaphysics from modern anthropology. When revisiting Platonism, we are in quest of a way of "saving the phenomena" from phenomenological premises.

Let me examine more closely how Benjaminian ideas relate to phenomena – by which we should understand not only things or events as empirical realities but also, and even primarily, semiotic manifestations of human languages[2]. In other words: how semiosis relates to non-semiotic naming.

The ambivalent platonic dictum of saving the phenomena (`ta; fainovmena swvzein`: *ta phenomena sozein*) acquires, in *Vorrede,* a position as

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[1] Recall the Platonic formulation of the issue of idea, not so much in the parabolic or mythical configuration of *Phaedrus*, as in the more argumentative discourse of the 7th epistle, 342a-343c. Ideas acquire the status of an epistemological *seuil* of questionability. They occupy a level of thought that the philosopher should reach by questioning the validity of four current modes of knowledge: the word that designates, the definition that describes, the schematics that represent and the experience that perceives. The idea would be, quite simply and pervasively, what remains to be addressed as truth when all such modes have exhausted their relevance.

It is highly significant, I think, that, contrary to what Tiedemann (1987, 73 et sq.) remarks with respect to other Benjaminian texts, the platonism of *Vorrede* does *not* involve reference to the notion of beauty.

[2] Matter, for Benjamin, is languaged – that is, always already formed and thus translatable through human naming. Note Tiedemann's remark:

> "Le terme de 'matière' a une signification totalement différente chez Kant et chez Benjamin. Pour Kant, elle est tout à fait indéterminée, 'abstraite', elle est pour Benjamin l' *ens correctissimum,* déjà individualisé par les formes" (*Tiedemann 1987,* 39).

central as the one of ideas themselves. Ideas would not be structures or figures effacing, or otherwise transcending semiotic manifestations. On the contrary, they would be devices intending to save their specificity. The task of ideational inquiry is defined as an endeavour to "tief in alles Wirkliche zu dringen, daß eine objektive Intepretation der Welt sich drin erschlösse [penetrate so deeply in all reality, that an objective interpretation of the world might be uncovered]" (228). Phenomena would be saved through the intensive contemplation of their singularly objective phenomenicity – not through a phenomenological critique of their subjective perception or understanding:

Für die wahre Kontemplation dagegen verbindet sich die Abkehr vom deduktiven Verfahren mit einem <u>immer weiter ausholenden, immer inbrünstigern Zurückgreifen auf die Phänomenen</u> die niemals in Gefahr geraten, Gegenstände eines trüben Staunens zu bleiben, solange ihre Darstellung zugleich die der Ideen und darin erst <u>ihr Einzelnes gerettet ist</u>. (*Vorrede,* 225)	Dans la vraie contemplation, par contre le rejet de la démarche déductive s'accompagne d'un <u>recours de plus en plus approfondi, de plus en plus fervent aux phénomènes</u>, qui ne risqueront jamais d'être regardés avec stupeur aussi longtemps que leur présentation est aussi celle des idées, ce qui est la seule façon de <u>sauver ce qu'ils ont de singulier.</u> (*Préface,* 43)

Linguistic phenomena would be endangered by approaches that view them as disposable mediations between an empirically registered reality and a knowing consciousness. Linguistic semiosis would thus need to be saved from words assuming the function of concepts: conventional generic categories or universals. At the same time, Benjamin affirms that concepts are far from dispensable abstractions or disturbing disfigurations. They would be, on the contrary, indispensable to ideational critique. Let us follow more closely how this is the case.

Concepts would disperse, isolate and arrange phenomena as objects of knowledge. They would thus be instances of catastrophes of phenomenic lives.

These catastrophes would be no more destructive than semiotic catastrophe at large. They would set the conditions under which ideational forms survive. The saving of phenomena can only occur as the re-arrangement or re-configuration of accomplished conceptual figures. In a typically Benjaminian dialectic twist, the saving of phenomena is viewed as involving the critical saving of their conceptual configurations. The following relevant passage can only be read in its entirety:

In dieser ihrer Aufteilung unterstehen die Phänomene den begriffen. Die sind es, welche an den Dingen die Lösung in die Elemente vollziehen. Die Unterscheidung in Begriffen ist über jedweden Verdacht zerstörerischer Spitzfindigkeit erhaben nur dort, wo sie <u>auf jene Bergung der Phänomene in den Ideen das Platonische `ta; fainovmena swvzein` es abgesehen hat</u>. Durch ihre Vermittlerrrolle leihen die Begriffe den Phänomenen Anteil am Sein der Ideen. Und eben diese Vermittlerrolle macht sie <u>tauglich zu der anderen, gleich ursprünglichen Aufgabe der Philosophie, zur Darstellung der Ideen</u>. Indem die Rettung der Phänomene vermittels der Ideen sich vollzieht, vollzieht sich die Darstellung der Ideen im Mittel der Empirie. <u>Denn nicht an sich selbst, sondern einzig und allein in einer Zuordnung dinglicher Elemente im Begriff stellen die Ideen sich dar.</u> Und zwar tun sie es als deren Konfiguration. (*Vorrede,* 213-214)

En subissant cette dispersion *[les phénomènes]* se soumettent aux concepts. Ce sont eux qui opèrent cette dissolution des choses en éléments. Ce n'est que lorsqu'elle s'est donné pour tâche de <u>mettre les phénomènes à l'abri dans les idées – le `ta; fainovmena swvzein` de Platon</u> – que cette différentiation en concepts échappe à tout soupçon de subtilité destructive. Leur rôle de médiateurs permet aux concepts des phénomènes de participer à l'être des idées. Et c'est le rôle qui les rend <u>aptes à cette autre tâche, tout aussi primitive, de la philosophie : la présentation des idées.</u> Tandis que s'accomplit ce sauvetage des phénomènes par l'intermédiaire des idées, la présentation des idées se fait par la médiation de la réalité empirique. <u>Car ce n'est pas en soi que les idées se présentent, mais uniquement par un agencement, dans le concept, d'éléments qui appartiennent à l'ordre des choses.</u> Et ceci parce qu'elles en sont la configuration. (*Préface,* 30-31)

There is a figure that Benjamin uses in order to tell how ideational forms relate to and can be discerned through phenomenic formations: the figure of constellation – a figure for the very notion of figural form. Its use is explained in mostly negative terms[1]. The figure of constellation tells us what ideas are *not* – they are *neither* the conceptual schematisation *nor* the governing law of the corresponding phenomena:

Die Ideen verhalten sich zu den Dingen wie die Sternbilder zu den Sternen. Das besagt zunächst: sie sind weder deren Begriffe noch deren Gesetze. (*Vorrede,* 214).	Les idées sont aux choses ce que les constellations sont aux planétes. Cela veut d'abord dire ceci: elles ne sont ni le concept ni la loi. (*Préface,* 31)

Ideas would not be structures of semantic potential underlying semiotic epiphanies[2]. Nor would laws of mechanical articulation or organic development be at stake[3]. Ideas would be "objective interpretations" of how finite phenomenic

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[1] One needs, perhaps, to revisit texts like Rilke's sonnet on the constellation of the *Reider* (*Die Sonette an Orpheus,* I, XI) in order to investigate the problematic complexity of the figure of *constellation*, too often considered as self-explanatory.

[2] It is thus wrong to assume, as Mosès does, that ideas or Adamic names are "entités sémantiques originelles" acquiring the weight of "réalités ontologiques" (1992, 132). It is equally wrong to opt for the other side of the same coin and attribute to ideas an aesthetic status, affirming, for instance, that: "l'identification d'un phénomène comme originel dépend bien d'une intuition de type esthétique ; reconnaître qu'un phénomène est originel c'est porter un jugement du même ordre que celui qui consiste à affirmer qu'une certaine oeuvre d'art est belle" (136).

[3] One suspects that Heideggerian problematics concerning the phenomenological tensions governing the temporal emergence of the *Seiend* out of the *Sein* would also have to be discarded. See, in this respect, Tiedemann (1987, 57 et seq.) – who overly simplifies Heidegger, however.

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singularities mutually belong to each other – of how, in other terms, they connect to essences communicable:

Während die Phänomene durch ihr Dasein, ihre Gemeinsamkeit, ihre Differenzen Umfang und Inhalt der sie umfassenden Begriffe bestimmen, ist zu den Ideen insofern ihr Verhältnis das umgekehrte, als die Idee als objektive Intepretation der Phänomene – vielmehr ihrer Elemente – erst deren <u>Zusammengehörigkeit zueinander</u> bestimmt. (*Vorrede,* 214-215)	Tandis que les phénomènes déterminent, par leur existence, par leur être-commun et par leurs différences le champ et le contenu des concepts qui les embrassent, leur rapport aux idées est l'inverse, dans la mesure ou l'idée, interprétation objective des phénomènes – ou plutôt de leurs éléments – déterminent d'abord leur <u>appartenance réciproque</u>. (*Préface,* 31)

The idea of mutual belonging implies, of course, the unity of a whole. Benjamin does not discard problematics of wholeness; he reconfigures them in ideational terms:

Die Phänomene gehen aber nicht integral in ihrem rohen empirischen Bestande, dem der Schein sich beimischt, sondern in ihren Elementen allein, gerettet, in das Reich der <u>Ideen</u> ein. Ihrer falschen Einheit antäußern sie sich, um <u>aufgeteilt an der echten der Wahrheit teilzuhaben</u>. (*Vorrede,* 213).	Cependant les phénomènes n'entrent pas intégralement dans le monde des idées, dans leur état empirique brut, encore mêlé de paraître, mais seulement à l'état d'éléments, sauvés. Ils se dépouillent de leur unité factice <u>pour participer, une fois dispersés, à l'unité authentique de la vérité</u>. (*Préface*, 30)

Conceptual figures would attribute to phenomena their "singularity". Ideas, on the other hand, would reconfigure their "totality":

Zwischen dem Verhältnis des Einzelnen sur Idee und zum Begriff findet keine	Il n'y a pas d'analogie entre le rapport du <u>particulier</u> à l'idée et son rapport au

| Analogie statt: hier fällt es unter den Begriff und bleibt was es war – <u>Einzelheit</u>; dort steht es in der <u>Idee</u> und wird was es nicht war – <u>Totalität</u>. Das ist seine platonische „Rettung". (*Vorrede*, 227) | concept : tantôt il tombe sous le <u>concept</u> et reste ce qu'il était – une <u>singularité</u> ; tantôt il se maintient dans l'idée et devient ce qu'il n'était pas – une <u>totalité</u>. Tel est son sauvetage platonicien. (*Préface*, 45) |

Let us now examine the degree and way in which ideas, in the fullness and concreteness of formational totalities, relate or connect to each other.

B.3.7. Monadic Connections

Benjamin introduces, in *Vorrede*, the notion of *Monad*, which he keeps as a crucial one up to his *Begriff* essay. If we were limited to *Begriff*, we would risk forgetting that *monad* is an attribute of *idea*[1]: "Die Idee ist Monad [The idea is a Monad]" (*Vorrede*, 228). It is, more specifically, a rhetorical device meant to tackle the problem of the historic relations between distinct ideational forms – or language-wholes.

Each monad, Benjamin says, echoing Leibniz, "gibt in der eigenen verborgen die verkürzte und verdunkelte Figur der übrigen Ideenwelt [gives hidden in its own figure the abridged and obscure figure of the rest of the world of ideas]" (228). This statement may refer to the correlative proposition that linguistic formations inescapably index purely human naming-language – and are thus connected or connectable to each other.

The following passage returns to a celestial figural pattern. This time ideas are not constellations, but suns. There would be "autonomy" and even "perfect isolation" between ideas and phenomena, as well as between ideas themselves, *to*

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[1] Benjamin thus remains quite close to Leibnizean *Monadologie*, the object of which, it should be recalled, is the notion of essence or substance in its relations to soul.

the degree that the perspective is one of empirical connections of "touch". If, however, one passes to a different register of relations – such as the one of musical harmony – ideas may be seen as effectively related to each other:

Und so bekennen die Ideen das Gesetz, das da besagt: Alle Wesenheiten existieren in <u>vollendeter Selbständigkeit und Unberührtheit,</u> nicht von den Phänomenen allein, sondern zumal voneinander. Wie die Harmonie der Sphären auf den Umläufen <u>der einander nicht berührenden Gestirne</u>, so beruht der Bestand des mundus intelligibilis auf der unaufhebbaren Distanz zwischen den reinen Wesenheiten. Jede Idee ist eine Sonne und verhält sich zu ihresgleichen wie eben Sonnen zueinander sich verhalten. Das <u>tönende Verhältnis solcher Wesenheiten</u> ist die Wahrheit. (*Vorrede,* 217-218)	Ainsi les idées témoignent-elles de la loi qui dit ceci : toutes les essences existent dans un état d'<u>autonomie et d'isolement parfait,</u> hors de l'atteinte des phénomènes, mais encore plus des autres essences. Comme l'harmonie des sphères repose sur le cours des <u>planètes qui ne se touchent jamais</u>, j'existence du *mundus intelligibilis* repose sur la distance infranchissable qui sépare les essences pures. Chacune des idées est un soleil, et entretient avec les autres idées le même rapport que les soleils entre eux. La <u>relation musicale des essences</u> est la vérité. (*Préface*, 34)

History is a field in which relations occur between ideational monads. The term *monad* is, in fact, introduced in a passage that discusses the over-determination of ideational totalities by and through the unlimited temporal perspective of history:

Damit bestimmt die Tendenz aller philosophischen Begriffsbildung sich neu in dem alten Sinn: das Werden der Phänomene festzustellen in ihrem Sein. Denn der Seinsbegriff der philosophischen Wissenschaft ersättigt sich nicht am	Ainsi la tendance de toute conceptualisation philosophique se définit à nouveau dans son sens ancien: établir le devenir des phénomènes dans leur être. Car le concept d'être de la science philosophique ne se rassasie pas du

Phänomen, sondern erst an der Aufzehrung seiner Geschichte. <u>Die Vertiefung der historischen Perspektive</u> in dergleichen Untersuchungen kennt, sei es ins Vergangene oder ins Künftige, prinzipiell keine Grenzen. Sie <u>gibt der Idee das Totale</u>. Deren Bau, wie die Totalität sie im Konstrast zu der ihr unveräußerlichen Isolierung prägt, ist monadologisch. Die Idee ist Monade. (*Vorrede,* 228)

phénomène, il lui faut aussi consommer son histoire. Il n'y a pas en principe de limites à <u>cet approfondissement de la perspective historique</u> dans ce genre de recherches, que ce soit dans le passé ou dans l'avenir. C'est elle qui <u>donne la totalité à l'idée</u>. Sa construction, dans la mesure ou elle est marquée par la totalité en contraste avec son isolation inaliénable, est monadologique. L'idée est monade. (*Préface,* 46)

The paradoxically simple figure of constancy – that is persistence – describes most tellingly the temporal status of an ideational monad:

Also erfordert die Struktur der Wahrheit ein Sein, das an Intentionlosigkeit den schlichten der Dinge gleicht, an <u>Bestandhaftigkeit</u> aber ihm überlegen wäre. (*Vorrede,* 216).

La structure de la vérité exige donc un être qui égale par son absence d'intentionalité l'être simple des choses, mais qui lui serait supérieure par sa <u>constance</u>. (*Préface,* 33)

Benjamin's monad is thus neither a pre-established nor an anticipated ontological entity – neither a founding nor a redeeming instance. It is permanently engaged in history, confronted with its concomitant phenomena:

In jedem Ursprungsphänomen bestimmt sich die Gestalt, unter welcher immer wieder <u>eine Idee mit der geschichtlichen Welt sich auseinandersetzt</u>, bis sie in der Totalität ihrer Geschichte vollendet daliegt. (*Vorrede,* 226)

Chaque fois que l'origine se manifeste, on voit se définir la figure dans laquelle une <u>idée ne cesse de se confronter au monde historique</u>, jusqu'à ce qu'elle se trouve achevée dans la totalité de son histoire. (*Préface*, 444)

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The suggestion that a monad accomplishes its totality under the perspective of historical temporality, is coupled with the configuration of historical temporality as unlimited. This implies that there would be no foreseeable end to the process of totalisation of a monadic idea, no historical moment of completion or closure for its totality. Being historic under the perspective of a temporality unlimited means, for all practical and theoretical intents and purposes, being eternal – or aeonic, as I have previously suggested. "Die Ideen sind ewige Konstellationen [Ideas are eternal constellations]" (215). No figure of ultimately fulfilled temporality would thus be compatible with the historicity of ideational monads[1].

A monadic idea is also configured, in *Vorrede,* as an origin or *Ursprung*, with respect to the corresponding phenomena. We have already discussed this notion in connection to *life* and *survival*[2]. Ideational origins would be foundational beginnings of history as little as they are its ultimate ends[3]. They would be historic only in the sense of a pre- or post- historical *Gewesene*.

The essay on *Aufgabe,* as well as, later on, the one on *Kunstwerk*, approaches the same issues by transposing them from the metaphysics of form to the history of formations. Benjamin's notion of the original work of art, crucial to both these essays, is close to the one of the original status of persisting ideational forms.

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[1] Aeonic temporality precludes the figure of messianic ends. I cannot agree with Tiedemann (1987) when he remarks that Benjamin ventures to grasp

> "une relation entre le monde historique et le monde messianique. L'oeuvre d'art en son origine, là ou il oppose de façon autonome son univers au monde historique, fait entrer la relation refractée entre le monde historico-phénoménal et le monde achevé, dans une relation symbolique." (89)

[2] See section B.2.2. The part of *Vorrede* entitled "Monadologie" comes, indeed, right after the one introducing and discussing the notion of "Urpsrung".

[3] Benjamin's aeonic temporality diverges the Heideggerian configuration of ontological historicity, within the setting of which poetry would disclose the original foundations of human and, more specifically, national beingness.

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B.3.8. Lives of Languages

Monad and *language-whole* are equivalent notions. They both concern the same issue, namely, how fields of linguistic manifestations can be envisaged as autonomous formations connectable to each other in history. The *Vorrede* essay addresses the most general epistemological dimensions of the issue. The essay on the task of the translator, to which we now turn, turns more emphatically to the question of history.

Already since the *Sprache* essay, Benjamin referred to translatability as a characteristic inherent to all languages: "ist die Übersetzbarkeit der Sprachen einander gegeben [the mutual translatability of languages is given]" (*Sprache,* 151). *Translation* would be situated at the foundations of all linguistic theory, to the degree that it designates the historic dynamics of linguistic transformation:

Die Übersetzung ist die Überführung der einen Sparche in die andere durch ein Kontinuum von Verwandlungen. <u>Kontinua der Verwandlung</u>, nicht abstrakte Gleichheits- und Ähnlichkeits-bezirke durchmißt die Übersetzung. (*Sprache,* 151)	La traduction est le passage d'un langage dans un autre par une série de métamorhposes continues. La traduction parcourt en les traversant des <u>continus de métamorphoses</u>, non des raisons abstraites de similitude et de ressemblance. (*OE,* I: 157)

In the *Aufgabe* essay, we pass from the relations between the universally human naming-language and languages of things, to the relations between different human languages[1] in history. If the latter are seen as foreign to each

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[1] Unless otherwise specified, the term *language* will refer, from now on, to language-wholes, in the sense discussed in section B.3.5.

other, then translation "nur eine irgendwie vorläufige Art ist, sich mit der Fremdheit der Sprachen auseinanderzusetzen [is only a, so to speak, provisional way to be mutually exposed to the foreignness of languages]" (*Aufgabe,* 14). Nonetheless, Benjamin also affirms that translation exposes the most general truth of an "innermost relationship of languages":

Alle zweckmäßigen Lebenserscheinungen wie ihre Zweckmäßigkeit überhaupt sind letzten Endes zweckmäßig nicht für das Leben, sondern für den Ausdruck seines Wesens, für die Darstellung seiner Bedeutung. So ist die Übersetzung zuletzt zweckmäßig für den Ausdruck des <u>innersten Verhältnisses der Sprachen</u> zueinander. (*Aufgabe,* 11-12)	Tous les phénomènes de la vie qui ont une finalité, comme cette finalité même, sont en fin de compte au service, non pas de la vie, mais de l'expression de son essence, de la représentation de sa signification. Ainsi la finalité de la traduction consiste, en fin de compte, à exprimer <u>le rapport le plus intime entre les langues</u>. (*OE,* I : 248)

A series of supplementary notions further qualify the nature of inter-linguistic relations – and keep suggesting that languages are essentially non-foreign to each other. *Verwandtschaft,* the German term currently naming historical affiliation or even kinship between languages or peoples is not avoided. Tendency is implied when *Konvergenz* is used. Stronger figures of affinity or unification occur in other passages, through such terms as *ergänzen*, *versöhnen*, and *übereinkommen*[1]. *Connection* (along with *connectedness* or *connectability*) is the term I suggest we use as the most general and inclusive one.

Translative connections between different human languages would be enabled, according to Benjamin, on the grounds of the fact that language-wholes are different modes of indexing the same thing: *reine Sprache*.

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[1] See especially *Aufgabe* 16-17

Jenes gedachte, innerste Verhältnis der Sprachen ist aber das einer eigentümlichen Konvergenz. Es besteht darin, daß die Sprachen einander <u>nicht fremd sondern a priori und von allen historischen Beziehungen abgesehen einander in dem verwandt sind, was sie sagen wollen</u>. (*Aufgabe,* 12)

Mais le rapport ainsi conçu, ce rapport très intime entre les langues, est celui d'une convergence originale. Elle consiste en ce que les langues <u>ne sont pas étrangères les unes aux autres, mais, *a priori* et abstraction faite de toutes relations historiques, apparentés en ce qu'elles veulent dire</u>. (*OE,* I : 248)

Benjamin's approach does not altogether discard historicist figures of linguistic evolution, including the one of common historical descent (*Gleichheit der Abstammung*: *Aufgabe*, 13). Nonetheless, it disputes the premises of historicist linguistics as it postulates that *all* human languages are essentially akin and potentially connectable to each other, independently from their historical ties.

Connectability is, for Benjamin, so much a part of linguistic lives, that language-wholes are also seen as paradoxically incomplete – and engaged in a perspective of mutual harmonisation. This does not concern modes of phenomenic communication, proper to specific linguistic manifestations. It concerns the very ideas of their formational wholes, that is to different modes of indexing purely human language:

Bei den einzelnen, den <u>unergänzten</u> Sprachen nämlich ist ihr Gemeinte niemals in relativer Selbständigkeit anzutreffen, wie bei den einzelnen Wörtern oder Sätzen, sondern vielmehr in stetem Wandel begriffen, bis es <u>aus der Harmonie all jener Arten des Meinens als die reine Sprache herauszutreten vermag</u>. So lange bleibt es in den Sprache verborgen. (*Aufgabe,* 14)

Dans les langues prises une à une et donc <u>incomplètes</u>, ce qu'elles visent ne peut jamais être atteint de façon relativement autonome, comme dans les mots ou les phrases pris séparément, mais est soumis à une mutation constante, jusqu'à ce qu'il soit en état de <u>ressortir, comme langage pur, de l'harmonie de tous les modes de visée</u>. Jusqu'alors il reste dissimulé dans les langues. (*OE,* I : 251)

The common reference to *reine Sprache* runs through the monadic ideas of all language-wholes. Relations between such wholes can thus depend neither on a mechanistic, nor on an organicist model of kinship or foreignness, likeness or difference, life or death. This is one of the most crucial points in Benjamin's historic philosophy of language. Inter-linguistic connectability presupposes difference in the most acute sense of the term – namely, monadic incommensurability. Language-wholes connect to each other very much like incompatible traditions of thought are brought together by Benjaminian dialect problematics.

Benjamin also insists that *über*-historical connections between languages not only entail but also presuppose the historical *Wandel* (change) of each language as a whole (*Aufgabe* 12-13). The principle of these changes, Benjamin warns us, does *not* reside in conditions of subjective reception by different human generations (*in der Subjektivität der Nachgeborenen*). It would inhere in the very life of each language-whole (*im eigensten Leben der Sprache und ihrer Werke*). At stake would be a most powerful and productive historical process (*einen der gewaltigsten und fruchtbarsten historischen Prozess*). Only impotence of thought (*Unkraft des Denken*) could be blind to it. The original, for instance, would survive as a formation (here: *Geformte*) to the precise degree that the corresponding semiotic artefacts undergo alterations:

Denn in seinen Fortleben, das so nicht heißen dürfte, wenn es nicht Wandlung und Erneuerung des Lebendigen wäre, ändert sich das Original. […] immanente Tendenzen vermögen neu aus dem Geformten sich zu erleben. (*Aufgabe,* 12-13)	Car dans sa survie, qui ne mériterait pas ce nom si elle n'était mutation et renouveau du vivant, l'original se modifie. […] des tendances immanentes peuvent surgir à neuf de la forme créée. (*OE,* I : 249).

The notion of *Nachreife* echoes the one of survival. The term connotes not so much *maturation* as *over-maturation* – not so much current *Leben* as *Über-leben.* It disputes the historicist distinctions between life and death, genesis and decay,

growth and degeneration. *Wehen* refers, accordingly, to the process of change marking the language of the translation:

So weit ist sie [die Übersetzung] entfernt, von zwei erstorbenen Sprachen die taube Gleichung zu sein, daß gerade unter allen Formen ihr als Eigenstes es zufällt, auf jene Nachreife des fremdes Wortes, auf die Wehen des eigenen zu merken. (*Aufgabe,* 13)	La traduction est si loin d'être la stérile équation de deux langues mortes que précisément, parmi toutes les formes, celle qui lui revient le plus proprement consiste à prêter attention à la maturation posthume de la parole étrangère et aux douleurs d'enfantement de sa propre parole. (*OE,* I: 250)

As de Man remarks, the insistence of the French translation on *douleurs d'enfantement* (for *Wehen*) is not in Benjamin. He is also accurate, I think, when he marks the divergence between *Nachreife* and *maturation*: "it is by no means a maturing process, it is a looking back on a process of maturity that has finished, and that is no longer taking place" (*Conclusions,* 85). We are, indeed, dealing with pains that could be either those of birth or those of death. I would add that Gandillac's *maturation posthume* is a very telling oxymoron, the tensions of which de Man overlooks when he emphatically retains the notion of death. "The translation [he says] belongs not to the life of the original, the original is already dead, but the translation belongs to the afterlife of the original, thus assuming and confirming the death of the original" (*Conclusions,* 85). This almost directly contradicts Benjamin's explicit discarding of the figure of death at the beginning of the above-cited passage. This difference is not without important theoretical dimensions. If *Überleben* is seen as over-determined by the figure of death, the historic potential of a *Gewesene* is minimised or completely outdone: human life, together with history, assumes the status of a "purely linguistic complication".

B.4. TRANSLATIVE HISTORY

B.4.1. Formations: Reproduced

The notion of *reproduction* is central to Benjamin's essay on *Kunstwerk*[1]. The title of the French version suggests that the essay concerns the effects of mechanical reproduction (*reproduction mécanisée*) on the work of art – and there are important parts of the essay that deal with just that. The German title, with its emphasis on reproducibility (*technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*) is more accurate. The essay investigates reproducibility as a characteristic of artistic or literary originals: "Il est *du principe de l'oeuvre d'art* d'avoir toujours été reproductible" (*Kunstwerk*, 140).

Benjamin's problematics about reproducible originality are comparable to philological problematics about the transmission of originals: the question is the same, but the epistemic conditions of its formulation and approach are drastically different. For Benjamin, an original formation, by its very nature as ideational form, entails and even presupposes changes of the corresponding semiotic artefacts – including changes of the very modes of its reproduction. Such changes acquire, in a sense, a positive historical value: it would be only *through* them that the original idea can persist. For philology, change through transmission retains the charge of scribal negativity as opposed to authorial and philological authority: original cultural forms persist *in spite* of the inadequacy and variability of the means of their recording. Benjamin's approach disputes the validity of historical principles of textual formness.

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[1] As I have already specified, this abbreviation refers to Benjamin's own French version of his essay on "L'oeuvre d'art..." which I will be quoting, as published in *Ecrits Français* (1991). The "Paralipomènes" that the French edition adds to the main essay are translated by the editors; quotations from these "Paralipomènes" will be accompanied with the German original from Benjamin's *GS,* III.

There is an important relation between the *Kunstwerk* essay and the *Aufgabe* one. Because of its reproducibility, an original can persist as the same formation and lay its claim to its translative transposition. The postulate of reproducibility as an essential attribute of all works of art is thus the counterpart of the postulate of translatability as an essential attribute of certain literary works.

We have already discussed passages from the paralipomena of *Kunstwerk*, concerning the criticism of the modern aesthetic and mystical approach to art and literature[1]. In connection to this issue, mimesis is also brought up as central to Benjaminian concerns:

Die Kunst ist ein Verbesserungsvorschlag an die Natur, ein Nachmachen, dessen verborgenstes Innere ein Vormachen ist. Kunst ist, mit andern Worten, vollendende Mimesis. (*GS,* III, 3, 1047)	L'art est une tentative d'amélioration de la nature, une imitation, qui dans son fond le plus caché consiste à servir d'exemple. En d'autres terms, l'art est une mimesis parachevant la Nature. (Benjamin 1991, 181)

The *Kunstwerk* essay can, indeed, be read as a distant sequel of the essay on *Mimesis*[2]: the notion of reproduction reconfigures the one of mimesis in terms closer to dialectic materialism. The persistence of an original formation through reproduction can be seen as involving mimetic operations. Reproduction takes place through the mimesis, by a series of semiotic constructs, of a persisting ideational form. Reproductions of an original formation would be piling up as mimetic instantiations of the same idea. The fact that every reproduced construct is an imitation of a previous one, would only be the historical manifestation of

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[1] See section B.1.3 above.

[2] This essay was discussed in section B.3.4.

the mimesis of the original idea by both. Essentially copying (or editing) would be irreducible to the phenomenological dependence of the copier (or editor) on previous copies (or editions).

Recall that Benjaminian mimesis does not necessarily presuppose imitative similarity. It mainly involves non-sensuous resemblance – of a kind specific to human-linguistic manifestations. Mimetic reproduction thus cuts through the historicist alternative between absolute likeness to an original and falsification or disfigurement. The persistence of a literary formation would, in fact, necessitate variance and change at the level of the corresponding semiotic corpi. Accordingly, the notion of the persisting reproducible original does not contradict but, on the contrary, presupposes the one of the varying reproductive copy. Originality would thus be of a formation, the emergence and survival of which involves the occurrence of a series of historic occurrences. We could even say that originality *is* an on-going historic event. Changing and variable constructs reproducing the same formation[1], would all be equally original mimetic instantiations of the corresponding ideational form.

The question of the kinds of semiotic variance and changes that sustain the mimetic reproduction of the same original formation, remains, of course, a crucial one. Benjamin's approach to this problem, in *Kunstwerk,* is based on the schema of dialectic tensions between different *modalities* of artistic reproduction, akin to corresponding socio-political orders of artistic production. Traditional orders would involve manual reproduction. This would be relatively limited and marked by the work as unique manifestation and presence. Modernity would

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[1] As I have already specified (see section B.1.4), I keep the term *formation* to designate a linguistic substance from the point of view of its constancy or persistence as an ideational form – or as a mode of indexing the *Gewesene* of purely human-linguistic communicability. The English *formation* would thus be equivalent to the German *Gebilde* or *Geformte* of Benjamin's *Aufgabe* essay. I will be using the term *construct* to refer to the changing and variant semiotic instantiations or enactments, through which an original formation is reproduced.

involve mechanical reproduction, emerging within the wider setting of what we could call de-territorialisation of human relations. Different media and techniques of reproduction would entail different extents and kinds of semiotic changes and variations marking reproductive process. The essay concentrates on painting and drawing as juxtaposed to photography and cinematography. Nevertheless, its approach is also applicable to the relations between manuscript and printed (or, eventually, electronic) reproduction of linguistic works. It could also hold for the relations between an initially oral semiotic emergence (reproducible "manually" through successive performances) and its reproduction via (the more "mechanical" process of) writing.

What mostly interests us here is how changes in modalities of reproduction affect the persistence of an original formation. The essay on *Kunstwerk* stresses the implications of each such modality on what Benjamin identifies, elsewhere, as *readability*. Crucial in this respect is the notion of *aura* as applied to traditional works of art: "une singulière trame de temps et d'espace: apparition unique d'un lointain, si proche soit-il" (*Kunstwerk,* 144). The traditionally reproduced work of art would retain an auratic cult-value connecting art to magic and ritual. This value would not allow the original (or its manual copies) to be addressed as entirely accessible or transparent to the beholder, listener or reader. It induces and necessitates immersion into a realm of auratic presence[1]. Modern reproducibility would be the tendency towards the decay or destruction of traditional aura. A new kind of value is attributed to art or literature. It would be a value of exposition, entailing the accessibility of the work of art (or of its reproduced and eventually re-articulated fragments), however far its original manifestation may have been. Reading would no longer be contemplative or immersive. It would mobilise, instead, human observation, perhaps even the absent-minded observation of a "faculté d'adaptation

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[1] Recall the Byzantine manuscript, in which marginal scholiastic reading is directly appended to the poetic corpus.

polytechnique" (*Kunstwerk,* 159). It would thus potentially involve a kind of intensified critical awareness or attention. Watching a cinema movie (as opposed to the contemplation of a painting in a museum) would be paradigmatic of such new modalities of reading[1].

The corresponding developments would not jeopardise the persistence of the original formation. Its ideational form would persist through changing conditions affecting its value and use.

Let me add that the implications of such changes are evaluated by Benjamin in terms explicitly political:

> Mais dès l'instant ou le critère d'authenticité cesse d'être applicable à la production artistique, l'ensemble de la fonction sociale de l'art se trouve renversé. A son fond rituel doit se substituer un fond constitué par une pratique autre: la politique. (*Kunstwerk,* 146)

The passage from manual to mechanical reproduction would potentially acquire a "fonction cathartique" (143) allowing for an eventual "emancipation de l'œuvre d'art de son existence parasitaire dans le rituel" (146). This should not be understood as automatically occurring with the emergence of mechanical reproduction. It would rather be a tendency with respect to which different social and intellectual fractions of modernity react in different ways, under different conditions. Furthermore, the schema does not only concern differences between distinct phases of historical development; its dialectic entails tensions marking art in general, in all its manifestations[2].

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[1] Respectively, one could compare the editorial reading of the modern philologist to the scribal reading of the Byzantine copier. On a different level, the difference would be analogous to the possession and reading of a copy of a modern standard edition in our office, as compared to our approach to a Byzantine manuscript in the corresponding section of a library.

[2] I am not sure that Tiedemann's critique of the Benjamin's dialectic as more or less simplistic (1987, 109 et seq.) is wholly justified: This critique echoes analogous Adornian reservations with respect to the *Kunstwerk* essay. It is not my objective, however, to engage in this

The aesthetisation, not only of art, but of politics itself, could be the paradoxical outcome of the corresponding tensions. Recall that Benjamin sets the modern abstract-magical conception of art (whether in the case of mysticism or of formalist aestheticism) as one of the major targets of his critique. If there is emancipation or katharsis, it is not only with respect to the realm of traditional cult, but also and perhaps primarily with respect to the idealised modern image of its "cultural heritage". Benjaminian problematics dismiss all kinds of non-dialectic nostalgia *or* oblivion of traditional aura, while probing the historic conditions of historic survival of artistic works and forms.

B.4.2. Formations : Changing

Literary formations persist as eventually translatable originals, through changing and variant constructs. In the following two sections, I will further inquire into the distinction between originals and translations. The latter, for reasons of terminological clarity, could be called *translata* – reserving the term *translation* for the operations of the translative event.

What kind of semiotic changes or variance do *not* substantially affect a formation – and, consequently, enable its persistence as an original? What kind of changes would entail the emergence of a formation related to another through translation?

Derrida (1985) contests the Benjaminian distinction between *originality and translation*[1]. He sees it as related to institutional practices negotiating the modern

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discussion. I will present my own view of how the notion of traditional or auratic readability may, indeed, be in need of further elaboration later in my thesis.

[1] Derrida (1985) and de Man (1986) differ from the point of view of their strategies with respect to the Benjaminian paradigm. Derrida exposes and even underscores dimensions that he judges to be problematic blind spots of the Benjaminian approach to language, whereas de Man is

values of authenticity and creativity. Benjamin's distinction, however, resists Derridian critique. His *Aufgabe* essay is little, if at all, concerned with the issue of social appropriation and institutional evaluation of literary formations in terms of authenticity or creativity. Self-sameness refers to ideational forms, independently of the conditions of their phenomenological production and reception. By erasing the distinction between the original and the translatum, Derrida implicitly disputes the grounds on which Benjamin retains and reconfigures it – which are those of theorising language and literature under the metaphysical perspective of linguistic life as human and historic.

What makes two constructs reproductive instances of the same formation would not be the intention of a copier, editor or publisher. It would, rather, be the fact that they are both recognisable as mimetically enacting the same ideational form. What turns a construct into a translatum with respect to an original, would not be the intention or mediation of a translator, reading the latter from the perspective of a different idiom. It would rather be the fact that the two constructs are recognisable as entertaining a specific kind of connection at the level of their respective formations.

In other words, *original* and *translatum* are relational notions. Any semiotic construct is an original, if viewed from the persistence of its formation as reproducible and translatable. Any construct would be a translatum, if its formation entertains translative connections to another language-whole. The question is, what defines the specificity of a *translative* connection. I suggest that the term *recollection* is crucial in this respect. Any linguistic construct would be a translatum with respect to another if the formation of the one connects to the

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more interested in appropriating or domesticating Benjamin within the setting of deconstructive or rhetorical criticism.

formation of the other in terms of recollective toils[1]. The relation at stake would thus be a historic one.

From an empirical point of view, of course, there would be no formations entirely unmarked by recollective connections to preceding ones. Nonetheless, the theoretical problem of the specificity of translative connections retains its interest. Benjaminian translation designates a range of relations of linguistic connectability which are neither those sustaining the constancy of original forms nor those entailing the emergence of novel ones. This translative neither-nor (neither conservation nor change) would be an allegory for the Benjaminian understanding of historic occurrences: those through which the past is recollected (instead of being either reproduced or superseded) by the present. Benjaminian translative history would thus cut through the modern alternative between, on the one hand, a determinant past, functioning as the source of what springs out of it and, on the other hand, an indeterminate present, constructing its own past according to its novel perspectives.

A linguistic formation would persist through reproduction when semiotic changes or variance are more or less limited to the level of the materiality of the signifier. This does not exclude the possibility of reproduction through more drastic changes affecting the idiomatic or compositional components of a construct.

For translation to occur, a change of idiom is, in principle, the crucial condition – while basic elements of the compositional component should remain unchanged. According to Benjamin, however, translation occurs between different language-wholes, not between different idioms. Consequently, not all events of inter-idiomatic transposition are necessarily translative. Nor do intra-

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[1] If one wanted to generalise the notion of recollection, one could distinguish, of course, *mimetic recollection*, accounting for the persistence of original linguistic formations, from *translative recollection*, accounting for their transposition onto translative ones. Definitions only serve to index a theoretical question – not to solve it.

idiomatic transpositions exclude the possibility of translative occurrences. Changes of the materiality of the signifier, for instance, could be historically translative.

Furthermore, changes or variations of the compositional component of an original construct, would not necessarily preclude translative connections. Benjamin's approach signals the affinity between translative work and a philosophy of knowledge that disputes the primacy of criteria and principles of empirical analogy and likeness between mental images (*Aufgabe*, 12). It also compares translation to romantic literary criticism, given the ironic awareness of the latter (15-16). One can surmise that various kinds of reading work (exegetical or hermeneutic commentary, for instance) may entail translative connections with the formation that is being read – independently of idioms at work. One could even view philological treatises (such as Wolf's *Prolegomena*) as formations largely translative of their material. Correlatively, one could critically re-examine, from a historic point of view, the kind of connections that "literary translations" entertain to their postulated original. Most crucial, for our purposes, would be the exact kind of connections that sustain a manuscript tradition. Independently of the idiom of the societies or scholarly communities in which the corresponding documents are produced, their constructs could be reproductions of the same original formation (in spite of their differences) or translative transpositions of it (in spite of their similarities).

Let us better investigate how Benjamin's *Aufgabe* essay describes the specificity of translative transpositions and connections.

B.4.3. Formations: Translative

In the following passage from *Aufgabe*, original poetry is distinguished from translation on the grounds of the *Intention* of the corresponding linguistic formations. Recall that Benjamin's notion of intention applies to languages as

wholes. One should thus understand *writer* and the *translator* as referring to non-anthropological discursive instances.

Ihre [*i.e. the translation's*] Intention geht nicht allein auf etwas anderes als die der Dichtung, nämlich auf eine Sprache im ganzen, von einem einzelnen Kunstwerk in einer fremden aus, sondern sie ist auch selbst eine andere: die des Dichters ist <u>naive, erste, anschauliche</u>, die des Übersetzers <u>abgeleitete, letzte, ideenhafte</u> Intention. (*Aufgabe,* 16)	Non seulement son intention vise autre chose que ne le fait celle de l'oeuvre littéraire, à savoir une langue dans son ensemble à partir de l'oeuvre d'art singulière écrite en une langue étrangère , mais elle même est autre : l'intention de l'écrivain est <u>naïve, première, intuitive,</u> ; la sienne est <u>dérivée, ultime, idéelle</u>. (*OE,* I : 254)

The distinction between a primary or naïve, and an ultimate or ideational intention, concerns the degree to which a formation regards the historic perspective. Translation would maintain a "Rictung auf ein letztes, endgültiges und entscheidendes Stadium aller Sprachfügung [direction towards an ultimate, definitive and exclusive stage of linguistic juncture]" (14) [1]. What runs through the toils of translation would be "das große Motiv einer Integration der vielen Sprachen zur einen wahren [the great motive of an integration of many languages into a true one]" (16). The "Sehnsucht nach Spracheergänzung [longing for language-juncture]" (17) would situate translation between art and philosophy, disconnecting it from both purely artistic and strictly scholarly concerns.

The above formulations seem to suggest that the translatum could, in a sense, be viewed as historically determinant with respect to the original. This would lead us (and has, indeed led many readers of Benjamin) to the largely

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[1] All page citations for quotations of Benjamin in German, in the rest of this chapter, refer to *Aufgabe* – unless otherwise specified.

historicist idea that the past is formed (or "constructed") according to the perspective of the present[1]. Benjamin would thus propose a constructivist, so to speak, critique of the deterministic view of history – a critique analogous to the one that is often, quite misleadingly, also attributed to Nietzsche.

This is inaccurate. Recall Benjamin's initial discussion of translatability: "Wenn Übersetzung eine Form ist, so muß Übersetzbarkeit gewissen Werken wesentlich sein [If translation is a form, then translatability must be essential to certain works]" (10). It is the original language-whole, which calls for translative connections. Translatabilty, as an essential attribute of any original literary work is the historic potential of a *Gewesene*: a challenge of recollection raised by an indexed instance of perfected human-linguistic communicability. The form of the original (or, in the terms of the *Vorrede* essay, its idea) sets the law of its eventual translative transpositions:

Übersetzung ist ein Form. Sie als solche zu erfassen, gilt es zurückgehen auf das Original. Denn in ihm liegt deren Gesetz als dessen Übersetzbarkeit beschlossen. (*Aufgabe*, 9)	La traduction est une forme. Pour la saisir comme telle, il faut revenir à l'original. Car c'est lui, par sa traductibilité, qui contient la loi de cette forme. (*OE*, I : 245)

The translative present follows the original past. More accurately: "geht die Übersetzung aus dem Original hervor. Zwar nicht aus seinem Leben so sehr denn aus seinem Überleben [translation proceeds form the original. Of course not so much from its life as from its survival] (10). Benjamin does not hesitate to use, in this respect, rhetorical figures of organicist connotations. He states, for instance, that translation does not abandon the concern to "den Samen reiner Sprache zur Reife zu bringen [bring the seed of pure language to ripeness]" (17).

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[1] See, for example, Mosès (1992), for whom Benjamin's history would be a "fonction du présent de l'historien" (95).

De Man is right, of course, when he exposes how such figures clash with (and must be read as ultimately outdone by) the Benjaminian reconfiguration of their logic and images. The following passage, in which Benjamin describes in detail the nature of translative connections, is quite telling in this respect. Translation, as we have seen, would regard the realm of innermost connections between languages. In so doing, it can hope neither to reveal (*offenbaren*), nor to establish or constitute (*herstellen*) such connections. It would be a highly idiosyncratic human-linguistic mode of exposing them (*Darstellungsmodus*):

So ist die Übersetzung zuletzt zweckmäßig für den Ausdruck des innersten Verhältnisses der Sprachen zueinander. Sie kann dieses verborgene Verhältnis selbst <u>unmöglich offenbaren</u>, unmöglich herstellen; aber <u>darstellen</u>, indem sie es keimhaft oder intensiv verwirklicht, <u>kann sie es</u>. Und zwar ist dieses Darstellung eines Bedeutenen durch den Versuch, den Keim seiner Herstellung ein ganz <u>eigentümlicher Darstellungsmodus</u>, wie er im Bereich des nicht sprachlichen Lebens kaum angetroffen werden mag. Denn dieses kennt in Analogien und Zeichen andere Typen der <u>Hindeutung</u> als die <u>intensive, das heißt vorgreifende, andeutende Verwirklichung</u>. – Jenes gedachte, innerste Verhältnis der Sprachen ist aber das einer <u>eigentümlichen Konvergenz</u>. (*Aufgabe,* 12)

Ainsi la finalité de la traduction consiste, en fin de compote, à exprimer le rapport le plus intime entre les langages.
Il lui est <u>impossible de révéler</u>, de créer ce rapport caché lui-même ; mais <u>elle peut le représenter</u> en le réalisant en germe ou intensivement.
Et cette représentation d'un signifié par l'essai, par le germe de sa création, est un <u>mode de représentation tout à fait original</u>, qui n'a guère d'équivalent dans le domaine de la vie non langagière.
Car cette dernière connaît, dans les analogies et les signes, d'autres types de <u>référence</u> que la <u>réalisation intensive, c'est à dire anticipatrice,, annonciatrice</u>. – Mais le rapport ainsi conçu, ce rapport très intime entre les langues, est celui d'une <u>convergence originale</u>. (*OE,* I : 248)

The translative *Darstellungsmodus* is a specific mode of reference or, more accurately, of deictic (*Hindeutung*) enactment (*Verwirklichung*), further qualified

as: tentative (*Versuch*) rather than definitive; elementary or tendential (*keimhaft*) rather than total or complete; and, finally, intensive, anticipatory and suggestive (*intensive, vorgreifende, andeutende*). This is how, through its connection to translation, the original form "hindeutet als auf den vorbestimmten, versagten Versöhnungs- und Erfüllungsbereich der Sprachen [points to the announced, forbidden realm of reconciliation and fulfilment of languages]" (15). What is impossible to reach is thus also inescapably indexed as pertinent for the historic lives of languages. Translative connections would liberate an otherwise enclosed or exiled instance of purely human language:

Jene reine Sprache, die in fremde gebannt ist, in der eigenen zu erlösen, die im Werk gefangene in der Umdichtung zu befreien, ist die Aufgabe des Übersetzers. (*Aufgabe,* 19)	Racheter dans sa propre langue ce pur langage exilé dans la langue étrangère, libérer en le transposant le pur langage captif dans l'oeuvre, telle est la tâche du traducteur. (*OE,* I : 259)

What is it exactly that *reine Sprache* is a prisoner of, hidden in the semiotic construct of a non-translated original literary work? It is a certain kind of meaningfulness or signification, which would be alien to purely human-linguistic communicability:

Ist jene letzte Wesenheit, die das reine Sprache selbst ist, in den Sprachen nur an Sprachliches und dessen Wandlungen gebunden, so ist sie in den Gebilden behaftet mit dem schweren und fremden Sinn. (*Aufgabe,* 19)	Si cette ultime essence , qui est bien le pur langage lui-même, dans les langages n'est liée qu' à du langagier et à ses mutations, dans les oeuvres [*rather* : dans les formations] elle est affligée du sens lourd et étranger. (*OE,* I : 258)

Signification is that from which translation saves the phenomena of the original formations. Recall the terms of the *Vorrede* essay: ideas are contemplative shelters that save the phenomena. The task of translation would be to read and mobilise

the idea of the original formation: its semiotic mode of indexing purely human naming[1].

Benjamin also uses, in connection to the above, the notion of symbol – which we have already encountered in the essay on *Sprache*. In current linguistic phenomena, Benjamin says, *reine Sprache* is present or active in two possible and quite different ways – either as the symbolising element (*das Symbolisierende*), or as the symbolised one (*das Symbolisierte*):

[…] das ist jener Kern der reinen Sprache selbst. Wenn aber dieser, ob <u>verborgen und fragmentarisch</u>, dennoch gegenwärtig im Leben als das Symbolisierte selbst ist, so wohnt er nur symbolisiert in den Gebilden. (*Aufgabe*, 19)	[…] c'est le noyau même du pur langage. Mais si celui-ci, <u>même caché ou fragmentaire</u>, est présent pourtant dans la vie comme le symbolisé même, il n'habite dans les oeuvres que symbolisant. (*OE,* I : 258)

In finite linguistic formations (*endlichen Gebilden der Sprache*) the nucleus of *reine Sprache* is attached to (and concealed or fragmented by) a mechanism of semiotic signification. Human language thus means or symbolises what the sign signifies. Translative deixis would expose the historic dynamics of languages (*im Werden des Sprachen selbst*) and thus enable *reine Sprache* to be recognised as the *Gemeinte* intended by the original formation as a whole. Translation is thus the task of turning linguistic manifestations from symbolising constructs into symbolised forms, via historic transposition:

Von diesem sie zu entbinden, das	La libérer de ce sens, du symbolisant faire

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[1] This, I think, is the direction in which the answer should be sought to the question that Derrida (1985) identifies as a central one for *Aufgabe*: what is there *à traduire*? Derrida subsequently investigates the relations between such notions as *form*, *symbol* and *truth* to what he calls "noms aux bords de la langue".

Symbolisierende zum Symbolisierten selbst zu machen, die <u>reine Sprache</u> <u>gestaltet</u> in der Sprachbewegung zurückgewinnen, ist das gewaltige und einzige Vermögen der Übersetzung. (*Aufgabe,* 19)	le symbolisé même, réintégrer au mouvement de la langue <u>le pur langage</u> <u>qui a pris forme</u>, tel est le prodigieux et l'unique pouvoir du traducteur. (*OE,* I : 258)

B.4.4. Translative Reading

When translation occurs, something happens to the readability of an original formation. Enacted translatability makes the original stand as differently readable. More specifically, the readability of the original is brought under the light of a historic potential. Translation functions, in this sense, as an effectively historic reading of the original: a reading of its ideational form. By *reading* one should not understand the perception or reception of the original by the differently languaged mind of the translator. What reads the original is the occurrence of the translatum standing by its side. Let us further inquire how the readability of the original formation is affected by translative reading – that is, how Benjamin's historic configuration of translation dovetails into his epistemological problematics about artistic forms as ideas.

Recall Benjamin's "law" of the distinction between the indexed meaning (or *Gemeinte*) and the mode (or *Art*) of indexing it. Translation copes with the implications of this law. I should point out that the law applies both to specific semiotic manifestations and to languages as a formational whole. The example that Benjamin gives in *Aufgabe,* in order to illustrate his point, concerns semiotic manifestations: specific words, in their respective languages (such as *Brot* and *pain*) index the same thing (bread) but only according to a regime of signification proper to the corresponding language. In an analogous way, Benjamin says, formations as language-wholes index the same thing but according to their mode of indexing. The thing, in this case, would be: *reine Sprache.* The analogy between

the two levels of linguistic life, should thus not be drawn too far[1]. Specific signs index meanings through the relations between signifiers and signifieds. Language-wholes index their own, purely linguistic reference. This idiosyncratic indexing, mechanisms of semiotic signification risk dissimulating:

Bei den einzelnen, den unergänzten Sprachen nämlich ist ihr Gemeinte <u>niemals</u> in relativer Selbständigkeit anzutreffen, wie <u>bei den einzelnen Wörtern oder Sätzen</u>, sondern vielmehr in stetem Wandel begriffen, bis es aus der <u>Harmonie all jener Arten des Meinens</u> als die reine Sprache herauszutreten vermag. So lange bleibt es in den Sprache verborgen. (*Aufgabe,* 14)	Dans les langues prises une à une et donc incomplètes, ce qu'elles visent ne peut <u>jamais</u> être atteint de façon relativement autonome, <u>comme dans les mots ou les phrases pris séparément</u>, mais est soumis à une mutation constante, jusqu'à ce qu'il soit en position de ressortir, comme langage pur, de <u>l'harmonie de tous ces modes de visée</u>. Jusqu'alors il reste dissimulé dans les langues. (*OE,* I : 251

The mode in which a language-whole indexes *reine Sprache* would be manifested only through a distinctly translative reading of how its semiotic units index their own meanings:

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[1] The "bread" example can lead to misreadings (exemplified by de Man) according to which the distinction between *Gemeinte* and *Art des Meinens* concerns semiotic relations between signified and signifier (or between sign and reference). This is most evident in Zohn's English translation of the relevant passage: *Gemeinte* is rendered by "intended object" (Benjamin 1968, 74). It is *object* that is problematic here, not *intention*, to which de Man draws his corrective attention. Signs can be seen as indexing "objects", but language-wholes index *reine Sprache.*

Denn dieser erschöpft sich nach seiner dichterischen Bedeutung fürs Original nicht in dem Gemeinten sondern gewinnt diese gerade dadurch, wie das Gemeinte in die Art des Meinens in dem bestimmten Worte gebunden ist. (*Aufgabe,* 17)	Car, selon sa signification littéraire pour l'original, ce sens ne s'épuise pas dans ce qui est visé, mais acquiert justement cette signification par la manière dont ce qui est visé est lié, dans le mot déterminé, au mode de visée. (*OE,* I : 256)

The translative task is thus to pass from mechanisms of semiotic signification to ideational forms – without losing from sight either the analogy or the difference between these two levels of linguistic life.Semiotic signification involves tensions between the signified and the signifier. Benjamin refers to the former as *Sinn* and to the latter as *Form*[1], *Gefühlsten*[2] (which should be close to rhetoric) or *Syntax* (in the wider sense of morphology and structure). The tensions are such that, as Benjamin describes at length, if one tries to follow the *Sinn,* one needs to change *Form* – and if one closely reproduces the latter, one risks losing the former.

Translative reading would be governed by "einer theorie, die anderes in der Übersetzung sucht als Sinnwiedergabe [a theory which is looks in translation for things other than the iteration of meaning]" (17). The quest for meaning would not be translative reading, to the degree that it does not probe semiotic tensions in a way that would expose or liberate the *Art* in which the original formation indexes pure language. Translative reading should, instead, concentrate on *Syntax*. More accurately, it should address *Wort,* instead of *Satz*:

Das vermag vor allem Wörtlichkeit in der Übertragung der Syntax, und gerade sie	C'est ce que réussit avant tout la littéralité dans la transposition de la syntaxe; or, c'est

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[1] *Form* is juxtaposed to *Sinn* in the last part of *Aufgabe* (18). The term, in this context, is used in a loose sense, closer to shape or contour.

[2] *Tonalité affective*, says Gandillac in *OE,* for this term of Benjamin's *Aufgabe* (17).

erweist <u>das Wort, nicht den Satz, als das Urelement des Übersetzers</u>. Denn der Satz ist die Mauer vor der Sprache des Originals, <u>Wörtlichkeit</u> die Arcade. (*Aufgabe,* 18)

elle, précisément, qui montre <u>que le mot, non la phrase, est l'élément originaire du traducteur</u>. Car si la phrase est le mur devant la langue de l'original, la <u>littéralité</u> est l'arcade. (*OE,* I : 257)

What exactly could *Wort* be, as the *ur*-element that enables reading to reach over the walls of *Satz*? In what sense is Benjaminian translation literal or *Wörtlich*?

There has been a tendency to consider that, in accordance with Benjamin's interest in fragments, *Wörtlichkeit* means concentrating on the individual words[1]. This would bring Benjamin extremely close to Humboldtian linguistics. Recall how Humboldt's "inner linguistic form" involves, indeed, not only morphology, syntax and rhetoric, but also the formation of isolated words. I here cite a relevant passage, already partially discussed:

Der Begriff der <u>Formen der Sprachen</u> dehnt sich weit über die Regeln der Redefügung und selbst über die der Wortbildung hinaus, insofern man unter der letzteren die Anwendung gewisser allgemeiner logischer Kategorien des Wirkens, des Gewirkten, der Substanz, der Eigenschaft, u. s. w. auf die Wurzeln und Grundwörter versteht. Er ist ganz eigentlich auf <u>die Bildung der Grundwörter selbst</u> anwendbar, und muss in der That möglichst auf sie angewandt werden, wenn das Wesen der Sprache wahrhaft erkennbar sein soll. (*Sprachbau,*

The concept of the <u>form of language</u> extends far beyond the rules of word-order and even beyond those of word-formation, insofar as we mean by these the application of certain general logical categories, of active and passive, substance, attribute etc., to the roots and basic words. It is quite peculiarly applicable to the <u>formation of the basic words themselves,</u> and must in fact be applied to them as much as possible, if the nature of the language is to be truly recognisable." (*Language*, 51)

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[1] Derrida (1985) is an example of such a misreading.

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De Man provides us with an important insight into how Benjaminian problematics diverge from Humboldtian linguistics. Benjamin's *Wort* would be referring us to the very notion of *Art des Meinens* as opposed to *Meinen*:

> *Satz* in German means not just sentence, in the grammatical sense, it means statement […] the most fundamental statement, meaning, the most meaningful word, whereas word (*Wort*) is associated by Benjamin with *Aussage,* the way in which you state, as the apparent agent of the statement. (*Conclusions,* 88)

Wort would thus have very little, if anything, to do with Humboldtian lexical units. It would also resist the Wolfian principles of textual formness. The Benjaminian objective would be to identify and critically appreciate elements that guard the idea of a linguistic formation against its textual reformation.

De Man proceeds (*Conclusions,* 87-88) to further translative interpretations of the Benjaminian distinction between *Gemeinte* and *Art des Meinens*. It would be equivalent to those between *vouloir dire* and *dire, meaning* and *saying, hermeneutics* and *poetics* or *stylistics*, *logos* and *lexis, statement* and *syntax*, *symbolised* and *symbolising*, *meaning* and *trope*. The relation between the two poles in all these conceptual couples would be that of a fundamental "nonadequation" (or "discrepancy", or "disjunction") between signifier and signified, marking "any work to the extent that that work is a work of language" (86). De Man well exposes the failing mechanisms of semiotic signification:

> Therefore the distinction between symbol and symbolised, the nonadequation of symbol to a shattered symbolised, the nonsymbolic character of this adequation [i.e. the fact the symbols cannot actually accomplish an effective *sym-ballein*] is a version of the others and indicates the unreliability of rhetoric as a system of tropes which would be productive of meaning. Meaning is always displaced with regard to the meaning it ideally intended – that meaning is never reached. (*Conclusions,* 91)

The problem with de Man's approach is that it limits its perspective to the level of semiosis – which, according to Benjamin, is only one of the basic

components of human-linguistic life. Benjamin's *Wort* is no more de Man's *dire* than it is Humboldt's *Grundwort* or Wolf's *forma textus*. It is ideational form read out of semiotic mechanisms, naming-language read out of word-language. Translative *Wörtlichkeit* is the reading of *lexis* as mimesis of *Name.*

One of the clearest indications of the resistance of the problematics of *Aufgabe* to de Man's dialectics is the following. Not all of the antithetical polarities brought up by de Man accurately correspond to what Benjamin discusses. There is one, in particular, with which de Man actually reverses Benjamin's figuration. De Man (*Conclusions,* 86) projects the distinction between *Gemeinte* and *Art des Meinens* on the one between *logos* and *lexis.* Benjamin, however, identifies *Wort* not with *lexis,* but with *logos*: "Auch im Bereiche der Übersetzung gilt: `ejn ajrch``/ h\n oJ lovgoß`, im Anfang war das Wort" (*Aufgabe,* 18). This is the *Wort* that translation reads in the original: the *logos* of a *Name*.

Benjamin does bring up a notion close to de Manian *disjunction*, namely, *Gebrochenheit* (refractability); but Benjamin's *Gebrochenheit,* occurs between language as a semiotic construct and language as an ideational form, or between language as a historical phenomenon and language as historic life – not between different components internal to semiotic phenomenicity. Translative reading would expose the disjunction and confront its challenge.

Only under such a translative perspective would tensions of signification on the level of semiosis be significantly readable: they would expose the occurrence of historic connections between languages. As long as this perspective is inactive, the original remains in a state where purely semiotic tensions tend to be neutralised:

[…] das Verhältnis des Gehalts zur Sprache völlig verschieden ist in Original und Übersetzung. Bilden nämlich diese im ersten eine gewisse Einheit wie Frucht und	[…] le rapport de la teneur au langage est tout à fait différent dans l'original et dans la traduction. En effet, si, dans l'original, tendeur et langage forment une certaine

Schale, so umgibt die Sprache der Übersetzung ihren Gehalt wie ein Königsmantel in weiten Falten. Denn sie bedeutet eine höhere Sprache als sie ist und bleibt dadurch ihrem eigenen Gehalt gegenüber unangemessen, gewaltig und fremd. Diese <u>Gebrochenheit</u> verhindert jene Übertragung, wie sie zugleich erübrigt. (Aufgabe, 15)

unité comparable à celle du fruit et de sa peau, le langage de la traduction enveloppe sa teneur comme un manteau royal aux larges plis. Car il renvoie à un langage supérieur à lui-même et reste ainsi, par rapport à sa propre teneur, inadéquat, forcé, étranger. Ce <u>caractère impropre</u>[1] empêche tout transfert et, en même temps, le rend inutile.(*OE,* I : 252-253)

Translative reading would not simply deconstruct the original. The deconstructive moment would only be a first step, providing the material in which effective historic transposition can take place. The tensions of signification, which de Man records, are only relevant as elementary indexes of the idea that there is to recollect.

De Man insists that "it is impossible to do hermeneutic and poetics at the same time" (*Conclusions,* 88). Wolf would have little difficulty to accepting this statement. So would Benjamin. The specificity of the Benjaminian approach resides in the additionally postulated possibility (or even urgency) to do a philosophical history of literature, which would be neither hermeneutics nor poetics. To signal this possibility would be the task of the translator, who toils the metaphysics of human-linguistic forms.

By reducing language to its semiotic nature, de Man resists the historic perspective on both humanness and language, which Benjaminian metaphysics insist on probing. De Man concentrates on the discrepancy between, on the one hand, the human intention of producing and communicating meaning and, on the other, the resistance of language to such an intention. It would follow that

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[1] Rather: "this refracted condition".

"language is not in any sense human" (*Conclusions,* 87). More specifically, "the inhuman is: linguistic structures, the play of linguistic tensions, linguistic events that occur, possibilities which are inherent in language independently of any intent or any drive or any desire we might have" (*Conclusions,* 96). De Man seems to overlook the fact that this would be inhuman, indeed, only if the modern anthropological and phenomenological definition of humanity were taken for granted. The Benjaminian suggestion that de Man refuses to read, is that the fallacy of this definition, far from exhausting problematics concerning the relations between language and human history, transposes them to a different field of theoretical and practical work, which has always been wide open.

The translative configuration of *language* is concomitant with the reconfiguration of the *human* as *historic.* The language at stake would be neither the cultural language of historicism, ideally restored in philological textual constructs, nor the purely semiotic language of which deconstruction exposes the resistance to historical canonisation.

B.4.5. Translative Writing

In the last part of the *Aufgabe* essay (17 et seq.), Benjaminian metaphysics undergo a very practical twist. The issue is not only how to read the original but also how to operate the writing of the translatum that presents this reading – how the translating language articulates its own formation, connecting to the one of the original. The following passage suggests, in a tone wholly endorsed by de Man, that there can be no guidelines for the translative task:

Erscheint die Aufgabe des Übersetzers in solchem Licht, so drohen die Wege ihrer Lösung sich um so undurchdringlicher zu	Dès lors que la tâche du traducteur apparaît sous cette lumière, les chemins de son accomplissement risquent de

verfinstern. Ja dieses Aufgabe: in der Übersetzung den Samen deiner Sprache zur Reife zu bringen, scheint niemals lösbar, in keiner Lösung bestimmbar. (*Aufgabe,* 17)

s'obscurcir de façon d'autant plus impénétrable. Disons plus : de cette tâche qui consiste à faire mûrir, dans la traduction, la sémence du pur langage, il semble impossible de jamais s'acquitter, il semble qu'aucune solution ne permette de la définir. (*OE,* I : 253)

The task of the translation would be as inevitable as its clear and definitive solution is impossible. Consequently, Benjamin's problematics, although addressing methodological or even technical concerns (how to translate), are not an argument in favour of a *Wörtlich* (word by word or literal) translation. We have, rather, an inquiry about the very meaning of *Wörtlichkeit*. Benjamin ventures to identify the linguistic marks that might allow us to recognise an emergent formation as the translative transposition of the *Wort* of an original idea. Since languages constantly change, these marks cannot be of likeness or resemblance between semiotic constructs. They involve relations of accord between linguistic formations at the level of their respective *Arten* of indexing *reine Sprache*:

[…] so muß, anstatt den Sinn des Originals sich ähnlich zu machen, die Übersetzung liebend vielmehr und bis ins einzelne hinein dessen Art des Meinens in der eigenen Sprache sich anbilden […]. (*Aufgabe,* 18)

[…] ainsi, au lieu de s'assimiler au sens de l'original, la traduction doit bien plutôt, amoureusement et jusque dans le détail, adopter dans sa propre langue[1] le mode de visée de l'original […]. (*OE,* I : 257)

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[1] Rather : "form itself in its language according to".

The semiotic construct of the translatum should become a medium of transparency allowing the original to be read under the historic perspective of pure language:

Die wahre Übersetzung ist durchscheinend, sie verdeckt nicht das Original, steht ihm nicht im Licht, sondern läßt die reine Sprache, wie verstärkt durch ihr eigenes Medium, nur um so voller aufs Original fallen. (*Aufgabe,* 18)	La vraie traduction est transparente, elle ne cache pas l'original, ne l'eclipse pas, mais laisse, d'autant plus pleinement, tomber sur l'original le pur langage, comme renforcé par son propre médium. (*OE,* I : 257)

Benjamin also uses metaphors of sound and, more specifically, resonance, in formulations that express, through their syntactical meanders, the complexity of the play of reflections and deflections that should mark translative transparency. Regarding the meaning of the original, the translator's language should set itself in motion. It should let resound, not the intention of a meaning, via repetition, but the harmonious or complementary connection of its own linguistic *Art* of indexing to that of the original:

Dagegen kann, ja muß dem Sinn gegenüber ihre Sprache sich gegenlassen, um nicht dessen intentio als Wiedergabe, sondern als Harmonie, als Ergänzung zur Sprache, in der diese mitteilt, <u>ihre eigene Art der intentio ertönen zu lassen</u>. (*Aufgabe,* 18)	En revanche, sa langue peut et même doit, face au sens, se laisser aller, afin de n'en pas faire résonner l'intention sur le mode d'une restitution, mais afin de <u>faire résonner son propre mode d'intention</u>, en tant qu'harmonie, complément de la langue dans laquelle cette intention se communique. (*OE,* I : 257)

In the language of the translatum the resonance of the original echoes itself as a calling cry. Translation becomes the site of a historic realm of connections

between languages as wholes, standing outside the phenomenic forest of signification:

Die Übersetzung aber sieht sich nicht wie die Dichtung gleichsam im innern Bergwald der Sprache selbst, sondern außerhalb desselben, ihm gegenüber, und ohne ihn zu betreten, ruft sie das Original hinein, an denjenigen einzigen Orte hinein, wo jeweils das Echo in der eigenen den Widerhall eines Werkes der fremden Sprache zu geben vermag. (*Aufgabe,* 16)	La traduction, cependant ne se voit pas, comme l'oeuvre littéraire, pour ainsi dire plongée au coeur de la forêt alpestre de la langue ; elle se tient hors de cette forêt, face à elle, et, sans y pénétrer, y fait résonner l'original[1] au seul endroit chaque fois où elle peut faire entendre l'echo[2] d'une oeuvre écrite dans une langue étrangère. (*OE,* I : 254)[3]

The translatum should let itself be marked by a significant perturbation of its idiomatic normality. The very borders between historically distinct idioms would thus be at stake:

Um ihretwillen bricht er morsche Schranken der eigenen Sprache: Luther, Voss, Hölderlin, George haben die Grenzen des Deutschen erweitert. (*Aufgabe,* 19)	Pour l'amour du pur langage, il brise les barrières vermoulues de sa propre langue : Luther, Voss, Hölderlin et George ont élargi les frontières de l'allemand. (*OE,* I : 259)

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[1] Rather : "makes the original cry out".

[2] Rather : "the echo of the reverberation".

[3] I owe the awareness of the complex play between resonances or cries, echoings and reverberations, marking Benjamin's figuration, to my discussions with Christine Bétrisey.

Let us return to the "royal plies" in which the *Sprache* of the translatum envelops its *Gehalt*. This, as we have seen[1], is the figure of a condition of refractability that derpives the translatum of the "fruit-to-skin unity" between *Sprache* and *Gehalt*, which characterises the original. It is also an additional figure for the *Wehen* of an emergent language-whole that undergoes the shock of its historic connection to the *Nachreife* of a persisting original. The figure tells us that the language of the translatum is marked by an idiosyncratic interplay between the meaning of words and their syntactical arrangement. The interplay would perturb the very mechanisms of semiotic signification of the translating language – the capacity or propensity of its signs to signify. The tendency to reduce human language to the communicational function of its semiotic nature would thus be countered. This tension would index that the essence of a purely human-linguistic naming is also inescapably at work in linguistic manifestations.

In translation, we have two different linguistic constructs. The one transposes into its language elements of the other's language. This transposition, according to Benjamin, should be *Wörtlich*. Let us then ask again: for a *Wörtlich* transposition to occur, which elements of an original semiotic construct should be transferred unaltered and which should undergo one or the other kind of alteration? Recall, in this respect, the principle of the impossibility or irrelevance of analogical likeness. Likeness of syntax or rhetoric would be no better guarantee for the occurrence of translative transpositions, than semantic equivalence between isolated words.

Let us first examine what happens with meaning (*Sinn*). We have seen that, according to Benjamin, translation allows its language to be detached from semnatic concerns: "dem Sinn gegenüber ihre Sprache sich gegenlassen" (18). Detachment does not mean total disregard or indifference. *Aufgabe* insists on inquiring into the significance that *Sinn* retains for translative connections to originals. Benjamin proposes similes involving the figure of touch (*berühren*): in

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[1] See my quotation from *Aufgabe* (15) in section B.4.4.

the case of Hölderlin, translation would touch sense the way the wind touches an aeolian harp (21). A more abstract figure is at work when translation is said to touch meaning the way a tangent touches a circle. The touch would be on an infinitely small point. It would, nevertheless, determine the direction that the tangent takes – a direction that loses, of course, much of its significance under the perspective of infinity:

Wie die Tangente den Kreis flüchtig und nur in einem Punkte berührt und wie ihr wohl diese Berührung, nicht aber der Punkt, das Gesetz vorschreibt, nach dem sie weiter ins Unendliche ihre gerade Bahn zieht, so berührt die Übersetzung flüchtig und nur in dem unendlich kleinen Punkte des Sinnes das original, um nach Gesetze der Treue in der Freiheit der Sprachbewegung ihre eigenste Bahn zu verfolgen. (*Aufgabe,* 19-20)	De même que la tangente ne touche le cercle que de façon fugitive et en un seul point et que c'est ce contact, non le point, qui lui assigne la loi selon laquelle elle poursuit à l'infini sa trajectoire droite, ainsi la traduction touche l'original de façon fugitive et seulement dans le point infiniment petit du sens, pour suivre ensuite sa trajectoire la plus propre, selon la loi de la fidélité dans la liberté du mouvement langagier. (*OE,* I : 259)

This ambiguous role of meaning (touched rather than transferred, infinitely minimised rather than either changed or preserved) would have to be enacted, in the translatum, through the interplay between the choice of words on the paradigmatic axis, and their syntactical arrangement on the syntagmatic one. Assuming we are dealing with a translative change of idiom, morphemic units should change, so that their semantic value may *remain in touch with* the words of the original. Furthermore, the translatum would need to somehow upset the signifying function of its chosen words, so that its language resists a "fruit-to-skin" semiotic unity and deploys its "royal plies". Syntax could do the job, if used in a way that prevents morphemic units from wholly assuming and acting

out their semantic value. In other words, there would have to be a certain degree and kind of syntactic misplacement of words. The translative formation would thus expose the refraction between language as a semiotic construct and language as purely human – between word as *lexis* and word as *Name*. This would, in turn, expose the irreducibility of human language to semiotic signification and communication practices. The emergence of a somewhat failing signifying mechanism would symbolise the occurrence of a historic connection accomplished on the grounds of purely human-linguistic communicability.

While choosing words that are *in touch with* (instead of being the semantic equivalent of) the words of the original, the translator would also have to *follow* (instead of either mechanically imitating or organically adapting) the syntax of the original. What matters most would thus be the exact kind and degree of the resulting syntactic misplacement of words, and the ensuing perturbation of the signifying function of semiosis in the translatum. This very perturbation is what would connect the specific translatum to the specific original. Through distinct degrees and kinds of semiotic perturbation, the language of translatum would thus enact its historic connectability with respect to the language of the original.

Needless to add, this strategy directly outdoes philological principles of textual formness. Benjaminian translation contradicts the philological restoration of semiotic constructs as cultural forms of compositional coherence and idiomatic consistency.

Literary originals or, as Benjamin puts it, "all great literary works" would be formations that induce or provoke the most telling *historic* disturbances of the languages in which they are transposed through translation. This is the sense in which such works would be translatable *par excellence* (*übersetzbar schlechtin*: 21) – the interlinear translation of the manuscript tradition providing the archetype of their translatability:

Denn in irgendeinem Grade enthalten alle großen Schriften, im höchsten aber die	Car, à quelque degré, tous les grands écrits, mais au plus haut degré les Saintes

| heiligen, zwischen den Zeilen ihre virtuelle Übersetzung. Die Interlinearversion des heiligen Textes ist das Urbild oder Ideal aller Übersetzung. (*Aufgabe,* 21) | Ecritures, contiennent entre les lignes leur traduction virtuelle. La version interlinéaire du texte sacré est l'archétype de toute traduction. (*OE,* I : 261-262) |

Benjamin is saying that, in the case of works of great literary potential, all translative enterprises would confront and expose, even if only *malgré-soi,* the irreducibility of human language to its semiotic nature and the overhanging question of its essence as purely human-linguistic communicability. They would have to deal with the provocative model of the philologically and historically suspect inter-linear translation that occurs, for instance, in the Byzantine manuscripts of Homer – a translation that, often, does little more than tell how its original makes no phenomenological sense.

I will return, in my next section, to the issue of translatability of "great literary works" and of the sacred texts as their paradigm. One could just further try, at this point, to present examples. With the Gospel, as quoted in *Aufgabe,* we have a very characteristic case, indeed, in which translation inevitably problematises the function of its own words as signifying vehicles. In the following English version, the word *word* sounds so misplaced that the use of *logos* in its place would make little difference. What matters is that the perturbation persists, as English strives to tell what was in the beginning, and was with God, and God was it, and of which all was made which has been made:

> In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and God was the word. The same was in the beginning with God. All things are through the same made and without the same is nothing made, which is made. [1]

Word can very well translate both the Biblical *logos* and the Homeric ε[ροß *(epos*). It would not *exactly* be the right word in either case; and the correlative

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[1] Gospel according to John, literal translation from Luther's version, in Carol Jacobs (1993, 141).

perturbation would be of a different kind in each case; yet it would be the right word, well misplaced, from a translative perspective.

We are thus driven back to the "naïve" question of Benjamin's essay on *Mimesis*: in what way, different words, differently placed, in different languages, could all bear mimetic, non-sensuous resemblance to some kind of a common name?

B.4.6. Assessing the Possibility

In spite of Benjamin's postulate of the "absolute translatability" of certain literary or sacred linguistic works, de Man presents Benjamin's challenge as residing in the suggestion that "it is impossible to translate" (*Conclusions*, 74). This idea of the impossibility of translation has become a commonplace in translation studies and is, indeed, very often attributed to Benjamin[1]. We are thus too prone, I think, to do away with the corresponding theoretical issue (the issue of the conditions enabling the occurrence of effectively translative connections) at the very point at which (as in the case of Benjamin) its poignancy becomes most perplexing. It is one thing to admit, together with most translators and theorists of translation, that the passage from one language to another does not allow a "perfect" transfer – whatever idea (usually a positivist one) of perfection one has in mind. Benjamin would be less interesting, had he simply re-discovered a basic

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[1] Derrida, in his own account of *Aufgabe*, is more sophisticated, but actually insists on the same: Benjamin would be saying that languages are, perhaps, *traductibles* (inviting or claiming translation) while remaining *non-traduisibles* (impossible to translate) (1985, 247). The task of the translator would thus be both inevitably undertaken and impossible to accomplish, echoing the Biblical paradigm according to which "Dieu impose et interdit *a la fois* la traduction" (214). At the same time, Derrida does envisage the occurrence of translation as an event historic, however rare: "Une traduction qui arrive, qui arrive à promettre la reconciliation, à en parler, à la désirer, une telle traduction est un événement rare" (235).

fact of linguistic life. It is a different thing to insist on the hypothesis that a certain kind of translation, under certain conditions, is not only inevitable but also possible, *precisely* on the grounds of the impossibility of a "perfect" transfer between different languages. This is what Benjamin does as he investigates the non-historicist and non-aestheticist premises and implications of the occurrence of translative events.

Why is there de Man's (highly informed and critically sophisticated) resistance to the Benjaminian postulate of translatability? The thorny issue, I think, is the status that Benjamin attributes to translation as a paradigmatic historic event. The resistance to translatability is a resistance to understanding language as historic – and, ultimately, to the notion of history as it persists beyond historicist premises.

De Man is, of course, perfectly aware of the stakes. The discussion following his lecture expresses this awareness quite tellingly:

> I think that what is implied, that what occurs, for example, is – translation is an occurrence. At the moment when translation really takes place, for example Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles, which undid Sophocles, undid Hölderlin, and revealed a great deal – that's an occurrence. That's an event, that is a historical event. […] In Hölderlin, translation *occurs*. Most of the translations that are in the market are not translations in Benjamin's sense. When Luther translated, translated the Bible, something occurred – at that moment, something happened – not in the immediate sense that from then on there were wars and then the course of history changed – that is a by-product. What really occurred was... translation. […] I realise this is difficult – a little obscure and not well formulated. But I feel it, that there is something there. Something being said there which is kind of important to me, which I think... which isn't clear. (*Conclusions,* 104)

Let us briefly probe the grounds on which de Man argues for the "impossibility of translation". I will not insist on the rather secondary (if not altogether irrelevant) argument that de Man's rhetoric uses as it invokes flagrant translation mistakes made by Benjamin's most competent English and French translators (Zohn and Gandillac, respectively). This concerns the phenomenology of reading: the state of mind that necessitates misreading (in a sense more

elementary that de Man's theoretical notion of *blindness* suggests) not as an impediment but as a precondition of reading. It affects the notion of translation no more than the copying mistakes of the scribe may affect the notion of reproduction. De Man's *Conclusions* comes closer to the point, I think, when he comments on Benjamin's statement according to which "steht […] die Übersetzung mitten zwischen Dichtung und der Lehrer [translation stands half-way between poetry and doctrine]" (*Aufgabe,* 17)[1]. De Man systematises and highlights the Benjaminian analogy between translation, philosophy and criticism – an analogy that also involves history.

Translation would be akin to philosophy (or to a certain kind of philosophical awareness) and criticism (especially the irony-sensitive literary theory of the Romantics) because in all three cases, thought realises the impossibility of approaching through relations of likeness the object it postulates as its original or primary source. History would confront the same conundrum:

> Because all these activities are derived from original activities they are therefore singularly inconclusive, are failed, are aborted in a sense from the start because they are derived and secondary. Yet Benjamin insists that the model of their derivation is not that of resemblance or imitation. […] All these activities – critical philosophy, literary theory, history – resemble each other in the fact that they do not resemble that from which they derive. (*Conclusions,* 83-84)

What fails, in fact, are the modern premises of generation or derivation through relations of representational analogy. These premises are, indeed, criticised by Benjamin as fallacious. The awareness of their fallacy, Benjamin also says, is the condition enabling theory to probe the possibility of different kinds of historic relations enacted through language. Translatability would be a paradigm in this respect.

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[1] The statement occurs in the context of Benjamin's comments on the language of poetic truth that Mallarmé would long for.

Towards the closure of *Aufgabe* (20-21) Benjamin further explores his notion of translatability by examining whether and how specific kinds of formations are, indeed, translatable. Translatability is clearly presented as a matter of degree. The degree to which an original is translatable would depend on the degree to which its formation is readable as a mode of indexing *reine Sprache*. According to this criterion, translatable would be those original works that current translative practices view as most difficult or even impossible to translate – namely, works of higher literary status:

Je höher ein Werk geartet ist, desto mehr bleibt es selbst in flüchtigster Berührung seines Sinnes noch übersetzbar. Dies gilt selbstverständlich nur von Originalen. (*Aufgabe,* 20)	Plus une oeuvre est de haute qualité, plus elle reste, même dans le plus fugitif contact avec son sens, susceptible encore d'être traduite. Cela ne vaut, bien entendu, que pour les textes originaux. (*OE,* I : 260)

In the case of original literary works, Benjamin is saying, translatability presupposes that their formation reaches beyond currently communicable statements and includes, attached to or hidden under the signifying weight of such manifestations, an element of pure linguistic communicability. This, we may surmise, is what makes their meaning difficult or impossible to transfer; it would also be what renders the idea of their language-whole eminently translatable.

Things become more complicated in the case of formations that are readable as the outcome of translative operations – which Benjamin also considers. He does not at all exclude the translatability of translata. Indeed, he uses its example as a stepping stone allowing him to pass to the crucial issue of the absolute translatability of great literary or sacred works.

Originals would be non-translatable if over-burdened by semiotic signification. Translata, on the contrary, would be non-translatable if altogether deprived of signifying consistency:

Übersetzungen dagegen erweisen sich unübersetzbar nicht wegen der Schwere, sondern wegen der allzu großen Flüchtigkeit, mit welcher der Sinn an ihnen haftet. (*Aufgabe,* 20)

Les traductions, en revanche, se révèlent intraduisibles, non parce qu'elles seraient trop chargées de sens, mais parce qu'elle le sont de manière trop fugitive. (*OE,* I : 260-261)

Earlier in his essay, Benjamin commented upon a different but related point; namely, the non-translatability of a specific element present in all translated texts. This element would be the very gesture of translative transposition, exposing the kernel of *reine Sprache* that inhabits the language of the original, and perturbing the language of the translatum:

Genauer läßt sich dieser wesenhafte Kern als dasjenige bestimmen, was an ihr selbst nicht wiederum übersetzbar ist[1]. Mag man nämlich an Mitteilung aus ihr entnehmen, soviel man kann, und dies übersetzen, so bleibt dennoch dasjenige unberührbar zurück, worauf die Arbeit des wahren Übersetzers sich richtete. Es ist nicht übertragbar wie das Dicherwort des Originals weil das Verhältnis des Gehalts zur Sprache völlig verschieden ist in Original und Übersetzung. (*Aufgabe,* 15)

Pour donner une définition plus précise de ce noyau essentiel, on peut dire qu'il s'agit de ce qui, dans une traduction, n'est pas à nouveau traduisible. Car, autant qu'on en puisse extraire du communicable pour le traduire, il reste toujours cet intouchable, sur lequel porte le travail du vrai traducteur et qui n'est pas transmissible comme l'est, dans l'original, la parole de l'écrivain, car le rapport de la teneur au langage est tout à fait différent dans l'original et dans la traduction. (*OE,* I : 252)

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[1] The English version by Zohn overlooks the *wiederum*. An element that is said by Benjamin to be not re-translatable, is thus reconfigured by the translator as not translatable at all (Benjamin 1968, 75)

The non-translatable translative gesture may or may not affect the translatum in its entirety. This sets the degree to which a translatum is translatable[1]. The translatability of the translatum presupposes that the corresponding formation deploys itself beyond the translative gesture *per se*; that its signifying component is not entirely governed by the indexation of purely human language.

If originals risk suffering from an excessive presence of signifying mechanisms, translata risk suffering from their excessive absence. The danger of this excess is always present, Benjamin warns – especially when the gesture of translation has been a particularly poignant one. Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles, Benjamin notes, provide us with examples of translata so deeply impregnated with the very gesture of translation, so entirely governed by the concern of historic connectability between language-wholes, that they are themselves non-translatable. They would thus be archetypes of a translative form (*Urbilder ihrer Form*: 21) exemplifying the risk run by all events of translative connection:

Die Sophokles-übersetzungen waren Hölderlins letztes Werk. In ihnen stürzt der Sinn von Abgrund zu Abgrund, bis es droht in bodenlosed Sprachtiefen sich verlieren. (*Aufgabe,* 21)	Les traductions de Sophokle furent les dernières oeuvres de Hölderlin. Le sens y tombe de précipice en précipice, jusqu'à risquer de se perdre dans les gouffres sans fond de la langue. (*OE,* I : 261)

The danger is to have language deprived of its human-historic potential. "Aber es gibt ein Halten [but there is an arrest]" Benjamin hastens to add. There

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[1] One can thus agree with Derrida (1985) when he states that "il n'y a pas de traduction de la traduction, voilà l'axiome sans lequel il n'y aurait pas «la tâche du traducteur" (239. This is only if one understands *traduction* as the translative gesture itself, not as the translatum as a formational whole.

is a further "Urbild oder Ideal aller Übersetzung [prototype or ideal of all translation]", designated by the absolute interlinear translatability of sacred texts:

Aber es gibt ein Halten. Es gewährt es jedoch kein Text außer dem heiligen, in dem der Sinn aufgehört hat, die Wasserscheide für die strömende Sprache und die strömende Offenbarung zu sein. Wo der Text unmittelbar, ohne vermittelnden Sinn, in seiner Wörtlichkeit der wahren Sprache, der Wahrheit oder der Lehre angehört, ist er übersetzbar schlechthin. (*Aufgabe,* 21)	Mais il existe un point d'arrêt. Aucun texte ne le garantit, cependant, hors du texte sacré, où le sens a cessé d'être la ligne de partage entre le flot du langage et le flot de la Révélation. Là où le texte, immédiatement, sans l'entremise du sens, dans sa littéralité, relève du langage vrai, de la vérité ou de la doctrine, il est absolument traduisible. (*OE,* I : 261)

Sacred linguistic works would be paradigms of how linguistic formations resist their reduction to the phenomenology of the production and reception of the corresponding semiotic artefacts – and thus trigger the metaphysics of their essential form. This, perhaps, is what the very notion of sacredness, along with the one of absolute translatability, strive to seize. It would also be what makes sacred works prototypes for all great, that is eminently translatable, literature[1].

Literature would be the field of most effectively translatable formations – that is, of formations that most tellingly claim historic connectability. The reading of literature would thus be a matter of indistinguishably historic and metaphysical toils – rather than of either historical or aesthetic ones. Linguistic formations would be literary to the degree that they induce intensive connections between perfected and emergent modes of purely human-linguistic communicability. They would be formations that expose in a most compelling way that human language is not limited to semiotic mechanisms of cultural

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[1] In this (and only in this) sense, *literature* could be naming linguistic *sacredness*.

communication – and that it thus survives textual restoration. Being utterly readable and translatable, literary texts would make human-linguistic history without being read as by-products of processes of becoming. As such, they would even stand beyond the very distinction between *original* and *translation*. Their originals may very well have been translations, just as their translations can live on as translatable originals. They would be, in either case, eminently translatable: never altogether erasing semiotic phenomenicity, but also never wholly reducible to its signifying mechanisms.

In-between the two extremes of impossible and absolute translatability, there would be the immense variety and multiplicity of translative events of historic connectability. The space between the sacred and the Hölderlinian archetypes would be that of their possibility – as well as of its risk.

Let us return to de Man in order to inquire more closely into his resistance to Benjamin's problematics: his rejection of the possibility of translation is the counterpart of his critique of the notion of history in its relations to human language. Towards the end of his *Conclusions*, de Man presents us with the following statement:

> Now it is this motion, this <u>errancy of language</u> which never reaches the mark, which is always displaced in relation to what it meant to reach, it is this errancy of language, this <u>illusion of a life that is only an after-life</u>, that Benjamin calls history. As such, history is <u>not human</u>, because it pertains strictly to the order of language; it is not natural, for the same reason: it is <u>not phenomenal</u>, in the sense that no cognition, no knowledge about man can be derived <u>from a history which as such is a purely linguistic complication</u>; and it is <u>not really temporal</u> either, because the structure that animates it is not a temporal structure. Those disjunctions in language do get expressed by temporal metaphors but they are <u>only metaphors</u>. The dimension of futurity, for example, which is present in it, is not temporal but it is the correlative of the figural patterns and the disjunctive power which Benjamin locates in the structure of language. (*Conclusions,* 92)

One can only agree with some of the points that de Man makes – such as the non-phenomenic status of the Benjaminian notion of history or the non-historicist status of the corresponding idea of temporality. It does not follow, however, that history is an "illusion" of life that would be "only" after-life. If

figuration there is, figures would be instances of life indistinguishably linguistic and historic: nothing justifies the tendency to address them as "only" metaphors.

My suggestion is that the stakes, being eminently philosophical, are also political. There are some indications in this respect at the closing statements of de Man, in the discussion that follows his lecture. It is affirmed that "Benjamin's concept of history is 'nihilistic' in Nietzsche's sense of the term" (*Conclusions,* 103). This could be accurate, provided one further inquires into the nature and implications of this nihilism. These are briefly discussed by de Man in a passage concerning the Benjaminian understanding of translation as a historic event:

> Understand by nihilism a certain kind of critical awareness <u>which will not allow you to make certain affirmative statements</u> when those affirmative statements go against the way things are. Therefore there is <u>not</u> in Benjamin at this point, a statement about history as occurrence, as that which occurs, as events that occur. (*Conclusions,* 104)

The issue seems to be the degree to which nihilism is compatible with affirmative statements about history. De Man's "impossibility to translate" echoes his dismissal of this compatibility. Benjamin's *Aufgabe*, in my sense, is an inquiry into its conditions. Translation, as an instance of human-linguistic connectability, becomes the paradigm of a historic event – it does not occur instead of history, but as history itself. "Translation is an occurrence" *is* a "statement about history as occurrence" – and a statement affirmative enough.

The issue of temporality is also brought up in an early essay of Benjamin, akin to his work on *Trauerspiel*: "Trauerspiel und Tragödie". In it, he juxtaposes historical to mechanical temporality. In both cases, time would be *Form.* The form of mechanical time would be empty measurement of transformations. The one of historical time would involve *Erfüllung* or *Ausfüllung* – filling-up, rather than fulfilment. The occurrence of events would be what fills-up the infinite form of historical temporality:

Die Zeit der Geschichte ist unendlich in jeder Richtung und unerfüllt in jedem	Le temps historique est infini dans toutes les directions, et non rempli à chaque

Augenblick. Das heißt es ist kein einzelnes empirisches Ereignis denkbar, das eine notwendige Beziehung zu der bestimmten Zeitlage hätte, in der es vorfällt. Die Zeit ist für das empirische Geschehen nur eine <u>Form</u>, aber was wichtiger ist, eine als Form unerfüllte. <u>Das Geschehnis erfüllt</u> die formale Natur der Zeit in der es liegt nicht. (*GS,* II, 1, 133-134).

instant. Ce qui veut dire qu'il n'est aucun événement empirique pensable qui ait un rapport nécessaire au moment déterminé où il se produit. Le temps, pour ce qui arrive empiriquement, n'est qu'une <u>forme</u> mais, et c'est plus important, une forme en tant que telle non remplie. <u>L'événement remplit</u> la nature formelle du temps dans laquelle il ne se situe pas. (Benjamin 1985, 255-256)

The above has little to do with de Man's sense of history or time as a figure that would be "only" metaphor. Benjamin's historical *Form* is prior to rhetorical semiosis. It would be the aeonic realm of essentially human-linguistic communicability, incessantly filled-up by linguistic formations, connectable to each other: indexed ideational forms substantiating the essence of accomplished lives, independently from dynamics or dialectics of birth, growth and decay[1].

Translation enacts an infinity of possible modalities of filling-up historical time with connections between perfected and emergent instances of human-linguistic life. What more does its paradigm tell us with respect to the notion of history? What happens to the original past as a translatable *Gewesene*? What happens to the reading and translating *Jetztzeit*?

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[1] Benjamin distinguishes and compares different modes of temporal filling-up, such as the tragic and the Biblical one, as well as the allegorical one of the German *Trauerspiel*.

B.4.7. Is there a Vessel?

Let us discuss a figure that Benjamin uses and which has attracted a lot of attention amongst readers and commentators of Benjamin, including de Man[1]. The passage in which it occurs follows Benjamin's remarks on how the translation of the *Wort* differs from (or is even incompatible with) an imitative transfer of *Sinn*. It explains how translation enacts "triftigeren Zusammenhängen [linkages more valid or effective]" than those of transferred meaning. Such linkages occur through the relations that the original and the translative language-wholes entertain to *reine Sprache.* The figure likens *reine Sprache* to a broken vessel. This triggers the age-old question of the degree to which translative events are historical steps towards a reconstruction or restoration of the vessel of a universal human language.

Here is the relevant passage (partly already discussed in a different context[2]) and its French translation. I provide in parentheses de Man's corrections to the English translation of Zohn, which also hold for the French version.

Wie nämlich Scherben eines Gefäßes, um sich <u>zusammenfügen</u> zu lassen, in den kleinsten Einzelheiten <u>einander zu folgen</u>, doch nicht so zu gleichen haben,	Car, de même que les débris d'une vase, pour qu'on puisse reconstituer le tout [*in order to be articulated together,* not *glued together*], doivent s'accorder [*must follow one another,* not *match*] dans les plus petits détails, mais non être semblables les uns aux autres, ainsi, au lieu de s'assimiler au
so muß, anstatt den Sinn des Originals sich ähnlich zu machen, die Übersetzung	sens de l'original, la traduction doit bien

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[1] De Man's reading of this figure follows very closely Jacobs (1993).

[2] See section B.4.5 above.

liebend vielmehr und bis ins einzelne hinein dessen Art des Meinens in der eigenen Sprache <u>sich anbilden</u>, um so beide wie Scherben als <u>Bruchstück</u> eines Gefäßes, als Bruchstuck einer größeren Sprache erkennbar zu machen. (*Aufgabe,* 18)

plutôt, amoureusement et jusque dans le détail, adopter [*form itself according to,* not *incorporate*] dans sa propre langue le mode de visée de l'original, afin de rendre l'un et l'autre reconnaissables comme fragments [*fragments as broken parts,* not simply *fragments as parts*] d'un même vase, comme fragments d'un même langage plus grand. (*OE,* I : 256-257)

Effectively translative connections, in the Benjaminian sense of the term, occur when the language of the translatum accords itself to the way in which the language of the original indexes pure language. Under the perspective of translation, the two language-wholes would thus be exposed as somewhat complementary on the grounds of purely human-linguistic communicability. They would be recognisable (*erkennbar*) as two broken fragments of a vessel, connecting to each other and forming a new fragment of the vessel – a fragment differently shaped and broken, suggesting in its own way the idea of the vessel and liable to its own connections to other fragments. The *Erkennbarkeit* at stake should be understood as analogous to the precarious and anticipatory, deictic *Darstellungmodus* that Benjamin has attributed to the translative gesture[1]. The vessel of the indexed *reine Sprache* stands in no position of temporal succession with respect to the accomplished ideational connection between its fragments. We are expected to assume neither that it has already existed in the past, nor that it will be wholly reconstituted in the future. The emergence of the new, translative fragment is not a step or a stage, following from previous ones or entailing succeeding ones, in procession. Benjaminian problematics clearly exclude such a view of matters human-linguistic; yet he insists that language

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[1] Recall the relevant passage cited and commented in B.4.3.

cannot disengage itself from the historic prospect of *Sprachfügung* (linguistic juncture):

Übersetzung also, wiewohl sie auf dauern ihrer Gebilde nicht Anspruch erheben kann und hierin unähnlich der Kunst, <u>verleugnet nicht ihre Richtung</u> auf ein letztes, endgültiges und entscheidendes <u>Stadium aller Sprachfügung</u>. (*Aufgabe,* 14)	Ainsi la traduction, encore qu'elle ne puisse prétendre à la durée de ses ouvrages, étant en cela sans ressemblance avec l'art, <u>ne renonce pas pour autant à s'orienter</u> vers un <u>stade</u> ultime, définitif et décisif <u>de toute construction verbale</u>[1]. (*OE,* I : 252)

This persistence of a deictic translative *intentio* (which is not the same as a phenomenological intention) is elsewhere seen as the *große Motiv einer Integration der vielen Sprachen zur einen Wahren*, the *Sehnsucht nach Spracheergänzung*, or even a *den Samen reiner Sprache zur Reife zu bringen*[2].

De Man is right when he corrects the English translator of Benjamin's essay, by remarking that the imagery of an initially whole vessel or of its gradual reconstitution in the future is not in *Aufgabe*. He is wrong (and in a sense, relapsing in the error he criticises) when he insists that we have a somewhat metonymic pattern in which the original is an initial fragment and the translatum the outcome of its further fragmentation. By turning the false imagery of a gradual reconstitution of a vessel into the equally false one of its continuous fragmentation, de Man misreads negative ontology into Benjamin's metaphysics:

> What we have here is an initial fragmentation; any work is totally fragmented in relation to this *reine Sprache*, with which it has nothing in common, and every translation is totally fragmented with respect to the

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[1] Rather : "of all linguistic juncture".

[2] These figures are from *Aufgabe* (16-17) have already been discussed, especially in section B.4.3.

> original. The translation is the fragment of a fragment, is breaking the fragment – so the vessel keeps breaking, constantly – and never reconstitutes it; there was no vessel in the first place, or we have no knowledge of this vessel, or no awareness, no access to it, so for all intents and purposes there has never been one. (*Conclusions,* 91)

De Man continues by inferring that, since there is no eventual reconstitution of the vessel of *reine Sprache,* the very notion of *reine Sprache* is irrelevant with respect to literary language: "*Reine Sprache,* the sacred language, has nothing in common with poetic language, poetic language does not resemble it, poetic language does not depend on it, poetic language has nothing to do with it" (*Conclusions,* 92). De Man thus reads *Aufgabe* as a statement that outdoes the pertinence of one of its central notions; but things could be quite different. Precisely because *reine Sprache* is not something that was either there in the past or will be there in the future, the deictic relation of linguistic formations to it, may retain a crucial pertinence for a metaphysics of historic form. Precisely because *reine Sprache* neither resembles, nor depends on the linguistic formations that index its essence, it may have a lot to do with all linguistic occurrences: as if by miracle or magic (*in einer wunderbar eindringlichen Weise*: *Aufgabe,* 15). Benjamin's *Aufgabe* is a critical investigation of the idiosyncratic pertinence of the notion of purely human-linguistic communicability, with respect to a theory of language as human and historic.

One could add that de Man's problematics are themselves far from clearly non-religious – although working in a direction different from the one in which Benjamin strives to guide his own concern for theology. In the following passage, for instance, de Man retells the story of the Fall in Odyssean terms:

> This movement of the original is a wandering, an errance, a kind of permanent exile if you wish, but it is not really an exile, for there is no homeland, nothing form which one has been exiled. Least of all is there something like a *reine Sprache*, a pure language, which does not exist except as a permanent disjunction which inhabits all languages as such, including and especially the language one calls one's own. What is to be one's own language is the most displaced, the most alienated of all. (*Conclusions,* 92)

If *reine Sprache* could be said to exist, it would not be only as a disjunction but also as a support of *triftigeren Zusammenhängen*: junctures or connections historic rather than historical. Perhaps there are no homelands, but homeness there will have been – making history.

B.4.8. Living Past

The failure that, according to de Man, marks translation would be exemplified by its effect on the *original* – as a category attributed to literary texts. This effect would be largely destructive, in three interrelated ways: disarticulation or dismemberment with respect to the very idea of an original whole; de-canonisation with respect to the role of the institution of literature; prosaification or de-sacralisation with respect to the value assigned to the corresponding text. All three aspects could also apply to the notion of the past as conceived by historicism – the notion of a tradition of which the original would be the synecdochic figure. Let me discuss each of de Man's points in turn.

The following passage (which is about the implications of translation, but also of philosophical and literary criticism) concerns the figure of disarticulation:

> They disarticulate, they undo the original, they reveal that the original was already disarticulated. They reveal that their failure, which seems to be due to the fact that they are secondary with respect to the original, reveals an essential failure, an essential disarticulation which was always already there in the original. They kill the original by discovering that the original was already dead. (*Conclusions,* 84)

Benjamin does say that each translative transposition operates on certain aspects or parts of the original, at a specific moment. Other translations of the same original would address, in different moments, different aspects. Ironically, the original would be transposed, in parts, to a condition that somehow better safeguards its wholeness:

Denn jede Übersetzung eines Werkes <u>aus einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt</u> der Sprachgeschichte repräsentiert hinsichtlich <u>einer bestimmten Seite</u> seines Gehaltes diejenigen in allen übrigen Sprachen. Übersetzung verpflanzt also das Original in einem wenigstens insofern – ironisch – endgültigeren Sprachbereich, als es aus diesem durch keinerlei Übertragung mehr zu versetzen ist, sondern in ihm <u>nur immer von neuem und andere Teilen erhoben zu werden</u> vermag. (*Aufgabe,* 15)	Car toute traduction d'une oeuvre appartenant à un <u>moment déterminé</u> de l'histoire de la langue, eu égard à un <u>aspect déterminé</u> de la teneur propre à cette oeuvre, représente les traductions dans toutes les autres langues. La traduction transplante l'original sur un terrain – ironiquement – plus définitif, dans la mesure où l'on ne saurait plus le déplacer de là par aucun transfert, mais seulement, vers ce terrain, <u>l'élever toujours à nouveau et en d'autres parties</u>. (*OE,* I : 253)

Exposing the language-whole of the original as historically incomplete would be the condition enabling translative transposition onto a higher sphere of linguistic life, in which the language of the original connects to other languages, indexing the perspective of a purely human linguistic realm:

In ihr (Übersetzung) wächst das Original in einem gleichsam höheren und reineren Luftkreis der Sprache hinauf, in welchem es freilich nicht auf die Dauer zu leben vermag, wie es ihn auch bei weitem nicht in allen Teilen seiner Gestalt erreicht, auf den es aber dennoch in einer wunderbar eindringlichen Weise wenigstens hindeutet als auf den vorbestimmten, versagten Versöhnungs und Erfüllungsbereich der	En elle l'original croît et s'élève dans une atmosphère, pour ainsi dire plus haute et plus pure, du langage, où certes il ne peut vivre durablement et qu'il est en outre loin d'atteindre dans toutes les parties de sa forme, vers laquelle cependant, avec une pénétration qui tient du miracle, il fait au moins signe, indiquant le lieu promis et interdit où les langues se réconcilieront et s'accompliront[1]. (*OE,* I : 252)

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[1] Rather : "the announced and forbidden site of reconciliation and accomplishment of languages".

Sprachen. (*Aufgabe,* 14-15)

De Man could also be referring to the Benjaminian suggestion according to which the translative perspective exposes the refractability or *Gebrochenheit* that disturbs the "skin-to-fruit unity" of current signification mechanisms. Recall that Benjamin's refraction refers to the relations between the semiotic and the non-semiotic or the historical and the historic dimensions of language lives – not to tensions internal to semiosis itself[1]. Under the light of the translative perspective, all linguistic semiotic constructs are exposed as the phenomenic ruins of perfected instances of purely human-linguistic communicability. The original may indeed be dismembered or disarticulated as a semiotic construct, but only in a way entailing the emergence of a surviving ideational monad. Translative gestures would thus be events of historic recollection of phenomenically ruined but essentially perfected forms of linguistic humanness.

The role of the original with respect to the institution of canonised literature, is discussed in the following, rather confused part of de Man's lecture, affiliating translation to romantic literary criticism. The confusion lies, quite significantly, in the fact that de Man oscillates between the imagery of freezing canonisation and the one of mobilising de-canonisation:

> The translation <u>canonises, freezes</u> the original and shows in the original a mobility, an instability, which at first one did not notice. The act of critical, theoretical reading performed by a critic like Friedrich Schlegel and performed by literary theory in general – by means of which the original work is not imitated or reproduced but is to some extent <u>put in motion, de-canonised</u>, questioned in a way which undoes its claim to canonical authority – is similar to what a translator performs. (*Conclusions,* 83)

"Claim to canonical authority" is the main issue. Translation, in Benjamin's sense, does crucially affect such claims. It contests their legitimacy, to

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[1] See section B.4.4 above.

the precise degree that they involve reference to a literary "cultural heritage" standing at the origins or foundations of a historical tradition. In so doing, translation opens the space for a different kind of claim: historic recollection displaces historical memorability. Historic recollection would, indeed, have little to do with historical monumentalisation or with other devices of canonical remembrance of things past.

The original would be, indeed, both "frozen", as a persistent formation *and* "put in motion" as a knot of linguistic survival. By assuming an authority that has little to do with institutional canonisation, it would claim the topical moment of a different kind of actuality. Snatched out of the processions of cultural heritages, it would assume the status of a site on the grounds of which the very idea of a historic heritage is constantly and urgently at stake. It would no longer stand at the origins of historical evolution because, by persistently claiming re-collection, it would undo stories of becoming. It would no longer provide the figural foundations of human cultures or civilisations, because its perfected presence would state and re-state how the human resists such taxonomies. Its survival would cut through memories of institutionalised traditions. The category of the original, in short, would become a figure for how historical past turns into historic *Gewesene*.

In the following passage, de Man links de-canonisation to prosaification and, ultimately, to de-sacralisation:

> The translation is a way of reading the original which will reveal those inherent weaknesses of the original, not in the sense that the original is then no longer a great work or anything, or that it wouldn't be worthy of admiration or anything of the sort but in a much more fundamental way: that the original is not canonical, that <u>the original is a piece of ordinary language, in a way – prosaic</u>, ordinary language – which as such belongs as much to that category as to the category of the original. It is <u>desacralised</u>. Decanonised, desacralised, in a very fundamental way. If you then think of the original as being Dante or Pindar, and you put that next to the way in which those authors are constantly sacralised – then you started from the notion of George, as the one who sacralises the notion of the poet – then you would see, in a sense, what happens to the original. (*Conclusions*, 98)

Benjamin, as we have seen, explicitly discards mystical aestheticism – together with the alternative of a positivist reduction to socio-cultural determinants. Translation would break with the status of literature as an icon – as well as with the iconoclasm of cultural phenomenology. It would thus present us, as de Man puts it, with " certain disjunctions, certain disruptions, certain accommodations, certain weaknesses, certain cheatings, certain conventions" proper to all modern idealisations (or trivialisations, for that matter) of literature. In this sense, the original would, indeed, undergo a shock of "prosaification" and "de-sacralisation" exposing the "ordinary" status of its language. At the same time, one would have to revise one's very understanding of language as "ordinarily" human. We would have to acknowledge the presence, in all linguistic manifestations, of a perplexing non-semiotic element: the *Name* in the *lexis.* We would, accordingly, have to envisage the possibility and need of a metaphysics of form, over-determining historical and aesthetic approaches to all genres of human language, whether poetic or prosaic, secular or theological.

B.4.9. Living Present

De Man insists with particular emphasis on how language, at work in translation, reaches an abyss that threatens all linguistic life:

> Translation, to the extent that it disarticulates the original, to the extent that it is pure language and is only concerned with language, gets drawn into what Benjamin calls the bottomless depth, something essentially destructive of language itself. (*Conclusions,* 84)

As he specifies elsewhere in his essay, a "*mise en abyme* structure" (86) would be inherent in all works of language. This postulate is strictly correlative to that of the impossibility of translation – which implies, as we have already seen, the attribution to historical life of the status of an illusive linguistic complication. Language is the abyss into which history falls, the "present" being as moribund as the "past". How much of this is also in Benjamin?

The above quoted passage refers to the closing part of Benjamin's *Aufgabe,* where translatability is discussed in relative detail. It draws, more specifically, on Benjamin's highlighting of the risk of the Hölderlinian translative gesture: "In ihnen stürzt der Sinn von Abgrund zu Abgrund, bis er droht, in bodenlosen Sprachtiefen sich zu verlieren. Aber es gibt ein Halter (*Aufgabe*, 21)[1]. The issue of translatability implies the more general one of the capacity of the present moment to make historic sense – that is to claim recollection for its own formations.

Benjamin insists, indeed, that there is a specificity marking translation with respect to its capacity to endure. The original persists, but translation cannot guarantee the durability of its own formations (*Aufgabe,* 14). The problem would lie in the provisional or temporary status that is proper to the translative mode of exposition (*Darstellunsgmodus*):

Damit ist allerdings zugestanden, daß alle Übersetzung nur <u>eine irgendwie vorläufige Art</u> ist, sich mit der Fremdheit der Sprachen auseinanderzusetzen. Eine andere als <u>zeitliche und vorläufige Lösung</u> dieser Fremdheit, eine augenblickliche und endgültige, bleibt den Menschen versagt oder ist jedenfalls unmittelbar nicht anzustreben. (*Aufgabe,* 14)	C'est concéder par là même, il est vrai, que toute traduction est une <u>manière pour ainsi dire provisoire</u> de se mesurer à ce qui rend les langues étrangères l'une à l'autre. Une <u>solution</u> de cette extranéité qui soit plus que <u>temporelle et provisoire</u>, qui soit instantanée et définitive, voilà ce qui est refusé aux hommes, ou, du moins, vers quoi ils ne peuvent tendre dans l'immédiat. (*OE,* I : 251-252)

In the following passage, the translative gesture is presented as a momentary enactment of the translating language, condemned to perish within the *bodenlosen Sprachtiefen* of a Hölderlinian abyss:

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[1] This passage has been more extensively quoted, along with its French translation, in section B.4.6 above.

Ja, während das Dichterwort in der seigenen überdauert, ist auch die größte Übersetzung bestimmt, in das Wachstum ihrer Sprache ein-, in der erneuten, unterzugehen. (*Aufgabe,* 13)	Disons plus : alors que la parole de l'écrivain survit dans son propre langage, le destin de la plus grande traduction est de s'intégrer au développement de la sienne, et de périr quand cette langue s'est renouvelée. (*OE,* I : 250)

Do the above mean that the translative language-whole (that is, the present moment as a recollecting instance) would be necessarily deprived of historic *Überleben*? Benjamin's problematics about the translatability of the translatum[1] suggest that the answer to the question should be a mitigated negative one. The non-durability of translation concerns the translative gesture itself – which, as we have seen, would not be re-translatable. The formation resulting from the translative task, however, constitutes a new *topos* of human-linguistic life, with its own potential of reproductive and translative survival. The non-translatability of the translative gesture, along with the eventual translatability of the translative formation as a new language-whole, jointly condition the historic status of presently emergent translative events.

The non-translatability of the translative gesture means that the translation cannot establish itself as a permanent historic link enabling the future to reach back to the original or to otherwise re-connect to it. The older original would persist as the *Gewesene* it has been, still unforgettable and still to recollect, thus over-powering, in a sense, the events of its translations. The translatability of the translatum means that the latter could assume the status of a new original formation, allowing new kinds of translative connections to the linguistic *Gewesene* indexed by its own language-whole. These new connections would

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[1] See B.4.6. above.

have something to do with the preceding originals, but only in a highly indeterminate way, disallowing the establishment of chains of derivation or continuity. Translative events would thus be present occurrences enacting historical kinship, but not establishing a lineage; provoking historical connections, but not propelling historical continuity; recollecting history, but not storing historical memory. They would be refractions of or deviations from the lives of their originals – tracing the trajectories of their own survival[1].

If one transposes the paradigm of translation to history at large, one could formulate the following suggestions as to the pattern of a translative human-linguistic historicity.

Consider, to begin with, that all present linguistic emergences are at least partly translative – that is somewhat marked and perturbed by connections, if only punctual and little systematic, to persisting older formations. There would be no *Jetzt* free from recollective connection to some surviving *Gewesene*.

Through its recollective dimension, historic *Jetztseit* would not build up chains of historical continuity: its own gestures of recollection would not be further recollectable. Its emergence would be monadic: it would not add up to stored precedents, analogous to the ones implied by the notions of phenomenological memory and knowledge. Human life would thus *not* be historically evolving through the conservation or transference, in and via different languages, of some given form of cultural or civilisational nucleus. It would be enacted, instead, through a multiplicity of linkages between singular events of recollection addressing cumulated instances of perfected past. No such event would be determined by its precedents or determinant with respect to analogous ensuing events. No present would lay foundations on which a past

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[1] Recall the vessel figure discussed in section B.4.7. Every translative linkage would be a fragment of *reine Sprache,* but the succession of linkages would not add up to a gradual reconstitution or approximation of the whole. Each reconstituted fragment would index humanness from its own aspect or angle, telling an irrevocable but also non-appropriative and non-appropriable way of establishing connections between modalities of having been human.

would be remembered by its future. The empty form of historic temporality would always remain to be re-filled anew.

This I suggest as an admittedly unclear image, alternative to the one of de Man's abyss, of how events of human-linguistic life would occur as historic, according to the paradigm of Benjamin's translation. There would be recollective gestures, venturing to articulate connections to *topoi* of perfected humanity, each gesture projecting its novel field of perfectedness and connectability onto a horizon of unlimited temporality: constantly changing topographies, with no topological principle ever providing the rationale of emergent differences, unions or intersections.

The past, although unable to sustain itself as a historical tradition, acquires a status somewhat more imposing than the present. This would only be the past as *Gewesene* – aeonic rather than historical. Much the same way as the Homeric mortals, humans would be irresistibly advancing in time by following their dead in the only future possible – one common to all and delimited by the very event of death. Only the angel of history, while also facing the same amassed multitude of the dead – that is ourselves, beholders of the painting that Benjamin has commented on – would be just as irresistibly drawn by time in some other, somewhat opposite direction.

PART C. *HOMERIC QUESTIONS*

C.1. EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES

C.1.1. Categories

The last part of *Vorrede* (228 et seq.) is a critique of approaches to German baroque drama, from the standpoint of a Benjaminian metaphysics of form. Benjamin argues against schools of historical-literary thought, which would fall short of a philosophical inquiry on the historic specificity of the German *Trauerspiel* – a rather marginal and little appreciated literary genre. This specificity, he says, is obscured or erased when the corresponding form is simply seen as a decadent or awkward attempt to imitate the tradition of Greek tragedy and the modern principles of Aristotelian poetics. The same would hold when this failure is explained or excused as a symptom of historically justifiable cultural deficiencies. Benjamin criticises, more generally, the scholarly quest of a relation of *Einfühlung* (empathy) to a form that is proven (and should be addressed as) highly resistant to scholarly literary taste. He discards, quite polemically, all tendency to intellectually domesticate literature from the perspective of a present pretending to have direct access to its past:

Wie ein Kranker, den im Fieber liegt, alle Worte, die ihm vernehmbar werden, in die jagenden Vorstellungen des Deliriums verarbeitet, so greift der Zeitgeist die Zeugnisse von früheren oder von entlegenen Geisteswelten auf, um sie an sich zu reißen und lieblos in sein selbstbefangenes Phantasieren einzuschließen. Gehört doch dies zu seiner	Comme un malade fiévreux qui traduit tous les mots qu'il entend dans les images déchaînées de son délire, l'esprit du temps se saisit des documents des cultures les plus éloignées dans le temps et dans l'espace pour se les approprier et les enfermer brutalement dans les phantasmes égocentriques. Sa marque caractéristique: il ne saurait y avoir de style nouveau, de

Signatur: kein neuer Stil, kein unbekanntes Volkstum wäre aufzufinden, das nicht alsbald mit voller Evidenz zu dem Gefühl der Zeitgenossen spräche. (*Vorrede,* 234)

civilisation inconnue qui ne parle immédiatement, de toute évidence, à la sensibilité contemporain. (*Préface,* 53)

This critical overview, in *Vorrede*, is founded by a preceding discussion of current epistemological principles, such as those of inductive and deductive reasoning – to which I now turn.

As I have already suggested, one can establish significant connections between Benjamin's historic metaphysics and Aristotelian problematics about categories[1]. A formation of any sort would be a primary essence (or substance): a phenomenic emergence, out of formlessness, of a *hypostasis* subject to the attribution of categories of second essence (or essential form in a strict sense of the term). When a formation is identified as human-linguistic, categories of second essence are being attributed to it. A human-linguistic formation would essentially be a mode of semiotic indexation of pure naming. The quest for the idea of such a formation would be a further gesture of categorial attribution, aiming at describing and re-telling how this indexation takes place. The idea would thus specify how essentially human-linguistic form is attached to the formation: no literary formation would be essentially human and linguistic without being a *specific mode* of human-linguistic communicability. The task of Benjaminian metaphysics of form is to recognise and describe the specificity ideational component of a literary formation. This presupposes the critical disputation of predominant epistemological problematics: ideas of literary formations should involve the use of categories proper to the question of human-linguistic essence.

The study that *Vorrede* introduces, intends to discuss the very notion of *Trauerspiel* as an idea proper to formation of the genre identified by this term.

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[1] See section B.1.4. above.

Recall: "Das Trauerspiel, im Sinn der kunstphilosophischen Abhandlung ist eine Idee [The *Trauerspiel*, in the sense of treatise of art-philosophy, is an idea]" (218[1]).

How does Benjamin's philosophy of art differ, in its epistemological and methodological dimensions, from conventional literary history? More specifically, what does Benjamin do with the historical-aesthetic concepts[2] that work as "universals" – that is, as categories attributable to "individuals" or "particulars" and defining their affiliation to species and genera, according to principles of deductive abstraction or inductive empiricism? How does the metaphysics of form turn such concepts into ideas? In what sense does it make the corresponding terms work differently than they do in current literary history?

The *wahre Kontemplation* of a Benjaminian idea is a theoretical endeavour intensely concentrating on the task of "saving the phenomena"[3]. It is concerned not with the observation of abstract rules or empirical tendencies but "mit der ihrer Fülle und konkret erfaßten Metaphysik dieser Form [with grasping the metaphysics of this form in its fullness and concreteness]" (228). The same task accounts for the "Wesen eines Kunstgebietes [essence of a domain of art]" under

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[1] All page citations in the present section will refer to *Vorrede* – unless otherwise specified.

[2] Historical concepts would be those implying the application of temporal or periodological schemas to cultural entities (from races or nations to social groups and, ultimately, individuals). Homer would thus essentially be a particular instance of "pre-classical Greek Antiquity". Aesthetic (or, more specifically, for our purposes, poetic) would be concepts distinguishing different kinds of cultural manifestations or literary languages, in terms of genres, for instance. Homer would thus essentially be "epic poetry". The juncture of historical and aesthetic categories would entail historic-aesthetic conceptual constructs such as *oral tradition* – or *baroque* and *romanticism*.

[3] Recall our discussion of this in section B.3.6.

a perspective turned, so to speak, towards phenomenic externality rather than towards internal domains such as the one delimited by psychological concepts:

Dies geschieht vielmehr in einer <u>durchgebildeten Darstellung seines Formbegriffs, dessen metaphysischer Gehalt</u> nicht sowohl im Inneren befindlich als wirkend zu erscheinen und wie das Blut den Körper zu durchpulsen hat. (*Vorrede,* 220)	Cela devient possible, au contraire, par <u>l'analyse élaborée du concept de sa forme, dont le contenu métaphysique</u> doit être montré moins à l'intérieur de celle-ci que dans son effet, comme le sang qui irrigue le corps . (*Préface,* 37)

Benjamin discards the deductive attribution of universals to ranges of phenomena, which would thus form a *pseudo-logisches Kontinuum* (223). His criticism is also and perhaps mainly addressed against what he sees as two equally false alternatives. The first would be the one of inductive empiricism for which Burdach's nominalism would opt. Benjamin considers Burdach's rejection of the realist understanding of *universalia in re* as partially justified, "soweit sie gegen die Hypostasierung von Allgemeinbegriffen geht [to the degree that it counters the tendency to hypostasise general concepts]" (221). He also argues that Burdach's turn to radically inductive reasoning expresses an aporetic *reservatio mentalis*, methodologically unsound: it would be blind to the very nucleus of a critical epistemology, namely the platonic task of a "Darstellung der Wesenheiten [presentation of essentialities]" (221). Although concepts like *Baroque* or *Renaisssance* may, indeed, have little to do with existing anthropological entities they cannot, Benjamin says, be discarded or blurred in favour of inductive uncertainties. The second rejected alternative is Croce's aesthetic intuitionism, erasing all possible mediation between specific manifestations of art and the general idea of art. Benjamin acknowledges the interest of Croce's concentration on concrete phenomena but criticises his tendency to deprive "die Kunstphilosophie ihrer reichsten Ideen wie des Tragischen oder des Komischen [the philosophy of art of its richest ideas such

the tragic and the comic]" (224). In response to a Crocean remark on the eventual significance of such concepts, Benjamin elaborates the epistemological status of his own notion of *Idee* as a *Monad* and an *Ursprung* (235 et seq.).

The solution to the epistemological problem is sought, by Benjamin, in the direction not of a rejection but of a reconfiguration of established historical-aesthetic concepts. Recall that ideas save phenomena by saving their initial conceptual configurations. The quest of an ideational form presupposes, accordingly, not the erasure of the concepts that have hitherto governed literary history, but the outdoing of their status as conceptual categories. The task of a historic philosophy and of a metaphysics of form is exercised on grounds always already laid by the conceptual operations that have provided thought and language with notions such as those of Renaissance or Baroque, tragedy, comedy or *Trauerspiel*. "Was aber solche Namen als Begriffe nicht vermögen, leisten sie als Ideen [What such names cannot do as concepts, they manage to do as ideas]" (221).

The task would not be to form new words but to critically reconfigure and jointly re-enact old ones. The whole history of philosophy would be reducible to "die Darstellung von einigen wenigen, immer wieder denselben Worten – von Ideen [the presentation of a small number of words, always the same – of ideas]" (217). These words, reconfigured as ideas, would be the inescapable elementary particles, the finite multitude of which constitutes the population of ideational forms:

Denn die Ideen bilden eine unreduzierbare Vielheit. Als gezählte – eigentlich aber benannte Vielheit sind die Ideen der Betrachtung gegeben. (*Vorrede,* 223)

Car les idées sont une multitude irréductible. Elles sont données à la contemplation comme multitude dénombrée – mais à proprement parler dénommée. (*Préface,* 41)

As historical-aesthetic concepts, theoretical terms would strive to name generic universals qualifying and categorising particulars or individuals. The same

words, when applied, as ideas, to formational substances, would expose monadic indexations of perfected instances of essentially human-linguistic life, irreducible to either empirical constructs or abstract-mystical entities.

The ideational shift is not a magical gesture of re-naming. It entails idiosyncratic reading work. The historical-aesthetic category of *Trauerspiel*, for instance, acquires the status of an ideational *Ursprung* when its language (or the *Art des Meinens* of the corresponding formation) is read as allegorical. This means that an epistemic shift analogous to the one operated with respect to the term *Trauerspiel* is at work with respect to *allegory.*

What are the methodological implications of such transpositions? The transposition from concept to idea changes the epistemic status of the corresponding term. A Benjaminian idea does not classify things: it is an *Idee nicht klassifizierend*. Ideas, in other words, would not work as generic categories ordering phenomena into logically structured classes of entities and expressing the common denominator of the corresponding structures:

Sie bestimmt keine Klasse und enthält jene Allgemeinheit, auf welcher im System der Klassifikationen die Jeweilige Begriffsstuffe ruht, die das Durchschnitts nämlich, nicht an sich. (*Vorrede,* 218)	Elle ne détermine aucune classe et ne contient pas en elle-même cette universalité qui dans le système des classifications fonde le degré conceptuel correspondant à chacune d'entre elles, c'est-à-dire à la moyenne. (*Préface,* 35-36)

Nevertheless, an idea would emerge as a certain kind of totality, out of phenomenic manifestations. Conventional literary history would obscure the very status of the corresponding unity, through intellectual operations of deductive or inductive dispersal and re-arrangement, and through schemas of temporal evolution or development:

Von der literarhistorischen unterscheidet eine solche sich am auffallendsten darin,	Pareil traité se distingue du traité d'histoire littéraire essentiellement parce

daß sie Einheit da voraussetzt, wo jener Mannigfaltigkeit zu erweisen obliegt. Die Differenzen und Extreme, welche die literarhistorische Analyse ineinander überführt und als Werdendes relativiert, erhalten in begrifflicher Entwicklung den Rang Komplementärer Energien und die Geschichte erscheint nur als der farbige Rand einer kristallinischen Simultaneität. (*Vorrede,* 218)

qu'il présuppose une unité là ou ce dernier doit montrer la diversité. Les différences et les extrêmes que l'analyse historico-littéraire amalgame et relativise en les présentant dans leur devenir accèdent, dans leur développement conceptuel, au rang d'énergies complémentaires, et l'histoire n'apparaît plus que comme la frange colorée d'une simultanéité cristalline. (*Préface*, 35)

Semiotic constructs (or, more generally, the semiotic component of languages) are, of course, always readable as symptoms or traces of historically situated conditions of human life. Nonetheless, the formation that they enact through their multiplicity and variety, is not. It involves a mode of indexing pure language, which is aeonic rather than temporal, historic rather than historical:

Und so wie jede, auch die ungebräuchliche, die vereinzelte Sprachform gefaßt zu werden vermag nicht nur als Zeugnis dessen, der sie prägte, sondern als Dokumente des Sprachlebens und seiner jeweiligen Möglichkeiten, enthält auch – und weit eigentlicher als jedes Einzelwerk – jedwede Kunstform den Index einer bestimmten objektiv notwendigen Gestaltung der Kunst. (*Vorrede,* 230)

Et de même que chaque forme linguistique, même inhabituelle, même singulière, peut être vue non seulement comme un témoignage de ce qui l'a façonnée, mais aussi comme un document sur la vie de la langue et de ses possibilités à l'époque, il y a aussi dans toute forme artistique, quelle qu'elle soit – et bien plus authentiquement que dans une œuvre particulière – l' index d' une figuration précise, objectivement nécessaire de l'art . (*Préface,* 48)

With respect to any field of semiotic manifestations, the task would be to recollect or recognise the ideational form that would stand at their historic

Ursprung. Reading would be equivalent to the restoration or re-instatement of such origins, but only in a way that clearly distinguishes it from the philological recovery of textual formness:

Im nackten offenkundigen Bestand des Faktischen gibt das Ursprüngliche sich niemals zu <u>erkennen</u>, und einzig einer Doppeleinsicht steht seine Rhythmik offen. Sie will als <u>Restauration</u>, als <u>Wiederherstellung</u> einerseits, als eben darin <u>Unvollendetes, Unabgeschlossenes</u> andererseits erkannt sein. (*Vorrede,* 226)	L'origine ne se donne jamais à connaître l'existence nue, évidente du factuel, et sa rythmique ne peut être <u>reconnue</u> que dans une double optique. Elle demande à être reconnue, d'une part comme une <u>restauration</u>, une <u>restitution</u>, d'autre part comme quelque <u>chose qui est pas lui – même inachevé, toujours ouvert</u> . (*Préface,* 43-44)

A further methodological problem occurs at this point. It concerns a predicament that haunts the dialectics of deductive reasoning and inductive research. Which semiotic constructs can be addressed as belonging-together to the same original formation – be it a single literary work or a whole genre such as the *Trauerspiel*?

Ideational unity is not conceptual homogeneity. The metaphysics of form work at the sites of tensions and uncertainties that deductive and inductive reasoning erases or neutralises. They address ideational totalities as the challenge of joined extremes:

Was aber solche Namen als Begriffe nicht vermögen, leisten sie als Ideen, in denen nicht das Gleichartige zur Deckung, wohl aber das Extreme zur Synthesis gelangt. (*Vorrede,* 221)	Ce que de tels noms ne peuvent faire en tant que concepts, ils y parviennent en tant qu'idées: elles ne sont pas le refuge du semblable, mais la synthèse des extrêmes. (*Préface,* 39)

The notion of *extremes* is crucial to Benjaminian methodology. It implies that semiotic constructs that fail to make textual or otherwise conceptual unity, may very well be readable as instances of the same formation, mimetic enactments of the same ideational form. It also identifies ideational tension, instead of structural harmony, as the very locus of reading. It would be as tension between extremely incongruous semiotic instances, that a perfected ideational totality persists, leading its idiosyncratic life, aeonically confronting the realm of an unlimited temporal perspective. The metaphysics of its form would thus necessarily involve a certain kind of historical research:

Die philosophische Geschichte als die Wissenschaft vom Ursprung ist die Form, die da aus den entlegenen Extremen, den scheinbaren Exzessen der Entwicklung die Konfiguration der Idee als der durch die Möglichkeit eines sinnvollen Nebeneinanders solcher Gegensätze gekennzeichneten Totalität heraustreten läßt. Die Darstellung einer Idee kann unter keinen Umständen als geglückt betrachtet werden, solange virtuell der Kreis der in ihr möglichen Extreme nicht abgeschritten ist. (*Vorrede,* 227)

L'histoire philosophique, considérée comme science de l'origine, est la forme qui fait procéder des extrêmes éloignées, des excès apparents de l'évolution, la configuration de l'idée, c'est à dire la totalité où de telles oppositions peuvent co-exister d'une manière qui fasse sens. On ne pourra en aucun cas estimer réussie la présentation d'une idée aussi longtemps qu'on n'aura pas parcouru virtuellement le cercle des extrêmes qu'elle peut contenir. (*Préface,* 45)

Each extreme would enact a different aspect of the persisting formation, indispensable to its monadic totality. It would be a semiotic catastrophe, which has to be addressed in its historic specificity *and* in its eventually tense articulation with preceding or ensuing catastrophes. Tensions such as these provide the dubious grounds for the persistence of the formation and the survival of its original ideational form. In this sense, the very givenness of a formation is somewhat problematic: it only painstakingly emerges as a historic

event in and through the accumulation of often disparate manifestations, many of which might appear bizarre, weak, awkward, decadent or otherwise deficient in pertinence. The corresponding research might result in bodies of material which strongly resemble the pedantic or trivial character of philological inquiries – but have nothing in common with a historicist quest for a corpus of typical similarities enveloping a paradigmatic average[1]. The ideational perspective is what gives to Benjaminian philology its historic-monadological line of escape[2].

Under this perspective, the fragment acquires the singular importance that Benjamin has attributed to it[3]. Yet it would be wrong to suppose that the Benjaminian use and valorisation of fragments undoes or erases problematics of wholeness or totality – that is, on ideas as monads connecting to each other in history. A fragment acquires its significance as a most characteristic extreme instance of some ideational form. It does not only cut through conceptual constructs but also paves the way to the contemplation of ideational totalities. In *Vorrede* Benjamin repeatedly stresses that an entire domain of art or literary genre can be as living a formation as any particular work – if not even more so[4]. Note the following remark on the notions of comedy and tragedy:

Denn auch wenn es die reine Tragödie, das reine komische Drama, das nach ihnen benannt werden dürfte, nicht geben sollte,	Car à supposer même qu'il n'y ait ni tragédie pure, ni comédie à quoi elles puissent donner leur nom, ces idées

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[1] The paradigm of the corresponding research work, as well as of the fragmentary and provisional way in which the idea might locally shine out of the amassed material, is provided by *Passagen*. The formation at stake would be the one of Parisian 19th century humanity.

[2] Recall the discussion of the relations of Benjamin to philology in B.1.1.

[3] See, on this point, the insightful analysis of Arendt (1968).

[4] "Die Idee einer Form [...] ist nichts weniger Lebendiges als irgendeine Konkrete Dichtung [The idea of a form... is not less living than any concrete work of poetry]" (230).

mögen diese Ideen Bestand haben. Dazu hat eine Untersuchung ihnen zu verhelfen, die nicht in ihrem Ausgangspunkt an alles dasjenige, was je als tragisch oder komisch mag bezeichnet worden sein, sich bindet, sondern nach Exemplarischem sich umsieht, und sollte sie auch nur einem versprengten Bruchstück diesen Charakter zubilligen können. (*Vorrede,* 224)

peuvent néanmoins exister. Elles doivent être aidées en cela par une étude qui ne s'attache pas à partir de tout ce qu'on a jamais pu qualifier de tragique ou de comique, mais qui cherche l'exemplaire, quitte à ne reconnaître cette qualité qu' à des fragments éclatés. (*Préface,* 42)

Ideational epistemology addresses the *topoi* of conventional historical or aesthetic topography in order to probe the corresponding topology. What idea could there be in such concepts as *tragedy*, *Baroque*, *epic tradition*, *Greek Antiquity*, *European literature* – or in an author's name? What idea could join Baudelairian poetry to trivial newspaper announcements or commercial advertisements? The quest may address aleatory and fragmentary, seemingly unrelated and chronologically or culturally disparate semiotic constructs, the unity of which has been completely blurred or erased by conventional historical-aesthetic categorisations and taxonomies.

C.1.2. History Matters

Before revisiting the Homeric Question, let us further consider the kind of significance that Benjamin's epistemology attributes to the description and positioning of semiotic constructs according to current conventional historical-aesthetic categories. If only ideas are at stake, why would it matter to situate the initial emergence and subsequent persistence of formations with respect to conventional historiographical and aesthetic schemas? Why would it matter to know that recent philological, older Renaissance Humanist, and still older Byzantine, Roman, Hellenistic and classical Greek times have produced one or

the other stratum of the presently extant remains of the Homeric language? These questions should be understood as concerning, not the overall validity of the corresponding terms or categories, but the exact kind of their pertinence.

For historicism, historical-aesthetic conceptual categories acquire their significance as universals pertaining to the classification and arrangement of cultural forms that would be the essence of all linguistic manifestations. For the Benjaminian metaphysics of form, some of these concepts, reconfigured as essential ideas, sustain, as we have seen, the quest for historic forms. The rest would retain an essential significance only with respect to the semiotic component of the formation – that is, with respect to the production and reproduction of semiotic constructs through which the formation persists as an original. With respect to the formation as a whole and, more particularly, to its surviving idea, they would acquire a status perhaps very close to what the Aristotelian *Organon* designates as contingency or occurrence – *kata; to; sumbebhkovß* (*kata to sumvevikos*)[1]. They would pertain, in other words, to events that have marked the life and survival of the formation by conditioning the semiotic constructs that have been mimetically indexing its idea. They would identify and describe the characteristics of each of the semiotic catastrophes (contingent occurrences or crucial accidents) through which a perfected idea of human-linguistic communicability can still be recollected as a *Gewesene* of one's own *Jetzseit.*

Specific modalities of semiotic catastrophe might enact particularly significant aspects of the formation as a whole. The historical and aesthetic categories, which serve to describe the corresponding semiotic constructs, might be usable as means to better circumscribe these aspects – and thus to further illuminate the indexed idea. Benjamin's historic metaphysics involve, accordingly, the meticulous recording of accurately dated and situated ranges or fragmentary instances of such constructs. The task presupposes that one

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[1] See also section B.1.4. above.

constantly keeps in mind and exposes through reading the distinction, as well as the connection between the semiotic and the purely human-linguistic nature of literary formations.

It should be noted that the same aesthetic or historical categories may acquire different significance for differently situated semiotic events. The attribution of a category of national or cultural identity, for instance, would have different implications, depending on the wider historical setting in which the construct at stake has occurred. *Greek* would be applicable to the language of semiotic material ranging from Homeric to modern times, but the attribution of this category would have a drastically different bearing, depending on the historical moment and the corresponding function of Greek as a medium of communication.

Recollective reading reaches to the historic origins of perfected modes of human-linguistic life by paving its way (instead of simply cutting) through amassed instances of semiotic constructs and correlative conceptual clusters. No present moment could thus avoid being modern in its very recollection: it always entails further semiotic and conceptual catastrophes of ideational forms. The metaphysics of form would thus be critical in a double sense. On the one hand, they would upset received notions and practices concerning the relations of the present to its "cultural heritage". On the other hand, they would undermine the authority of conceptual and categorial orders – ultimately, of semiosis as such, and of its cultural determinants. In this sense, a philosophical history of literature would open the "site of the logical possibility of metaphysics"[1] onto the field of political and ideological struggles.

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[1] Recall Benjamin's *Programm* and our discussion of it in section B.2.4.

C.2. HOMER

C.2.1. A Homeric Idea

There is, today, a mass of different kinds of semiotic constructs carrying, in whole or in fragments, *scripta* that have long been and are still considered as forming two poems debatably labelled "Homeric"[1]. Their ensemble can be distributed chronologically, depending on the time of emergence and the conditions of preservation of the corresponding material: Homeric citations in antique authors, Hellenistic and Roman papyri, Byzantine codices, early Humanist printed editions, modern philological ones and, finally, more recent versions, electronically registered. Byzantine codices present us with the oldest extant specimens of an *Iliad* and an *Odyssey* as relatively standardised compositional wholes, which have sustained the notion of a Homeric "vulgate"[2]: most of the preceding documents or versions can be seen as fragments or variants of the corresponding linguistic *corpi*. The notion of *vulgate* thus provides the basis on which has been raised and debated the issue of the variance that marks different *scripta*, both synchronically (among *corpi* of the same epoch) and diachronically (among historically successive strata of material). There would be variance on a multiplicity of levels: material and technical characteristics of the scribal signifier, morphological and syntactical or metrical norms of the

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[1] Halsam (1997, 59) notes that, although there must have been, throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, very few owners or even readers of a "complete" Homer in scroll or codex, "at all periods there is a strong sense of each [Homeric] poem as a whole and this was not compromised by their physical fragmentation".

[2] The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the two components on which this thesis concentrates, as the core of a Homeric poetic formation. The problematics could also apply to an extended range of *scripta* including *Batrachomyomachia* and the *Hymns*. The formation at stake would be a different one, but the problems concerning its readability as Homeric would be the same.

corresponding idiom, aspects of the articulation and extent of the compositional wholes.

The Homeric Question has been the question of the identification of the exact range and kind of scribal material that can validly be addressed as properly Homeric. It asks whether and how the present moment (which has always been a moment of reproduction and translation of Homer, from the point of view of a language more or less non-Homeric) may intervene and change the semiotic material it has received from the past. Why and to what extent could or should one change the Homeric thing that has been there? The theoretical dimensions of the issue include the epistemic status of the very notion of *Homer* and of the corresponding category of *Homericity*. One can reform the received material, so that it complies with one's idea of Homericity; one can keep the material more or less the same, but revise the idea of Homericity.

We have already seen how the modern philological debate of the Question has been negotiating these two alternatives on the grounds of historicist anthropological premises. Homericity would be a historical category attributable, as a category of essence, to the *cultus vitae* expressed by the composer of the poems – their authorial agency, whether collective or individual. There could be nothing essentially Homeric that would not be also, primarily and just as essentially, archaic Greek. The philological qualification of *scripta* as properly Homeric thus implies figural transpositions from cultural era or epoch, to author or producer and, finally, to product or offspring. Aesthetic categories, articulated around the central notions of traditional poetry and epicity, provide further criteria for what the philologically minded scholar expects and intends to read as the literary *vestigium* of Homeric culture.

Under the perspective of Benjaminian metaphysics, the Homeric Question would be the question of the survival of *Homer* as an idea – that is as a mode of having indexed purely human language and thus as a form original, in the pre-or post-historical (that is, historic) sense of the term. Epistemologically prior to all Homeric semiotic material, would be a Homeric formation or language-whole,

substantiating the Homeric idea. All corresponding semiotic constructs, *including the supposed initial emergences of such constructs as oral or written poetry of early Greek antiquity*, would be readable as phenomenic instantiations or enactments, necessarily changing and variable, of this formation.

The Homeric Question would thus designate the task of turning the name of *Homer* from concept to idea. The question would be analogous to one that Benjamin has formulated in his essay on *Mimesis*. By considering the entirety of signifiers that, under different conditions of linguistic life, have instantiated the same thing, and by arranging them around their common centre, how can we investigate what makes these signifiers akin to their central signified[1]? The signifiers would be the Homeric semiotic constructs; standing at the centre of their field (rather than either at the beginning or the end of a chain) would be Homer; we would accordingly be investigating Homericity. This means investigating how Homer has managed to survive as a human-linguistic idea through variable and changing semiotic catastrophes – rather than debating whether Homer has existed as an individual or collective author of given literary works.

The use of the term *Homer*, as a name of the idea at stake is preferable to others, to the precise degree that no corresponding human entity can be positively known to have existed. Its ideational shift counters both the alternatives that historicist problematics have set as the only valid ones – namely, to either discard the idea of Homericity under the pretext that Homer has been a historical invention, or to hypostasize it as the figure of a historically original authorial agency.

Homer, as an idea[2], would be prior to historical or aesthetic concepts that have served to delimit Homericity – such as *Greek antiquity*, *epic poetry* or even

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[1] I am paraphrasing a passage already cited, in section B.3.4., from *Mimesis* (212).

[2] As an idea, Homer is an "it".

literature, whether oral or written. Homer, as well as the Homeric formation as a language-whole, would thus be essentially neither ancient Greek, nor Roman, Hellenistic, Byzantine or Modern philological; it would be essentially neither oral poetry nor written tradition. It would be any or all of these if we understand them as conceptual contingencies (*symvevikota*): significant or even crucial accidents that have marked the survival of the idea and the persistence of the formation through semiotic artefacts.

The surviving form of Homer would be, not the common past, but the perfected present shared by what we know as a series of successive moments or eras. It would be the *Gewesene* of each respective *Jetztseit* – archaic, classical and hellenistic Greece, Rome and Byzantium, Western modernity, and other, unknown or unpredictable historical sites. It would stand beyond and be engaged in the corresponding ventures of reproduction and translation of the Homeric formation. A historic *Ursprung*: something like a *terminus post quem*, with respect not to the connected knots of a historical chain, but to the chain itself and to each of its knots separately – including its initial and its future ones.

As such, Homer would upset the topography of cultures or civilisations seen as a series of vehicles through which a common tradition is being preserved and transmitted. It would not lie at the foundations of historical becoming involving dialectic tensions between conservation and novelty. It would not be situated at the historical beginnings of a literary history that would have either followed or deviated from it. The historic condition of having been there does not comply with figures of historical narration telling stories of cultural kinship or divergence, continuity or rupture, tradition or modernity.

Let us rethink the kind of relations that each different *Jetztseit* in the life of the Homeric idea has entertained with the *Gewesene* of the Homeric idea. One should start with the very language-whole that indexes the idea: the idiom with which the extant Homeric semiotic material is co-extensive.

C.2.2. Homeric Greek

Since we have no remains of the Homeric language other than the Homeric *scripta,* the Homeric literary formation is a language-whole in a very literal sense of the term: it coincides with the remains of a whole linguistic idiom.

One way of starting an inquiry into the idea of Homer, would be by re-thinking the Homeric idiom as a "dead" language. This presupposes the critical appreciation of the figure of death applied to languages. Let me insist on the reasons for which the figure of *dead language* may present an interest for our purposes, in spite of its historicist connotations. What would be the historic significance of a historical distinction of languages in terms of dead and living ones? Would living languages relate to each other in ways different from those in which they connect to dead ones? The figure of death may have a lot to do with *survival* in the sense of *Überleben*.

Differences between languages concern, to begin with, their morphology, syntax and semantics – as well as rhetorical and literary custom and practices. They also involve techniques and methods of oral or scribal semiotic production and reproduction. They involve, furthermore, the very status of a given language as a medium of communication and, more particularly, its role as a medium of local, national or oecumenic status. These differences work differently, depending on the degree and way in which the distance of death has been established between them.

The distinction between dead and living languages concerns the degree to which living human beings use language as a medium of current communication. A language would be dead when no longer spoken or written as such a medium. The extant instances of a dead language constitute a finite semiotic corpus. The corresponding language-whole, in other terms, persists only through toils of reproduction and translation, undertaken by different living languages that connect to it over the specific kind of distance that the figure of death ventures to grasp.

How does the condition of linguistic death compare to linguistic foreignness? Is a dead language more foreign than a living one, or could it, under certain conditions, undo the notion of foreignness? The distance between living languages, foreign to each other, could be considered as largely controllable, if not surmountable, through processes of ascertained knowledge and familiarisation. The distance between a dead language and a living one excludes the control of on-going usage. Death of a language means that recollection intervenes and over-determines memory and experience as means through which one gains access or connects to the language concerned. In this sense, the reading of a dead language is necessarily translative – and its translation is exclusively based on reading.

I suggest that we should not understand the figures of death or foreignness as topographic devices arranging the historical positioning of differences between past and present cultures. They would refer, rather, to modes of distances, each entailing or enabling distinct kinds of historic relations. The figure of death sets the conditions under which forms of perfected *Gewesene* fill-in an otherwise empty *Jetztseit*. Consequently, it transposes language to a status that might mitigate the applicability of the figure of foreignness.

Let us further consider in more detail the linguistic environments within the setting of which the Homeric language-whole has been persisting as dead – or, in terms closer to Benjamin, has been surviving as perfected. How has Homeric Greek related to other varieties or dialects of Greek, to classical or medieval and early modern Latin and, finally, to modern Western national languages? I will only briefly survey the kinds of distances marking the relations of these languages to the Homeric language, insisting on how the figures of death and foreignness may be helpful in this respect [1].

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[1] I will not examine here the crucial role of Arabic, which has been decisive with respect to classical Greek (especially in the way in which it must have remoulded the mediation of Byzantine Greek) but does not directly concern Homer. For an overview of this issue see the contribution of Rémi Brague in Droit (1991).

C.2. Homer

One should start with the following basic observation. Homeric language has been addressed as somewhat antiquated (that is not currently living) from the standpoint of all the languages in the living environment of which Homeric poems were produced and read. Homeric language, in other words, has been always-already somewhat dead – even for linguistic environments with respect to which it was not foreign.

The relations between the Homeric language and other forms of Greek, within the setting of archaic Greek linguistic life, remains, as we have seen, an open issue. Recall, in this respect, the resistance of the Homeric language to the historicist approach based on the distinction and taxonomy of different Greek "dialects" [1]. Although it tends to abandon the notion of *kunstsprache*, recent philological research, insisting on the notion of *dialect*, observes that an idiosyncratic distance of relative antiquation must have been separating the Homeric language from all varieties of locally used Greek in pre-classical Greece[2].

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[1] See section A.4.4. above.

[2] Halsam (1997) remarks the following:

"This revered panhellenic possession formed a central part of Greek education and crucially employed as dialect which, while displaying an obviously Ionic character overall, was distanced from all contemporary varieties by its generally archaic "feel" and the integration of "foreign" elements of non-Ionic origin." (194)

An equivalent phenomenon would be at work at the level of the initial alphabetic recordings and subsequent transliterations of the Homeric poems. Halsam further remarks that the earliest texts, written in archaic local alphabets and transcribed into the standard orthography of the 5th century B.C. must have entailed multiple problems of spelling and annotation, especially of unfamiliar or archaic forms.

Problems analogous to the above may concern modern languages as well. Such seems to be the case of medieval vernaculars. Cerquiglini (1989) insists on the formative role of the manuscript literary tradition with respect to oral idioms. He correlatively criticises the primacy attributed to the notion of historically and geographically identifiable oral "dialects", as

The Homeric idiom was also charged with a distinct aura of historic distance at the age of classical Greece. The non-local character of the Homeric language-whole (often qualified as "panhellenic") must have been accentuating this tendency, as Greek continued to evolve at the level of local city-cultures. The story of the Pisistratedean recension, of dubious historical credibility as it may be, strongly suggests that the Homeric language-whole was addressed as somehow situated outside the realm of current life: it had to be somehow re-collected[1]. Democritus' attested treatise on the epic language (of which we only know the title) could be considered as an indication of the fact that Homeric Greek had been raising, at least since the 6th century, problems of compatibility

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obscuring the determinant role of the written tradition with respect to emergent vernaculars (see especially p. 87).

[1] Wolf quotes a number of antique and medieval sources as credible witnesses corroborating the general hypothesis of an initially oral and subsequently compiled Homeric poetry, in a note to his Chapter XXXIII (*PRE,* 137, n.5). These range from Cicero and Pausanias to Aelian and Suidas, without excluding the otherwise dubious Eustathius. Wolf does not consider, however, the highly problematic issue of the very meaning of the different terms used by his sources to name the exact kind of operation at stake: *sunqevtein, sunavgein, sullevgein, suntavssein, ajqroivzein...* The only extant sources that describe in detail the operations of the "recension" attributed to Pisistratus are grammarian scholia to an extant manuscript of the Dionysius Thrax. Wolf (*PRE,* 140 et seq., n. 9) quotes the relevant passages only in order to condemn its flagrant lack of proper historical sense while also admitting that "this is the one grammarian who explicitly confirms that the first text was prepared by Pisistratus". We could also quote here, from the English translation of *Prolegomena*, the shorter of these passages:

> "[Pisistratus] wished the poetry of Homer to be preserved. He proposed a competition at public expense, had heralds announce it, gave safe conduct to those who knew how to reveal the poems of Homer and wished to do so, and established a reward of one obol for each line of verse. In this way he brought together all the versions, and gave them to wise and understanding men." (*PRE,* 140-141).

with living Greek, although not necessarily of understanding[1]. This did not prevent Homer from, not simply remaining familiar to living Greek but actually providing the main reference of classical Greek linguistic and cultural *paedeia.*

In Alexandria and other cities of Hellenistic culture, older Greek, starting with Homer, acquired the institutionalised status of a historically distanced but perplexingly non-foreign language[2]. The transposition of Greek to the status of an oecumenic language of culture and commerce must have played a crucial role in this respect. The emergence and development of Greek grammar and metrics, based on Homeric and classical Greek alike, testifies to this effect. So do the reforms and changes of methods of scribal annotation, as well as the whole enterprise of textual canonisation which is known to have been the task of Alexandrian scholars and librarians. Note that, although no translation of Homer is known to have been produced by Hellenistic Greek, much of the Alexandrian scholia to Homer, as recorded in the Byzantine tradition, are translative rather

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[1] I am referring to "*Periv JOmhvrou h[ojrqoepoivhß kai; glwssevwn* [On Homer or on the correct use of words and languages]" (Democritus 68 A 33, xi, i) as cited by Pfeiffer (1986) who also remarks:

> "The wording of this title suggests a distinction between a 'straight' epic diction and the obsolete words needing explanation; this would be no startling novelty, as the correctness of Homer's use of the Greek language and the difficulty of his rare vocables were discussed at least from the sixth century on." (42)

[2] Pfeiffer (1968) remarks that Greece, together with its Homer, began with the Alexandrians, to acquire a status that could be considered as very close to that of an antiquity:

> "Their incomparably precious heritage had to be saved and studied. This was felt to be, first of all, a necessity for the rebirth and future life of poetry, and secondly an obligation to the achievements of past ages which had given birth to the masterpieces of Hellenic literature. The relation of the new generation to the past was entirely different from that of Aristotle, the whole perspective of literary criticism was changed." (102)

According to Lamberton (1997, 44) Hellenistic readers admired in Homer "its distance in time, its strangeness".

than editorial in character[1]. At the same time, Homer was persistently considered as paradigmatic with respect to Greek language as a whole[2].

Romans can be seen as the first to venerate Homeric Greek, not only as a distinctly old language, but also as one that required learning, analogous to that of foreign languages. With them, Homer becomes translatable in the current sense of the term – into Latin[3]. In the Eastern part of the empire, Greek (gradually substituted for Latin as an official language) acquires a new oecumenic character –as the language not only of scholarship but also of religion. It undergoes idiomatic tensions and changes, entailing its division between, on the one hand, the common and Scriptural versions of a *koine* and, on the other, tendencies imitative of old attic Greek. The status of old Greek changes accordingly. Its antiquated character is accentuated, but so are strategies and practices that disallow its configuration as either dead or foreign. Byzantine scholars (whether ecclessiastic or secular) are known to have developed, more generally, a highly

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[1] Greek in Hellenistic times became, it should be recalled, a language of translation *par excellence*, in a process that led to the emergence of Biblical Greek of the Old and, later, of the New Testament. Classical Greek does not seem to have practised translation as we know it.

[2] Lamberton (1977) remarks that up to Roman times, "to know Greek was to have read Homer" (45).

[3] For insightful remarks on the specificity of the Roman mediation with respect to antique Greece, see Droit (1991) especially the contribution of Jacques Brunschwig. The latter insists not only on the technical aspects of the Roman mediation, but also on its crucial implications on the level of ideology or mentality with respect to the notion of cultural tradition. According to Brunschwig, Latin common sense, applied on matters cultural and linguistic, breaks with the hermetism marking previous Greek approaches to tradition: the dead acquire an interest only as a drastically distant reality, losing much of the idiosyncratic actuality with which their survival was vested in pre-Roman Greek times.

C.2. *Homer*

ambiguous relationship to the pagan linguistic tradition[1]. Old Greek language and literature becomes the object of a learning, the peculiarity of which is only partially, but significantly enough, rendered by its qualification as "rhetorical"[2]. At the same time, techniques and methods of copying, storing and reading old documents change significantly – especially around the 9th century[3].

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[1] Jaeger (1961) remarks that the Byzantine approach to Homer, if not to Greek antiquity in general, was a "necessity having something to do with the fact that the continuity of life depends on form – something very hard for the pure intellect with its historical blind spot, to grasp" (127-128, n. 6). The study concludes as follows:

> "For all of them the Greek tradition was the ultimate cultural link. It is wrong to ask whether they always preserved the exact shade of meaning of the classical Greek archetype. What they preserved were certain basic tendencies of the classical mind around which the ideas of their own age could crystalize. Their wrestling with the classical heritage evolves in certain historical stages, which clearly show an architectural logic in their gradual progress. The Hellenistic element constitutes its intellectual medium and determines its dialectical rhythm, a great historical rhythm that will always remain one of the reasons for our inexhaustible interest in the subject." (185)

A more mitigated or critical approach to the question of the degree to which continuity can be said to have been established between pagan Greek and Christian Byzantine *paedeia* is expressed by Lemerle (1971), who considers Jaeger "exagérément optimiste" (43, n.1).

[2] Lemerle (1971) proposes the following complex appreciation of Byzantine rhetoric, as a mode of literacy specific to Byzantine scholarship and education:

> "Ainsi la rhétorique est un ensemble de procédés et de conventions, empruntés à l'hellénisme classique et surtout à l'hellénisme alexandrin, qui ont procuré au troisième hellénisme, celui de Byzance, un mode d'expression littéraire qui lui est propre. Nous sommes donc ici en présence d'un système de référence au passé, qui est chargé de signification, et qu'il ne faut réduire ni à un archaïsme arbitraire, ni à une vaine parure de lettré. La rhétorique byzantine représente l'*autre* aspect du langage. Elle s' apparente à un langage d'initiés. Elle appartient à ce monde des *signes,* qui double et transcende celui des formes, et qui et l'autre face du réel. Nous retrouvons alors cette distinction, que les auteurs byzantins ont si souvent énoncée, les artistes si souvent exprimée, entre l'univers sensible, ·ÈÛıËÙÒfĩ˜ qui nous enveloppe, et l' univers intelligible, ÓÔËÙfĩ˜, dont l'accès exige une préparation et presque une initiation. Et ainsi nous découvrons, dans la *paideia*, l'un des caractères profonds et essentiels, de la mentalité et de la civilisation byzantine." (307).

[3] See, amongst others, the Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on *Byzantine books and bookmen* (1975).

Within this setting, Homer becomes the object not only of systematic scribal reproduction, but also of exegetical and lexicographic work, as well as of translation. The latter never circulates autonomously. It is either appended to the original (as interlinear translation) or integrated into treatises of exegetical commentary, such as the Eustathian ones – to which we will return. One could see, in such translative practices, the index of linguistic strategies dealing with new kinds of historic distances, without subsuming them under the figure of foreignness[1].

With Humanist modernity, Homeric Greek gradually passes, as we have seen, to the position of a language of "antiquity" – and is thus drastically cut from the evolving Greek language and its continuing life. Homer, in other words, gradually occupies a field marked by joined or alternating distances of both death and foreignness[2]. The early Humanist editing and reading of Homer must

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[1] Byzantine translations of Homer, very little studied until today, provide us with a most interesting case through which the difference between death and foreignness of languages may be highlighted and appreciated. This difference is somewhat blurred for speakers of modern European languages, especially since European scholarship started forgetting the crucially mediating role previously assumed by Biblical, medieval or even modern Greek, in the modern learning of antique or Homeric Greek. The Byzantine scholar was in a better position to perceive how certain aspects or dimensions of Homeric Greek remain obscure or enigmatic, even when there is perfect current knowledge of the language. In other words, Byzantine translations may be better informed than modern ones, with respect to the issue of a historic distance between languages dead and living, irreducible to the distances between languages simply different or foreign to each other.

[2] As Grafton notes, historians have tended to view Humanistic scholarship as having been profoundly transformed "after the French revolution, by the rise of a new German hermeneutics and historiography which learned from the radical changes of its own time to see the past as a genuinely foreign country" (1991, 3). Grafton's work, opting for a reassessment of the Humanist tradition, investigates the degree to and ways in which such changes had been already at work at least since 1600.

C.2. *Homer*

have been conditioned by the oecumenicity of neo-Latin European scholarship resisting, but also integrating, the dynamics of vernacularisation of national languages[1]. The advent of Wolfian philology occurs as the culmination of a gradual process through which both Homeric and classical Greek are placed in a drastically new environment of linguistic and academic life. The institutionalisation of modern national-state languages is coupled with the emergence and development of their academic and largely inter-national or even trans-national idioms. Academic philology (the field in which Latin has persisted the most, as a linguistic mediation between Homer and modernity) postulates its valid access to properly Homeric language and form, while national literatures domesticate the Homeric tradition through literary translation[2]. This is the setting that undergoes, today, the still aporetic tensions of a post-modern globalisation – which has not yet clarified its own kind of distances and connections with respect to its Homeric *Gewesene.*

C.2.3. Homeric Persistence

There would be two fields of linguistic life and work, through which the Homeric idea has been leading its survival and enacting its communicability. The first is of the reproduction and circulation of semiotic constructs constituting the

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[1] Latin persisted as the main language of translation of Homer, after modern vernacular languages had proven their own translative potential with respect to other languages. The phenomenon could, perhaps, be largely accounted for as a strategy through which the historical distance of Homer was somewhat mitigated via the mediation of a language more akin to the very idea of antiquity. The same strategy could be partly at work in the case of the persistence of Latin with the field of modern philological editing.

[2] For an interesting overview of the immensely rich and populated space of translations of Homer into modern English, see Steiner and Dykman (1996).

Homeric original. The second is of translation generating other formations, recollecting the Homeric idea. Each living linguistic environment would enact, through its own modalities of reproduction and translation, the specific kinds of historic distances through which it addresses the Homeric language-whole. The offspring of the reproductive and translative work of every *Jetzt* would pass on to succeeding generations – but would not be necessarily suitable for or compatible with their own conditions of relating to the Homeric *Gewesene*.

Different kinds of distances would be at work, to begin with, through the different regimes of reproduction – techniques and methods of recording and copying, storage and circulation of the Homeric poems. Through these regimes, the Homeric idea would be carried over from one environment of living languages to the next. *Carried over* implies persistence *through* semiotic change and variance, not transmission *in spite* of them. Each regime would be a means of tackling specific readability problems proper to the kind of distance that separates the corresponding *Jetzt* from its Homeric *Gewesene*. This would affect all levels of semiotic work: modes of coping with the relations between the compositional whole and its parts, ways of dealing with linguistic morphology and structure, means to produce the signifier and its material support.

The Alexandrian regime is often seen as substantially departing from an older model of document composition. For the latter "the written text is a given sequence of letters, whose articulation is effected by the reader in the act of reading" (Halsam 1997, 57). If "letters alone constitute the text: all else is interpretation" (ibid.). Alexandrian and post-Alexandrian regimes of copying and editing have introduced novelties each of which has turned the reading of Homer into a different kind of interpretative practice. Consider, for instance, the difference between being encouraged or discouraged, by the scribal artefact, to read a noun-epithet complex as two grammatically related morphemes – or, at a different level, to read the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* with or without a division into distinct rhapsodies.

One should envisage the possibility that questions such as the Homeric one are largely stimulated by changes in regimes of semiotic reproduction destabilising long-standing readability traditions – starting with the passage from practices of oral transmission to technologies of written copying. The corresponding developments may have a lot to do with the Benjaminian juxtaposition between immersive-contemplative reading (proper to the aura of traditional reproducibility) and polytechnic or critical-observational reading (induced by mechanical reproducibility) – however simplistic this schema may be[1]. The modern philological criticism of the Byzantine vulgate could be partially understood as coping with the challenge of readability, with which the remains of manuscript tradition presented the era of mechanical reproducibility. Historicist premises (combined as they are with aesthetic ones) could be related to strategies of resistance to the ideologically destabilising implications of new technologies of semiotic reproducion. The idea of a textually restored Homer could be a substitute for the traditional auratic authority of manuscript Homer[2]; its elaboration and application would be working towards the neutralisation of tensions inherent in the modern institution of literature[3].

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[1] See section B.4.1. abaove. The schema is, I think, quite questionable. As I will try to show later, Byzantine readings of Homer comply very little, if at all, with the "contemplative" or "immersive" mode of reading that the manuscript "aura" is supposed to entail. One should investigate the possibility of the very notion of "aura" (or of equivalent figures) actually being a by-product of a modern misreading of traditional oral or scribal reproductive practices.

[2] Cerquiglini (1989) speaks of an "idéalisation moderne de l'aura manuscrite" operated by philology, especially with respect to medieval literature (24).

[3] Historical hermeneutics at large may be seen as a strategy to reconfigure the ideal of auratic or contemplative reading under conditions of mechanical reproducibility. The alternative theories and practices of close reading, including the deconstruction of a postulated textual construct, expose the impasse of this tradition, without, however, effectively probing the historical conditions of its exhaustion.

Each moment and site of reproduction and re-occurrence of the Homeric original can thus be seen as having received from the past and transposed to the future punctual solutions to readability enigmas that only turn into further enigmas – conditioning the Homeric claim to translation.

In a strict sense of the term, translation only concerns the systematic transposition of the Homeric idiom to a different one. In a wider sense of the term, it would concern a great part of all exegetical work on Homer, as well as of the variety of recorded and edited Homeric scholia[1] and of philological commentary appended to modern editions of Homer.

Recall that translative toils, according to Benjamin, entail the emergence of new ideational formations that are historically connected to the original one (in the sense in which *Übersetzung* configures historic connectedness) but may also have their own life as distinct originals. They would be themselves (to a certain degree, under certain conditions and in certain ways) reproducible and translatable. What Benjamin excludes is the further translation of the translative gesture as such: no translative recourse to the Homeric original can found its historic effectiveness on the mediation of previous translative toils. This has important implications as to whether and how Homeric scholiastic or exegetic material, produced in a given linguistic environment, can be put to translative use by succeeding ones. Benjamin's theory provides an explanation to the fact that this only occurs to a very limited extent indeed[2].

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[1] Nagy (1977, 116-117) presents an overview and classification of the different classes of Homeric scholia. The scholia *majora* include the marginalia initially edited by Villoison and are of a predominantly editorial or hermeneutic concern. The scholia *minora* include papyrus and interlinear rather than marginal commentary, but also glossaries and lexica, as well as running paraphrases of Homer.

[2] Recall that the Alexandrian marks, on the margins of papyri, remain unreadable as to their exact rationale and editing presuppositions or implications. Also recall that modernity, starting with Pope and exemplified by Wolf, has not managed to read the Byzantine scholia and, more generally, the toils of old exegetes or grammarians, as anything more or less than a

The specific historic significance that the Homeric language assumes, as old or foreign, for the different languages that connect to it, defines the kind of recollective operations that govern translative toils. Each translative connection would tell the kind of distances its language experiences and deals with. Classical attic Greek, when translating Homeric Greek, operates a historic connection of a nature very different from the one operated by Hellenistic or Byzantine Greek. Homer is differently old in each case. So does classical Latin, as compared to Humanist neo-Latin, or to modern national languages. Homer is differently foreign in each case. Such differences do not simply entail different translative formations but also presuppose different modalities of translation, different ways of undertaking the translating task – eventually unreadable or incommensurable to each other. At stake are not only different social and intellectual horizons but also, and primarily, different kinds of historic distances between the translating present moment and its translatable *Gewesene*, not necessarily co-extensive with chronological positions and cultural affiliations – distances involving the significance of linguistic death as compared to linguistic foreignness[1].

Let me return, now, to the figure of linguistic death. A literary *Gewesene* would survive by undergoing multiple deaths, involving, for the living, various

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perplexing and eventually disposable muddle. An analogous attitude is expressed, today, by literary translators with respect to older philological work.

[1] The difference between death and foreignness may mark translations of Homer into the same modern idiom. One of the ways to appreciate and understand how Pope's Homer differs from Pound's translation in "Canto I", would be, I think, to consider that the former domesticates foreignness whereas the latter recollects death. Or, to put it more mildly: the dimension of linguistic foreignness is more pronounced in Pope, whereas linguistic death is preponderant in Pound.

modalities of mimesis and recollection[1]. The dead engage in the dynamics of their survival only those living instances that effectively confront the challenge of their specific *Gewesene*: they are only *dead to* living ones – *one's own* dead.

The difference between historicism and Benjamin, in this respect, is the following. Historicism assumes that one's own dead have and will have necessarily always been one's own: there would be no Homer, other than the one lying at the foundation of Western literary tradition. The Benjaminian metaphysics of form highlight the poignancy and weight of recollective toils, as well as the political nature of their occurrence. The field of historic connections to Homer would have to be understood as constantly open to drastic changes, in the perspective of a linguistic life essentially aeonic – unlimited historic temporality always remaining to be filled-in.

Überleben, in the case of formations such as the Homeric one, may thus have more to do with on-going emergences of linguistic lives, than with submerged historical depths. Its transformations take place in different, largely

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[1] The Homeric Question shows the problem of death, in matters linguistic or literary, to be much more complicated than we sometimes suspect. I am not sure that "post-modern" critics and theoreticians would be so keen on announcing the death of "authors", "literatures" or "cultures", let alone "history" as such, had they taken seriously into consideration the precedent of the death of languages such as the Homeric one. Death appears, in fact, to be far from condemning the dead to indifference or oblivion, as most of the death-announcements complacently seem to postulate. On the contrary: the issue of the appropriation of the dead always risks opening new and unexpected fields of problems and work. In fact, it is *only* the death of a language that may turn texts into practically inexhaustible fields of reading work, more or less independently of their current literary value. The more such reading remains close to mourning (or to foretelling, which could be the same) the less it runs the risk of falling into a "recycling" routine, which buries the very issue of readability, together with that of recollection, under the economics of "use".

unpredictable directions and ways, depending on a variety of events of *enchaînement* to the Homeric *Gewesene*[1].

The two next sections of the present chapter will address the persistence of a Homeric formation as our own original.

C.2.4. Saving the *Scripta*

As we have seen while discussing *Vorrede*, the dispersion operated by conceptual taxonomies of phenomena would be presupposed but also undone by the Benjaminian inquiry into ideational forms as monadic totalities. Homer as an idea would, accordingly, save the phenomena of Homeric *scripturae* (in the entirety of their pile and the singularity of each of its lumps) from their historical and aesthetic conceptualisation and criticism – and, more precisely, from the Wolfian idea of textual formness. Directly related to this task, is the Benjaminian notion of semiotic *reproduction*, as opposed to the philological notion of *transmission*. Both of these notions presuppose that there is an original – but they configure originality in highly different ways.

Philological *transmission* involves the figure of an authoritative original act of poetic or artistic creation of which all forms, except textual ones, are necessarily dubious (including its initial fragmentary oral expressions). The figure of the authorial creation, coupled to philological criticism, acquires the positive status of a restorable agency of truth, freed from the defects marking the disfiguring mediation of either oral or scribal negativity. Oral performance and

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[1] Homer could be presently undergoing a shift of survival, for instance, as the *Gewesene* of linguistic formations such as Walcott's Carribean *Omeros.* This might very well be an additional knot or lump crucial enough to involve, potentially, the change of the topography of Homeric idea as we know it. *Omeros* actually anticipates the emergence of an original that is somewhat being translated without having been read.

scribal copying would be both governed by phenomenological tensions between faithfulness and falsification with respect to a culturally original form. This form would stand alone at the beginning of the temporal chain of its transmission – and would emerge in its properly historical validity only at the modern closure of the chain. The ensuing variance marking semiotic constructs is seen as incompatible with the idea of the textual stability and self-sameness of an original text. Textual restoration thus occurs largely in spite of or against the grain of the necessary but also necessarily obscuring mediation of techniques and methods of performing a song, copying a manuscript or printing a book. The historicist intellect has to cut through such *vestigia*, by imposing its own critical sense of historical formness as textual[1].

For Benjamin, as we have already seen, it is not in spite of, but through reproductive change and variance that an idea leads its life and survival[2]. Benjaminian *reproduction* involves the understanding of methods and techniques of transmission as modalities of mimesis of an ideational form. This pre-or post-historical idea would be the essential origin of the series of semiotic constructs,

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[1] See Cerquiglini (1989) for a critique of the philological critique of the manuscript tradition. Cerquiglini attributes a crucial importance to the "variance essentielle dont la philologie, pensée moderne du texte, n'a vu que maladie infantile, désinvolture coupable ou déficience première de la culture scribale, et qui est seulement un excès joyeux" (42). The theory of an original act of authorial genius would be concomitant with the philological ideal of a " texte sûr ": " La thèse de la copie comme dégénérescence présuppose un *original sans faute* " (90). More generally, modernity would entail the combined elaboration of the notions of original authorship and philological critique, centred around the ideal of stabilised and invariant textuality :

> "Le texte comme pierre d'achoppement, de quelque regard qu'on l'examine, semble une des valeurs de notre Modernité. Origine du discours critique, car il pose crucialement la question de l'origine (qui l'énonce, ou le transmet, dans quelles conditions et à quelles fins ?), défi et garant du commentaire, car il est la matérialité même (publié sous le contrôle de l'auteur ou du philologue, imprimé, joint au trésor sacré de la bibliothèque)." (18)

[2] See section B.4.1. above.

all of which would be equally original – or, perhaps more accurately, equivalent instantiations of historic originality. Expressions such as *original copy* would not be oxymoronic. The performers or scribes phenomenologically repeat or copy a previous semiotic construct; their activity, however, would be essentially mimetic of a surviving ideational form, re-emerging as persisting formation. If one could identify an instance of initial formational emergence, its moment would have the function of an inaugural mimetic event. It would be what provided linguistic life with a first instantiation of an emergent idea, the construct of which has triggered the process of reproduction through further mimesis. The idea itself, taking place in history, sets the formational grounds on which different sites and moments of on-going linguistic life enact different aspects or parts of its unlimited historic perfectedness[1]. In this sense, originality is an on-going historic event: semiotic catastrophes make up the field of its life, not of its demise.

Under the perspective of such a metaphysics of ideational form, the piled-up semiotic constructs of Homeric poetry would all be dated and historically specific, but also original Homeric occurrences – readable or recognisable as instantiations of the same idea. The idea itself can, in turn, only be identified or

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[1]Cerquiglini (1989) has insisted on the non-applicability of the philological concept of textuality to the manuscript tradition of medieval literature. As *écriture en acte,* rather than as recording of oral precedents, manuscript literature would actively form the language it enacts, through the continuous *remaniement* of its semiotic enactments: "L'oeuvre scribale est un commentaire, une paraphrase, le suplus du sens, et de langue, apporté à une lettre essentiellement inaccomplie. On comprend que le *terme de texte soit mal applicable à ces oeuvres*" (59).

Cerquiglini also examines more recent philological paradigms, which he compares to the traditional or dominant one. Bédier sees the manuscript tradition as an evolving form of life comparable to a " rhizome confus et flasque " as opposed to a " belle arborescence orinnée " (96). His model, however, based on the organic paradigm of early 20th century biological taxonomies, would still involve the quest of a single textual construct as the invariant original.

described as a device that saves the phenomena of semiotic reproduction. No historically bygone *cultus vitae* provides the reference with respect to which the authenticity of the constructs can be measured. This does not mean that performers, scribes or editors invent or generate an idea otherwise indeterminate. The specificity of the Benjaminian quest for an ideational *Ursprung* resides in how it cuts through the alternative between historicist determinism and cultural relativism – as well as through the alternative between deductive and inductive epistemology.

When Alexandrian librarians copy "non-Alexandrian poems, of much of which they did not themselves approve" (Grafton 1985, 34), by adding word-separation, punctuation and rhapsodic divisions, they produce Alexandrian semiotic constructs. When Byzantine monks copy pagan writings of "outside wisdom", by changing the script of their received manuscripts, making paper codices out of parchment, and adding marginalia, they produce Byzantine linguistic constructs. Accordingly, modern philology, when editing its own textual Homer, produces modern texts. The corresponding constructs would also all be, essentially, mimeses of the Homeric idea. Even if we somehow had extant traces of archaic oral performances of Homeric poems[1], there would be no reason to consider them as more (or less) original than their written recordings. They would stand as additional constructs, of the same ideational form, presenting us with different aspects of its life and survival.

In this sense, Benjamin's approach outdoes the figure of original authorship. A kind of analogous relativisation is also paradoxically at work, as we have seen, in the Wolfian paradigm: the philologically restored text would represent the proper form of historical Homericity, even more validly than the initial songs of Homer would have done. For Wolf, the supreme instance of formness resides in a temporal moment of cultural origins dovetailing into an

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[1] This, as we will shortly see in more detail, is what the "oral theory" of Homer seems to be in quest of, when inquiring into contemporary oral epic practices.

equally temporal moment of textual reformation: philological textuality saves the figure of original authorship against all mediation of performative and scribal negativity. Benjamin's *idea* as historic *Ursprung,* is intended to shelter temporal travail against all historicist figurations of cultural beginnings and textual ends.

Let us consider, in this respect, the following hypothesis. Let us suppose that the Homeric compositional whole, as we have it, is the offspring of a compilation of disparate and fragmentary Homeric *scripta,* operated by medieval scribes, possibly monks of the early Byzantine period. Our extant Byzantine manuscripts would be copies of archetypes composed by such scribes on the sole grounds of their mastery of, and interest in, the grammar and rhetoric of Homeric fragments to which they had access. I am not suggesting that such a hypothesis is a historically plausible one. It is not[1]. I am just wondering what the effects or implications of its hypothetical plausibility would be. Would or should it seriously perturb our present appreciation of the extant *scripta* as Homeric? Historicism would give a clearly positive answer to this question. Benjaminian metaphysics would involve an answer more mitigated, if not altogether contrary. There would be no significant reason, indeed, from a historic point of view, to consider that a Byzantine enactment of the Homeric language-whole as a compositional whole is in any sense less or more Homeric than a fragmentary Homer that would have preceded it. The same idea would survive and the same formation would persist, under different conditions and modalities of semiotic enactment.

The old myth of the "Pisistratedean recension" concerns the originality of Homeric semiotic constructs. Recall that, as the little credible scholiast testifies, Pisistratus managed to form the Homeric corpus in its original entirety by, not simply asking, but actually paying anyone who had Homeric verses in his

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[1] Our hypothesis would sound more plausible had no Hellenistic or Roman Homeric papyri been discovered – which would allow the Wolfian suspicion against the authority of the manuscript tradition as a whole to be taken somewhat more at face value.

possession or knowledge, to contribute them in view of the first integral written recording of Homer. This could be an ironically informed allegory of the very enigma of Homeric originality[1]. The myth tells us that this originality does not depend on the processes and mechanisms of the initial emergence of Homeric *scripta.* There would be something essentially Homeric about these *scripta*, which goes well beyond the phenomenic conditions of their production. The idea of Homer would invalidate all criticism informed by historicist or, more generally, phenomenological concerns.

The Benjaminian notion of mimetic reproduction disputes the notion not so much of *creativity* as of *invention* – along with the correlative ones of *social construction*. By being the persistent object of creative mimesis, the Homeric idea would allow for very little, if anything, to have been invented in the history of its life and survival, whether by archaic Greek singers of by modern interpretative communities[2]. The crucial challenge would be how to grasp, at our specific

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[1] Nagy (1997) attributes to this story the status of a historically paradigmatic myth:

"It can also be argued that such a story is characteristic of a type of charter myth, attested not only in other archaic Greek traditions but also in those of a wide variety of different cultures, that serves to explain the genesis of a centralised oral tradition in the metaphorical terms of written traditions, so that the gradual evolution of an oral tradition into a centralised institution is imagined by the myth as an instantaneous re-creation of a lost or at least obsolete archetype of an ultimate Book." (109)

[2] In this sense, one would have to be critical towards the following contemporary account of the Homeric Question, which does, otherwise, present us with an extremely insightful and concise description of the phenomenological dimensions of the issue and their understanding by a post-philological awareness:

"Composed of the inventions of rhapsodes over a span of time we can only attempt to quantify, along with the literary interpolation of poets, of politicians and ultimately of textual critics such as Crates of Mallos, the poems that lay before the unknown creators of the vulgate incorporated their own history. Those nameless editors carved them down and shaped them into the poems we know, finally a manageable and uniform oeuvre, with an author named Homer, who had a biography, an iconography, a style, a view of the world. Sophisticated and critical biographies of this poet came into existence and prefaces were written to introduce the first-time reader to his life, ideas and importance. In the schools of the Hellenistic world, the Homer of the subsequent European literary tradition was invented. From that point, as Greek paideia spread through the Roman world, we can talk of interpretive communities, conflicting claims about the meaning of

moment of Homeric survival, this "Protean thing" (Halsam, 1979, 56): how to discern it out of the field of variant and even polyglottic mimetic enactments, all of which would claim the status of a generalised originality[1].

A debatable suggestion, in this respect, would be, I think, that the Byzantine vulgate be considered as a field of semiotic mimesis, which presents us with most significant instantiations of the Homeric formation: even if, and perhaps because, they would be extreme ones.[2]

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the poems and about the wisdom of Homer, its scope, its contemporary relevance." (Lamberton, 1997, 34)

[1] This question is connected but not reducible to the one of a post-philological edition of Homer. The latter has recently been raised in terms that could combine with problematics I have exposed.

Contemporary Homeric studies seem to opt for a rehabilitation of the manuscript tradition in its entirety, especially in its Byzantine form – as opposed to the typically Wolfian tendency of its devaluation. Nagy (1997) for instance, opts for an inclusive edition, from which no part of the manuscript tradition would be absent:

> "As of this writing, Homeric scholarship has not yet succeeded in achieving a definitive edition of either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. Ideally, such an edition would encompass the full historical reality of the Homeric textual tradition as it evolved through time, from the pre-classical era well into the medieval." (101)

His "evolutionary model" aims at accounting for "a plethora of different authentic variants at different stages (or even at any one stage) in the evolution of Homeric poetry *as an oral tradition*; variations in the textual tradition would reflect different stages in the transcribing of this oral tradition" (111).

In the field of medieval literature and philology, Cerquiglini (1989) formulates quite provocative suggestions in favour of a rehabilitation of manuscript traditions in their entirety. All variant versions of a given work would fall under a regime of "authenticité généralisée" and would have to be recorded and accounted for. The method of doing so would not be to strive for the "phanstasme du fac-similé" (112). It would, rather, have to exploit the potential of electronic media since "l'ordinateur, par son écran dialogique et multidimensionnel, simule la mobilité incessante et joyeuse de l'écriture médiévale" (114).

[2] In recent editorial practices, there are tendencies towards minimalist editorial intervention on the vulgate, as exemplified by the recent edition of Thiel (Homer, 1991-1996).

C.2.5. Homeric Extremes

I now turn to the methodological problem of how to delimit a range of semiotic material, which would be most tellingly readable with respect to Homer as an idea claiming recollection on behalf of a currently living language. For, although Homer survives as the field of Homeric semiotic constructs in its entirety, any specific connection to its *Gewesene* on the part of a *Jetzt* presupposes the re-arrangement of the field.

The issue would be how to avoid relapsing into what Benjamin has criticised as the false alternative between inductive empiricism and deductive abstraction. This aporetic alternative sets the grounds on which the philological tradition has oscillated between exhaustive recension and hypothetical emendation, venturing either to record the entire range of variant manuscript readings or to reconstruct a single original archetype.

The issue of variance (in all its levels and extents, from the materiality of the signifier to the articulation of compositional wholes) can only be effectively addressed in conjunction with critical problematics concerning the very nature of the identity that varies. For Wolf, what varies is the tendency to reach a *textus* that has not yet managed to acquire its proper stability. Its invariable form would be definable according to principles of textual coherence and cohesion, enabling the knowledge of the past as cultural and historical. For Benjamin what varies is the enactment of a formation that can only persist through variation. Its persisting ideational wholeness would consist in the *Art* in which its language

According to Halsam (1997), this "'conservative edition' destined to be highly influential" (100), treats the Byzantine manuscripts "not merely as textual vehicles but more holistically as historical documents" (92). Thiel privileges the medieval vulgate as juxtaposed to older readings. His edition is based on a relatively limited, selected range of Byzantine manuscript material, while drastically reducing its *apparatus criticus.*

indexes purely human-linguistic communicability. When confronted with a given corpus of semiotic material (such as a Byzantine manuscript) Wolfian philology asks whether it is readable as a historically valid text. When confronted with the same, Benjaminian metaphysics ask whether it provides access to extremes that would be significant as to the essential form of a surviving Homeric idea.

The entirety of Homeric semiotic phenomena is only condemned to monumentalised oblivion by the impossible task of their exhaustive reading. It could be saved by the extraction and reading of those semiotic instantiations, in which the corresponding ideational whole would be most crucially and even precariously at stake. The overall form of the Homeric idea would thus emerge, neither through an exact mapping of its semiotic topography, nor through the identification of an average of tendencies summarising a presumed topological principle. It would do so through the critical delimitation of and contemplative concentration on specific sites of semiotic ruins, concretely dated as to the conditions of their catastrophic emergence, each offering a crucial insight onto particular aspects of a persisting language-whole. Such aspects would have to be extreme instances of substantiation, which enact the ideational monad of the Homeric formation not in their structural uniformity, but in their articulative tension. The Benjaminian idea is not formed as an abstract entity, to the shape or figure of which a scholarly intellect could gain speculative access. Its monadic totality consists in the very intensity through which instances, often incompatible or incongruous, of semiotic phenomenicity, are recognisable as enactments of what has enabled their bringing-together – of Homer. What matters more is the uncertainty of likeness and difference, connection and disjunction between different constructs – rather than the constructs themselves.

Extreme sites of the Homeric formation could be small parts or fragments of compositional wholes. They could also include larger units – ranging from individual rhapsodies, to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as a single poetic body. The Homeric formation could thus be envisaged as significantly enacted in tensions

between highlighted lines or even word-clusters. It would also consist in the tensions between an over-all narrative and the problematic status of its poorly articulated joints. Homer would *be* the disturbing outburst, imminent at any given point of an otherwise easily summarised narration, of problems confronted by scholiastic or philological exegetical commentary.

Homeric extremes should also include readability challenges presented by the very materiality of extant Homeric semiotic corpi. An initial concentration on philological standard editions should be coupled with the experience of reading Homer in manuscript codices or even papyri. One would thus have to dispute an important component of the philological notion of transmission, namely, the presupposition that the material aspects of the signifier are purely technical in nature, presenting us, at most, with problems of paleographic deciphering[1]. The challenge of manuscript readability should be considered, instead, as involving important aspects of the Homeric idea: in an age of mechanical or electronic reproducibility, it would claim translation along with the Homeric idiom and its compositional articulation.

One of the most crucial specificities of ideas such as the Homeric one, would consist in how they exercise and accustom us to a reading of linguistic forms as fields of uncertainty-tensions – not textually interwoven structures[2].

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[1] On the grounds of these traditionally philological premises, transliteration into a different alphabet would also be envisaged as an equally neutral device of transmission, without implications as to reading. This conception marks, indeed, to a considerable degree, the electronic reproduction of antique texts.

[2] The ideational totality of the *Odyssey*, for instance, could be seen as enacted *by the fact that* its formation is one which could-or-could-not include the *Nekyias* as we have them, could-or-could-not end at the closing of the 23d rather than with its 24th rhapsody. The very *possibility* of regarding both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as one formation is perhaps more interesting and telling, ideationally, in its uncertainty, than any effort to determine the historical truth-value of such a hypothesis. There would also be uncertainty, of course, as to a number of morphological

This would not be far from how the Alexandrian scholar and the Byzantine scribe have addressed their own *scripta*. The Alexandrian sigla as well as the Byzantine scholia could be better understood as markers of uncertainty, than as guidelines of exegetical illumination or editorial emendation. Needless to add, modern philological research has also practically, even if often *malgré-soi*, sustained a host of uncertainty-knots constitutive of the Homeric formation – and remain extremely valuable as such, in their plethora.

In short, a basic methodological precondition for the reading of Homeric *scripta* as an original formation would be to resist their reduction to a historically and aesthetically restructured textual form. One would have to disengage the Homeric language-whole from postulated norms of oral or scribal, antique, medieval or modern, poetic or epic poetics and semiotics. It is only by swimming through the ocean of historical and aesthetic categories, that one can eventually consider their pertinence.

I will survey, in my following sections, two very different cases of approaches to the readability and translatability of the Homeric language-whole. Neither of these approaches pretends to re-construct the stories of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey,* investigates the conundrum of its semantics, or elaborates principles of editorial reproduction. They are of interest to us as non-Wolfian endeavours to address the Homeric *Art* of indexing human-linguistic communicability – and to eventually engage in a historic connection to it, through translation or translative exegesis and criticism. The first is the pre-philological, Byzantine case of Eustathian commentary. The second is our contemporary, largely post-philological approach that has been labelled *oral theory* of Homer.

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components and the role of grammatical, syntactical or metrical rules with respect to their semantic value – or as to the exact position of repeated lines.

C.3. READING HOMER

C.3.1. Old Strangeness

I want to review, very briefly, the tradition that has mostly suffered effacement under the procession of philological awareness: the Byzantine reading of Homer. *Byzantine* is, of course, a generalising historical concept – and should, as such, be used with reservation. I understand it as an initial means of naming a certain stage of life of the Greek language, within the setting of which the historic condition of Homer changes with respect to both its Alexandrian and Roman precedents. The Homeric language persisted as one of non-foreignness while gradually acquiring intensified dimensions of oldness. Byzantine editing and commentary of Homer is a field in which the readability of the Homeric language-whole, involves its translatability in ways more marked than in the case of Alexandrian Greek and quite different from Latin. Tensions of closeness and distance between Byzantine and Homeric Greek are particularly ambiguous, exposing how oldness, advancing to the point of an imminent death, can resist foreignness: Homer would be to Byzantine Greek, an ageing stranger, not a foreigner.

These tensions could be considered as analogous to those involved in Benjamin's notion of aura: "apparition unique d'un lointain, si proche soit-il" (*Kunstwerk,* 144). Homeric language would not be foreign; it would remain *proche*; but its *lointain* would also be particularly pronounced; it would be getting older and older. The same is perhaps implied by our current notion of the Byzantine approach to older Greek language as predominantly rhetorical[1].

The Byzantine reading of Homer could, in this sense, be considered as a particularly interesting extreme instance of Homeric survival. It is well exemplified as such by Eustathius, Bishop of Thessaloniki (1193-1197). His

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[1] See Lemerle (1971) as discussed in the footnotes of section C.2.2.

Homeric *Commentarii* (1960; 1971) is a running line-by line commentary on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, inextricably grammatical, historical, rhetorical, and exegetical, including a translative paraphrase for each commented passage of the original. It originally bears the enigmatic title `Parekbolaiv`, which has been insightfully but inaccurately translated as *Compilations*. The Greek title denotes digression of para-digression, as well as flowing trends, as of a river – without it being clear whether the flowing is out of a source or into an ocean.

Eustathius' *Commentarii* has functioned as a crucial mediation between Homer and its modern readings – something like a manual for the learning of Homeric language and culture, acknowledged as indispensable by early Humanist scholarship, and forgotten or somewhat erased as such by the modern classicist. A careful reading of his text can easily identify a great multititude of points on which most modern commentaries, up to now, follow him closely[1]. Based on Eustathius' Preface (`Prooivmion`) to his *Commentarii* on the *Iliad*, I will venture to recall, very briefly, how Eustathius understands the Byzantine moment of Homeric translative readability. His standpoint, it should be remarked, upsets the Benjaminian distinction between the immersive-contemplative character of traditional approaches to the work of art, and the observational distantiation that would characterise modern reading. His case thus suggests that one should critically revise Benjaminian dialectics. I could tentatively qualify the Eustathian reading as one of playful amazement, disengaged interest, or enchanted resistance: the old, getting older, remains

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[1] Allen (1931) remarks that the influence of Eustathius, after the *editio princeps* of the *Commentarii,* in 1542-1550, "was very great, as may be seen in any apparatus criticus".

readable as perplexingly familiar. Translative connections are constantly at stake in the very closeness of this reading[1].

The oldness of the Homeric language is attested by the term *palaioiv* (perhaps quite close to *veterans*) which Eustathius, together with most Byzantine scholars of his times, uses to qualify all instances of Homeric, classical or Hellenistic Greek paganism. On the other hand, well demarcated neighbourhood is implied by the equally standard term of "outside wisdom" (*e[xw sofiva*, 1[2]), through which pagan Greek values are seen by the Byzantines as separate from, or strange with respect to, the realm of Christian beliefs. Eustathius very characteristically configures this neighbouring oldness as a historic, rather than historical issue. He briefly summarises stories and hypotheses about the hypothetical times and sites in which Homer, as an individual, might have existed. He disqualifies all of them as irrelevant to his task. The question of whether Homer has sung or written his poetry is accordingly disregarded. It is as a historically indeterminate figure that Homer is assigned by Eustathius the position of a "spermatic origin" (*spermatikw``ß ajrchv*, 6) and "hegemony" (*kaqhghthvß*, 6) with respect to poets at large.

From the very outset of his preface, Eustathius uses the figure of an Odyssean travelling through mythological strangeness as an allegory of reading

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[1] Browning (1992) summarises as follows the ambiguously historical relation that the late Byzantine scholar entertains with Homer, involving a constant interchange between commentary and translation:

> "For Eustathius the *Iliad* is in one sense a contemporary text. He often illustrates or explains a point by citing a word or expression from the colloquial Greek of his own time or a feature of contemporary life [...] Yet viewed from another standpoint, the Iliad belongs to a remote past. Words have changed their meanings, and the reader must be alert to these semantic changes. He goes on (comm. on *Iliad* 1.25) to give a list of words whose meanings have changed since Homer's time." (143-144).

[2] Page citations will refer to the Preface of Eustathius' *Commentarii* to the *Iliad* (Eustathius 1971, vol. I: 1-8). For block quotations, references to line numbers, preceded by a colon, will be added after page numbers. Translation is my own, unless otherwise specified.

relations to Homer. Homer would be the singing of Sirens, to which the reader reacts with restrained but acknowledged awe, ultimately, but far from absolutely, resisting their seduction. It is the Byzantine present, not the Homeric past, that holds the position of the *Ithaka* that the Byzantine reader aims at recovering. Homer would rather be the Oceanus itself, which constantly risks keeping one away from home:

> If one were to resist the dominion of the Homeric Sirens, it would be good for one to cover his ears with wax or find recourse to some other means, so that one may avoid seduction [*wJß a]n ajpofuvgei tov qevlghtron*]; were one not to resist but, rather, to encounter the singing, I think that one would not easily circumvent the encounter, however tightly one may be chained, nor would one be able to be happy after having circumvented it; for if we consider that, as there are certain sights, like the seven are said to be, there are also hearings that are worth revisiting [*ejpistrofh`ß a[xia*], then one would have to count among them the Homeric poetry, which no old sage that I know of declined to taste, especially amongst those who drew upon outside wisdom [*th`ß e[xw sofivaß*][…]. (1: 1-9)

Homeric mythology thus provides Eustathius with figures for perfectedness, not death – and for conditions of attractive strangeness, not foreignness. Note the ambiguity with which, in the following passage, the figure of flowing combines with that of influence and the figure of strangeness with that of hospitality:

> […] for all rivers and all springs and all fountains come out of Oceanus, as the old word has it; and so it is out of Homer that flows, if not all, at least a lot of influence on the word [*lovgou ejpirrohv*] of the sages; for no one of those who have ventured through the above, in what they say about nature or about ethos or simply about verbal expression of anything, in whatever way one conceives of it all, has visited the Homeric locus without having been offered hospitality [*ajxenagwvghtoß*]; instead, all have resided under its roof, others in order to spend there the rest of their lives and continue to be fed on its meals, others in order to satisfy some immediate need and take along with them some useful part of its words. (1: 9-16)

In old Greek, *xevnoß* is a stranger, not a foreigner: the hosted one. It is noteworthy that Homer offers hospitality to the Byzantine reader, not the

reverse. Homer is the one who is visited – and who hosts in hospitable ageing strangeness.

The value that Eustathius attributes to the distant locus of Homeric poetry is one of accommodation and usefulness rather than of ritual or cult. The poems are said to be a basic utility (`basiko;n pra`gma`) full of goods (`gevmousa ... kalw`n`) for such arts and sciences as philosophy, rhetoric, strategic skill, moral education and, finally, history as educational experience. Allegorical interpretation would be a stratageme allowing the Byzantine reader to profitably confront the paradox of a fruitful access to an otherwise strangely perfected past. Reading would thus gain access to a realm of perennial synchronicity, in which historic oldness acquires its presently engaging multifaceted actuality:

> […] and as for the venerable things that accompany history, no one could deprive them of the Homeric art, whether it be polytropic experience [`polupeirivaß`], pleasure of hearing, spiritual education [`yucavß paideuvein`], elevating to virtue or whatever the historian is praised for; and, granted, the abundance of myth, creates the risk of seductive amazement [`kivndunoß ejsti; tou` qaumavzesqai`], but Homeric myths are not mainly for entertainment but constitute, rather, the shadows or screens of noble concepts [`ejnnoiw`n eujgenw`n skiaiv eijsin h[parapetavsmata`]; […]. (2: 10-15)

Eustathius insists that the Homeric actual thing (`pra`gma`) is usable in a multiplicity of ways or purposes. His formulations cannot help but remind us of Odysseus' `poluvtropon`: "`poluvcrhston ei\nai crh`ma thvn ÔOmhrikh;n poivhsin` [Homeric poetry being of a use multiply usable]" (2). The polytropic use of Homer would involve translative connections as reading would have to be informed by the various exegetical digressions to which Homer leads the reader:

> […] my aim is rather to furnish useful ideas for prose writers who wish to make use of appropriate rhetorical subtleties, procedures helpful to those who wish to imitate the poet and admire him for his skill, words mostly for prose use, but sometimes hard, rugged and poetic, which call for etymological explanation, maxims, by which Homeric poetry is adorned, factual information drawn not only from Homer but from other sources,

too, myths both in their pure form and allegorically interpreted, and a myriad other things both beautiful and useful. (3: 12-22)[1]

The poetics which Eustathius elaborates in the rest of his preface, present poetry in general as a mixture or intermingling of truths and lies or myths and facts, that a moderate reader should confront as such, by combining a rhetorical analysis with allegorical exegesis[2]. One should neither obscure the Homeric coil with excessive allegorical schemas, nor wholly neglect the "*ÔOmhrika; pterav* […] *ajnagwgikou`` u{youß* [Homeric wings … of anagogical heights]" (4).

Eustathius also ponders on the unity of the Homeric *scripta* as a whole. As if explicitly contesting principles of textual formness, he tells us that the Homeric work (*e[rgon*) does not impose on the reader a closely-knit texture or continuity. It should be envisaged, instead, as composed of parts quite autonomous with respect to each other, allowing the reader to advance at ease or according to convenience:

> Compared to other cases, the work that we have at hand does not extend in body and style in a unified and continuous sequence [*katav sunevceian ajdiavstaton*], which would wear out the interlocutor in a continuous stress with no refuge; rather, each useful piece lies there as such and on its own [*e{kaston tw``n crhsivmwn kaqΔ auJto ; ijdiva/ kei``tai*], so that once this is completed, one can start anew passing on to a next one. Thus, those who go through this writing can often rest as if finding a refuge. (3: 28-33)

Let me add that Eustathius affiliates his reading task to a specific dialogical setting. He says that he does not address instances of high and sophisticated authority but friends of conversational intercourse ("*ouj pro;ß megistavnwn tinw`n ejpetavcqhmen, oJpoi`av tina plavttontai oiJ komyoiv, ajlla; pro;ß fivlwn oJmilhtw`n*"), for the sake of a formative implication in reading ("*ajgwgh; kai; diatribh; anagnwvsewß*", 3).

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[1] Translation of Browning (1992).

[2] Browning (1992, 142-143) elaborates on this specific point.

In short, for Eustathius, Homeric readability entails a conversational and polyvalent translative task, constantly changing registers and jumping from exegetic commentary to allegorical interpretation. His commentary enacts this approach through its continuous interplay between paraphrase and novelistic re-writing[1]. The original formation he has provided us with (often regarded, since Pope and Wolf, as a dispensable monstrosity[2]) is paradigmatic of the distances that separate Byzantine reading both from the imagery of a traditionally contemplative reading and from the practice of historically informed criticism.

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[1] The following description, by Lemerle (1971), of the commentary of Arethas to the manuscripts of his own library, could also largely apply to the style and articulation of Eustathius' *Commentarii*:

> "Mais s' agit-il proprement de scolies? Plutôt du commentaire perpetuel comme on disait autrefois, d'un lecteur qui dialogue avec son auteur. Réagissant toujours très vivement au texte qu' il a sous les yeux, Arethas explique, applaudit, blâme, s'indigne, invective remplissant les marges et les bas de pages qu'il demandait à ses calligraphes de ménager très larges." (239)

Very much like Arethas, Eustathius had before his eyes a Byzantine Homeric manuscript including Alexandrian scholia. His translative rather than reproductive reading must have involved continuous reaction to and intercourse with both Homer and the scholia.

[2] The philological reservation towards Byzantine reading is echoed in the following description, by Lemerle (1971), of our own aporetic reaction to the way in which Byzantines have, more generally, related to their old Greek precedents:

> "Nous sommes choqués par l'usage qu'ils font, pendant l'époque que nous avons considérée, des grandes oeuvres que nous aimons: ils les lisent peu, ils se contentent aisément de florilèges, de recueils de citations, de glossaires, de commentaires, de manuels; ils ne cherchent pas l'esprit [...]. Souvent leur érudition nous surprend: mais, à bien regarder, la littérature antique est-elle pour eux autre chose qu'un vaste magasin d'accessoires, au service d' une "rhétorique" savante et compliquée?" (306)

C.3.2. Non-textual *Scripta*

Byzantine Homer could be the survival of the Homeric language-whole through a historic distance of imminent death but resisted foreignness. Modern philology, diverting from the Byzantine precedent, would enact relations of a differently structured field of historic distances with respect to Homer, negotiating new modalities of death along with diversified conditions of foreignness. I turn now to the "oral theory" of Homer, as an example of a somewhat post-philological approach to the Homeric language-whole – one that has decisively perturbed, if not displaced, the Wolfian paradigm since the 1960s. It could be seen as standing at the point of exhaustion of the modern national-academic philological paradigm. Homer, persisting in the *scripta* of modern philological reproduction, assumes the position of a death that should be differently recollected – and a foreigner that should be differently addressed.

The oral theory of Homer has been considered as having made "the most important single discovery about Homer during the past half-century, the decisive proof that the poems are oral compositions" (Dodds 1954, 13). Although the standardised label "oral theory" also suggests as much, I do not think that this would in any sense summarise the significance of the corresponding approach to Homer. Equally authoritative witnesses, in fact, have been persistently arguing that there is "no decisive argument against the composition of the Iliad and the Odyssey in writing" (Pfeiffer 1968, 25, n. 1).

The interest that the oral theory of Homer presents us with does *not* lie in its views on the historical problem of the initial emergence of Homeric poems[1]. From that point of view, it always risks turning into a quite conventional neo-unitarian stand: a compromise between the analytic hypothesis of originally oral Homeric poems and the unitarian defence of the transmitted vulgate. The crucial

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[1] According to what I suggest in this section and elaborate in the following ones, my use of the term *oral theory* implies quotation marks.

insight of the approach is, instead, the opening of a distinct perspective on the issue of readability of the Homeric *scripta*. This perspective diverges, most significantly, from the very terms of the traditional philological debate. It involves, more specifically, the elaboration of the following, often implicit double premise. *Primo,* Homeric *scripta* (in their modern-philological version, but also as the Byzantine vulgate that sustains it) would be validly readable documents as they stand. In this sense, the analytical task of textual reconstruction would be superfluous, if not wholly misleading. *Secundo,* the reading of the *scripta* should be operated on grounds other than those of textual formness. In this sense, the unitarian position on the Homeric Question is also disputed.

According to oral theorists, the very idiosyncrasy of the Homeric *scripta*, as we have them, instead of being corrected away, could and should be addressed as an object of reading, however problematic or even ineffective such a reading may prove to be. Almost everything that the analyst wanted to emend, and the unitarian philologist was willing to excuse, is turned into a readable form, the main interest of which lies in its eccentricity. Principles of textual formness should be bracketed, so that the form at stake exposes its readability challenge – eventually affecting our notion of poeticity or even of literature at large.

What we have is thus a reading practice addressing *scripta* from the point of view of non-textual principles of linguistic formation. The historical question of the degree and way in which, analogous principles are at work in social settings of oral poetry is, in my view, supplementary and even secondary to the main issue. In the case of Homer, the reference of oral theorists to the paradigm of oral poetry could, in fact, be considered as figural. It would be a metaphor, largely catachrestic in status, standing for *non-textuality* – given the lack of more appropriate conceptual devices. I will later discuss in detail how this use of *orality*, as it combines with historical or pseudo-historical problematics, may neutralise crucial insights of the theory. I will first concentrate on the insights themselves.

Note that the exact level or aspect of the Homeric formation on which oral theorists situate their reading is not easy to define in conventional terms. As we will see, it is neither a "linguistic" analysis of the Homeric idiom, nor an inquiry on the "content" of Homeric discourse. I intend to investigate, more specifically, whether and how this reading addresses the *Wort* of a formation as translatable language-whole; whether and how it exposes aspects of an ideational form indexing purely human-linguistic communicability.

I will be concentrating on Lord (1960) and Peabody (1975)[1]. Lord's *Singer of Tales* could be considered as paradigmatic with respect to Homeric studies since the 1960s – perhaps in a sense close to how Wolf's *Prolegomena* functioned with respect to older philological problematics[2]. It is particularly marked by a terminology that limits its insights in a historicist direction. Peabody's *Winged Word* presents us with somewhat deviant problematics, driving oral theory to its most interesting extremes. Although it is mainly based on a reading of Hesiod, it has a direct bearing on Homer: an epic idea emerges as a language-whole wider and more varied than the strictly Homeric one.

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[1] Respectively abbreviated as *Lord* and *Peabody*.

[2] Wolf puts to new use material relatively peripheral with respect to the Homeric texts, while also establishing direct relationships between the field of classics and other academic disciplines such as history, Biblical studies and, eventually, literary studies. Lord*'s* work also involves the introduction and valorisation of new material. It includes empirical research on contemporary Yugoslav oral poetry. It thus connects Homeric studies to the field of oral literature at large or even of cultural ethnology or anthropology. It should be recalled that Lord continues and accomplishes a project methodologically anticipated and delimited by the work and early publications of Parry (1971), which only gradually opened to the perspective of the comparative investigation of contemporary poetic traditions. Peabody, although following Lord closely and explicitly, avoids systematic reference to the field of contemporary oral poetry.

C.3.3. Mimetic Formation

Lord states the paradox of Homeric readability as follows:

> It is a strange phenomenon in intellectual history as well as in scholarship that the great minds herein represented, minds which could formulate the most ingenious speculation, failed to realize that there might be some other way of composing a poem than that known to their experience. (*Lord*, 11)

This "other way of composing" a poetic whole Lord sees as occurring under historical conditions of oral poetic tradition. Disregarding this configuration, we could concentrate on the issue that Lord acknowledges as being at stake: "Change and stability – these are the two elements of the traditional that we must try to comprehend. What is it that changes and why and how? What remains stable and why?" (*Lord*, 102). The issue, in other words, would be the nature of a formational whole that can only be reproduced as such through constant alteration of its semiotic enactments. The notion of textuality, together with problematics of historical originality, would be signalling our blindness with respect to the peculiarity of the oral-traditional mode of linguistic life:

> Our real difficulty arises from the fact that, unlike the oral poet, we are not accustomed to thinking in terms of <u>fluidity</u>. We find it difficult to grasp something that is multiform. It seems to us necessary to construct an ideal text or to seek an original, and we remain dissatisfied with an ever-changing phenomenon. (*Lord*,100)

Lord's figure of *oral tradition* names the specificity of a regime of linguistic reproducibility. The emphasis, as Lord explicitly states, should be on the notion of tradition (designating a whole mode of linguistic life) rather than on orality (designating the nature of the linguistic medium). A correlative key-notion is the one of *performance*. We can keep this notion by insisting on its etymological connection to *form*, while bracketing its references to the phenomenon of oral recitation. It would name the emergence and persistence of linguistic formations through events in which different components of linguistic life (components which the textual paradigm separates) merge into a single process. As Lord

remarks, "we are dealing with a particular and distinctive process in which oral learning, oral composition, and oral transmission almost merge; they seem to be different facets of the same process" (*Lord*, 5).

Performative events could be instances of mimesis of something that survives, not *in spite* but *through* or *as* change and fluidity of semiotic constructs. Although the notion of mimesis is not used by Lord, it is suggested by his explicit insistence on the fact that oral tradition does *not* rest on memory and memorisation on the part of the performing composer[1]:

> To the superficial observer, changes in oral tradition may seem chaotic and arbitrary. In reality this is not so. It cannot be said that 'anything goes' Nor are these changes due in the ordinary sense to failure of memory of a fixed text, first, of course, because there is no fixed text, second because there is no concept among singers of memorization as we know it, and third, because at a number of points in any song there are forces leading in different directions, any one of which the singer may take. (*Lord*, 120.)

This implies that the substance of a given formation is necessarily connected but also irreducible to the materiality of its semiosis. Lord could be confronting this problem when he proposes that one should distinguish between, on the one hand, the "wording" of any particular performance of a song, and, on the other, the "essence" or the "general idea of the story" which delimits the identity of the song at stake:

> We think of change in content and in wording; for, to us, at some moment both wording and content have been established. To the singer the song, which cannot be changed (since to change it would, in his mind, be to tell an untrue story or to falsify history) is the essence of the story itself. His idea of stability, to which he is deeply devoted, does not include the wording, which to him has never been fixed, nor the essential parts of the story. He builds his performance, or song in our sense, on the stable skeleton of narrative, which is the song in his sense. […] Yet there is a

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[1] This counters the commonplace phenomenological problematics approaching traditional poetry as mainly involving dynamics of a *verbomoteur* status or as fundamentally resting on the use of *mnemotechnic* linguistic devices and strategies – on which Ong (1982) and Havelock (1986), amongst others, particularly insist.

> basic idea or combination of ideas that is fairly stable. We can say, then, that a song is the story about a given hero, but its expressed forms are multiple, and each of these expressed forms or tellings of the story is itself a separate song, in its own right, authentic and valid as a song onto itself. We must distinguish then two concepts of song in oral poetry. One is the general idea of the story, which we use when we speak in larger terms, for example, of the song of the wedding of Smailagic Meho, which actually includes all singings of it. The other concept of song is that of a particular performance or text, such as Avdo Mededovic's song, the Wedding of Smailagic Meho, dictated during the month of July, 1935. (*Lord,* 99-100)

I will return, shortly, to Lord's notion of the "stable skeleton of narrative" or, more generally, the "story". What interests us, at this point, is the very quest of the grounds on which the identity of a poetic formation would rest.

Stability through fluidity implies relations of recognisable likeness between semiotic constructs, which have nothing to do with the textual model of semiotic similarity:

> […] the two songs are recognizable versions of the same story. They are not close enough, however, to be considered exactly alike. Was Zogic lying to us? No, because he was singing the story as he conceived it as being like Makic's story, and to him, word for word and line for line are simply an emphatic way of saying *like*. (*Lord,* 28)

The notion of *recognition*, in the above quotation, could be considered as significantly displacing *memory*. The notion of a non-exact likeness could be very close Benjamin's non-sensuous resemblance[1].

An immediate implication of Lord's problematics is that there would be neither an original version of a given song, nor an author of such an original. An event of initial performance may be conceivable and its performer may even be identifiable – but this would not make this performance into an original, nor its performer into an author. The very nature of the formation at stake is what precludes the relevance of such notions. Lord stresses the impasse of the textually biased notion of original authorship – whether individual or collective:

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[1] Recall section B.3.4. above.

Actually, only the man with writing seems to worry about this, just as only he looks for the non-existent, illogical and irrelevant original. Singers deny that they are the creators of the song. They learned it from other singers. We know now that *both* are right, each according to his meaning of song. To attempt to find the first singer of a song is as futile as to try to discover the first singing. And yet, just as the first singing could not be called the original, so the first man to sing a song cannot be considered its author, because of the peculiar relationship, already discussed between his singing and all subsequent singings. From that point of view a song has no author but a multiplicity of authors, each singing being a creation, each singing having its own single author. This is, however, a very different concept of multiple authorship from that, or more properly those, in general use among Homerists. (*Lord,* 102)

Peabody insists, along with Lord, that traditional poetic performance does not involve memorisation of previous performances. Each performance would, rather, be the re-enactment of what has already been enacted: "an oral tradition does not retrieve acts from the past; it performs actions that were also performed in the pas*t*" (*Peabody*, 430, n. 16). Peabody further understands the precedents of each occurrence of a given song as historically non-determinate. At stake would be a "truth" that each performance would "phenomenalise". This would presuppose "remembrance" in a sense that Peabody explicitly distinguishes from "memorisation" and connects it to "recollection". On the grounds of this notion of recollected truth, Peabody displaces Lord's notions of *story* and *skeleton of narrative*:

> Song is remembrance of songs sung. As remembered experience, song is the result, not of deliberate memorisation but only of recollection. Song, accordingly is to be associated with the interpretation of signs; that is, with meaning. Song is the conscious, phenomenalised aspect of the oral compositional process. Song can *sometimes* be identified in traditional compositions as a plan of themes, or as a skeleton of narrative, or as a basic idea; but more simply, song is what the singer remembers as the truth. This memory functions as a cybernetic control from which a singer will not deliberately depart. (*Peabody*, 216)

Peabody's approach invalidates the very figure of a singer-audience communication chain – if not the notion of semiotic communication at large. At

stake would be, not authorial inventions or intentions, but instances of historically and phenomenologically indeterminate "traditional thought":

> The thought of an oral tradition – the significant structures of its informational data – lies in the linguistic texture of its songs. A singer effects, <u>not a transfer of his own intention, but a conventional realisation of traditional thought</u> for his listeners, including himself. This thought does not originate with any one individual; rather, it has been organised and has accumulated during millenia of cultural experience. This thought is realised and phenomenalised, however, by individuals at particular moments of time. This description <u>does not correlate with our common understanding of communication</u> if that term is taken to imply a pipe-line transfer of information from singer to listener. (*Peabody*, 176)

Performative instances of traditional thought acquire, in *Peabody,* a status quite comparable to that of ideationally self-sufficient language-wholes:

> For the traditional listener, who may be a bard himself, traditional songs constitute a complete sign world in which nothing extraneous (i.e. environmental or individualistic) occurs and in which there are no lacks or needs – a world, in this respect, of ideal self-sufficiency. (*Peabody,* 172.)

The completeness of each sign-world would not be equivalent to the one of a world-view or an otherwise structured set of beliefs, attitudes or modes of thought. The connection of each performance to the truth of its idea would be one of an on-going life, impossible to stabilise – as the prospect of the next performance is constantly imminent. The "entire thought of a tradition is never sung" (*Peabody,* 179), since "every song is true but no song is ever the complete and permanent truth" (177). We could, perhaps configure the same as a surviving *Gewesene.*

Formations of the Homeric type would persist through variable but equally valid constructs, all of which would be mimeses of an idea perfected in terms of a historically non-determinate tradition. Through each of its per-formative instantiations, the idea at stake would emerge as addressable in its essential self-sufficiency; every semiotic instance would index the survival of its communicational perfectedness, but no instance would exhaust it. With each

performance, the dynamics of human-linguistic communicability would expose their historic potential anew.

C.3.4. Linguistic Substance

Form acquires a central importance in Lord. It refers to the level of elementary linguistic units, as well as to their assembly in larger units:

> The practice of oral narrative poetry makes a certain <u>form</u> necessary; the way in which oral epic songs are composed and transmitted leaves its unmistakable mark on the songs. That mark is apparent in the <u>formulas</u> and in the <u>themes</u>. It is visible in the structure of the <u>songs</u> themselves. (*Lord,* 141)

Formula is a key-concept in oral theory. Its emergence and hegemony, already implicitly suspected by Lord and further criticised or mitigated in more recent developments of oral theory, exposes the difficulty of thinking *form* in non-textual terms.

The presence of formulas as a lever of articulation of poetic compositions has been considered as the safest indication or even proof of the fact that the corresponding semiotic construct conforms to principles of traditional, if not oral, literary life. The term designates semantic units (mainly complexes of words making up a half or a whole line) standardised as means to meet the demands of given metrical norms or constraints. Lord reminds us of its definition by Parry as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (*Lord*, 4). Assembled formulaic units form themes: "Following Parry, I have called the groups of ideas regularly used in telling a tale in the formulaic style of traditional song the "themes" of the poetry" (68). On the grounds of formulaic compositional principles, metrics would assume the structural and generative function of a poetic "grammar":

> Without the metrical restrictions of the verse, language substitutes one subject for another in the nominative case, keeping the same verb; or

> keeping the same noun, it substitutes one verb for another. In studying the patterns and systems of oral narrative verse we are in reality observing the grammar of poetry, a grammar superimposed, as it were, on the grammar of the language concerned. *(Lord*, 35-36)

The idea that formulaic grammar is *superimposed on* an otherwise natural linguistic order, echoes a textual bias – the premises of which have been haunting discussions and tensions over the notion of formula itself. These discussions have been, tellingly enough, centred on the issue of the degree to which the use of formulas would be compatible with genuine poetic creativity – the degree to which a formulaic singer can also be viewed as a "poet". How far would formulas be quasi-mechanical means to comply with metrical regularities? Would they, perhaps, also allow a choice of words according to their purely semantic or otherwise artistic value? Lord is significantly ambiguous in this respect. There are passages in which he suggests that formulaic grammar is more restrictive or mechanical than current linguistic grammar:

> Or, to use another figure, the formula is the offspring of the marriage of thought and sung verse. Whereas thought, in theory at least, may be free, sung verse imposes restrictions, varying in degrees of rigidity from culture to culture, that shape the form of thought. Any study of formula must therefore properly begin with consideration of metrics and music, particularly by the young singer first becoming aware of the demands of his art. (*Lord,* 31)

At the same time, Lord sees formulaic regularity as resisting the textual notion of mechanical repetition:

> We may otherwise think of the formula as being ever the same no matter from whose lips it proceeds. Such uniformity is scarcely true of any elements of language; for language always bears the stamp of its speaker. <u>The landscape of formula is not a level steppe with a horizon which equalizes all things in view, but rather a panorama of high mountains and deep valleys and of rolling foothills</u>; and we must seek the essence of formula at all points in the landscape. (*Lord,* 31)

Lord insists that formulas are *not* repetitive *clichés*. The singer, he says, "depends less and less on learning formulas and more and more on the process of substituting other words in the formula patterns" (*Lord*, 36) thus constantly

creating new formulas "by putting new words into old pattern" (43). Elsewhere in his work, the notion of a pre-established metrical schema imposing formulas as mechanical devices, is further mitigated. The hexametric structure is likened, not to a poetic grammar superimposed on natural language, but to the grammar of an entire language-whole that should be understood as paradigmatic with respect to language in general:

> A style thus systematized by scholars on the foundation of analysis of texts is bound to appear very mechanical. Again we may turn to language itself for a useful parallel. The classical grammar of language, with its paradigms of tenses and declensions, might give us the idea that language is a mechanical process. The parallel, of course, goes even further. The method of language is like that of oral poetry, substitution in the framework of grammar. (*Lord*, 35)

The young singer, Lord affirms, learns his art "like a child learning words, or anyone learning a language without a school method; except that the language here being learned is the special language of poetry" (22).

If formulaic regularity is the grammar of a specific mode of linguistic life, then formulas are simply the words of oral poetry – while words are its letters. The issue, in other terms, is whether and how a *Wort* proper to the Homeric language might be readable through what we are accustomed to perceiving and interpreting as word in the current sense of the term[1]. Peabody drives oral theory

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[1] For a concise and detailed summary of the on-going debate on the formula, see Russo's (1997) contribution to the *New Companion to Homer* (250 et seq). One of the most interesting insights on the matter seems to be Nagler's, who insists that the very principle of metrical equivalence defining a formula remains rather unclear, if not epistemically undefinable. His problematics about the "generative nature of the formula" suggest that *formula* could be configuring something close to the non-semiotic Benjaminian *Name.* He seems, however, to confuse platonic idealism with phenomenology, form with *Gestalt*. Russo presents his views as follows:

> "Such open-endedness is not merely descriptive but has a theoretical centre, an abstract, pre-verbal mental template for which no English term exists and which may be called *Gestalt.* It is closer to the concept called *sphota* by Sanskrit grammarians and has looser resemblances to the Platonic Idea, the Jungian archetype, and the Levi-Saussurian structural model of myth. It is at this level of phenomena that the true formula exists, as a

further in this direction, as he explicitly discards both the idea of purely metrical constraints and the problematics of semantic value of units identified according to textual principles of morphology and semantics. He rethinks the formula. He sees it as referring to what would be better understood as elementary linguistic substances, largely accounting for the specificity of the Greek epic language-whole.

Peabody reminds us, to begin with, that the hexameter "was invented long after the event to describe existing fact and it does not necessarily identify elements that played any operative role in the actual process by which traditional verses were composed" (*Peabody*, 17). Formulas would not be aggregates of words used to fit pre-established metric necessities. They would be different kinds of elementary lectic units, reproducible in ways that make them *look like* clusters of word-units, in the textual sense of the term. Rather than words combined and made to fit the metrical formal unit of a colon, formulas would be grammatically indeterminate elementary substances, which actually generate the metrical regularity that they are supposed to conform to:

> Cola exist not as intervals between prescribed caesuras but as groups of closely associated syllables. These groups of syllables, whose form is that of their traditional linguistic substance, create the phenomena of caesuras

> mental potentiality; all the actual verbalisations made by the reciter are called "allomorphs" of this one entity." (251)

Russo himself arrives at interesting concluding suggestions, stressing the need to acknowledge and investigate the specific literary status that repetition acquires in Homer, as opposed to our modern sense of textual creativity:

> "Anyone who reads Homer in Greek becomes eventually aware that repetition is constantly at play, some of its forms being more immediately evident that others. The uniquely satisfying effect that Homeric style has upon us derives from our perception, at different levels ranging from fully conscious to subliminal in varying degrees, that patterns of sentence, phrase, word, rhythm, and sound are repeatedly returning, and recalling one another with a subtlety that defies precise definition and classification. It is this refusal of the formulaic to be defined and classified, and its increasing identification with the organised functioning of language on multiple levels simultaneously, that the studies of the sixties and seventies successfully, even if sometimes unintentionally, brought to light." (252)

as they join in sequence to form utterance periods or verses. When the colon is considered as a group of syllables one is no longer dealing with theoretical or abstract form but with the actual substance of language. (*Peabody*, 70)

Through the extremely wide, albeit finite, variety of their possible combinations, these "lexical elements" would generate the colonic pattern that makes up what has subsequently been read as a dactylic hexametric line[1]:

Language does not often occur as a random sequence of simple signs. It occurs in syntactic periods compounded of sign units. In the Greek epos traditional sign units that are at once metrical, formulaic, and lexical units join in traditional ways to form utterance periods. Even if these colonic units are more extended than what we ordinarily call single words, they characteristically function like single lexical elements. (*Peabody*,118)

From the point of view of the phenomenology of its production, the semiotic construct of a performance would emerge according to dynamics proper to the process of utterance of its epic *Worten*. A series of formational levels, from elementary to more complex ones are articulated to each other: from cola and lines to stanzaic phrases and periods, and from there to larger units of stanza-development and themes. The process is not understood as the gradual succession of elements adding up to syntagmatic completeness. Each level (starting with the one of the very first uttered unit) contains, in a sense, a formational core the elaboration of which generates the higher or more complex ones:

The degree of precision (the scale) to which a semantic period is focused or realized (made phenomenologically real) depends on the number of restrictive elements added to the initial utterance. […] The semantic scope of the stanza is generally established with the first lexical element uttered, but subsequent elements and clauses reduce this scope and make its reference specific. […] Once a full semantic period (a stanza) has been

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[1] The idea of a line basically structured not in terms of six metrical feet but in terms of four colonic units, indistinguishably rhythmic and semantic, has been advanced by Frankel since 1926 (Russo 1997, 240)

realized, no single clause period within it (no mater how syntactically independent) is semantically independent. (*Peabody*, 127)

A given thematic expansion or variation could thus be a gesture of repetition, elaboration or diversion with respect to a previous lectic or thematic cluster. It could also be one of correction of and compensation for a previous occurrence of an erratic twist. The overall process would be one of limps and lingerings, constantly re-focusing and controlling circumstantial occurrences, including alliterative and rhythmic ones[1].

C.3.5. Formational Wholes

Let us now turn to the epic song as a formational whole. What relations would there be, between the whole that persists through varying performances, and the parts that these performances may be differently enacting and connecting to each other?

The notion of *story* is central to Lord's understanding of formational wholeness. "The stable skeleton of narrative" constitutes, as we have seen, the basic formative drive underlying the various performances of a recognisable song. *Idea* serves, in Lord, as synonymous to *story*. Recall: "Yet there is a basic idea or combination of ideas that is fairly stable" (*Lord*, 100). The elements that the story assembles and runs through would be the themes. Their articulation into a song, however, is not pictured as the orderly arrangement of a whole, through systematic assembling of parts. It is, rather, seen as the result of compositional work striving with the disturbing potential of distinct themes that have a "semi-independent life of their own" (94). More precisely: "at a number of points in any song there are forces leading in different directions, any one of

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[1] See especially Peabody's description and analysis of different levels of compositional articulation (159; 219).

which the singer may take. If his experience of a particular song is weak, either as a whole or at any part, the force in a direction divergent from the one he has heard may be strongest" (120). Each theme would be a knot at which there is "a pull in two directions: one is toward the song being sung and the other is toward the previous uses of the same theme" (94). These directions are elsewhere specified as involving a "tension of essences" (97). The story-idea would be an essence of a higher level, imposing its own unity as the grounds on which thematic tensions are resolved and the song emerges as a stable and identifiable compositional whole. The reconstruction of the story becomes the object of a reading that circumvents the philological task of emended textual uniformity:

> If one cannot reconstruct an original text, and if one cannot reconstruct with any degree of exactness the myriad thematic complexes which the poem has shown in the past, one can, I believe, <u>reconstruct a basic form, a more or less stable core of the story</u>. (*Lord*, 219)

Lord also takes into consideration the shortcomings of this rather Procrustean solution to the problem – a solution that does not effectively displace the Wolfian conception of textual formness. He observes, for instance, that the "grand scale of ornamentation" is a component of the whole, as important as the story itself, deserving analogous reading attention. He also acknowledges that the former upsets the "close-knit unity" and relative self-sufficiency of the latter (148).

Peabody's approach tends to break more clearly with the philological conception of textual wholeness. Recall that songs, for Peabody, are remembrances of the truth of songs sung. This truth would *not* lie in the narrative skeleton of a story. Story, in Peabody, acquires an eventual importance only as a tentatively efficient or "cybernetic control" – not as the conceptual construct, the form of which would be repeated or imitated. Peabody insists that the song "is not an ideal, a mental model which the singer strives to imitate; it is a control, a flange, that keeps him on the track" (217). As such, "the song pattern […] is not a generative, substantive feature of traditional thought". It follows that

the "intrusion of a song pattern into a composition does not necessarily have anything to do with the unity of that composition" (260).

Stories thus lose much of the significance that is usually attributed to them as drives or grounds of formational wholeness. Even more importantly, Peabody's perspective turns the phenomenic compositional unit of a song into the most variable component of an essentially persisting poetic formation. "The phenomenalized surface of meaning associated with song is not unimportant, but it is the least stable aspect of the tradition, unreasonable as that may seem to us" (*Peabody*, 218). The poetic formation, at the level of its phenomenic enactment in semiotic wholes, would thus be flexible or even always necessarily incomplete – and thus never actually fragmentary, in a strict sense of the term.

"A traditional composition grows in mounting levels (from clauses to stanzas, to passages, to sections) until one unit stands realized on the topmost level, whatever level that may be" (*Peabody*, 195). Contingency entails the uncertainty of the overall phenomenon of performance, and sets the very point at which a performance stops and the song emerges as a semiotic construct. The topmost level realised by a compositional occurrence cannot be foretold, nor understood in terms of the degree to which completeness has been reached. It would be the eventful result of a performative activity that Peabody describes, very tellingly, as made of "anaphoric patterns of association and varied repetition" (182).

Lord's "tensions of essences" would thus not be resolved on the stable grounds of a narrative wholeness. The essential wholeness of an epic formation would even *consist in* such tensions, marking the uncertainty of the knots that connect the parts of its performative enactments. The result would be what philological poetics venture to emend and poetic translations strive to domesticate. As Peabody remarks, "the surrealism that we sense is due largely to the synthetic compression that our analytic techniques effect when applied to a recorded text" (*Peabody*, 257).

The reading that Peabody proposes, contesting such techniques, would work by almost reversing philological *historicae rationes*: "One will do better tripping the text of the *Works & Days* down to its first eight verses than arguing the first ten away from the remainder of the text" (*Peabody*, 264). Such a post-philological reading would expose the reader's language to the specificity of the Greek epic formation of traditional truth. It could be very close to translating an ideational form indexing a perfected mode of human-linguistic communicability.

Approaches such as those of Lord and, especially, Peabody have been supported by a systematic reference to the figure of traditional oral poetry. Nevertheless, nothing prevents their theoretical insights from applying, in spite of their pseudo-historical rhetoric, to the overall process of emergence and reproduction of the Homeric *scripta*. The latter would constitute the tradition of a poetic formation, persisting through variance and change of its semiotic instances, in ways analogous to those suggested by the imagery of oral performance. The notion of performance could, indeed, be extended so that it also covers events of copying or editing of scribal material[1]. The Byzantine vulgate would mark a topmost level of compositional activity, reached under conditions that have driven the Homeric formation to some of the most engaging extremes.

One would have to read Homeric *scripta* as varied instances of mimetic recollection, rather than as supports of historical memory. Their language would consist in units and articulations that categories and analytical tools of conventional linguistics may fail to adequately account for. Their formational unity would be variably formed through tense and uncertain junctures between

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[1] Note Finnegan's (1977) suggestion that the element of "performance" might be more present in written literature, especially poetry, than we usually tend to suspect (273). This agrees with the suggestions of Cerquiglini (1989, 60) concerning the manuscript tradition of medieval poetry: many features usually assumed to be oral in origin may very well be proper to manuscript writing and copying itself.

utterly fragmentary, but solid parts and pervasively totalising, but precarious wholes.

C.3.6. The Historicist Bias

Oral theorists tend to outdo their insights on the issue of Homeric readability through their insistence on the historicist schema of orality – more specifically, of oral tradition as historically specific *cultus vitae*. Written traditions would succeed oral ones as distinct cultural realms in history; if the latter persist, they would only do so through remains that fail to ascertain their historical actuality. The point I want to make is that the challenge that the readability of formations like the Homeric one may present to reading is thus paradoxically neutralised. Oral theory would save Homer from the principles of textual formness only in a way that also allows these principles to be sheltered against the eventually disturbing implications of a translative reading of Homeric eccentricity. The case of Lord is quite characteristic in this respect.

Lord returns to the basic Wolfian hypotheses according to which the oral composition of the Homeric poems has occurred in a cultural realm of orality, essentially untouched by the invention and development of writing. His answer to the correlative question, of how the passage to written transcripts occurred, is very different from Wolf's – so much so, that it can be characterised as almost pseudo-historical. He advances, in this respect, a hypothesis the figure of which has proven as tenacious as it is simple – or even simplistic. Through oral dictation, a practically illiterate Homeric bard passes on to a freshly literate scribe a specimen of oral performance, which is faithfully transposed to writing. The Homeric "oral dictated texts" would significantly differ from the "autograph oral texts" of literate bards or from "transitional texts" produced by "non-descript

hybrids"[1] in cases of oral traditions developing along and influenced by written ones[2]. The fact that, according to this schema, writing had not affected the Homeric oral tradition, is seen by Lord as having enabled the purely oral character of Homeric poetry to be retained through the dictating performance and be registered as such by the scribe. The possibility of a series of recording events, entailing different kinds of transcripts, circulating and affecting further performances and recordings, is not taken into consideration. The effects of the very situation of dictation on performance are acknowledged but minimised[3]. The possible effects of different waves of alphabetic transcription are overlooked.

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[1] *Lord* elaborates on this point, pp. 124-130 and summarises, pp. 149-150.

[2] Peabody does not contest Lord's overall conception of a historical gap between oral and written traditions. Nevertheless, he situates Homer in a rather ambiguous or border-line position in this respect. The era of Greek epic orality would be a stage of maturity of techniques of composition and performance of a much broader tradition, the beginnings of which are traced back to the Mesopotamia of the 3rd millennium B.C. Homer (as opposed to Hesiod) would be situated at the closing of this tradition and the opening of a new one. His poems would be closer to hybrids, significantly affected by Athenian cultural policies of the 6th century. See especially *Peabody,* 504, n. 127.

[3] Lord acknowledges, of course, that the dictating performance must have displayed certain peculiarities or even anomalies, as compared to normal performances. The specificity or unusualness of the circumstances would have altered its temporal deployment:

> "In a way this was just one more performance for the singer, one more in a long series. Yet it was the strangest performance he had ever given. There was no music and no song, nothing to keep him to the regular beat except the echo of previous singings and the habit they had formed in his mind. Without these accompaniments it was not easy to put the words together as he usually did. The tempo of composing the song was different, too. Ordinarily the singer could move forward rapidly from idea to idea, from theme to theme. But now he had to stop very often for the scribe to write down what he was saying, after every line or even after part of a line. This was difficult, because his mind was far ahead. But he accustomed himself to this new process at last, and finally the song was finished." (*Lord,* 124.)

In spite of the above, there would be no change of poetics at this critical point of passage from orality to writing (128).

The issue of the exact mechanisms of further written reproduction of the initial transcript, as well as the one of the standardisation of a vulgate, are not addressed. The extant manuscripts are assumed to have somehow directly descended from the initial recording, retaining its basic characteristics.

The advent of literacy is thus seen as enabling the quasi-automatic scribal conservation of the basic features of oral poeticity. At the same time there would occur a drastic marginalisation of oral tradition, preventing the merging or mutual influence between the norms of the new culture and the remains of the old. As a result, oral tradition was not actually *transmitted* in a strict sense of the term: "Oral tradition did not become transferred or transmuted into a literary tradition of epic, but was only moved further and further into the background, literally into the back country, until it disappeared" (*Lord,* 138).

Written traditions would preserve Homer, but only as the remains of a distant past, the actuality of which is drastically neutralised. Homeric orality would thus be not only dead and foreign, but also incongruous to living literary norms. Homer is pushed even further in the position attributed to it by the Wolfian figure of historical *tenebrae*. Wolfian *historicae rationes* persist in the background of Lord's rationale. The problem, however, is no longer the deficiency of the transmission mechanisms, but the historical gap between written and oral literary traditions.

The above have crucial implications with respect to the reading of the Homeric poems – the degree and the way in which their readability is enacted. On the one hand, the issue is re-stated and re-affirmed as an open one: one *should* venture to address Homeric poetry in the specificity of its language. On the other hand, the actual tackling of Homeric readability is somehow seen as historically impossible. The eccentricity of non-textual language can be acknowledged and even described; its historical circumscription, however, prevents its challenge from spilling over and upsetting the order of textual formness. An equivalent historical bias is echoed in *Peabody* when, on the grounds of the "fundamental difference between the semantic behaviour of oral utterance and the semantic

behaviour of written statement" (127), it postulates that epic orality is "far more important to users than interesting to onlookers" (208).

The paradox of the oral-theoretical standpoint is also expressed by the current tendency to regard oral theory as strictly concerning the *production* of the Homeric artefact. The question of the "so what?" of oral theory with respect to the reading of Homer remains characteristically pending. Answers tend to be sought in the direction of the phenomenology of reception of originally oral artefacts[1]. I would suggest that one should rather start by checking the historicist bias implicit in the very distinction between *orality* and *writing* as historical categories.

C.3.7. Non-textual Form

Oral theory can be better appreciated, in its insightful implications on the readability of the Homeric *scripta*, if one considers its use of the notion of *orality* as a rhetorical device. Its status would be catachrestic, and the corresponding

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[1] The *New Companion to Homer* is quite characteristic in this respect. The "so what?" question is explicitly raised by Foley (1979) in his article on the "Oral tradition and its implications", where he criticises oral theorists for their "virtually exclusive attention to composition at the expense of reception" (164). The article concludes by insisting on the quest of an approach to reading and poetics at large, which would make oral rhetoric "fit the world of the reader" (173). Very characteristic is also the case of Bakker (1997). His essay proposes a radically oralist approach. Homeric diction would be transcribed "special speech", analysable through a "discourse analysis" that would understand Homeric language as the direct expression of an individual "flow of consciousness", "never meant to be read" (292).

In a different setting, Havelock (1986) stresses the need to re-read both archaic and classic Greek texts with an eye to the overtones of their oral background. He maintains that modern textual academic bias has led to a systematic mis-translation of the texts of epic tradition. At the same time, archaic orality is seen by Havelock as practically inaccessible to the modern reader – that is, as untranslatable: "classic orality is untranslatable" (96).

problematics pseudo-historical; they would reflect the lack of better terms for what is actually at stake. At stake, I think, is the possibility of understanding how literary language, independently of its semiotic status, presents us with the issue of form in ways not complying with historicist principles of textual formness.

Wolf, as we have seen, paradigmatically indexed principles of textual formness through his detection of the defects of the Homeric *scripta*. Compositional coherence and idiomatic consistency would have to be discerned in and further imposed on the *scripta*, so that they assume a form readable as properly historical. Such problematics echo the modern metaphysics that Derrida (1968) has identified as *logocentric*. They involve the postulate that language, if adequately formed, can provide access to truth, transcending the disturbing mediation of signifying mechanisms – of the *signifiant*. The linguistic sign could, in other words, be driven to a condition of transparency and presence with respect to its presumed meaning – the *signifié*. In the case of philology, the signified truth would be a cultural form, while the disturbing and dispensable signifier would be the semiotic constructs of the transmission chains.

Let us take for granted, for the purposes of my present argument, Derrida's use of the term *logos*[1] and concentrate on the metaphysics that it has been made to stand for. What I would like to critically discuss, in this respect, is a supplementary but determinant aspect of the Derridean notion of logocentrism – namely, the phonocentric bias that is supposed to be its most typical and perhaps most crucial correlative:

> […] *logocentrisme*: métaphysique de l'écriture phonétique (par exemple l'alphabet) qui n'a été en son fond – pour des raisons énigmatiques mais essentielles et inaccessibles à un simple relativisme historique – l'ethnocentrisme le plus original et le plus puissant […] (Derrida 1968, 11).

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[1] If the metaphysics concerned are those of Western modernity, *ratio* would depict their specificity more accurately – including the ratiocentric misreading or mistranslation of Greek *logos*. Derrida, following Heidegger, has the tendency to generalise his suggestions applying them to "Western" metaphysics at large.

Logocentrism would involve a certain kind of readability attributed to writing (especially to, and through the model of alphabetic writing). It would consist in reading the written sign as if it referred to an oral one, through which truth emerges in its postulated presence. More specifically, the written word would be read as a "signe signifiant un autre signifiant, signifiant lui-même une vérité éternelle, éternellement pensée et dite dans la proximité du logos présent" (27). *Gramma* would thus be made, on logocentric premises, to echo or to represent *phone*, while the latter would be idealised as the medium *par excellence* in which *logos* presents itself as transcendental meaning. Logocentric metaphysics would, accordingly, attribute to the paradigm of oral linguistic communication a privileged significance:

> Le système de 's'entendre-parler' à travers la substance phonique – qui se donne comme signifiant non-exterieur, non-mondain, donc non-empirique ou non-contingent – a dû dominer pendant toute une époque l' histoire du monde à partir de la différence entre le mondain et le non-mondain, le dehors et le dedans, l' idéalité et la non-idéalité, l' universel et le non-universel le transcendental et l' empirique etc. (Derrida 1968, 17).

Writing would acquire a dominated position, from the site of which, its practice would also inevitably resist the metaphysics of voiced *logos*:

> Telle est la situation de l' écriture dans l' histoire de la métaphysique: thème abaissé, réprimé, déplacé mais exerçant une pression permanente obsédante depuis le lieu où il reste contenu. Il s' agit de biffer une écriture redouteé parce qu' elle rature elle-même la présence du Propre dans la parole. (Derrida, 1986, 381)

Écriture would involve the perplexing dimension of a *textualité*, the intricacies of which would constantly tend to deconstruct the conceptual schemas and dialectics of logocentric discourse. Derrida thus retains the term *text*, but turns it against the very principles of formness with which Wolf identifies it.

Throughout this thesis, I have been critical with respect to the term *text* – and I have understood this reservation as including the Derridean or, more generally, post-modern use of the term. Let me elaborate on this point.

The debate on the Homeric Question, from Wolf to oral theorists, suggests that there is a crucial significance, indeed, to the very separation of *orality* from *writing*, as notions referring to historically and epistemically distinct realms of human-linguistic life. On the grounds of this typically modern separation writing, rather than orality, has actually been privileged as a linguistic form enabling privileged access to historical truth. The figure of written textuality has provided the paradigm for linguistic formness at large. According to this paradigm, relations between *phone* and *gramma* have been understood as historical – and *phone* has been idealised. Logocentrism, in other words, has been based on a graphocentric, rather than phonocentric bias[1]. In the case of Wolf, for instance, textual writing assumes a historically valid formative role with respect to all kinds of linguistic *vestigia* – including pre-textual scribal practices as well as oral precedents. As we have seen, Wolf's restored textuality aims at recovering oral originals no more than it aims at returning to archetypal written documents: it exposes the historical form that both these linguistic regimes would obscure or hide. In the case of oral theory, orality acquires a specificity, the readability of which is neutralised under the acknowledged weight of written literary traditions.

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[1] Stock (1983) analyses the passage to literacy and written culture, situated at the scholasticist closing of the European middle-ages. He reminds us that the emergent modern metaphysics of language was moulded according to the acute textual awareness of *Scripturae* and to the corresponding reading experience. We can surmise that the modern understanding of relations between *logos* and *phone* involved the transposition, to the idea of voice, of a figure of consistency and immediate presence, the prototype of which resided in textualisable scribal constructs. From a more theoretical perspective, Agamben describes as follows the inherent connection between phonocentrism and graphocentrism:

> "La métaphysique, en effet, ne signifie pas simplement le primat de la voix sur le gramma. Si la métaphysique est la pensée qui pose à l'origine la voix, il est également vrai que cette voix est pensée, depuis le début, comme supprimé, comme Voix. Définir l'horizon de la métaphysique simplement par la suprématie de la ÊˆÓ‹ signifie penser la métaphysique sans la négativité qui lui est consubtantielle. La métaphysique est toujours déjà grammatologie et celle-ci est fondamentalogie, au sens où est attribué au gramma (à la Voix) la fonction d'un fondement ontologique négatif." (Agamben 1982, 81-82)

The joint gesture of the idealisation of *phone* and the historicisation of orality can thus be considered as a rhetorical device through which principles of textual formness extend their validity over the domain of linguistic semiosis at large. We could, in fact, easily reverse the Derridean statement about the position of writing. Such would be the condition of orality, in the modern sense of the term: a figure repressed through its monumental idealisation, displaced to the margins of historical formness, and permanently obsessing or even destabilising, from there, the textual paradigm of linguistic formations.

The hypothesis that the relations between scribal and vocal signs involve historically distinct realms of oral and written traditions, needs to be questioned as such. The notion of textuality presupposes and sustains this schema. This is why it should be used with extreme care. It cannot, in any case, provide the conceptual support of an effective critique of modern metaphysics. Its use by Derridean deconstruction has, more often than not, been accompanied by a simplified conception of orality, taking the logocentric historical idealisation of *phone* for granted. Disputing these premises, one should understand human-linguistic form as running through the fundamentally textual distinction between oral and written cultures. *Phone* and *gramma* could be different media of linguistic semiosis, differently enacted under different contingencies – but also elements proper to essentially human-linguistic life in all its manifestations, cutting through historical categorisations of cultural realms of orality and writing.

One of the most significant contributions of the oral theory of Homer lies in how it has exposed a challenge of readability that invalidates, not only the reading of writing in terms of textual formness, but also the correlative idealisation of the figure of orality. None of these two kinds of linguistic signs would permit us to expect that meaning can immediately present itself through language. Relations of signs to human-linguistic essence would always be

enacted in gestures or processes of non-analogical mimesis, refracted indexation and toilsome recollection – necessitating an analogous awareness on the part of all reading. Homer thus exemplifies how the issue of readability can be raised in non-textual terms for both vocal and scribal semiotic constructs – which might enable us to theoretically probe the very relations between scribal and vocal semiosis.

C.3.8. Linguistic Traditions

According to the Benjaminian paradigm of literary formations, semiosis at large, whether scribal or vocal, would be the mimetic enactment of ideational forms, indexing instances of the naming-language of purely human-linguistic communicability, under historically conditioned contingencies of communication. Naming-language has been understood by Benjamin on the grounds of the Biblical allegory of Adamic condition. His insistence on the role of sound as a formational principle suggests that figures such as those of *phone* or *voice* could be retained – provided we understand them in the sense of the pre- or non-semiotic addressive potential proper to the communicability of human essence[1]. Both scribal and vocal signs would involve this potential – an essential element of all manifestations of human-linguistic life.

Literary formations would persist as historic precisely because they would be irreducible to their semiotic carrier, in any of its modalities. A surviving mode of indexing purely human language would be at stake in all semiotic instantiations of a persisting formation, whether vocal or scribal – especially in constructs that stand as extremes particularly revelatory of the corresponding idea. Questions would thus arise, such as: What specific aspects of the idea are liable to be brought to the fore by the different kinds of semiotic constructs that

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[1] See our discussion of Benjamin's *Sprache* in B.3.2.

reproduce it? In what ways and under which conditions does each kind attain its moment of readability?

In the case of Homer, the problem of the connections between scribal and vocal semiosis remains a crucial one, but it should *not* be solved on the grounds of a historicist separation between cultural realms of orality and writing[1]. Scribal

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[1] The separation between orality and writing as distinct historical realms has been under systematic criticism, both in the field of Homeric studies and in the wider one of oral or traditional poetry. According to Foley (1997), in his contribution to the *New Companion to Homer,* there would be:

> "a very gradual (and never complete) shift from one technology to the other, with a continuing persistence of oral traditions and their expressive strategies long after the appearance and adoption of literacy for certain activities […]. In this spirit it is wise to discard absolute categories of oral versus written and to conceive of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as oral-derived traditional texts." (163).

As Russo (1997) remarks, in his contribution to the same volume, the notion of a specifically and exclusively oral Homeric poetry was mitigated since the 1960s, by studies situated in the Parry-Lord tradition, which kept revising the nature and semantic value of the formula – such as those of Hainsworth and Hoekstra, for instance.

Finnegan (1977), addresses the broader field of oral poetic cultures. The study opts for the "denial of a clear-cut differentiation between oral and written literature" since "the oral/written distinction, so far as it exists, is more like a continuum, or perhaps a complex set of continuums" (272). Cerquiglini (1989), addressing mostly medieval literature, insists that the manuscript tradition is a factor in the formation (not in the simple expression or reproduction) of an emergent language – a factor as determinant as oral tradition may be.

For a concise general overview regarding the relations between orality and writing, see Ong (1982). Ong retains the distinction between "primary oral cultures" entirely foreign to writing and literate cultures combining written traditions with oral practices. The former are rather grossly identified as governed by the "psychodynamics" of a "verbomotor life-style" (36; 68) corresponding to a unified and centralized economy favouring interiorization (71). The introduction and expansion of literacy and writing technologies are seen as drastically "restructuring consciousness" (see especially chap. 4). The picture gets more complicated and the analysis becomes more sophisticated when Ong attributes to orality tensions and complexities that are often considered as limited to writing: "looking back from the break made by writing, one can see that the pipeline is broken even earlier by spoken words, which do not themselves

and vocal practices, oral and written semiotic constructs, would constantly entertain, between them, relations over-determined by the mimetic connection of both to a perfected ideational form. Historical changes affecting the reproducibility of literary works could entail the passage from one kind of semiosis to the other, especially from vocal to scribal reproduction – and, eventually, to the field of electronic semiosis. There would be no reason to overrule the possibility that written transcription has functioned, under given conditions, as a means to record and reproduce oral constructs – just as oral performances may reflect developments occurring in scribal copies[1]. Both kinds of semiosis would, in any case, be affected by a more general trend towards what Benjamin has identified as mechanical reproducibility – each in its own degrees, means and ways. The readability of each instance of semiotic reproduction would be determined not only by the difference between the vocal and the

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transmit an extramental world of presence as through a transparent glass" (167).

[1] A few remarks could be added here on the complicated issue of the relations between Homer and writing and, more specifically, Greek alphabetic writing. This discussion has interesting implications with respect to the question of alphabeticity itself, in its relations both to a general theory of language and to the history of "Western civilisation". Aspects of these implications have been brought to the foreground by the otherwise exaggerated havoc provoked by Bernal's *Black Athena* (1987) – see also footnotes of section A.1.3 above.

For an account of the long-standing debate on Homer and writing, see Lorimer (1948). For an interesting recent development see Powell (1991), and the abridged version in Powell's contribution to *New Companion to Homer* (1997). Powell returns to the argument that the Greek alphabet was invented for the sake of recording hexametric poetry – initially formulated in 1952 by H. T. Wade-Gery in *The poet of the Iliad*. The historical aspects of Powell's study, pertaining to the dating of the emergence of Homeric poetry and of the Greek alphabet may be questionable, although tellingly illustrated. What would mostly interest us would be his, technical rather than theoretical, inquiry on how the Greek-alphabetic phonography was specifically adapted to the reproduction and circulation, not of human voice or orality in general, but of epic oral poetry in particular.

C.3. Reading Homer

scribal medium, but also by parallel developments of technological levels and modes of mechanicity, affecting both media[1].

History would be a field in which vocal or scribal constructs, along with the emergent electronic ones, deploy their specificity as different media of reproductive mimesis, each constantly upsetting the self-sufficiency of the others. Through complex reproductive trajectories, formations would persist, making history. This means that the notion of tradition would retain its importance, if appropriately reconfigured, over and above the distinction between different media of semiotic reproduction, or the separation of corresponding cultural eras. Traditions would be formations persisting, through semiotic change and variance, as reproducible and translatable originals. As such, they would be carried over (and, in a sense, would carry, rather than be carried by) historical settings or cultural eras. The *Gewesene* of a formational tradition would have only contingent relations to individual or collective agencies of authorship, copying or editing, as well as to historical or aesthetic conceptual constructs. The kind of life that a tradition bears, would thus significantly differ, depending on the historical conditions through which it emerges and persists – such as those marking old and new ways of territorialisation and globalisation. Nonetheless, the survival of its instance of human-linguistic communicability, would not depend on these conditions – it would rather underlie or even over-determine them.

Throughout modernity, principles of textual formness have moulded, not only our way of addressing antique literature, but also current practices of literary composition and publication. One can envisage the possibility that a different sense of linguistic formation, partly arising from the revisiting of old literary formations and partly from the challenge of newly emergent traditions,

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[1] The Benjaminian distinction between traditional or auratic and mechanical or expositional reproduction could be further elaborated in this respect. This should be in the direction of mitigating its simplistic dialectics, as well as of accounting for the specificity of electronic reproducibility and its ambiguous relations with both scribal and vocal registers.

might presently entail a different understanding of the facts of literary life. This should include our more recent literary past[1] as well as the deployment of current literary practices – under conditions in which the distinction between the oral and the written tends to be practically invalidated by novel media of linguistic semiosis.

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[1] The Shakespearean original, for instance, may have emerged as tradition through processes comparable to those of the Homeric one. Both the Homeric and the Shakespearean originals would persist as reproducible and translatable, but neither the Homeric nor the Shakespearean idea would be reducible to a historically identifiable moment or era of anthropological life.

PART D. PROSOPA

D.1. HUNCH-BACKING

D.1.1. Intended Ends

I now turn to the significance of theological problematics with respect to a critical theory of language and history. As we have seen, Benjamin, in *Programm*, designates the quest for a "logical site of metaphysics" as crucial to a critique of Kantian anthropology[1]. This quest would involve a post-Kantian approach to religious experience and theological thought, along with the reconfiguration of the idea of the human. The quest persists, albeit in more ambiguous terms, up to Benjamin's later writings. Recall the introductory section of *Begriff*, in which the role of theology is likened to the one of a disfigured hidden expert: a hunchbacked dwarf (*buckliger Zwerg*) who can pull the strings of the puppet chess-game of ideological conflicts, so that historical materialism invariably wins. Recall *Passagen* (N8, 1) where theology assumes, with respect to tasks of historic recollection, an analogous position, marked by a double interdiction. We are forbidden, Benjamin says, both to erase its role and to bring it to the fore, without some kind of conceptual accommodation:

[…] aber im Eigedenken machen wir eine Erfahrung, die uns verbietet, die Geschichte grundsätzlich atheologischen zu begreifen, so wenig wir sie in unmittelbar theologischen Begriffen zu schreiben versuchen dürfen. (*Passagen*, 589)

[…] mais nous faisons, dans la remémoration, une expérience qui nous interdit de concevoir l'histoire de manière fondamentalement athéologique, même si nous n'avons pas, pour autant, le droit d'essayer d'écrire avec de concepts immédiatement théologiques. (Benjamin

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[1] See section B.3.4 above.

1993, 489)

Benjamin is telling us that our understanding of history cannot follow modernity and its juxtaposition of Humanist anthropology to phantasms or figures of religious life or theological thought. One can thus not start from a fundamentally non-theological position. The *explicit* use of theological problematics is also disallowed. The reasons for this second interdiction could be various. They could be of an epistemological order: theory would have to retain its conceptual autonomy with respect to theology. They could also be related to the effects of the modern division of scholarly labour: this division has entailed a condition of quasi-illiteracy of secular intellectuals with respect to the expertise of theology in matters of language and history. The second interdiction could, most importantly, be due to the very nature of the first one – that is, to the very way in which theology assumes its continuous presence with respect to theory. This presence should not be the theology that modernity has rebuilt as its own counterpoint.

The *Aufgabe* essay exemplifies how steps could be made towards assigning to theological problematics their due place in theory. Paul de Man is very helpful, I think, in exposing the complexity and delicacy of the issue. He actually opens and closes his lecture with relevant remarks. From the outset, he takes his distance from approaches that criticise Benjamin for having regressed to a pre-modern spiritualism or mysticism. He does the same with approaches that praise Benjamin for having reattributed a revelatory sense of sacredness to poetic language, forgotten or obscured by modernity. De Man is very accurate, in my sense, when he thus reads *Aufgabe* against its misreading as a "religious statement of the fundamental unity of language" (*Conclusions,* 90). A gesture very characteristic of such a misreading is the one that understands the deictic reference of translative gesture to *reine Sprache* as implying figures of messianic teleology and redemption. The passage in *Aufgabe,* which could most easily lend itself to such a misreading is the following:

D.1. *Hunch-backing*

Wenn aber diese derart bis an messianische Ende ihrer Geschichte wachsen, so ist es die Übersetzung, welche am ewigen Fortleben der Werke um am unendlichen Aufleben der Sprachen sich entzündet, immer von neuen die Probe auf jenes heilige Wachstum der Sprachen zu machen: wie weit ihr Verborgenes von der Offenbarung entfernt sei, wie gegenwärtig es im Wissen um diese Entfernung werden mag. (*Aufgabe,* 14)

Mais, lorsqu'elles [les langues] croissent de la sorte jusqu'au terme messianique de leur histoire, c'est à la traduction, qui tire sa flamme de l'éternelle survie des oeuvres et de la renaissance indéfinie des langages, qu'il appartient de mettre toujours derechef à l'épreuve cette sainte croissance des langues, pour savoir à quelle distance de la révélation se tient ce qu'elles dissimulent, combien il peut devenir présent dans le savoir de cette distance. (*OE,* I: 251)

I suggest that the initial clause, introduced by *Wenn*, be read as hypothetical rather than temporal. Benjamin would thus be saying the following. If (or, even better, to the degree that) we think of the whole process of growth of languages from the perspective of a messianic end, translation assumes a very distinct function: it resists or even outdoes the transposition of this perspective within the field of human history. Translation, we are being emphatically reminded, depends on eternal (*ewigen*) or endless (*unendlichen*) survival of languages. Through its occurrence, the *distance* would be probed between the concealment of *reine Sprache* in linguistic phenomena and the prospect of its revelation. The knowledge of this distance (not its extinction or minimisation) would enact the ambiguous role of the element of *reine Sprache* in the very task of translation. The passage further suggests that *reine Sprache* is *not* a sacred language. It is the element of human-linguistic communicability, which constantly operates a separation between the historical realm of linguistic manifestations and the realm of messianic redemption. This entails a double interdiction, analogous to the one we encounter in *Passagen*. It disallows both the

rationalist erasure of the messianic from history, and its theocratic inscription into history.

One can thus agree with de Man when he observes that "History, as Benjamin conceives it, is certainly not messianic, since it consists in the rigorous separation and acting out of the sacred from the poetic" (*Conclusions,* 92). Yet one cannot extend one's agreement to de Man's ensuing remark, according to which "*reine Sprache,* the sacred language, has nothing in common with poetic language […] poetic language has nothing to do with it". There is actually both a misreading and a misinterpretation in this statement. There is misreading in qualifying *reine Sprache* as sacred language. There is misinterpretation in understanding the "rigorous separation of the sacred from the poetic" as entailing the total irrelevance of sacredness (as well as of humanness) with respect to issues linguistic (as well as historical). We have already discussed the relevance of *reine Sprache* as purely human language, along with the issue of the possibility of translation[1]. Let us concentrate on the significance of sacredness – and of the messianic.

One has to account, somehow, for the persistence, in *Aufgabe,* of concepts or arguments indexing theological problematics – and de Man refuses to do so. Recollection and survival are seen by Benjamin as ultimately regarding God's thought or recollection (*Gedanken Gottes*, 10). Later in *Aufgabe,* a solution to the problem of the foreignness in languages (other than the precarious translative one) is seen as depending on the *Wachstum der Religionen*. Religious growth would enable the maturation, in all languages, of the seed of a higher language: "in den Sprachen den verhüllten Samen einer höheren reift" (14). All this could be related to the closing remarks on the perfect translatability of sacred texts, in their paradigmatic resistance to historical conditioning[2].

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[1] See sections B.4.6. and B.4.7. above.

[2] See sections B.4.6. and B.4.9 above.

D.1. *Hunch-backing*

For Benjamin, human language cannot be confined to anthropological schemas of historical or cultural phenomenology; neither is it a mechanism of semiotic figures, of which ideas such as those of the human and the sacred would be the rhetorical by-products. Language inherently involves both the idea of human history and the question of its limits. As such, it fills-up the realm of otherwise empty temporal forms with different configurations of the constantly pending issue of the relations between the human and the non-human, the historic and the sacred. In this sense, there is, indeed, as de Man points out in conclusion, little room for the periodological schemas that breed the Humanist understanding of *modernity*. Yet de Man is wrong when he suggests that the currently viable alternative to theocracy can only be the understanding of language as a rhetorical structure entailing political history as its result and displacing all reference to the relations between the sacred and the human:

> For we now see that the nonmessianic, nonsacred, that is the political aspect of history is the result of the poetical structure of language, so that the political and poetical here are substituted in opposition to the notion of the sacred. To the extent that such a poetics, such a history, is nonmessianic, not a theocracy but a rhetoric, it has no room for certain historical notions such as the notion of modernity, which is always dialectical, that is to say, an essentially theological notion. (*Conclusions*, 93)

Language is central to how Benjaminian metaphysics, Demanian deconstruction and Gadamerian hermeneutics understand the specificity of a post-modern theoretical awareness. Its centrality has different implications in each case. Gadamer, in his approach to language, retains the concealed, yet persistent historicist overtones of Heideggerian ontology. De Man rejects ontological historicism, but can only do so by erasing human history and politics under the poetics of semiotic phenomenicity. Benjamin, in his concern for linguistic historicity, insists not only on the separation but also on the mutual pertinence between the human and the sacred – as fundamental to both politics and poetics.

It is solely on the grounds of a presumed modernity that religion and theology have assumed the status of a theocratic over-determination of human

history – in juxtaposition to its Humanist emancipation. Language, as understood by Benjaminian metaphysics, questions the notion of modernity (a gesture that de Man endorses) and exposes, accordingly, the fallacy of the very dialectics of Humanism and theocracy (an implication that de Man fails to address). The task would be to rethink the relations between the human and the sacred, beyond the modern premises of this polarity. There has been and still is a non-anthropological way to think the human, just as there has been and still is a non-theocratic way to think the sacred. Language would be the field of a politically mattering mutual separation *and* juncture of both these elements with respect to history.

Even the notion of spirit (*Geist*) can be expected to persist under the Benjaminian perspective. It does so, joined to the idea of nihilistic politics, in Benjamin's early "Theologisch-politisches Fragment", the opening paragraph of which de Man cites in support of his conclusions. Let us also ponder on this fragment, with respect to which de Man no longer simply overlooks or misreads but actually hides. This short text bears explicitly on how the messianic may acquire some kind of pertinence with respect to the worldly, while remaining strictly separate from it. Here is the passage, as de Man translates it:

Erst der Messias selbst vollendet alles historische Geschehen, und zwar in dem Sinne, daß er dessen <u>Beziehung</u> auf das Messianische selbst erst erlöst, vollendet, schafft. Darum kann <u>nichts Historisches von sich aus sich auf</u> Messianisches beziehen wollen. Darum ist das Reich Gottes nicht das Telos der historischen Dynamis; <u>es kann nicht zum Ziel gesetzt werden</u>. Historisch gesehen ist es nicht Ziel, sondern Ende. Darum kann <u>die Ordnung des Profanen nicht am Gedanken</u>

Only the messiah himself puts an end to history, in the sense that it frees, completely fulfils the <u>relationship</u> of history to the messianic. Therefore, <u>nothing that is truly historical can want to relate by its own volition</u> to the messianic. Therefore the kingdom of God is not the telos of the dynamics of history, <u>it cannot be posited as its aim</u>; seen historically it is not its aim but its end, its termination; therefore <u>the order of the profane cannot be constructed in terms of the idea of the</u>

| des Gottesreiches aufgebaut werden, darum die Theokratie keinen politischen sondern allein ein religiösen Sinn. Die politische Bedeutung der Theokratie mit aller Intensität geleugnet zu haben ist das größte Verdienst von Blochs 'Geist der Utopia'. (Benjamin 1989d, 203) | sacred. Therefore theocracy does not have a political but only a religious meaning. To have denied the political significance of theocracy, *to have denied the political significance of the religious, messianic view,* to have denied this with all desirable intensity is the great merit of Bloch's book *The Spirit of Utopia.* (*Conclusions,* 93) |

I underlined what de Man well translates but refuses to read. I italicised a paraphrase that de Man adds to the original, to support his interpretation. The issue, in this passage, is the denial of the political significance not of religious problematics in general, but of their theocratic configuration. Theocracy would be an understanding of history and politics based on the prospect of reconstructing human reality in accordance with figures of messianic transcendence. Benjamin seeks a different way of understanding how the mutual pertinence (*Beziehung*) between the sacred and the profane would be possible or opportune.

In his comments on the passage, de Man insists on how *Telos* (very much like the English *end*) connotes both purpose and termination. The German original is unambiguous in this respect. Positing messianic redemption as a purpose (*Ziel*) in history, Benjamin says, is a misprision, since this actually implies positing the termination (*Ende*) of history. The messianic cannot be pertinent as a purposefully intended objective of human politics. De Man's excursus is, in fact, revelatory. It reminds us of the ambiguity of Benjamin's notion of *Intention* in the *Aufgabe* essay – and of de Man's discarding of the notion. One could, indeed, try to understand the messianic as an object of linguistic *Intention*. Recall that *Aufgabe* inquires into how *reine Sprache* is indexed by linguistic manifestations without ever being reached or even purposefully intended as such. In an analogous way, the messianic could be indexed by historical phenomenicity, to the precise degree that this indexing hinders the

building (*aufbauen*) of human history according to volitional prospects of messianic endings.

De Man hides the immediate sequel to the quoted paragraph. The fragment continues, in fact, by affirming that the mutual pertinence of the profane and the messianic is one of the most fundamental points on which philosophy of history has still a lot to teach us. "Die Beziehung dieser Ordnung auf das Messiansche ist eines des wesentlichen Lehrstücke der Geschichtsphilosophie" (Benjamin 1989d, 204). Benjamin goes on to probe the issue. He does so, as the title of the essay suggests, in terms fragmentary or even cryptic – which do not enable anything more than an initial contemplation of what may be at stake. The two orders, profane and messianic, are pictured as two arrows pointing in different directions and charged with their respective potential – *Dynamis.* The two directions would tend to diverge, rather than to converge. They would still entertain between them relations of mutual influence or echoing, analogous to those between two forces following lines that never meet, tracing opposite trajectories. The profane would thus remain separate from the messianic, but would also be a category most pertinent with respect to the issue of its closeness: "Das Profane also ist zwar keine Kategorie des [messianisches] Reichs aber eine Kategorie, und zwar der zutreffendsten eine, seines leisesten Nahens" (*ibid.*).

Benjamin further suggests that there might be a way in which the profane sustains or carries the *Dynamis* of the messianic – the latter being co-extensive with accomplished happiness for humans. Human history would involve a double potential of *restitutio* (reinstating, recalling): spiritual and worldly. Spiritual *restitutio* would involve the *integritas* of immortality. Worldly *restitutio* would (cor)respond (*entspricht*) to it, by involving, instead, the aeonic ruining (*Untergang*) of the very pastness of the past (*Vergängnis*):

Der geistlichen restitutio in integrum, welche in die Unsterblichkeit einführt,	Au mouvement spirituel de la *restitutio in integrum* qui conduit à l'immortalité,

entspricht eine weltliche, die in die Ewigkeit eines <u>Untergang</u> führt und der Rhythmus dieses ewig vergehenden, in seiner Totalität vergehenden, in seiner räumlichen, aber auch zeitlichen Totalität vergehenden Weltlichen, der Rhythmus der messianischen Natur, ist Glück. Denn messianisch ist die Natur aus ihrer ewigen und totalen <u>Vergängnis</u>. (Benjamin 1989d, 204)

correspond une *restitutio* séculière qui conduit à l'éternité d'un <u>anéantissement</u>, et le rythme de cette réalité séculière éternellement évanescente, évanescente dans sa totalité spatiale, mais aussi temporelle, le rythme de cette nature messianique est le bonheur. Car messianique est la nature de part son éternelle et totale <u>évanescence</u>. (*OE,* I, 264-265)

It is important, I think, to understand *Untergang* as ruining, rather than as *anéantissement*; and *Vergängnis* as presently perfected rather than as simple past. The Wolfian quest of the *prisca et genuina forma* of the Homeric idea could be seen as the misplacement of a task of spiritual *restitutio in integrum* onto an *Untergang* that can only be recollected through a *weltliche restitutio.* The latter can only take place as an event of historic, that is, perfected temporality: not exactly eternal nor simply transient, but eternally passing away; not exactly total, but passing away in its spatial and temporal totality. This would be the temporal and spatial coordinates of a historically aeonic *Gewesene.*

Recollecting the historic *Untergehen*: if translation is the task with respect to poetic originals, nihilism is the task at the level of world politics – "die Aufgabe der Weltpolitik, deren Methode Nihilismus zu heißen hat" (Benjamin 1989d, 204.)

This would be Benjamin's history – occurring, as political and translative, at the point at which phenomena echo most intensively the messianic realm, while remaining most separated from it. Messianic echoing would be what

safeguards the persistence of human *Untergang*[1] – preserving, instead of terminating, the very possibility of historic events.

Anthropic formations would be neither spirit nor matter; they would be the co-substantiation of these two essentially different natures. Literary formations would, accordingly, be neither purely human-linguistic naming nor phenomenic semiosis; they would be the mode in which the latter, as substantial language-whole, indexes the former. I turn to the theological notion of *hypostasis* and its relations to *prosopon.*

D.1.2. Anthropic *Prosopon*

I have been using the term *formation* as a translation of Benjamin's *Gebilde*. The term, applied to literary language, designates the historic constancy of an ideational mode of indexing (*Art des Meinens*) purely human-linguistic communicability, instantiated through varying semiotic constructs. Benjamin's problematics of *Idee,* concern the historic status of a formation as *Ursprung*. A formational idea would be an original *Gewesene* addressed by *Jetzseit.* I would now like to further investigate and differently configure the theoretical and methodological implications of the notion of formation. One way of doing so, would be to return to the *topoi* of Aristotelian problematics about categories and follow certain aspects of their fortune in the field of theology.

I have understood *formation* as equivalent to the Aristotelian notion of primary essence (*prote ousia*). It would correspond to the initial step in the

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[1] One should read, in connection to this, the essay of Hölderlin at the beginning of which, the notion of *Untergehen* occurs in connection to the one of *fatherland*: "Die untergehende Vaterland [...]". Then one could pass on to Hölderlin's "Andenken" and try to read what remains, "*was bleibet*", under a Benjaminian rather than a Heideggerian perspective. Then return to the Odyssean *nostos* and its Ithaka.

process of categorisation, which enables things to acquire the status of a phenomenic *hypokeimenon*. Formations would thus be subject to the attribution of further categories: those defining what they essentially are, on the level of a second essence (*deutera ousia*), and those designating their contingent properties (*kata to symvevikos*)[1].

Homer, as an idea, would designate the primary essence of a formation: identify it as a specific mode of indexing its purely human-linguistic second essence and open it to the attribution of categories of historical or aesthetic contingency.

We are already beyond Aristotle and into the field of initially neo-platonic and eventually Christian theological conceptualisation, when we consider that *formation* comes very close to what has been called *hypostasis* in Greek and is accurately translated into Latin as *substantia* – and from there as *substance*. I have suggested that *substance* be retained as equivalent to *prote ousia*; *essence,* in a strict sense of the term, could be considered as synonymous with *deutera ousia* .

One of the aspects of Christian theological tradition which presents a particular interest for my notion of *formation* is the following. A *hypostasis* may be one and indivisible, while multiple second essences (also referred to as `fuvseiß` or *natures*) may be involved in the corresponding substantiation, clearly distinct and even incongruous with respect to each other. Such could be the case, for instance, of Christ as one of the three *hypostaseis* of the Trinity of the New Testament[2]: the *hypostasis* of the Son would be unitary, although involving the co-substantiation of a divine and a human nature. Recall the question of the double nature of human language as semiotic communication and pure

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[1] See my initial exposition of these problematics in section B.1.4.

[2] I am referring to the solution that the "dogma of Chalcedona" (A.D. 451) advanced with respects to the relevant theological debates.

communicability[1]. A further element of theological problematics that could relate to Benjaminian ones is, indeed, the way in which the notion of *hypostasis* relates to the question of communicability. This is strongly connoted in a further term used by Christian theology (and particularly influential within its Eastern and, later, Orthodox tradition) to identify the status of all three Godly *hypostaseis*. I am referring to the notion of `provswpon` (*prosopon*), which has been considered as the translative equivalent of (but remains, in my sense, quite distinct from) the Latin *persona* and the corresponding terms of modern European languages[2].

I am interested in probing this notion in connection to problematics concerning literary formations – and, more specifically, their unitary persistence as well as their readability and translatability. In what respect could it be useful or insightful for us to understand the status of a literary formation as *prosopic*? This implies the possible transposition of a theological concept onto our field of literary theory. I will venture to operate the transposition, not by drawing directly on theological debates, but by exploring how the notion of *prosopon* has already been transposed from the question of divine to the one of human *hypostasis.* My paradigm for this initial transposition is the theologian V. Lossky

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[1] See mainly section B.3.4. of the present thesis.

[2] The work of Leontios Byzantios (1966), situated in the 5th century A.D., is widely acknowledged as fundamental with respect to the notion of *prosopon* in its relation to debates and problematics over the double nature and unitary *hypostasis* of Christ.

I suggest that we keep the Greek term *prosopon* instead of using its Latin or modern European equivalents. The term indicates my distances with respect to the extremely wide field of modern uses and misuses of the notions of *persona* or *personne* in the philosophy of law, politics and ethics (including the trend known as *personalisme*) as well as, more recently, in literary, especially narratological theory.

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and, more precisely, his essay on the "Notion théologique de la personne humaine" (1967)[1].

Lossky's is actually a double task. He explores, on the one hand, how theological contemplation can extend its domain of applicability. In view of such an extension, notions such as the ones of *hypostasis* and *prosopon* might have to undergo conceptual modifications. On the other hand, he considers the implications of his gesture, with respect to the very notion of the human as an object of study. His transpositional gesture does not simply bridge theological and anthropological problematics; it also disputes the adequacy, if not the validity, of conventional anthropological conceptualisations of the human.

Lossky starts by presenting the notion of a *prosopic hypostasis*, as it emerged through early ecclessiastic debates on the unitary *hypostasis* and the double nature of Christ. The notion of *prosopon* should be a device enabling us to conceive and understand how a *hypostasis* can be *in* two natures without either becoming divisible itself or merging the two into a single whole. Transposed to the case of humans, the notion of *prosopon* should, accordingly, allow us to envisage a unitary singularity proper to every human being, given the double nature, spiritual and bodily, which its *hypostasis* substantiates. In other words, the human *prosopon* should designate characteristics different from those that make up either of the two components of human nature. Lossky is thus driven to the formulation of the crucial question of his essay, concerning the specificity of the notion of *prosopon* and, more precisely, its distinction from the anthropological notion of the human *individual*:

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[1] For relatively recent surveys of the uses of the notion of *prosopon* see Meyerson (1973) and Carrithers et al. (1985). My way to Lossky has largely been traced through the reading of Gianaras (1982) and, especially, Ramphos (2000). The relations between the approach I present here, and Levina's often emphatically phenomenological notion and theory of *visage* (see, for instance, Levinas 1974), deserve further investigation.

D.1. *Hunch-backing*

[…] dans quel sens devra se faire la distinction entre la personne or l'hypostase humaine et l'homme en tant qu'individu ou nature particulière. Qu'est-ce que doit signifier la personne par rapport à l'individu humain? (Lossky 1967, 117)

Lossky investigates the very specificity of the substantiation of humans as *prosopic* formations, connected to but also distinct from forms proper to spiritual immutability, as well as to forms of phenomenic transience. He thus engages in a critique of previous attempts to identify or define the notion of human *prosopon* on the grounds of concepts referring to the spiritual or bodily nature of humans. He takes critical distances, to begin with, from the highly influential tradition of Boece's definition of the human *prosopon* as individually substantiated rationality – or, more specifically, *substantia individua rationalis naturae* (Lossky 1967, 116). He continues by also discarding, on equivalent grounds, definitions of the human *prosopon* based on the neo-platonic concentration on `nou``ß` (*nous*) or on the modern psychological notion of `yuchv` (*psyche*).

An initial step which, Lossky suggests, could help us to identify the specificity of the status of a human *prosopon,* would be to consider the kind of question to which one answers when designating a *prosopon* (a procedure echoing Aristotle's argumentation in *Categories*). This would not be the question *quid?* to which one answers by further qualifying the nature of a substance. It would rather be the question *quis?*: "or, à la question *quis* on répond par un nom propre, qui seul peut désigner la personne" (Lossky 1967, 116). The proper name would thus be the sole attribute of which humans would be subjects as *prosopa*[1]. In other words, at stake, in the notion of *prosopon* would be the issue of the very communicability of human essence.

In accordance to the above, Lossky suggests the following way of understanding the specificity of a *prosopic* human *hypostasis* :

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[1] Recall, from section B.3.2. that, according to Benjamin's *Sprache*, the proper name would be the most significant survival of purely human naming-language in linguistic semiotic practices.

Dans ces conditions il nous sera impossible de former un concept de la personne humaine, et il faudra se contenter de dire; la personne signifie l'irréductibilité de l'homme à sa nature. "Irréductibilité" et non "quelque chose d'irréductible" ou "quelque chose qui rend l'homme irréductible à sa nature", justement parce qu'il ne peut s'agir ici de "quelque chose" de distinct, d'une "autre nature" mais de quelqu'un qui se distingue de sa propre nature, de quelqu'un qui dépasse sa nature, tout en la contenant, qui la fait exister comme nature humaine par ce dépassement et, cependant, n'existe pas en lui-même, en dehors de la nature qu'il "enhypostasie" et qu'il dépasse sans cesse. (Lossky 1967, 118)[1]

The term *prosopon* would thus be closer to a figure than to a concept. It configures the necessarily asymptotic relation between, on the one hand, the emergence of humans as *hypokeimena* and, on the other, elements making up the spiritual and bodily essence of human beings. It indicates the irreducibility of substantiated humanness not only to contingent attributes but also to categories of second essence. It can only be defined as this very irreducibility – something quite close to a Derridean supplement, without which humans would be aggregates of spiritual and material forms.

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[1] The cited passage closes with a reference to Heidegger that we can only very briefly comment on here:

"J'aurais dit "qu'il extasie", si je ne craignais qu'on me fasse a reproche d'introduire une expression qui rappelle trop "le caractère extatique du Dasein" chez Heidegger après avoir critiqué d'autres qui se sont permis de faire des rapprochements pareils." (Lossky 1967, 118)

The divergence between Lossky and Heidegger resides, perhaps, in a point that can also be crucial for the distinction between Benjaminian and Heideggerian thought, in spite of terminological likeness. According to Lossky (1967), the problematics of the irreducibility of *prosopic hypostasis* are rather obscured by the conceptual schemas of Heideggerian ontology, including the basic distinction between Beingness and being, or essence and existence:

"Si le nouveau domaine de l'inconceptualisable, parce qu'irréductible à l'essence, s'ouvre à un Maxime le Confesseur dans la notion de l'hypostase créée, ce n'est pas dans la distinction Thomiste de l'essence et de l'existence – distinction qui pénètre jusqu'au fond existentiel des êtres *individuels* – que l'on trouvera la solution ontologique du mystère de la personne humaine. […] Le niveau sur lequel se pose le problème de la personne humaine dépasse donc celui de l'ontologie, telle qu'on l'entend habituellement." (120-121)

If we insist on further specification, we can have recourse, again, to the notion of communicability. Recall that, according to Benjamin's *Sprache*, the linguistic essences of things are identical to their spiritual essences to the degree that the latter are communicable; as such, languages as wholes communicate nothing but the very communicability of the corresponding spiritual essence[1]. The proposition that human *prosopon* is the irreducibility of the human to its own nature, would mean, accordingly, that no human is ever only *itself*, always being itself *as communicable* – a self involving linguistic propensity and eventually bearing a proper name. The following further suggestions could be advanced with respect to the human *prosopic hypostasis.*

A *prosopon* would emerge and persist as capacity to address and be addressed. This addressing can only be of other *prosopa* – or of otherness as *prosopic.* It would be fundamentally and primarily the *prosopon* and only the *prosopon* of one, which is engaged when one emerges as an addressive challenge or takes up the addressive challenge of another.

A *prosopon* would thus trigger connections or relations that we could, perhaps, further configure as conversational, provided that the term be understood as closer to its Greek equivalent of `sun-omiliva` (*sunomilia*: a gathering in intercourse) than to its modern sense of discursive exchange. It would be a source of value attributable to linguistic toils, for which criteria of epistemological, aesthetic, economic or, more generally, socio-psychological bearing cannot account.

We could also configure the *prosopon* as a kind of intelligence, to the degree that one reads in this term an *inter-esse* or an *inter-legere,* rather than its phenomenological significance, whether anthropological or technological. A *prosopon* would thus set the conditions of a political *neg-otium*, exposing how different modes of categorial attribution are ceaselessly and inescapably at stake.

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[1] See especially sections B.3.2. and B.3.3. of the present thesis.

A *prosopon* would have no unity or identity, except in terms that constantly upset the presumed self-sufficiency of both spiritual constancy and material mutability. It would only persist as the precarious formation of mimetic and recollective toils unaccountable in terms of subjective intentions or desires, projections or memories. It would be humanity: linguistic-historic.

D.1.3. Prosopopoetic Language

By configuring a literary formation as a *prosopic hypostasis* we would dispute anthropological figures and premises: *prosopon* displaces, to begin with, the anthropological understanding of the human.

The *prosopon* of a given literary formation as primary essence or substantial *hypostasis* would be its ideational form: the *Art* or mode in which, variable semiotic constructs index, *qua* language-wholes, purely human-linguistic communicability. The *prosopon* of a linguistic formation would be, in other terms, a mode of co-substantiating the two essentially distinct natures involved in any human-linguistic manifestation – without this compromising either the unity of the formation or the distinctness of its essences. I am referring to the spiritual nature of a pure naming-language, telling humanness as communicable, and the idiosyncratically material nature of semiosis as a medium of communication. The configuration of linguistic formations as *prosopa* would also indicate the irreducibility of linguistic life to either of its two natures. There would be something in linguistic formations as substantiated *hypokeimena*, which transcends, and perhaps even over-determines, how categories of second essence (such as spirit and matter, human-linguistic purity and semiosis) as well as categories of contingency (such as those designated by historical or aesthetic concepts) are attributable to them.

The historic life of the *prosopic* ideational form proper to a formational language-whole would be marked by the features we have already discussed as

proper to a human *prosopon.* It would consist in a way of addressing (and of being addressable by) other language-wholes, equally *prosopic* in status. The reading of a literary formation, in other words, would not involve reception by cultural subjects of history, any more that its occurrence involves analogous subjects of production. Addressed as a matter of conversational intelligence would be the indexation of the very issue of purely human-linguistic communicability – its interest as such, prior to any current communicational concerns. The corresponding conversational tasks would involve, as we have seen, the reproduction of semiotic constructs as well as the translative intercourse with the *Art* in which *reine Sprache* has been indexed. At stake, in such tasks, would be the survival of the *prosopic* addressing, which is substantiated in the formation. The stakes would be historic and, as such, political.

According to the above, the *Art* proper to the language-whole of a literary formation could be further qualified by the (largely catachrestic but perhaps useful) transposition of a term designating a basic figure in classical rhetoric; namely, *prosopopoeia*. The ideational form of a persisting formation would be describable and analysable as prosopopoetic figuration.

Language-wholes would form themselves as *prosopa*, claiming their recollection by other, equally linguistic *prosopa*. *Prosopopoeia* would thus be the occurrence of an addressive propensity entailing historic connectability between languages as wholes. Its status would be prior to the semantic value of specific semiotic manifestations, such as individual words or elaborate statements. It would also be prior to rhetorical discrepancies between semiosis and semansis. What de Man understands as tensions constituting the very nature of semiotic constructs, would depend on how this nature is co-substantiated with the one of pure communicability, in the *prosopon* of the corresponding language-whole.

For the purposes of this argument, one should *not* understand *prosopopoeia* as an anthropomorphic metaphor, that is, as a rhetorical trope attributing anthropological characteristics to non-human entities. One could consider, instead, that the anthropological configuration of human beings presupposes

figural transpositions deriving from and depending on the *prosopic* status of human language-wholes.

The above may lead to a further insight into translation and translative connections as historic.

As we have seen, translation involves modes of indexation that characterise the language-wholes of the original and the translatum. In other terms, translative would be events through which one linguistic *prosopon* emerges as an addressive engagement in conversational intercourse with another. The translative connection to the *prosopon* of the original as a *Gewesene* would entail the emergence, in *Jetztseit*, of human-linguistic otherness as *prosopic*. Through translation, human languages would thus be enacted as *prosopic* formations – rather than as systems subject to norms of idiomatic or cultural formness.

We can thus better understand the Benjaminian insistence on the disturbing effects that the translative gesture has on the language of the translatum. Recall how the task of a *Wörtlich* translation involves, for the translatum, a drastic disturbance or even disfiguration of its structures or norms of semiosis and semansis[1]. Through the interplay between syntax and morphology, translation would entail a sense of semiotic perturbation – or displacement. This disturbance would be what brings to the fore the issue of indexation of *reine Sprache*. Brought to the fore would be, in other terms, the irreducibility of human language, as historic formation, to either of the two components of linguistic life – historically conditioned semiotic structures and purely human-linguistic communicability. The perturbation of semiotic normality would be the mark through which the language of the translatum exposes the prosopopoetic toils of connection between different instances of human-linguistic life – not as idioms foreign to each other but as *prosopa* distinct with respect to each other.

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[1] See section B.4.5. above.

D.1. *Hunch-backing*

In translation, a given challenge of *prosopic* addressing is transposed: this transposition is closer to transfiguration than to transference or to transmission. The translative gesture as such remains non-translatable[1]. It does not survive in the on-going life of the translatum as a new original. Consequently, human-linguistic history is not conceivable as built up through a chain of translative connections. In other words, *prosopic* connectability between human language-wholes entails unique historic events, involving the distinctness of the *prosopa* immediately concerned, none of which merges into or is represented by the other. There would be no transmissible cultural or anthropological entity sustaining a process of either mechanical stability or organic development.

If literature is language most prone to translative connections (as well as most resistant to simple trans-idiomatic transfer of meaning or syntax) then literature is language most challengingly exposing its *prosopic* potential.

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[1] See sections B.4.6 and B.4.9. above.

D.1. *Hunch-backing*

D.2. HEROIC EPOS

One of the reasons for which works like the Homeric poems retain a crucial significance is that their conditions of survival expose with particular intensity the challenge of prosopopoetic readability proper to all literary formations. Their form emerges as a per-formative event of addressive propensity, irreducible to either semiotic constructs or conceptual abstractions. This emergence is a claim of recollection addressed by a human-linguistic *Gewesene* that retains its drastic, that is, historic distances with respect to all *Jetzseit*. Reading turns into an endeavour to recognise the distinctness of a *prosopon* – to effectively address the idea proper to its characteristic mode of indexing pure linguistic humanity.

No reading of Homer would be free from the translative challenge that the Homeric original presents. The challenge would be there, whether one systematically transposes Homeric Greek into a given living idiom or does so sporadically, in an exegetical or critical commentary of the Homeric idea[1]. The reading of Homer would, in either case, be co-extensive with the emergence and eventual persistence of a new linguistic *prosopon,* recollecting itself through its connection to the Homeric one. Living language-wholes would be made, by this very reading, to tackle the problem of their own historic presentness, by figuratively filling-in the schemas of distances, of death or foreignness[2], through

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[1] From this point of view, one has to be critical towards recent tendencies in classical studies, often labelled "theoretical" – with further qualifications ranging from "marxist" or "feminist" to "deconstructive" [for a brief overview see Peradotto (1997)]. They invariably bracket, if not the issue of the original altogether, at least the one of its translative challenge. They read Homer as if it were a modern or post-modern text, written in a well-known foreign language. In this sense, they continue and intensify a tendency that, as we have seen, inheres in traditional philology.

[2] Recall our discussion of these notion in section C.2.2 above.

which they connect to their Homeric precedent. Reading Homer means enacting one's own linguistic practices as prosopopoetic emergences – which may entail not only perturbations of semiotic norms but also changes in the very status of languages as communicational media.

In this sense, the reading of literatures Homeric detaches itself from the setting of a historicist *Altertumswissenschaft* while connecting to issues raised by what has been called *emergent literature*[1]. Any effective reading of Homer, today, should be expected to have, on the language of the reader, effects comparable to the tensions that have been marking English, for instance, as it passes from the status of a national or international vernacular to the status of a global linguistic medium[2].

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[1] The notion of *emergent literature* connotes the problem of the readability of literary formations that are written in modern European languages in ways that upset the modern function and status of these languages as national ones. For a presentation of the corresponding theoretical and political implications see Godzich (1994).

[2] For the specificity of the case of English as it evolves in the realm of post-vernacular linguistic life see Godzich (1999a). The article is particularly interesting in how it connects the evolving status of languages as media of communication to the more general issue of the function of language with respect to human thought and practices:

> "Parler ici et aujourd'hui d'un anglais mondial c'est dire que le millénaire de la vernacularisation tire à sa fin, c'est à dire que s'instaure de manière perceptible un autre dispositif, un nouvel agencement de rapports entre la symbolisation et la communication, et que ce nouveau dispositif entraîne inévitablement des transformations d'ordre politique, de nouvelles manières de concevoir la relation au territoire, et la création de nouvelles collectivités.'' (39)

At stake in these transformations would ultimately be something close to what I understand as historic recollection: "le mode d'une mémoire à venir et non celui d'une mémoire à préserver" (44).

Exemplary, both with respect to the translation of Homer in general and with respect to the workings of English is, in my sense, the case of Ezra Pound's "Canto I". The Canto translates, in a Benjaminian sense of the term, an extreme instance of the Homeric formation, into an English emphatically turned towards its own poetic tradition, while reaching well beyond its modern-national configuration. It thus effectively assumes the consequences of a translative connection to the Homeric *prosopon*. The recent case of Derek Walcott and his *Omeros* is also particularly

If we want to tentatively designate the specificity of the readability challenge addressed to contemporary languages by the Homeric *prosopon*, we could borrow a concept quite current in historical and aesthetic approaches to Homer – namely, *epic hero*. We would do so in order to check the potentiality of turning such a concept into an idea.

Heroic would be the mode in which the Homeric formation indexes the communicability of human essence. In doing so, it would have very little, if anything, to do with anthropological notions of traditional heroism. It would be primarily attributable to the *prosopon* of Homer as a language-whole. The stories of Homeric human figures as heroes would have to be understood as rhetorical constructs conditioned by the prosopopoetic figuration proper to the language they are told in. *Epic*, it should be recalled, comes from the Greek and, indeed, Homeric `e[poß` – word or story or language. As for *hero*, it comes from the equally Greek and Homeric `h{rwß` – applying not only to excelling warriors but also to Pheakian humanity, if not to mortals at large. *Heroic epos* would thus be equivalent to *human language*.

The heroic characteristic of Homeric language could reside in how this language raises the issue of *prosopon* at the very edge of the passage from the chaotic battlefield or ocean of phenomenic non-distinctness, to the precarious affirmation of human-linguistic form. There would be struggle: for the very emergence of the human as a primary substance, confronting the prospect of fatally accidental occurrences – touched or marked, perhaps, but still unsheltered

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instructive. Its English tries its own limits as the literary idiom of a globalised language, as it ventures to sustain a connection to its own Homer – persistently recollective, even if only distantly translative in the strict sense of the term.

Medieval and modern Greek is a linguistic field particularly interesting from the point of view of the potential effects of translative connections to one's Homeric *Gewesene.* Through its life, distances of oldness or death become increasingly significant while distances of foreignness are constantly mitigated. One could compare, in this respect, Byzantine interlinear translations with modern ones – such as the one of Kazantzakis-Kakridis or the more recent one of Maronitis.

by categories. The emergence would be, in other words, out of nowhere and into no-place. This is how Homeric language has, indeed, persisted with respect to all the linguistic environments that have preserved and translated it – anticipating but also resisting the incessant work of configuration of its essence in conceptual terms, aesthetic or historical. It has been, in a sense, cutting time and space coordinates, challenging the validity and integrity of temporal and spatial figures of formness. It has also, in a sense, been itself cut by such co-ordinates: the wholeness of its formation has been invariably marked by accidental occurrences or interruptions – very much like the ones Peabody has described with respect to the ever-unstable topmost level of songs sung. Uncertainty has reigned supreme over what all this may be about or where it might be heading. What persists, *ce qu'il y a*, would be the idea of a perfected *Gewesene*, addressable as the only certainty possible. This certainty of having been there, confronting the uncertainty of everything, save one's obstinate addressive propensity, would constitute the heroic idiosyncrasy of the *prosopon* proper to the Homeric formation as a language-whole, as well as to the human figures it forms as heroes[1].

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[1] The heroism of Homeric language and figures should not be understood as expressing temporal moments of historical beginnings. It pertains to instances of humanity always already historically perfected. Things like Homer – or Achilles and Odysseus, for that matter – are, perhaps, not very far from what the following tells us about its own things – emergences out of our post-modern *Jetztseit*:

> "Choses et non déchets, car il n'y a déchets que dans la perspective d'un sujet. Et quelque part, parmi ces choses, il y a cette entité curieuse qui n'est pas encore ou déjà plus le sujet, qui n'assume pas encore ou déjà plus le poids du monde, mais qui en reçoit les pulsations, les intensités, et qui tente, elle aussi, de persister. Ni être ni étant, hors de l'ontologie comme de l'ontique, elle se trouve dans un monde dont elle fait partie, non pas en tant qu'ange déchu ou surhomme en devenir, mais en tant que persistance qui cherche à préserver ses énergies et d'en capter d'autres. Car son emplacement dans l'indécidable ne l'immobilise pas, bien au contraire. Il la contraint en mouvement, un mouvement dans un espace non cartographié et même pas orienté, un mouvement pour lequel la vitesse et la célérité sont bien plus importantes que la direction." (Godzich 1999b, 41)

We would be as far from figures of conventionally heroic valour or nostalgia, as we are from a language telling the *cultus vitae* of archaic nations. The *aristeia* of the Iliadic *prosopon* would be heroic because it consists in the capacity of warriors to address each other and their Gods in speech, through battle turmoil[1]. The *polytropon* of the Odyssean *prosopon* would be heroic because it consists in the capacity to address, out of oceanic waves, figures of both extreme foreignness and extreme familiarity[2].

Emergences, seducing foes or hosts, planning the fall of cities or the murder of suitors, only to announce the hazard of their own imminent re-submersion in a realm of foretold unrest[3].

Exhausted rather than accomplished, this thesis cannot conclude otherwise than by stating the obvious. We need to keep on doing what others did

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[1] In the *Iliad,* Aeneias addresses Achilles before their duel:

there are revilements to tell between us both
a great lot, not even a hundred-oar ship would carry the burden.
turnable is the tongue of humans, and therein lots of tellings
of all sorts, and of words lots of ground hither and thither.
and whatever word you have said, such will you overhear.

(*Iliad,* XX, 246-250, my translation)

[2] In the *Odyssey,* Alkinoos (in-between oceanic foreignness and Ithakian familiarlity) addresses Odysseus at the banquet:

over you is form of words, within you organs of excellence.
like a bard have you outworded the tale
of all Argives and of your own wretched suffering

(*Odyssey,* XI, 367-369, my translation)

[3] One can restart with the clusters of Homeric words which configure the human as `a[nqrwpoß. Qumo;ß,` in its junction to `yuch;,` could mean *mind* and *soul* – why not? How are they separable in the figure of a dying human? `Novstoß,` in its junction to `patrivß gai`a,` could mean *return to fatherland* – why not? How does this story make the name of a returning human? `[Epea,` in its junction to `kleva,` could mean *words* and *glories* – why not? How do they bring about encounters of conversational interest in recollection?

before us: reproduce and translate our Homer – and assume the consequences as to who, or what, or how *we* will have been, living human languages, *out of Homer*.

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