



AV

# Komparatistik

Jahrbuch  
der Deutschen Gesellschaft  
für Allgemeine und Vergleichende  
Literaturwissenschaft

# 2017

Aus dem Inhalt: Joachim Harst, Christian Moser, Linda Simonis: Languages of Theory. Introduction • Maria Boletsi: Towards a Visual Middle Voice. Crisis, Dispossession, and Spectrality in Spain's Hologram Protest • Peter Brandes: Poetics of the Bed. Narrated Everydayness as Language of Theory • Annette Simonis: Stephen Greenblatt and the Making of a New Philology of Culture • Dagmar Reichardt: Creating Notions of Transculturality. The Work of Fernando Ortiz and his Impact on Europe • Michael Eggers: Topics of Theory and the Rhetoric of Bruno Latour • Nicolas Pethes: Philological Paperwork. The Question of Theory within a Praxeological Perspective on Literary Scholarship • Achim Geisenhanslüke: Philological Understanding in the Era After Theory • Joachim Harst: Borges: Philology as Poetry • Regine Strätling: The ›Love of words‹ and the Anti-Philological Stance in Roland Barthes' »S/Z« • Markus Winkler: Genealogy and Philology • Christian Moser: Language and Liability in Eighteenth-Century Theories of the Origin of Culture and Society (Goguet, Smith, Rousseau) • Linda Simonis: The Language of Commitment. The Oath and its Implications for Literary Theory • Kathrin Schödel: Political Speech Acts? Jacques Rancière's Theories and a Political Philology of Current Discourses of Migration • Helmut Pillau: »Ein großer weltlicher Staatsmann wider alle Wahrscheinlichkeiten.« Gertrud Kolmar und Jean-Clément Martin über Robespierre • Pauline Preisler: Die abstrakte Illustration. Paul Klees »Hoffmanneske Märchenszene« und E. T. A. Hoffmanns »Der Goldene Topf« • Nachruf, Rezensionen.

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und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft  
von Joachim Harst, Christian Moser und Linda Simonis

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Regine Strätling

## The ‘Love of words’ and the Anti-Philological Stance in Roland Barthes’ *S/Z*

One characteristic of the work of Roland Barthes—and of that of other structuralist theorists—is the attempt to replace traditional forms of academic criticism, its unreflected claim of objectivity, and its dominant methods of ‘text explanation’ by science-based approaches which draw extensively on the ideas and terminology of theoretical corpora such as Marxism, Existentialism, psychoanalysis, and linguistics. Promoting in particular a technical vocabulary derived from structural linguistics, Barthes set about re-inventing activities like writing, reading, and literary criticism. This project of renewing the approach to literary texts involved questioning key categories of literary criticism such as the notions of the author, especially authorial intention, and of interpretation in the sense of a method to achieve and fix a stable textual meaning. Yet an important part of Barthes’ project consisted in renewing the language of criticism itself. Few literary scholars have actually been as productive and inventive as Barthes in creating a new vocabulary for literary criticism. Indefatigably, he came up with ever-new terms to bring to attention hitherto un-noticed phenomena concerning the production and reception of signs.

These features make Barthes’ work an interesting case to study concerning the fate of philology in such an ambitious theoretical endeavour—all the more so as Barthes, who held a university degree in Classical Philology, clearly opposed his own notion of textual analysis to philology (very similar in this respect to Nietzsche, historically the most prominent critic of philology, who was also professionally trained in classical philology). Barthes does so for example in his 1973 contribution to the *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, in the entry “Texte (théorie du)”: “On peut attribuer à un texte une signification unique et en quelque sorte canonique; c’est ce que s’efforcent de faire en détail la philologie et en gros la critique d’interprétation.”<sup>1</sup> The encyclopaedic context of Barthes’ publication may mislead those who expect an impartial reference-book contribution to provide an unbiased, balanced overview of theories on the notion of ‘text.’ In fact, Barthes’ entry for the *Encyclopaedia Universalis* is very much in line with the critical impetus of d’Alembert’s and Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* and realises the idea advocated by Diderot in his article “Encyclopédie” that the characteristic of a good dictionary is “de changer la façon commune de penser.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Barthes’ article attempts to radically reinvent the idea of literature in general. The article appears as a sort of battleground on which the term ‘philology’ serves as a means to demarcate the territory

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1 Roland Barthes. “Texte (théorie du).” *CŒuvres complètes II: 1966-1973*. Ed. Éric Marty. Paris: Seuil, 1994, pp. 1677-1689, p. 1682.

2 Denis Diderot. “Encyclopédie.” *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. Vol. 5. Ed. Denis Diderot/Jean le Rond d’Alembert. First edition. Paris: Le Breton/Durand/Briasson/Michel-Antoine David, 1751, cols. 635-648A, 642A.

of Barthes' own position and to mark out who is in the opposing camp. 'Philology' is obviously one of his principal opponents: according to Barthes, philology seeks to constitute the literary work as a closed object with a determinable and determined meaning, whereas the approach suggested by Barthes and his peers rejects the idea of an ultimate referent of the literary text. Thus, the article for the *Encyclopaedia Universalis* epitomises the opposition between philological work and the ambitions of so-called "French Theory" in the 1970s—an opposition which at the time of Barthes' article had entered a new—though not the last—stage of the history of the resentment against or the defence of philology.<sup>3</sup>

The anti-philological stance that Barthes adopts in his encyclopaedia entry (and elsewhere) could easily be discounted as the merely polemical use of a buzzword. Since philology's claim to the status of a "Leitwissenschaft" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>, the rejection or the appropriation of 'philology' has been a recurrent move in literary studies' power struggle over the most influential method of reading yet, the most advanced conception of the study object, and, in a larger context, about the standing of literary studies in comparison to other scientific disciplines. The relation between Barthes' position and philology deserves a closer look, however. What exactly is Barthes opposing under the label 'philology'? And do Barthes' theoretical advancements actually present a radical rupture with philology or do they not, at least to some extent, also build on philological methodology? To put it differently: do Barthes' works not, rather than entirely refuting philological methods of reading, serve to re-orientate philology itself—in line with or going beyond other contemporary views?<sup>5</sup>

To answer these questions, it will be necessary to sketch out at least roughly which notions of philology are and which are not compatible with Barthes' theory of the text, and which notions of philology may even form an integral part of his approach. This is all the more indispensable as there is no single canonic definition of the term 'philology,' but an abundance of different conceptions of what philology is.<sup>6</sup>

3 On the history of the criticism of philology see Marcel Lepper. *Philologie zur Einführung*. Hamburg: Junius, 2012, pp. 117-122. Regarding the recent movement towards a defence or the claim of a return to philology see, e.g., the review by Carlos Spoerhase. "Studien über die Philologie." *Arbitrium* 30.2 (2012), pp. 141-147.

4 Lepper. *Philologie zur Einführung* (note 3), pp. 113-117.

5 Paul de Man has pointed out the latter possibility, albeit without naming Roland Barthes, in his attempt to dissolve or, rather, to relocate the conflict between literary theory and philological work in his influential essay "The Return of Philology" published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1982. De Man assimilates philology and "French Theory" as in his view both apply a similar way of reading: "[I]n practice, the turn to theory occurred as a return to philology, to an examination of the structure of language prior to the meaning it produces." Paul de Man. "The Return to Philology." *The Resistance to Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, pp. 21-27, p. 24.

6 See e.g., Lepper. *Philologie zu Einführung* (note 3), p. 10, and Jan Ziolkowski. "What is Philology: Introduction." *On Philology*. University Park/London: Penn State University Press, 1990, pp. 1-12.

If we come to the conclusion that philological interpretation does indeed form a part of Barthes' theoretical as well as practical endeavour, it will be important to determine its exact place and function. What happens to philology in such a theoretical environment? Is it simply given a 'facelift' or is it adapted to theoretical insights that cannot be dismissed? Ultimately, these questions point toward the aesthetic aspects of Barthes' theoretical language. Therefore, I will eventually change perspective and examine whether a particular relation between theory and philology has had a part in the overwhelming success and the obvious attractiveness of Barthes' *language of theory*.

My emphasis will be on Barthes' essay *S/Z*, one of his most technical literary analyses as well as his most extensive and meticulous analysis of a literary text. Barthes himself promoted his 1970 essay as the first exhaustive structuralist analysis of a narrative text.<sup>7</sup> With regard to the state of the art of structuralist textual analysis, Barthes claimed that after a period dedicated to extracting the macro-structures of texts, structuralism now had to face a new challenge: it had to proceed to a more comprehensive approach, also taking into account the micro-structures of a given text. And indeed, although Barthes in *S/Z* does not proceed literally word by word, he very nearly does so.

## I. A Plurality of Readings in Barthes' *S/Z*

The essay *S/Z* was published in 1970 and is based on a previous seminar at the *École pratique des hautes études*, where Barthes had held the position of director of studies since 1962. The course taught in the years 1967-1969 was called "Analyse structurale d'un texte narratif: 'Sarrasine' de Balzac," and it was entirely dedicated to Balzac's novella *Sarrasine*. As Barthes' notes for the seminar reveal, his reading of Balzac's novella was so scrupulous, exploring the minutest details, that at the end of his seminar he had hardly reached the end of the frame narrative of the novella.<sup>8</sup> The book *S/Z* testifies to this kind of scrutiny, which Barthes names "*step by step*" ("*pas à pas*") and "*slow motion*" ("*un ralenti*").<sup>9</sup> In the context of the present article, a detailed description of Barthes' procedure cannot be given, especially as the essay resists any attempts at summarization. Likewise, I will not discuss in greater detail Balzac's novella nor the question whether it may have been the very slowness of Barthes' reading which led him to both the surprising assumptions concerning the novella and the far-reaching theoretical ideas which are incorporated in the essay, punctuating the reading of the novella.

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7 See Roland Barthes. "Analyse structurale d'un texte narratif: 'Sarrasine' de Balzac." *CŒuvres complètes II* (note 1), pp. 521-522, p. 521.

8 See Roland Barthes. *Sarrasine de Balzac: Séminaires à l'École pratique des hautes études (1967-1968 et 1968-1969)*. Ed. Claude Coste and Andy Stafford with a Preface by Éric Marty. Paris: Seuil, 2016.

9 Roland Barthes. "S/Z." *CŒuvres complètes II* (note 1), pp. 555-741, p. 562 and 563. Further quotes from *S/Z* will be referenced in the running text parenthetically by the abbreviation "S/Z" followed by the page number.

Instead, I will focus on aspects that relate to and illustrate what Barthes terms “un *ralenti*” and “*pas à pas*.” This step-by-step mode becomes visible primarily in Barthes’ division of Balzac’s novella into 561 reading units, which he calls “lexies.” This linear segmentation conforms to a certain degree to the structuralist method of segmentation and recombination<sup>10</sup>, but at the same time clearly exceeds structuralist approaches by the sheer number of segments—a number far too large to posit any underlying structure. A ‘lexia’ may comprise a few sentences but can also be smaller, comprising only a part of a sentence, a few words. It is not so much understood as a unit of sense, one that makes sense with regard to a given plot; rather it is a deliberately isolated segment within which the reader may identify processes of signification. In comparison to the length of the novella, the detail of Barthes’ procedure becomes obvious: the twenty-two pages of the novella (as printed at the end of Barthes’ essay) are analysed by Barthes on more than 200 pages, by exploring the different and super-imposed processes of signification in each lexia. At first glance, one could assume that *S/Z* represents a work of impressive philological diligence, at least if we understand philology in the sense of paying particularly detailed attention to a text—or, as Roman Jakobson is said to have defined philology, as “the art of reading slowly.”<sup>11</sup> This definition more or less puts into temporal terms what the *New Critics* defined spatially as ‘close reading.’

However, in the opening pages of *S/Z* we again encounter Barthes’ rejection of philology, or at least the rejection of philologists as a caste:

Les uns (disons: les philologues), décrétant que tout texte est univoque, détenteur d’un sens vrai, canonique, renvoient les sens simultanés, seconds, au néant des élucubrations critiques. En face, les autres (disons: les sémiologues) contestent la hiérarchie du dénoté et du connoté [...]. (*S/Z* 559)

Barthes rejects the philologists because, he writes, they accept only one single meaning as the principal, authentic, correct meaning of a word, a sentence, a text. Other meanings are at best admitted as secondary connotations. On the other hand, the semiologists, amongst whom we can count Barthes himself, contest this traditional hierarchy and proclaim a plurality of equally valid meanings.

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10 Cf. Barthes’ definition of structuralist practice in “L’activité structuraliste” (1963): “L’activité structuraliste comporte deux opérations typiques: découpage et agencement. Découper le premier objet [...] c’est trouver en lui des fragments mobiles dont la situation différentielle engendre un certain sens [...]” Roland Barthes. “L’activité structuraliste.” *Œuvres complètes I: 1942-1965*. Ed. Éric Marty. Paris: Seuil, 1993, pp. 1328-1333, p. 1330.

11 Calvert Watkins. “What is Philology.” *On Philology* (note 6), pp. 21-25, p. 25. With regard to the slowness of the reading process as basic ingredient of a minimal definition of philology see also Sean Gurd. “Introduction.” *Philology and Its Histories*. Ed. Sean Gurd. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010, pp. 1-19, and Stephen Best/Sharon Marcus. “Surface Reading: An Introduction.” *Representations* 108 (2009), pp. 1-21.

Barthes thus vetoes philology in a very specific sense. If he terms this particular mode of reading—a mode that looks for the one, correct, authentic meaning—'philology,' this surely relates also to his training as a classical philologist. As mentioned above, Barthes studied Classical Philology at the Sorbonne, a choice of subject that he tended to regret—according to an autobiographical note—as he suffered from absolute boredom in the lectures.<sup>12</sup> Also, the library and the archive were clearly not Barthes' favourite playground. Or, to put it differently, the library was no more than a playground for Barthes, not the location of what Gumbrecht has called the "laborious (not to say sweaty) intellectual craftsmanship" of philology.<sup>13</sup> As to the same autobiographical note, the library was for Barthes a place to escape to from boring classes; not a place where he would pore over ancient documents but a place where he would chat with friends. A statement by Barthes reported by Gerard Genette points in the same direction: "I became a structuralist to avoid working in the library. Now that structuralism has become itself a vast library, it is time to leave."<sup>14</sup> Thus, the—in Barthes' view—unenticing idea of tediously reconstructing, editing and annotating old texts with recourse to a vast amount of other sources in order to identify some original or authentic version may also be echoed by his aversion to philology.

Although painstaking efforts to establish the correct version of a text, if necessary by means of restoration, may seem to Barthes like an unpleasant, annoying activity, this is surely not the crucial point in his rejection of philology. This becomes all the more evident when we look at the role the term 'philology' plays in Barthes' famous controversy with academic criticism, namely his debate with the literary scholar Raymond Picard who published a severely critical review of Barthes' collection of essays on Racine.<sup>15</sup> Picard effectively accused Barthes of philological incorrectness. This harsh judgement was partly provoked by Barthes' use of theory in his reading of Racine, especially his recourse to the vocabulary of psychoanalysis. Picard not only attacked Barthes for his allegedly imprecise, metaphorical use of technical terms, which in his view lead to a totally subjective and arbitrary, if dogmatically formulated construction of a Racinian anthropology "au gré de ses [Barthes'] besoins,"<sup>16</sup> he also deemed this a fatal neglect of historical contextualisation.<sup>17</sup> Theory, in this case psychoanalytically inspired theory, clashed with philology. But Picard also blamed Barthes for basic

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12 See Barthes' text "Biography," written in the context of his seminar "Le lexique d'auteur" and his work *roland BARTHES par roland barthes* [1975], published posthumously together with the reprint of his notes for the seminar "Le lexique d'auteur" in: Roland Barthes. *Le lexique d'auteur. Séminaire à l'École pratique des hautes études (1973-1974) suivi de Fragments inédits du Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. Ed. Éric Marty. Paris: Seuil, 2010, pp. 249-257, p. 256.

13 Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. *The Powers of Philology: Dynamics of Textual Scholarship*, Urbana/Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003, p. 5.

14 Quoted in Martin Stingelin. "Das Glück des Goldstaubs auf der Zunge." *FAZ* 97, 25.04.2012: N3 [trans. R. S.].

15 Cf. Raymond Picard. *Nouvelle critique ou nouvelle imposture*. Paris: Pauvert, 1965.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 25 and 30, quote p. 36.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

mistakes regarding the meaning of words, misunderstandings that, according to Picard, originated yet again from Barthes' ahistorical reading of Racine. Picard's example was the word 'respirer,' which Barthes—in Picard's view—had understood according to its 20<sup>th</sup> century meaning: 'to breathe,' but not in the sense that the word had had in Racine's day, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> Barthes reacted to this accusation in his 1966 essay *Critique et vérité*. Referring to and quoting from Picard he wrote: "On professe qu'il faut 'conserver aux mots leur signification', bref que le mot n'a qu'un sens: le bon. [...] On en vient ainsi à de singulières leçons de lecture: il faut lire les poètes sans évoquer: défense de laisser aucune vue s'élever hors des mots si simples et si concrets [...]"<sup>19</sup> Although Barthes scores off Picard here, he acknowledges that

le discours de l'œuvre a un sens littéral, dont la philologie, au besoin, nous informe; la question est de savoir si on a le droit, ou non, de lire dans ce discours littéral, d'autres sens qui ne le contredisent pas; ce n'est pas le dictionnaire qui répondra à cette question, mais une décision d'ensemble sur la nature symbolique du langage.<sup>20</sup>

In the following passages, Barthes clearly proclaims the freedom of the reader to explore the plurality of meanings uninhibited by the constraints of historical contexts and free also from any need to tie an interpretation to the supposed intentions of the author.

While Barthes concedes in *Critique et Vérité* that philology comes first but is only the initial step in the exploration of the multiple meanings inhabiting a literary work, in *S/Z*, the term 'philology' becomes the name of a mode of reading that allows only one meaning of a text, the correct one. And now, in this sense, the concept it is clearly refuted. Barthes' own approach in *S/Z* is precisely the opposite: instead of determining a single correct meaning, he diversifies his modes of reading in order to multiply possible signifieds. Thus, he states with reference to his 'step-by-step' reading of the textual fragments he calls 'lexies': "Ce qui sera noté, c'est [...] la translation et la répétition des signifiés. Relever systématiquement pour chaque lexie ces signifiés ne vise pas à établir la vérité du texte (sa structure profonde, stratégique) mais son pluriel [...]" (*S/Z* 564) With a view to enabling a plurality of meanings, the deceleration of reading is complemented by reading the primary text repeatedly. In a similar vein as Deleuze, Barthes sees repetition—here the repetition of reading one and the same text—as a movement that does not produce identity but difference:

Mais pour nous qui cherchons à établir un pluriel, nous ne pouvons arrêter ce pluriel aux portes de la lecture: il faut que la lecture soit elle aussi plurielle [...]. La relecture [...] est ici proposée d'emblée, car elle seule sauve le texte de la répétition

18 Ibid., pp. 53-54. See also Katrine Pilcher Keuneman. "Preface to English-language Edition." *Criticism and Truth*. Trans. and Ed. Katrine Pilcher Keuneman. Foreword by Philip Thody. London/New York, NY: Athlone, 1987, pp. XIII-XX.

19 Barthes. "Critique et vérité." *Œuvres complètes II* (note 1), pp. 15-51, p. 22

20 Ibid.

(ceux qui négligent de relire s'obligent à lire partout la même histoire), le multiplie dans son divers et son pluriel [...]. Si donc [...] on relit *tout de suite* le texte, c'est pour obtenir, comme sous l'effet d'une drogue (celle du recommencement, de la différence), non le 'vrai' texte, mais le texte pluriel: même et nouveau. (*S/Z* 564-565)

The differential plurality that Barthes is aiming for is thus located both at the level of the text and at the level of analysis; it has a reflexive as well as a productive component. The key to both is slow and repetitive reading. Contrary to what one might expect, this is obviously not conceived of as boring and dull but compared to the effects of drug-induced ecstasy ("comme sous l'effet d'une drogue").

In order to reflect the plurality (limited though it may be) of meaning in Balzac's novella, Barthes determines five modes of reading, five so-called codes: the hermeneutic, the semantic, the proairetic, the cultural, and the symbolic code. Every 'lexia' is read or decoded according to at least one of these, but often to several, if not to all five codes. These codes illustrate the pleasure that Barthes takes in dividing, classifying and naming. The hermeneutic code, for example, allows for a mode of reading that focuses on the various ways in which the novella organises questions and answers. The cultural code refers to a certain type of knowledge, while the code named 'proairetic'—a designation Barthes derives from Aristotle—is the code of actions and behaviour. This latter code "lie la *praxis* à la *proairésis*, ou la faculté de délibérer l'issue d'une conduite" (*S/Z* 566). One of the innovations in *S/Z* is Barthes' typographical rendering of these five different modes of reading. He displays them one beside the other without then reprising them in a harmonising overall statement (cf. *S/Z* 568). To mark the different layers of reading—'reading' in its multiple senses: as the action of reading, as the written matter which can be read, and in the sense of a particular interpretation—, Barthes makes use of different fonts: the lexia in question is printed in bold letters above the different attempted decodings, each of which is introduced by the abbreviated name of the respective code printed in capital letters. Alongside the linear segmentation of the book according to the reading of the 561 units and the vertical segmentation according to the five 'voices' of the text accentuated by the five modes of decoding, the book is divided into 93 chapters, which include—in yet another, different and larger font—theoretical reflections on the on-going reading practice. Thus the object of study, Balzac's novella, is disrupted and superposed by an excessive, proliferating critical discourse that looks to some extent like an overabundant philological commentary.<sup>21</sup> In a way, Barthes' own procedure is 'proairetic,' too, as it constantly reflects its own actions and behaviour. Barthes' criterion for the quality of the

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21 One could rate this procedure—rather than just as an advancement in structuralist methodology—as a return to much older practices of commenting, as a blending of the practice of abundant *ad litteram* commentary, which discusses the semantic problems of each sentence and of single words, with types of commentary that take the shape of an individual text placed next to the one annotated. For different types of commentary, cf. Thomas Leinkauf. "Marsilio Ficinos Platon-Kommentar." *Der*



overall result of his reading is not the determination of any verifiable truth about Balzac's novella, however, but the consistency of the analysis as such.

## II. Barthes and Szondi

In many respects, Barthes' plea for a multiple reading that leads to a rejection of philology shares ideas with a contemporary essay on reading which, interestingly, calls for respecting a text's plurality in the very name of philology: Peter Szondi's 1962 treatise "Zur Erkenntnisproblematik in der Literaturwissenschaft," republished in 1970, i. e., in the very same year as *S/Z*, under the title "Über philologische Erkenntnis." There are substantial differences between Szondi's and Barthes' modes of reading literary texts, which I cannot discuss here<sup>22</sup>, but I would like to highlight some points where their positions overlap. First, Szondi argues similarly to Barthes that reading, whether it be called philological or not, cannot do away with polysemy and the ambiguities of meaning ("Mehrdeutigkeit"). Second, he claims that this ambiguity is a fundamental fact and due to the peculiar nature of texts, their being made up of linguistic signs. The ambiguity is thus independent of any authorial intention. It cannot therefore be resolved by means of reconstructing authorial intention, nor is it limited to cases where the author has intended to create ambiguity:

Das wissenschaftliche Postulat, daß nur die vom Dichter intendierte Mehrdeutigkeit vom Verständnis zu berücksichtigen ist, scheint nämlich weder der Eigenart des dichterischen Prozesses, noch der Eigenart des sprachlichen Kunstwerks ganz gerecht zu werden. Denn es setzt voraus, daß ein poetischer Text die Wiedergabe von Gedanken oder Vorstellungen ist. Steht das Wort gleichsam als Vehikel im Dienst von Gedanken und Vorstellungen, so dürfen im Fall einer Mehrdeutigkeit nur die Bedeutung oder nur die Bedeutungen beachtet werden, welche dem Gedanken oder der Vorstellung entsprechen.<sup>23</sup>

As a consequence, Szondi insists on the perpetual nature of any philological practice:

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*Kommentar in der Frühen Neuzeit*. Ed. Ralph Häfner/Markus Völkel. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2006, pp. 79-114, p. 80-81.

22 A contrastive comparison of Barthes' and Szondi's modes of reading and writing can be found in Sandro Zanetti. "Zwischen Mimesis und Abstraktion. Von Jean Leclerc zu Peter Szondi und Roland Barthes." *LASL* 40.2 (2015), pp. 348-373. Significantly, Zanetti chose for his comparison Szondi's essay "Eden" on Celan's poem "Du liegst," in which Szondi grapples with the question how to conceptualize the role of his intimate knowledge of and even of his personal involvement in the biographical circumstances of Celan's writing of the poem. Such a problem would hardly occur to Barthes, who had proclaimed the 'death of the author' and reduced the lives of the authors he loved to a handful of 'biographèmes.'

23 Peter Szondi. "Über philologische Erkenntnis." *Hölderlin-Studien. Mit einem Traktat über philologische Erkenntnis*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1970, pp. 9-34, pp. 30-31.

Dem philologischen Wissen ist ein dynamisches Moment eigen, nicht bloß weil es sich, wie jedes Wissen, durch neue Gesichtspunkte und neue Erkenntnisse ständig verändert, sondern weil es nur in der fortwährenden Konfrontation mit dem Text bestehen kann. [...] Das philologische Wissen hat seinen Ursprung, die Erkenntnis, nie verlassen, Wissen ist hier perpetuierte Erkenntnis [...].<sup>24</sup>

Szondi argues that philology is not a form of knowledge, but essentially a critical activity ("kritische Tätigkeit") characterized by two moments: the activity of differentiating and the activity of decision-making ("des Scheidens und Entscheidens").<sup>25</sup> Szondi thus understands philology not so much as an array of techniques to establish the correct version of a text, but as literary criticism, while insisting on the etymological meaning of the term 'criticism' as derived from the Greek verb *'krínein'* — 'to differentiate,' 'to distinguish.'<sup>26</sup>

We thus find in Szondi's remarks on philology not only a call to respect the fundamental plurality of meanings, a claim similar to Barthes' argument, even though it is certainly much less radical and far from resulting in such experimental forms as Barthes' essay *S/Z*. We also find an accentuation of literary criticism as a dynamic *activity* ("kritische Tätigkeit") similar to *S/Z*, where Barthes sets off from the very first page his own mobile practice against the standard structuralist aim of detecting an underlying structure.<sup>27</sup> In Barthes, this valuation of mobility is apparent *in nuce* in his shift from the term 'structure' towards the term 'structuration,' which stresses the idea of dynamic processuality.<sup>28</sup> This emphasis also informs a basic distinction suggested by Barthes in *S/Z*, namely that between two types of texts, the readerly ("lisible") and the writerly ("scriptible") text. The second type, the writerly text, allows for a reading as *practice* that is not mere consumption of the text but places the reader in a position of voluptuous productivity, a position where he or she can "accéder pleinement à l'enchantement du signifiant, à la volupté de l'écriture." (*S/Z* 558) As far as Szondi is concerned, the idea that the analytical process is necessarily a mobile one translates into his

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24 Szondi. "Über philologische Erkenntnis" (note 23), p. 11.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 13. Christoph König highlights as well the importance Szondi attributed to the activity of distinguishing, distinguishing being for him an essential means of understanding. See Christoph König, *Philologie der Poesie. Von Goethe bis Peter Szondi*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014, p. 102.

26 Barbara Johnson highlights the etymological root of the term 'criticism' in her review of Barthes' *S/Z*, too. Cf. "The Critical Difference." *Diacritics* 8.2 (June 1978), pp. 2-9. Yet, the understanding of the word 'philology' in the sense of 'criticism' is far older and can be traced back to Plotinus who praised the rhetorician Longinus as a 'philologist', adding that Longinus was *'kritikótatós'* ('most discerning critic'). Cf. Ralph Häfner. "Vorwort." *Philologie und Erkenntnis*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2010, pp. VII-VIII, p. VII.

27 This accentuation of reading as a mobile practice that differs from standard structuralist methodology is present throughout Barthes' texts of the 1960s and 1970s and most prominent in his 1963 essay "L'activité structuraliste," which negates the idea of structuralism as a school or a dogma by defining it as a specific activity.

28 See the chapter "Le tissu des voix" in Barthes' *S/Z*: "Il s'agit en effet, non de manifester une structure, mais autant que possible de produire une structuration." [*S/Z* 568]

definition of philological insight as “perpetuierende Erkenntnis.” This accentuation of the perpetual nature of insight with regard to literary texts very much follows the same line of thought as Barthes’ advocacy of a repetitive reading that will produce different results.

Finally, we find in Szondi’s notion of philology an emphasis on the activity of distinguishing and differentiating that is also at the heart of Barthes’ analytical approach in *S/Z* and beyond, throughout his overall œuvre in fact. This differentiating gesture figures, in a nutshell, in the essay’s very title. In the minimal graphic (not phonetic) difference between the two letters ‘z’ and ‘s,’ Barthes identifies the central conflict of Balzac’s novella which, according to him, is built around the contagious effects of castration that touch various personae of the novella and render difficult any attempt to classify the protagonists according to stable dichotomies such as male/female or animate/inanimate and to structure the text accordingly (see *S/Z* 626).

It is not all surprising that Szondi shares basic assumptions with Barthes and with structuralist linguistics in general, if we consider that Szondi himself contributed decisively to the introduction of French theory into German academia and that he tried to adopt structural linguistics in some of his essays and seminars for the interpretation of poetry. Yet, what is crucial here is that Szondi’s use of the term ‘philology’ is well compatible with the modes of reading that Barthes promotes as decidedly un-philological. This highlights once more how the term ‘philology’ is mobilised for very different purposes in the politics of literary criticism. But it also enables us to take a little step back from Barthes’ explicit rejection of philology and allows us to investigate the relation of Barthes’ reading modes to concepts of philology away from polemical oppositions.

### III. Philology and Barthesian ‘love of words’

Our detour via Szondi’s treatise has provided us with an understanding of philology that corresponds with Barthes’ idea of textual plurality and critical productivity. The question arises, however, about the exact place of an activity thus defined in Barthes’ work and, more generally, in the structuralist context. I would like to argue that the attitude that Szondi qualifies as ‘philological’ comprises precisely those qualities that enable Barthes to distance himself from structuralist methodology. Such distancing does not imply the renunciation of linguistic vocabulary, nor does it mean giving up on the structuralist follow-up on the Saussurian conception of the linguistic sign. It is therefore perhaps not so much a rupture than a shift—a shift, however, which Barthes highlights in the very first lines of *S/Z*: In this prominent place he argues that the dominant methods of structuralist analysis reduce the singularity of the text in order to lay bare general structures. Slowing down the reading process and unfolding the diverse ramifications of meaning is clearly meant as an antidote to such a reduction to singularity: “[C]ommenter pas à pas, c’est par force renouveler les entrées du texte, c’est éviter de le structurer de trop, de lui donner ce supplément de structure qui lui viendrait d’une dissertation et le fermerait: c’est étoiler le texte

au lieu de le ramasser." (*S/Z* 563) It is revealing how the reference to structuralism in the title of the seminar held at the *École pratique des hautes études* which announced the "analyse structurale d'un texte narratif" is suppressed in the title of the ensuing book.

As argued above, it is not only the "pluriel" of the text that Barthes' excessively slow reading is supposed to yield. Plurality also figures in his analytical vocabulary and at the conceptual gateways, which appear as the necessary counterparts to the 'writerly' text. Part of the essay's analytical plurality consists in the subtle integration of newly emerged theories such as Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, according to which the text—any text—is but a mosaic of more or less identifiable quotations. While Kristeva's name does not appear in this essay without footnotes, the idea of general and unavoidable intertextuality resonates in a number of statements in *S/Z*, e. g., when Barthes suggests that both Balzac's novella and his own reading/writing are made up of quotations (see e. g. *S/Z* 568). Barthes' activity of decoding actually addresses such a variety of literary aspects that these can hardly be brought in line with any single concept or theory. Fragmentating both the primary text and the analysis itself into small segments allows Barthes to avoid the pressure of consistently linking the diversity of his theoretical observations to one specific theory, just as he refuses resuming the multiple results of his readings of Balzac into one. Theory is inspirational without becoming a straightjacket; it is subjected to the pleasure principle.

Here, finally, we touch upon an aspect that has already resonated in Barthes' comparison of the effects of repetitive reading to drug-induced ecstasy and which is even more explicit in the above-quoted statement about the critic's affection in dealing with a 'writerly' text, that is "accéder pleinement à l'enchantement du signifiant, à la volupté de l'écriture." (*S/Z* 558) What we may call—with Szondi—'philology' thus appears as a mode of reading that Barthes was to later name (in a 1973 publication) the 'plaisir du texte.' With this label, he conceptualizes how the critic yields to the drifts of the text and to the drifts of his or her own dispositions. In Barthes' stressing the voluptuous affection of the literary critic to his object of study we may identify yet another aspect of philology: i. e., the meaning of philology in its oldest, etymological sense as 'love of the word' or 'love of words.'<sup>29</sup> The 'pleasure of the text' appears ultimately as a new wording of an old concept: it is essentially philology in its literal meaning—'love of words'—that also provides the grounds of Barthes' exploration of textual plurality in *S/Z*. The 'pleasure of the text' is not only the pleasure of avoiding

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29 The literal translation of the term 'philology' as 'love of words' is proposed by Karl Uitti. "Philology." *The John Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory & Criticism*. Ed. Michael Groden/Martin Kreiswirth/Imre Szeman. Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994, pp. 567-573, p. 567. Other literary reference books translate it as 'love of the word,' with the object of affection in the singular. Yet, in view of Barthes' attachment to structural linguistics, according to which meaning is not inherent in the sign but generated through difference which necessitates a plurality of paradigmatic signs against the backdrop of which the chosen sign can develop signification, the translation proposed by Uitti is more adequate for a discussion of Barthes' position.

the library and of getting around that laborious and sweaty craftsmanship, it is much more: pleasure in Barthes' sense is quite straightforwardly understood as a sensuous, erotic affection. As we have seen, the Barthesian 'love of words' consists of noticing, exploring, and naming linguistic shifts and differentiations, however minute they may be, as minute even as the minimal difference in the graphical shapes of the letters 's' and 'z.' And vice versa: the exploration of multiple meanings is just the basis for savouring the *eros* of the signifier.<sup>30</sup> Barthes' reorientation of structuralism in *S/Z* thus unites seemingly opposed attitudes towards the text: *eros* and academic criticism, affection and science-based methods, subjective devotion and objective distance. Barthes' voluptuous attitude to the signifier and the pleasures derived from his own *écriture*, the pleasures which the 'writerly' text affords him, are perhaps best illustrated by his commentary on the graphical difference between the letters 's' and 'z':

*SarraSine*: conformément aux habitudes de l'onomastique française, on attendrait *SarraZine* [...]. Or Z est la lettre de la mutilation : phonétiquement, Z est cinglant à la façon d'un fouet châtieur, d'un insecte érinnyque; graphiquement, jeté par la main, en écharpe, à travers la blancheur égale de la page, parmi les rondeurs de l'alphabet, comme un tranchant oblique et illégal, il coupe, il barre, il zèbre [...] Z est la lettre initiale de la Zambinella, l'initiale de la castration, en sorte que par cette faute d'orthographe, installée au cœur de son nom, au centre de son corps, Sarrasine reçoit le Z zambinellien selon sa véritable nature, qui est la blessure du manque. De plus, S et Z sont dans un rapport d'inversion graphique: c'est la même lettre, vue de l'autre côté du miroir: Sarrasine contemple en Zambinella sa propre castration. Aussi la barre (/) qui oppose le S de *SarraSine* et le Z de *Zambinella* a-t-elle une fonction panique: c'est la barre de censure, la surface spéculaire, le mur de l'hallucination, le tranchant de l'antithèse, l'abstraction de la limite, l'obcité du signifiant, l'index du paradigme, donc du sens. (*S/Z* 626)

Thus, the essay illustrates by its very title what in my view is a decisive feature of Barthes' 'love of words': the possibility of detecting differences on the level of the primary text and of introducing differentiations, producing signifiers on the level of analysis. Philology in this sense would then also be the driving force behind Barthes' relentless creation of new analytical terms: The introduction of new terms represents the possibility to introduce a difference—a difference that allows for a new view, a difference that sets the structures of classification in motion. To refuel this movement of perpetual lexical differentiation, Barthes came up time and again with terms derived from Latin and Ancient Greek, thus creaming off his professional training in classical philology. An example for this is the term 'proairésis' mentioned above, which is adopted in its specific Aristotelian sense for the designation of one of the five codes in *S/Z*. The term 'proairésis' exemplifies not only how Barthes' terminological distinctions tend to give way

30 Cf. *S/Z* 666: "Il serait donc faux de dire que si nous acceptons de relire le texte, c'est pour un profit intellectuel (mieux comprendre, analyser en connaissance de cause): c'est en fait et toujours pour un profit ludique: c'est pour multiplier les signifiants, non pour atteindre quelque dernier signifié."

to yet further distinctions, but also how they are usually applicable just as much to his own analysis as to his objects of study and thus have a self-reflexive quality. Barthes brings in the term 'proaïrésis' to refine the analysis of a literary text on the level of action and behaviour. As indicated above, he does so by inserting with this classical term a difference into the very concept of action: With reference to Aristotle, Barthes now understands action not only as a practice (*praxis*), but as a practice which is also a reflection of this practice. This idea of action in turn illuminates Barthes' own writing practice in *S/Z* and elsewhere—a practice that continuously reflects itself.

This differential movement of Barthes' own text is surely an important part of the aesthetics of his theoretical style, or, put differently, a reason for the persistent attractiveness of his theoretical language. Linked to this is a second and possibly just as decisive element of the aesthetics of Barthes' theoretical language, i. e., his creativity with regard to finding, forging and introducing new terms for the work of the critic—terms that allow to see a difference, terms that make a difference. These terms are words, which—for a certain period of time—are cherished, are loved by Barthes himself.<sup>31</sup> Thus, his 'love of words' is not only a love for the words of the primary text but essentially also one for his own words. This endows his practice of writing with a strong auto-affective dimension, which is perhaps as contagious as is castration in Balzac's novella, but with the opposite—not a sterilising, but a fertile and creative—effect. The voluptuous auto-affectation of Barthes as creator of signifiers also affects his readers to this day. While the literary critic Oliver Jahraus has stated in his 2004 introduction to literary criticism that philology in its old etymological sense has ceased to play a role in the academic discussion of literature<sup>32</sup>, Roland Barthes' 'writerly' practice and the wide, on-going reception of his texts suggest that this assessment might have to be relativized.

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31 Cf. the fragments "Mot-couleur" and "Mot-mana" in *roland BARTHES par roland barthes* [1975]. Paris: Seuil, 1995, p. 117.

32 Oliver Jahraus. *Literaturtheorie. Theoretische und methodische Grundlagen der Literaturwissenschaft*. Tübingen/Basel: Francke, 2004, pp. 14, 24.