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Philology in the Age of post-Foundational Thought[1]

Within the broader context of the discussion about the challenges philology faces today the paper examines the relationship between contemporary philology and the so-called post-foundational (political) thought; the latter being essentially characterized by bringing issues traditionally belonging to the philological field to the centre of political and ontological inquiries. Besides examining the advantages and disadvantages, opportunities as well as pitfalls philology has to encounter in case of this potential broadening of the scope of relevance within the field of contemporary social sciences and humanities, the paper notes how such a constellation shifts the focus back to certain factors and problems with the (self) understanding of philology that have marked its entire history, being most prominently articulated within the so-called discussion on the return to philology. The paper thus aims at exploring to which extent a post-foundational perspective could deepen insights obtained in the above-mentioned discussion, thereby improving the self-understanding and positioning of philology in the contemporary context.

Keywords: philology, return to philology, politics, post-foundational thought, Oliver Marchart, Ernesto Laclau, Paul de Man

I.

When contemporary challenges to philology are mentioned, what usually comes to mind is either the continuing decline of the prestige of humanities within the present social system and its technoscientific paradigm or the dissolution of its disciplinary unity due to the divergent development of what were previously its sub-disciplines or some of the specific challenges that have appeared in the change of technological substratum, leading to the establishment of the so-called "digital humanities". How-

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ever, it is of equal importance to examine the challenges put in front of philology by epistemological shifts that have taken place in its disciplinary neighborhood, affecting humanities and social sciences in general, especially when we consider that after the so-called linguistic turn it would be hard to imagine a phenomenon in that field which does not interfere with the domain of philology in some way.

This paper will therefore focus on one example of the abovementioned issue by examining the challenges posed to philology by certain currents in political theory which Marchart (2014) labels as "post-foundational thought". The paper will question (potential) effects of that theoretical corpus – which establishes a homology between discourse analysis, political theory and general ontology – on the position of philology within the field of contemporary humanities as well as examine which questions and possibilities are brought forward in such a constellation and to what extent contemporary relations revive and reflect certain earlier issues and controversies about the status and nature of philology that are still relevant for present-day discussion.

The paper will, however, have to refrain from offering a final answer to these questions, not so much due to lack of space, but due to the nature of the matter regarding which the questions are posed. The confrontation between philology and the post-foundational paradigm in political thought would nevertheless provide us not only with an opportunity to reconsider its current position from a specific point of view, but also with an opportunity to ask more general and fundamental questions, hence challenging the seemingly self-understandable, but at the same time elusive notion of philology itself.

II.

The starting point of this enquiry as it has just been outlined reveals that fundamental features of post-foundational thought are not altogether unfamiliar to contemporary philology. Quite the contrary seems to be the case if we remember a paradox representative of the post-foundational corpus: that "in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse-provided" (Derrida 2002: 354) (or that "/t/here is nothing outside of the text" (Derrida, 1997: 158))[2], while at the same time "one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure" (Derrida 2002: 352). This paradox domesticated in the philological domain by the literary theory and certain bordering zones between philology and philosophy much earlier and with stronger effect than in other domains. As noted by Beardsworth (1998: 1), "/t/he first sustained reception of Derrida's thinking", and the same applies to the broader theoretical current it be-

[2] The latter quote is probably the most famous, but at the same time most infamously misunderstood thesis by Derrida, which forced him several times to clarify that does not argue in favour of pan-textualism or radical immanentism, but in favour of the notion of text which continuously subverts the opposition between the inner and outer, making the "there is nothing outside the text" claim synonymous to "there is nothing outside of context". Cf. Derrida 2016: 28; 1988: 136.

longed to, "took place in university departments of literature", while in political theory it lagged behind.

In his *Post-Foundational Political Thought* (2007) Marchart quotes the same part of Derrida's text to illustrate the paradoxical nature of the quasi-foundation that is characteristic for post-foundationalism, before the analysis turns to the genealogical account of the post-foundational positions in political theory since the earlier twentieth century and up to the groundbreaking junction with post-structuralism. Marchart, therefore, uses the signifier "post-foundational" as a common denominator for scholars whose oeuvres are marked by the return of the previously suppressed political[3], i.e. by a certain realization of the onto-ontological difference between the political and politics, alongside with the inevitable absence of the absolute/final ground of the political[4].

As explained by Marchart (2007: 2), "/t/he ontological weakening of ground does not lead to the assumption of the total absence of all grounds, but rather to the assumption of the impossibility of a final ground, which is something completely different as it implies an increased awareness of, on the one hand, contingency and, on the other, the political as the moment of partial and always, in the last instance, unsuccessful grounding."[5] He recognizes the inaugural impulses of such thought already in works of Schmitt, Arendt and Ricoeur, while attributing the role of paradigmatic representatives to authors such as Nancy, Castoriadis, Badiou, Rancière and (especially) Laclau. His tacit favouritism towards Laclau[6] will justify relying on him as a point of reference in this text as well.

Marchart (2007: 146) ascribes to Laclau the discovery of the crucial feature of the post-foundational conceptualization of politics: the fact that equation marks can be drawn between discourse theory, political ontology and general ontology, i. e. that (Laclau's) "theory of political signification" is also at the same time a "political theory of signification" as well as *prima philosophia*[7]. Although Marchart claims that he will "draw these consequences that Laclau himself seems hesitant to draw" (ibid.), reread-

[3] The return of the political is opposed to the reductive approach to politics in both orthodox Marxist and liberal paradigms. Within the former, politics is reduced merely to an issue of the superstructure, based on firm economic ground, while in case of the latter it is enclosed as an autonomous social domain with its own separate rationality, wholly in the jurisdiction of political science.

[4] Different variations of the distinction between politics and the political, alongside the dynamics between the grounding and de-grounding are, according to Marchart (2007: 18), primarily Heidegger's heritage, i.e. variations of his ontico-ontological difference and his notion of *Abgrund*. He notes that many of the scholars he analyses are often subsumed under the notion of left Heideggerianism (ibid. 2). It is worth adding that many of them are also linked by a critical evaluation of the Marxist heritage, which is why they are sometimes designated as post-Marxist as well.

[5] In other words, "/s/uch a deconstruction of foundationalism is something quite different from its simple inversion." (Marchart 2007: 13)

[6] Apart from Laclau's position in the abovementioned study, another argument in that direction is also Marchart's next book, dedicated to the "political ontology after Laclau". (Marchart, 2018)

[7] Cf. Marchart 2007: 149.

ing earlier Laclau's works from the perspective of his final book (*The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*, 2014) would bring that claim in question.

Since his most famous study, coauthored with Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* [1985], Laclau's view on politic centers on the notion of hegemonic articulation; a supplementary grounding which temporarily stabilizes the differential field of the discursively conceptualized social, the stability of which is constantly subverted by the ineradicable dissemination of meaning caused by the absence of a transcendent foundation (cf. Laclau, Mouffe 2014: 97). Borders of a given social order are nothing other than the lines of antagonisms (ibid. 111) which show dissent regarding the content attributed to empty signifiers, which through such attribution become provisionary nodal points of the established social order. What is understood under "politics" is, therefore, a process of re-articulation of the social order due to an escalation of antagonism(s): a transgression of given differential positions in a certain system, a hegemonic articulation of conflict agents through chains of equivalences that stretch along the lines of antagonisms (ibid. 122), and finally a stabilization of a new differential system.

In his last book, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* (2014), Laclau proceeds with the elaboration of his hegemony theory. However, in comparison to his earlier studies, here he is more systematic in establishing the connection between hegemony and rhetorical operations constitutive of signification in general.[8] Somewhat simplified: initial transgressions of differential positions in a certain system are recognized as metonymical shifts that every hegemonic articulation begins with. Chains of equivalencies, which equate previously differentiated positions confronted with their antagonists, are recognized as metaphorical articulations, while the provisional grounding, in which a certain particular (empty) signifier seizes the function of representing the universal, to which itself is incommensurable, is recognized as catachresis. Politics is thus defined as an "articulation of heterogeneous elements, and such articulation is essentially tropological, for it presupposes the duality between institution and subversion of differential positions that we find as defining a rhetorical intervention." (Laclau, 2014: 67) The same rhetorical intervention is, however, at work in both language as well as in the production of what we call "objectivity", which is why Laclau argues in favour of the "centrality of catachresis"[9]

[8] The link between traditional rhetorical notions and crucial elements of Laclau's theory of hegemony is not established in *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* for the first time; Laclau establishes it already in his earlier works, even though it is only in passing and insufficiently elaborated. Cf. Laclau, Mouffe 2014 and Laclau 2007.

[9] An interesting similarity to Laclau's centrality of catachresis is noticeable in Hamacher's *95 Theses on Philology* (2009: 34), in which Hamacher, as one of the partakers in the discussion on the return to philology, argues that the source point of philology is the investigation of the "zero point" on the Jakobson's coordinate system of metaphor and metonymy. Such a zero point would imply both of the tropes, but also neither of them, an empty place occupied by no figure. Although Hamacher does not designate it as a catachresis, the function it assigns to it is the same, the reference to Jakobson being another important overlapping.

and of "rhetoricity" as "a condition of signification and, as a result, of objectivity", while discarding the existence of something like a zero-degree of the tropological (ibid. 66).

In other words, although Laclau (2014: 67) warns against the temptation of turning rhetorical categories into the new "locus of hard transcendentality", with every other domain being reduced merely "to the empiricity of 'case studies'", or – to put it differently – although he underscores the necessity of having in mind the mutual overdetermination of different social domains, the examination of rhetoric – encompassing the study of language and general mechanisms of signification and representation – unavoidably becomes a somewhat privileged terrain for posing political and ontological questions. It is thus hardly possible to avoid questioning what such a situation would imply for philology as a disciplinary terrain where the aforementioned examinations traditionally take place.

III.

The Rhetoric, as a living fossil stemming from antique orders of knowledge, has impressively outlived their numerous shifts and it would be exceptionally imprecise for us to subsume it under one of the contemporary disciplines. Despite the fact that its different components cut across various domains of the present-day episteme, its aspects that Laclau is primarily interested in are mostly objects of study within various philological departments. This would mean that what Laclau's perspective potentially offers to philology – as the academic domain which does not exactly have the reputation of being very modern, and which gets increasingly suppressed to the margins of the social significance[10] – is a broadly open door for a grand return; a recognition of relevance for a comprehensive understanding of the social.

Nevertheless, such a potentially noticeable return reveals itself as a redoubling of a previous, more familiar return. Roughly at the same time when Laclau's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and Nancy's *Inoperative Community* (as paradigmatic works of post-foundational political thought) were published, De Man's text entitled *The Return to Philology* (1986) appeared. This short and seemingly unimportant essay soon afterwards started a whole genre of discussions on its title topic, which lasted for the next three decades[11]. During that time, however, these two coexisting lines have never completely crossed, at least not until Laclau's final book. Since De Man's call for a

[10] As noted by Pollock (2009: 934), "/f/or many, *philologist* is hardly more than a term of abuse, 'what you call the dull boys and girls of the profession.'" See also Pollock's (ibid. 934–935, 945) overview of the social conditions that produced/contributed to such image of philology, as well as Harpham's (2009: 36–37) account on the traditional image of philologists' as the ones detached from worldly events.

[11] Some of the most famous contributions to the discussion were articles and books by Ziolkovski (1990), Said (2004), Gumbrecht (2003), Hamacher (2009), Harpham (2009), Pollock (2009), Holquist (2011), Ferguson (2013) and Biti (2014).

return to philology was proffered as a turn to "an examination of the structure of language prior to the meaning it produces" (De Man, 1986: 24), it is no wonder that the encounter happened after all and that Laclau's articulation of the tropological nature of post-foundational thought notably draws on De Man[12].

However, De Man's call for a return to philology was harshly criticized by some of the participants in the second wave of the discussion, who regarded themselves as (more) authentic representatives of the discipline. Harpham (2009: 37), for example, argued that De Man tried to affiliate (his notion of) philology with deconstruction, overemphasizing its one feature at the expense of all the other equally traditional and important ones. Pollock (2009: 947) was much harsher in his claim that De Man's philology "has become a shrivelled, wrinkled thing unrecognizable to anyone who considers himself a philologist", since he "eviscerates the discipline by falsely privileging one of its instruments and doing so incoherently and self-contradictorily"[13]. Both of them, along with several other authors, criticize De Man for lacking in what they think is concrete philological competence and experience. But perhaps the central feature of their distancing gesture is the shift of the focus towards the signified in a hermeneutical manner; the ascription to philology of the task to open a window in the original context of the work and/or to be the instrument for the (re)construction of sense of texts[14].

Be that as it may, what is in question here is not the simple binary opposition between favouring the signifier and signified, nor between the "textual autonomy" (Pollock 2009: 947) and the consciousness of context. Both De Man and his critics (nominally) discard approaches characterized by the complete reduction of the signifier.

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[12] Laclau argues that De Man's examination of the rhetorical as a phenomenon that subverts every idea of the immediate and stable meaning has already reached the central thesis of *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*, namely that "a generalized rhetoric (...) transcends all regional boundaries and becomes coterminous with the structuration of social life itself" (Laclau, 2014: 79). Also, Laclau claims that De Man was aware of the political dimension of his enquiry. It is also interesting to note that Ferguson (2013: 339) draws certain parallels between Rancière's reading of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and De Man's definition of the philological reading. That could suggest another junction of the two lines, besides the one in Laclau's work, although not an intentional and explicit one. Moreover, striking similarities can be noticed between Laclau's conceptualization of the relationship between rhetoric and ontology and the one by Hamacher, although Laclau never referred to Hamacher in his work. Hamacher (2009: 27) argues that the "languages of knowledge are grounded in languages of nonknowledge, epistemic practices in those of the euchē -: ontology in philology", while adding that the fundamental ground of philology, "/i/ts *fundamentum in re*, is an abyss" (ibid.). That makes philology "the movement of attending to that which offers itself to this attending and which slips away from it". (ibid. 28)

[13] Cf. the more thorough and much harsher Ziolkowski's (2005: 242) analysis of De Man's (ab)use of the term 'philology', in which Ziolkowski argues that De Man compensates for his inability to refer to any actual philologist by his academic stardom. Gumbrecht (2003: 29–30), as an "actual philologist", had more understanding for De Mann's stance, arguing that his proposed reading had much to do with the (traditional) philological one, and that "de Man liked to associate himself with the general role of the philologist, although probably not without a grain of self-irony."

[14] Cf. Said 2004: 59 and Pollock 2009: 934.

They both at the same time do not remain enclosed in the narrow borders of the text, although different emphases they give (seemingly) lead them in a different direction[15]. Finally, although both sides advocate a narrowing of the disciplinary focus in contrast to the excessively wide and hazy range that philology tried to cover in various earlier moments of its history, each could justifiably criticize the other for exactly that.

The genealogical perspective certain partakers of the discussion sought the solution in, instead of unravelling the conceptual dispute, only testifies to the repetition of analogous dilemmas and oppositions. Holquist (2011: 275) and Pollock (2009: 956) recognize a similar relation in the clash between Hermann's text-oriented *Wortphilologie* and Böckh's cultural and intellectual history-oriented *Sachphilologie*, with Pollock (ibid. 931) adding another conflict – that of *Wissenschaft*- and *Bildung*-principle[16], or the polemic between Wilamowitz and Nietzsche. Harpham underscores the historical oscillation between philology as the practice of a highly specialized, meticulous research (Harpham, 2009: 36) on the one hand, and the all-encompassing, "highest form of modern scholarship" (ibid. 40) on the other; or between pure science nominally independent of any political/ideological goals, and an engagement with an almost occult obscurantism that could not brag of such an independence (cf. ibid. 41).

Harpham (2009: 36, 54) therefore concludes that it is impossible to simply discredit one of the opposing sides as wrong, since philology is characterized by "a double commitment to an empirical attention to linguistic fact and a more subjective approach to questions of context, meaning, and value", a duality that was handed down to disciplines that emerged from it[17]. Harpham explains the general inability to firmly ground

[15] Pollock (2009: 957) underscores the significant importance of the traditional hermeneutical *applicatio* stage, arguing that it is incompatible with De Man's views. Thereby he neglects De Man's explicit comments in *Return to Philology* (1986) on the transformative effects which the type of reading he advocates exerts on readers and the institutional context, as well as the clear remarks he makes on the political dimension of his work elsewhere (cf. Laclau, 2014: 79). Moreover, although he is indubitably one of the strongest critics of the (alleged) appropriation of philology by deconstruction, the ideal combination of textual, contextual and philologist's meaning he aspires to, in which the latter refers to the consciousness of one's own historical situatedness, comes relatively close to deconstruction, especially keeping in mind the temporal dimension of those meanings and the inability of self-presence and immediate self-reflection of that sort. Regarding the hermeneutical *applicatio,* it is also interesting to note that Gumbrecht (2003: 19) establishes a firm relation between the imagination philologists require in their interpretations of objects and everyday needs and functions those objects fulfil. He derives the link from the Heidegger's concept of *Zuhandenheit*, and Heidegger's influence is unavoidable in De Man's works too.

[16] The *Bildung*-principle itself is, as Biti (2014b) demonstrates, marked by a duality between its Enlightenment and romantic conceptualizations; between the orientation towards the public sphere and the education of the other, and the orientation on the (individual or collective) self-fashioning.

[17] Harpham's formulation of the duality perhaps does not grasp all the aspects in a perfect manner, but it indicates the bottom line of the issue very satisfyingly. Dealing with that problem more thoroughly, I tried to grasp the same complex relationship from the perspective of a slightly different opposition – the one between a game and commentary (cf. Glavaš, 2015).

the signifier of philology, despite the frequency of its appropriation or ascription as "the absence of the hard core" (ibid. 54), which is the reason he argues that it signifies "not so much a discipline (…), as a kind of dream or myth of origins." (ibid) At the same time, he points at the "aura of power" (ibid. 40) around the signifier of philology as the reason behind numerous attempts of its appropriation within various "returns", which in fact assume the function of its re-grounding.

The comparison of this observation by Harpham with Laclau's theory of hegemony reveals clear structural analogies which lead to the conclusion that philology is nothing other than what Laclau would call an empty signifier (charged with strong effect, but without determined content – just as the typical empty signifiers in political domain, such as freedom or justice), while the "returns" to it are essentially moments of hegemonic re-articulation. Hence establishing of a relation between the genealogical enquiry of philology and post-foundational thinking of politics enables us to shed a new light on the discussion of a return to philology as well as of the general features of that discipline. However, that is not the only connection brought to light.

It would be surprisingly misinformed and incorrect to believe that the relation between politics and philology in any form was established for the first time by the contemporary post-foundational thought. Nevertheless, a retrospective glance from that particular perspective, coupled with the genealogical picture sketched in the discussions on the return of philology, can emphasize and deepen certain well-known links. Pollock (2009: 242), for example, in his (somewhat problematic) prolongation of historical continuity of philology beyond the borders of European modernity, points to a certain underlining of the homology between poetry and philology on the one side, and socio-political order and its (re)construction on the other, which was present even in ancient India and which is intriguingly comparable to Laclau's claims. On the European stage, on the other hand, the situation is once again two-fold.

Already the mythical moment of the invention of philology (or, according to Holquist (2011: 271), its reinvention), the matriculation of Friedrich Wolf in 1777, inscribed itself in the historical memory as a de-grounding, an emancipatory gesture of refusing the subordination of (philological) scholarship to religious ends. In fact, as underscored by Harpham (2009: 50), immediately afterwards philology "played a key role in breaking the hold on the human imagination of the biblical account of human origins and had made the human past available for systematic inquiry as never before." Similarly, Foucault's (1994) account on the formation of philology ascribes to it the break with the fixed table of representation and the fixed hierarchy of languages tightly related to it, which is characteristic of the classical episteme.

Simultaneously with its subversive agency, philology also ensured firm support for the grounding of certain political projects. While searching for its own disciplinary foundation and the origins of its objects of research, philology provided a scientific background for various origins/centres glorified in different political paradigms; from

the close cooperation of certain philologists with the Prussian state on its nation-building project (Harpham, 2009: 38), to the fact that philology was one of the primary sources of arguments for many of the racist and anti-Semitic discourses in the nineteenth century (with Gobineau as an extreme example) (ibid. 44–45). Harpham's critique of the debate on return to philology as not having adequately considered the relations between philology and power was motivated principally by his conviction that such links are not coincidental, especially since certain examples occurred after the nineteenth century as well[18].

Although he overlooked it in De Man's work, Pollock (2009: 960) recognizes the political input of Said's (2004) contribution to the discussion, arguing that "Said's most important contribution may lie not so much in having taught us to read literature politically (...), but, instead, to read politics philologically, by demonstrating how the text of a political problem has been historically transmitted, reconstructed, received, or falsified." It is noticeable that Pollock's observation, although similar to what Laclau writes about, ends on a foundational tone, since the notion of "falsification" implies a certain original truth as a point of reference, instead of placing focus on hegemonic articulation. Yet his insistence that a reconstruction of a text (as the primary task of philology) should by all means equally take notice of textual and contextual meanings, as well as of the position of the philologist (what he calls "philologist's meaning") (cf. Pollock, 2009: 960), along with the continuing responsibility for questioning its genealogy (ibid. 948), is a curious detour by Pollock that brings him very close to De Man's stances and deconstructionist's practices he previously so harshly discarded. That would consequently make his "philological reading of politics" more homological to Laclau's, despite the abovementioned reference to truth.

The inclusion of context and genealogical self-reflection in the focus of the discipline as well as the possibility of philological reading of politics necessarily inscribe philology in a broader discursive network of over-determination and bring to the fore the aporias of framing. When the uncontrollable elusiveness of the disciplinary borders of philology is examined from that perspective, it reveals itself neither as a naivety of previous centuries, nor as a specificity of the current situation, but rather as a structural necessity that also becomes observable in contemporary attempts of its suppression.

[18] In *The Powers of Philology*, Gumbrecht (2003: 2) argues that "philological practice has an affinity with those historical periods that see themselves as following a greater cultural moment, a moment whose culture they deem to be more important than the cultural present", which would go hand in hand with the obsession with finding the source; whether it is the *Ur*-language, *Ur*-race or some other similar incarnation. Moreover, in his introduction to *Reexamining the National-Philological Legacy* (2014a), Biti examined the constant oscillation of philology between uncritical cosmopolitism and different nationalisms, arguing that they are simply mirror images of each other. In both of their backgrounds, he recognizes the same basic principle of the exclusion of the other, which could be avoided only by acknowledging inner division/contamination of each of the two positions by the other.

Despite the effort to fixate it, philology remains a signifier which repeatedly rearticulates the disciplinary field positioned somewhere on the continuum between the very narrowly understood textology and Böckh's infamously broad "knowledge of what is known" ("das Erkennen des Erkannten"; cf. Pollock 2009: 933). What still remains as our task is to enquire the meaning this has for its positioning in the contemporary version of such a discursive network.

IV.

It is worth reminding that the discussion on a return to philology resulted from acts of resistance against what was seen as a signifier absolutely devoid of any concrete meaning and its transformation into a buzz-word susceptible of various contents. However, the attempts not to simultaneously define philology as excessively shallow and banal produced a list of requirements that are to be kept in mind. While the list *per se* is not problematic, problems arise when it comes to its implementation in the concrete research practice, or – even worse – in university programs and other institutionalized forms. The previously mentioned discussion can provide us with another ambivalence to illustrate this matter.

When writing about the (unsuccessful) institutionalization of philology on American universities, Harpham (2009: 51) on the one hand argues that the causes at least partially lie in the fact that its speculative dimension ruled it out of the sciences and its empirical and technical character disqualified it from the 'humanities'", leaving it somewhere in the middle. On the other hand, Pollock (2009: 948) argues that "/p/erhaps no aspirant for inclusion in a new disciplinary order could satisfy these historical, global, and methodological-conceptual requirements better than critical (...) philology", while the "new disciplinary order" largely implies a transgression of the conventional disciplinary borders. The situation is similar to the one described earlier in this paper: although two claims are mutually contradictory, it is impossible to simply discard one of them as false.

Having in mind what has been analysed heretofore, the same could be said regarding the question posed in the introduction of this paper. The post-foundational thought indubitably offers philology new opportunities for its reinvention on the terrain of political theory, as well as in the broader space of humanities and social sciences. Yet, it is also clear that such an expansion of its scope, just as earlier in history, could bring philology in danger of disciplinary dilution.

On the one hand, the positive dimension of seizing the opportunity is not limited to the mere struggle for academic positions and prestige or aura of social relevance (although it would be a mistake to underestimate the importance of it for the future of a discipline). More importantly, this is unavoidable to a certain extent due to the continuous crossing and renegotiation of the border between text and context, in which philology engages *per definitionem* while dealing with its task of text (re)construction. It is

also crucial for its auto-reflexivity, historical and critical self-awareness, and its social (or better said – political) responsibility, which are all features underscored as necessary even by the more conservative particinpants in the discussion. In other words, it would both introduce philologists to new discursive and social environments, as well as in a way return them to the loci they traditionally inhabited.

On the other hand, in its extreme form, the over-inflation of the sphere of philological social and academic authority would result in a two-fold negative effect. It would harm the specific competencies of philologists by distancing them from their primary methods and objects of examination, and annulling the distinctiveness of their discourse structure, which are both fundamental prerequisites for philology to be able to engage in any broader task. But it would also dissolve its political potential, by doing what Laclau (2014: 67) strongly warned against – establishing a new instance of the hard transcendence instead of exploring the overdetermination between the different spheres. Although further development of such academic tendencies is hence far from being solely in the domain of philologists' agency, the awareness of them should not be neglected, since they are bringing very favourable opportunities as well as pitfalls.

The optimal path – if such notion is not too naive – would lie somewhere in between the Scylla and the Charybdis of disciplinary dissolution by either autistic enclosure or over-expansion. Even though this might seem as a somewhat clichéd conclusion, it would be immeasurably hard to put it in practice. As Harpham (2009: 56) notes, "a selective recall is somehow psychically and professionally necessary"; grasping philology in its totality would be equally impossible as getting rid of its history or isolating it from its contemporary context. However, if it is necessary to be selective in such a delicate positioning, luckily it is also possible to do it more than once. While philological input is crucial for the post-foundational thought, the structural analogies between the two sides which we previously pointed to also reveal that there are elements of post-foundational thought which could be helpful to philology in its institutional and identity crises.

Although all the partakers in the return to philology discussion try to distance themselves from the naivety of nineteenth-century-like search for the origins, most of them still strive to determine the characteristic of *proper* philology as the firm core that would differentiate it from various misconceptions. Yet if we accept the post-foundational perspective that discards the existence of the firm ground/core, then the ever-problematic unity of philology[19] could be conceptualized not as something well- or ill-derived

[19] Besides Harpham's (2009: 54) already mentioned comment on the "absence of the hard core" of philology, it is also worthy to note Pollock's (2009: 946) remark that philology "never developed into a discrete, conceptually coherent, and institutionally unified field of knowledge but has remained a vague congeries of method", which is all the more interesting when taking into account that he nevertheless tries to crystallize a stabile core with his research. Hamacher (2009: 41) goes a step further by claiming that every historical subordination of philology to any concrete discipline threatened/threatens "to destroy the philological impulse".

from the hidden underlying principle, but as a provisional catachrestic (hegemonic) articulation overarched by the empty signifier of philology. If the original (or proper) core of philology was as much a mirage as the voice of Homer or Aryan *Ursprache* (Harpham, 2009: 54), if that what distinguished philology among other disciplines was not a surface reflection of the unique centre, but the result of historically dynamic articulation of heterogeneous elements, then instead of the search for the core, a space could open up for a strategic and critical thinking confronted with actual challenges.

At first, this might seem as a strictly scholastic distinction with little or no relevance for the actual practice, but the perspective, possibilities and orientation are not altogether negligibly different in a situation in which one works in a discipline dedicated to the rediscovery and/or preservation of its venerable core, as opposed to the situation in which one discards it as a derived projection of a differential system and actively embraces the possibilities of a continuous (re)articulation in given historical conditions. Although he would probably not completely agree with its theoretical background, the latter option would surely provide more suitable ground for Pollock's task of unified search for textual, contextual and the philologist's meaning (Pollock, 2009: 950), his request for genealogical self-reflection and global comparative perspective (ibid. 948). In addition to that it would obtain a better position in Harpham's (2009: 56) balancing between the "scholarship's highest aspiration and darkest fears" that he ascribes to philology.

In other words, embracing the post-foundational perspective – as opposed to both foundational and anti-foundational – could reveal itself as a good way for philology to balance between its historical heritage and the openness to the contemporary context without either ossifying the discipline or dissolving it in its surroundings. It could also maximize its potential for being the critical mechanism both in the sense of traditional textual criticism and the more general socio-political one. For a tangible result to be achieved, however, such an orientation would have to reflect itself not only in singular decisions and individual research practices, but also in school and university programs, and various engagements of scholars both within the academic field as well as in broader socio-political sphere; in all the places where philology as a discipline is constantly (re)produced.

Finally, certain concerns and uneasiness regarding everything said so far could be felt from the standpoint of national philologies, since both the discussion about broadening of the scope of philology's authority and the one about its self-understanding primarily deal with a relatively abstract notion of philology, at the same time neglecting the fact that the philological practice in its concrete institutionalized form largely takes place within departments of different national philologies. However, these concerns are at the very least questionable. It is true that the post-foundational perspective is deeply critical of the ground-providing agency national philologies participated in within the larger framework of racist and nationalist projects of the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries. It is also true that many contributors to the discussion on the return to philology explicitly criticized those particular historical episodes. But that does not mean that they discard the relevance of the national philological perspective *per se*. On the contrary, the importance ascribed to the historical and an institutional context by the relatively recent discussion on philology goes hand in hand with the post-foundational notion of the decentralized structure[20]and implicitly designates an important task to national philologies.

If the two perspectives were conjoined, the national philologies would hence remain very significant for the insight in the historical and cultural specifics, although not anymore by being guardians of the sacred cores of national identities and treasuries of national myths, but by performing critical operations on national(ist) narratives they once helped construct, as well as by enabling the refinement of the perspective which would prevent shallowness and mono-perspectivism. To put it simply: its orientation would shift from a centripetal movement and monologism characteristic for the nineteenth-century philology towards centrifugal critical corrections and polyphony[21]. It is also worth noting that, from the (pragmatic) institutional point of view, such a step

[20] Taking Pollock as an example; he explicitly argues that contemporary philology should meet three minimum requirements: "historical self-awareness, universality and methodological and conceptual pluralism" (Pollock 2009: 948) The first should ensure that philology does not remain "arrogantly indifferent to [its] own historicity, constructedness and changeability" (ibid.), while the latter points towards his later conclusions that certain interpretative choices, as well as the contexts which influenced them, are "also part of what philology seeks to understand" (ibid. 954) That is why he affirms a historicist perspective, while at the same time warning that "historicism carried too far can underwrite the ideology of singular meaning; the point of production of a text is fetishized to the complete disregard of the plurality of textual meaning at any given moment and a fortiori of its changeability over time." (ibid. 955); cf. Gumbrecht's (2003: 42, 45) claims that the commentary, as a discourse metonymically representing the philological practice in total, is a discourse that "almost by definition never reaches its end" while both limiting and providing an abundance.) It is therefore obvious that – as already mentioned – although Pollock initially criticizes De Man's establishment of the firm link between deconstruction and philology, his "critical" or "hermeneutical" (ibid. 948) philology has significant overlapping with deconstruction, perhaps bigger than he would like to admit. Gumbrecht (2003: 49) is less reserved regarding it, openly arguing that "that deconstruction has pushed certain principles of the discourse of commentary to its possible limits." In addition to that, deconstruction, with its constant subversion of the clear-cut border between text and context, *ergon* and *parergon*, subject and object etc., is a theoretical current that has made possibly the strongest impact on the contemporary post-foundational thought, especially considering the influence it exerted on the most recent post-foundational political theorists as Nancy, Rancière or Laclau. Finally, the latter group could also learn something from philologists such as Pollock, since, while they clearly underscore the importance of historical context, several critics warned against the lack of attention they pay to its own institutional situatedness. Cf. Bowman, 2007.

[21] As Hamacher (2009: 25) writes: „There is not one language but a multiplicity; not a stable multiplicity but only a perpetual multiplication of languages. The relation that the many languages within each individual language, and all individual languages, entertain to one another is philology. Philology: the perpetual extension of the elements of linguistic existence."

beyond the narrow national framework could reveal itself as an unexpected lifeline for smaller national philologies, since their traditional (institutional) space is rapidly shrinking due to the already mentioned circumstances.

All the positive potentialities sketched so far would not neutralize the pitfalls which philology faces today, nor could they by any means permanently resolve the dualities, contradictions and aporias which marked its centuries-long history by ensuring some final *Aufhebung*. They would also not be the absolute innovation, the turning of the blank page that promises a thorough revolution of the discipline. The productive exchange between (contemporary) philology and post-foundational currents in other disciplines would rather be a return to certain moments, attempts and issues in the history of philology re-contextualized in a new theoretical/discursive environment. But, as we have seen, such returns are always at the same time reinventions and recurrent returns/reinventions are what has kept philology going for centuries.

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Filologija u postfundacionalnom dobu

Uključujući se u općenitiju raspravu o izazovima s kojima se suočava današnja filologija, članak propituje odnos suvremene filologije i tzv. postfundacionalne (političke) misli, čija je bitna odlika dovođenje elemenata tradicionalno pripadajućih oblasti filologije u središte političkih i ontoloških pitanja. Osim što postavlja pitanje o prednostima, ali i manama; prilikama, ali i ugrozama koje takvo potencijalno širenje domene mjerodavnosti u okvirima društveno-humanističkog disciplinarnog prostora stavlja pred filologiju, rad uočava da taj suodnos u žarište ponovno stavlja neke ključne stavke i probleme glede (samo)razumijevanja filologije koje su obilježile njezinu povijest, najprominentnije artikulirane u okvirima tzv. rasprave o povratku filologiji, te nastoji ponuditi odgovor na pitanje u kojoj mjeri postfundacionalna perspektiva može doprinijeti uvidima ostvarenim u toj raspravi, a time i boljem samorazumijevanju i suvremenom pozicioniranju filologije.

Ključne riječi: filologija, povratak filologiji, politika, postfundacionalna misao, Oliver Marchart, Ernesto Laclau, Paul de Man.