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*W*Orte*: Decolonial Philologies and Poetical Places

Towards an Understanding of Lyric as (World) Theory?

> The issue of value surfaces in literary criticism with reference to canon formation. From this narrowed perspective, the first move is a counter question: *why* a canon? What is the ethico-political agenda that operates a canon? By way of a critique of phallogocentrism, the deconstructive impulse attempts to decenter the desire for the canon. Charting the agenda of phallocentrism involves the feminist, that of logocentrism the Marxist interested in patterns of *domination*. [...] When we feminist Marxists are ourselves moved by a desire for alternative canon-formations, we work with varieties of and variations upon the old standards. Here the critic's obligation seems to be a scrupulous declaration of "interest".
> We cannot avoid a kind of historico-political standard that the "disinterested" academy dismisses as "pathos". That standard emerges, mired in overdeterminations, in answer to the kinds of counter-questions of which the following is an example: What subject-effects were systematically effaced and trained to efface themselves so that a canonic norm might emerge?[1]

Introduction

The echo of 'an end of theory' still resonates in Literary Studies and Comparative Literature, but there are growing numbers of publications that emphasize 'literary theory' and state its reawakening.[2] This new turn to literary theory often sees itself also in a process of dis/continuation with past approaches to language (philology) and present ones (world literature). Both of these attempts are often

1 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value". *Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. London/New York: Routledge, 1988, pp. 154-178, here pp. 154f.

2 See for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "What is Left of Theory?" *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2013, pp. 191-217; Achim Geisenhanslüke. *Textkulturen: Literaturtheorie nach dem Ende der Theorie*. Paderborn: Brill | Fink, 2015; idem. *Der feste Buchstabe: Studien zur Hermeneutik, Psychoanalyse und Literatur*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2021; idem. "Diskurse und Gegendiskurse: Das Jahr 1966 und die Wege der Kritik". *Verabschiedungen der "Postmoderne": Neuere Historisierungen von "Theorie" zwischen "Post-Truth"-Narrativen und Generationengeschichte*. Ed. by Florian Scherübl. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2022, pp. 67-83; Galin Tihanov. "Ferrying a Thinker across Time and Language: Bakhtin, Translation, World Literature". *Modern Languages Open* 1 (2018): pp. 1-10; Miglena Nikolchina. "Born Undead: Beyond Theory, World Theory". *differences* 32.1 (01.05.2021): pp. 1-6; Kamelia Spassova. "The Return to/of Theory". *differences* 32.1 (01.05.2021): pp. 74-96.

seen as a hinderance to 'literary theory'. There are, thus, different presumptions about what 'literary theory' is. Not surprisingly, the debate follows different generic narratives, from linguistically interested stances and the poetics of Roman Jacobson, Erich Auerbach's efforts towards world literature, more recent advances as can be seen in the work of David Damrosch, and finally, to the call of a 'return to philology'. This call of a 'return to philology' was taken up by Paul de Man, but can, in fact, be seen as an inherent part of the work of Erich Auerbach and Peter Szondi, and, thus, stands in a German-speaking tradition and understanding of Comparative Literature that is inclined towards 'world literature', but not in a homogenizing and hegemonic sense. Instead, coming from excluded and marginalized positions that signal cultural and language diversity, it can be regarded as an acknowledging understanding that simultaneously *claims* and *provincializes* 'Europe' and that remains critical to national(-istic) understandings of 'culture' and 'literature'. It is *this* thread of a 'return to philology' that was taken up by Edward W. Said in his posthumously published work *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2003), which is, unfortunately, hardly ever mentioned in the more recent turn to 'theory'.[3] Interestingly, other meta-theories to language – as can be seen in poststructuralist thought and questions of subjectivity, too – are often missing in these recent approaches to 'theory' and 'world literature'. The turn to literary theory seems important indeed – I cannot think of a (con-)text that would come into existence without being based on different preliminary assumptions and theoretical presuppositions, mostly without us being aware of them. However, I think that the scope of its understanding should be expanded to include critical approaches about the constructedness and politics of meaning and reading and the production of 'knowledge', which are built on (often hidden) theoretical presuppositions.

3 Siraj Ahmed's rather historico-ontological critique that attempts to follow 'archeology' and 'postcolonial criticism' to "their logical conclusion" (p. 4), is a bifurcated one. For one thing, Ahmed criticizes that neither Auerbach nor Said pay enough attention to the Eurocentric, colonial underpinnings of early philologist attempts. For another thing, although he discerns the early developments of philology in the 'Old Testament', the Hebrew Bible, with G. W. F. Hegel's reading of the image of the Tower of Babel, he anchors his work himself in colonial philologist European thinking, a gesture that he vehemently criticizes in Auerbach as well as Said. Although I sympathize with the quest to undo philology as an approach altogether, because of its racist and colonial history and still resonating, long-during implications for how 'knowledge' has been structured and which material outcomes it produced since, I wonder whether it is possible to entirely dismiss it. Can a science simply be stopped? Might it not be important and necessary, instead, to come to another understanding of 'philology' and to use it as a subversive strategy to develop mechanisms that further shift the humanities in other, more open directions, not least by stressing philology's violent history? This is certainly what I attempt in this approach presented here. Otherwise, I fear that such 'paused' understandings of philology might be activated again and put into effect someday within nationalistic and populist-fascist reasonings. Cf. Siraj Ahmed. *Archaeology of Babel: The Colonial Foundation of the Humanities*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018, p. 2.

Within this new turn to 'theory', Miglena Nikolchina critically claims that we may also need to discuss conceptions of 'world theory' parallel to elaborations on 'world literature' in order not to universalize 'European' assumptions about what 'theory' is and what it means.[4] The question for me, though, is twofold: Firstly, I wonder what 'European' or 'Western' theories are. Is modern thought, or thought in modernity, not per se entangled with the other's text(s), as well as with the other's interventions in thought and with questions of othering (and *selfing*)? Are not (feminist and queer) Jewish, Black, postcolonial, and decolonial theorizations of the wor(l)d) – even when they are brought forward from within 'Europe' (and often enough they do so out of marginalized 'European' spaces or from positions that are in dialogue with 'European' grand narratives) – already *different* and *differing* configurations of interventionist, critical thinking that go beyond what is conceived as 'pure' 'European' or 'Western theory'? And must not 'European' theory construe itself in difference to what is construed as *other*, which foregrounds the question – the other of *what*? Such reasoning, which is not uncommon in approaches that understand themselves as 'critical postcolonial' stances[5], cannot overcome the problem of 'origins' and the movement of *différance* so cautiously theorized by Jacques Derrida and almost forgotten, or at least not much *en vogue* lately in the (especially US-centered, anglophone) humanities and literary studies. In view of this, the question arises whether it would not be appropriate to assume a diverse (and expanding) archive of 'world theory'?

Secondly, theory in this wider sense already emerges as an essential component of the historically conditioned entanglements of thought so that we always seem to follow theories in conscious and unconscious ways. Our actions and in(ter)ventions remain inscribed in 'theory'. To paraphrase Jacques Derrida,

4 Nikolchina. "Born Undead" (annot. 2), p. 4.

5 Sara Hakim Grewal problematizes a common understanding of *ghazal*-poetry as 'world poetry'. She argues against approaches to *ghazal*-poetry as a 'transhistorical' and 'transnational' phenomenon. Rather, she advocates an approach that would be more specific with regard to historical developments and 'origins'. She wants "to see and honor" 'differences' rather than "homogeneity" for purposes of 'cultural comparison', and in order to be "reminded" that 'nations' are not "pre-given". This approach though, too, comes with its own problems, I think. For one thing, *ghazals* are much older than 'nations'. And I think the search for 'origins' is problematic as it can be essentializing. Moreover, are *ghazals* not different even within similar generic structures (not to mention languages and 'cultures')? At what point does 'difference' end? And who can define its borders? Cf. Sara Hakeem Grewal. "The Ghazal as 'World Poetry': Between Worlding and Vernacularization". *Comparative Literature* 74.1 (2022): pp. 25-51, here p. 27ff. For me, the question – with regard to 'world literature' – is rather which languages are taken into consideration, in which spaces *by whom*, and for which hidden and/or assumed purposes, goals, and reasons, and which generalizations are taken for granted. I think, therefore, that a power-sensitive, genealogical approach might be fruitful in examining the emergence, dismissal, use, and abuse of different forms of 'lyricism', and in examining, the attitudes of the compilation of 'lyric', of what has been considered and understood as poetry and what not – and for which reasons.

theory and practice are infinitely intertwined.[6] A kernel part of these entanglements are questions of historically driven, political, and discursive configurations of power interrelations. As long as questions of power are unresolved (and they remain, by character, infinite) it is difficult, I believe, to speak of an end of theory, and pretending not to see theory may result in a dangerous liaison with the economy of power. Against this backdrop, the question of theory (and whose theory) should be addressed, since it is connected to the structures of power that mark the infrastructure of the material world everywhere, up to the body. They are also part of our textual corpora and include access to language and structures of knowledge production. These entanglements are much more complicated than a North–South divide; they only seem accessible when we provide intersectionally informed theories and knowledge production that are more susceptible to alterity, ethical quests, and equity, which give shape to the formation of subjectivity, knowledge as well as knowledge production – and which call into question the 'knowing' subject. Theory, thus, always means the theory of reading and the politics of making.[7]

To carve out space for the possibilities of such critical theories and inclusive *forms* of theorization, we may also need to think about the significance of subjectivity, the reification of literature, and body politics in the production of knowledge on a global scale. Currently, academia seems to be dominated by the power dispositive of hierarchized epistemes and unquestioned values within the automated, supposedly transparent, panoptic space of the internet, rather than the much more significant question of accessibility and difference. In Sara Ahmed's *Cultural Politics of Emotion* ([2004] 2014), the idea of such an urgent, existential quest to keep critical theorization alive and part of academic knowledging is connected to the senses and to the body.[8] Taking David Hume's term 'impression' as a starting point, Ahmed writes: "We need to remember the 'press' in an impression. [...] I will use the idea of 'impression' as it allows me to avoid making analytical distinctions between bodily sensation, emotion and thought as if they could be 'experienced' as distinct realms of human 'experience'".[9] The impression that 'presses' itself on me, in this sense, is that academic learning is more than ever regulated by an economy of knowledge production that is attached to market-affine values of academic trends and tokenisms. As academics, we too, are economized and placed within specific structures of economized thinking, knowledge production, closed ('identitarian') discourses, and the

6 See Jacques Derrida. *Theory & Practice*. Trans. by David Wills. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019.

7 Cf. Geisenhanslüke. "Diskurse" (annot. 2).

8 The economy of 'knowledging' contaminates us and leaves, in violent ways, its impressive traces on our minds and our bodies. It is thereby dependent on our subjectivities and how we relate to discourse. This form of contamination also comes with a specter of affectivity that gives an impetus and orientation to our quests and angles them in specific directions.

9 Sara Ahmed. *Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014, p. 6.

raising of money. To borrow a term coined by Derrida again, we are contaminated[10] by this economy of regulated knowledge production. Within this system of the curriculumization of knowledge, conformity, it seems, has also become an essential part of academic learning and social media, with its digital generation of dopamine, its often dangerous judicial appeal, and (racist) politics of inequity; it has become another means for generating collectivities of sameness.[11] The question what we read, what we consider and value as knowledge, and what we archive as knowledge or dismiss as not-knowledge seems to determine our positions and to regulate the unseen theories with which we see the wor(l)ds. This remains a problem to be constantly problematized on a globalized scale[12],

10 Jacques Derrida. *Acts of Literature*. Ed. by Derek Attridge. London/New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 225.

11 Although the internet remains an important space and cultural archive for people living diasporic lives, it also is a medium that is not accessible to everyone everywhere. However, this exclusion often remains unproblematized. Furthermore, besides works that explore the techno-biological manipulation and impact of engineered social media on the body and mind (see for an introduction for example, Trevor Haynes. "Dopamine, Smartphones and You: A Battle for your time". *sitn*, https://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2018/dopamine-smartphones-battle-time, May 1, 2018 [21.03.2023]), more recent works also question the image of the internet as a space of neutrality and democratization. Nevertheless, while critical approaches to the politics of digitality and its (ab-)uses are on the rise, the digital realm, compared to its central role in structuring social 'realities', discourses, and behaviors, especially in the Western world, is still underexplored. Groundbreaking in this regard are the works of Safiya Umoja Noble. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism.* New York: New York University Press, 2018, and Ruha Benjamin. *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019. Safiya Umoja Noble problematizes data discrimination and the values that are prioritized. In her research, she has discerned structures of inequity in the process of digital decision-making tools that she calls *technologies of redlining*. Noble regards this biased automatism of the digital as a major, future human rights issue. See ibid., pp. 2ff. Ruha Benjamin warns against the "(click) submit" of digital choice making and shows how racism is part of the social system of digital design; cf. Benjamin, 2019: pp. 38ff. With regard to processes of coloniality, Sahana Udupa and Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan, from a perspective of "media anthropology", try to embrace the ambiguity of the digital space as an 'unsettling battle ground' of different political ideologies, and to examine social media as a productive site of undecidability for further scrutinizing. However, they use 'decoloniality' as what they call a "critical lens" to examine movements and discourses that purport decolonial political effects on the digital. In doing so, the book invites for further examinations of "digital communication" and "to engage with contemporary social movements" (p. 13) and remains itself undecided. Cf. Sahana Udupa/Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan (eds.). *Digital Unsettling: Decoloniality and Dispossession in the Age of Social Media*. New York: New York University Press, 2023.

12 As Gayatri C. Spivak warns us, the question of terms and terminology in the critique of what is learned (and what not) is not sufficient, but rather presupposed in the economization of knowledge production; any alternative term will be taken to serve the status quo. What is true of 'money' as a material/value of exchange (and

and yet it is not the question of 'identity' that I want to refer to and emphasize here, but of domination.[13] We can assume that such an economy also produces *unknowledge* and *ignorance*. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick speaks of "the epistemological privilege of unknowing" as a disciplining and controlling machinery of sociopolitical structuring, and thus, not only of the university[14], but beyond it, of the materiality that such a machinery sets into motion. Sometimes it may not be the 'command of knowledge, but its ignorance'[15] that presses itself on us, by which we get contaminated and are channeled into specific tunnels of engineered knowledge (production) towards 'new' and 'ready consumerable' paths and products for thought. Sedgwick speaks of *different forms* of unknowledge and ignorance, using both terms in the plural. It might be fruitful, then, to think of an inter-related economy of procedures of *unknowledge* and ignorance through which our theories may be informed. This would make it possible to see what is relegated as *unknowledge* and ignorance, what is made unimportant, and what is seen as *unknowledge* and ignorance in terms of an 'originary, passive innocence' from a position of power, in which a conscious or unconscious strategy of pre-structured, premised ignoring is also at work.[16] It also depends who is ignoring or ignorant from which perspectives within this machinery.

In thinking theory, we may have to presume such aporias as the fundament of our positions and bodily places. At first glance, aporias signal impasses, limits that cannot be trespassed or translated. But untranslatability and limitation may also signify unthinkable possibilities of trespassing and the opening up of not-imaginable places of being (in the world).

In *Comment s'en sortir?* Sarah Kofman uses the term 'aporia' to discuss such impossible 'openings' in thought and texts. Taking Plato's *Symposium* as her point of departure, Kofman brings into play the figure of Métis, the Greek goddess of practical, but also complex, implicit knowledge and wisdom, as the mother of aporia and of philosophy.[17] Kofman discusses aporia as a conundrum that accompanies thinking in the process of forming meaning. She regards Métis as a figure that seeks orientation in the not-knowing movement of thought as a process *towards* sense-making. Such a 'path' must have a *place* – or leave a

capital data these days) is also true for *terms* and *terminologies* (like 'decolonization'), in the marketplace of 'knowledge'-production, and must therefore be handled with caution, as it gets used up or becomes part of the circulated capital data – and useless; cf. Spivak. "Scattered Speculations" (annot. 1), p. 163. See also David Scott/Sylvia Wynter. "The Re-Enactment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter". *Small Axe* 8 (2000): pp. 119-207; Maria Lugones. "Toward a Decolonial Feminism.". *Hypatia* 25.4 (2010): pp. 742-59; Gurminder K. Bhambra. "Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues". *Postcolonial Studies* 17.2 (2014): pp. 115-21.

13 Spivak. "Scattered Speculations" (annot. 1), p. 155.

14 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *Tendencies*. Ed. by Micheéle Aina Barale/Jonathan Goldberg/Michael Moon/Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993, p. 24.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Sarah Kofman. *Comment s'en sortir?* Paris: Galilée, 1983, pp. 16ff.

trace – along which it can be tracked, and maybe this place can be grasped within and in-between *words*. The German term for the word *Wort* can be used to visualize such an imagining. It harbors and combines 'word' (*Wort*) and 'place' (*Ort*) and makes it possible to look at words as messy places and containers of thought and epistemology. It also connects philology with the place in which it is used and understood and indicates the subjectivity and positionality of the speaking subject (of knowledge production), and, thus, can stand for 'theory' as such as a thought-praxis that is enmeshed within history, language, discourse, and the politics of reading.

In continuing to explore Nicholchina's call for a more inclusive 'world theory' in this broader sense, I wish to turn to lyric. Lyric can be regarded as a 'planetarian' possibility to theorize the wor(l)d, language, and experiences from endless subject-positions. It may thus be seen as an infinite archive of aporias and of riven words, as containers in transit, between different wor(l)ds, in-between *W*Orten*. The recent turn to lyric and theorization of lyric, in fact, could be understood as a productive combination of such related parameters towards wor(ld) theory.[18] Since lyric can be conceived of as a world phenomenon that can be found everywhere in manifold forms, such an approach to (lyrical) theory also entails a decolonial, anti-dominant stance, as it allows, on the one hand, a more planetarian understanding of 'knowledge' that can be gained out of lyrical texts.[19] On the other hand, because lyrical 'knowledge' is rather allegorical and without an affirmative enforcement of a specific truth or meaning, it also harbors processes of 'not-knowing' that remain open to further thought and the

18 Cf. Achim Geisenhanslüke. *Nach der Tragödie: Lyrik und Moderne bei Hegel und Hölderlin*. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2012; idem. *Am scharfen Ufer: Hölderlin, Frankreich und die Heideggersprache*. Paderborn: Brill | Fink, 2021; idem. *Rauhe Rhythmen: Friedrich Hölderlins Nachtgesänge*. Baden-Baden: rombach, 2023; Jonathan Culler. *Theory of the Lyric*. Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2015/2017; Jahan Ramazani. *Poetry in a Global Age*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2020; Peter Brandes. "'jenseits des Weltgrats': Figuren des Globalen in Celans Hamburg-Gedicht Hafen". *Komparatistik* 2020/2021. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2022, pp. 57-77; idem. "Paul Celan – Dichtung als globale Sprache". *Komparatistik* 2020/2021. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2022, pp. 19-22; Vidyan Ravinthiran. *Worlds Woven Together: Essays on Poetry and Poetics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022.

19 This is in fact thematized by Paul Celan in his poetological elaborations. Celan speaks not only of the dialogic that lyric (*Dichtung*) offers. He also emphasizes the potential possibility that lyric, in being on the move (*unterwegs*), may (*vielleicht*) also hit on hearts (*Herzland*) instead of "countries". Cf. Paul Celan. *Gesammelte Werke*. vol. 3, 2001. See for a reading of the role and image of the 'place' (*Ort*) in a topographical sense in Paul Celan's lyric Sandro Zanetti. "Orte/Worte – Erde/Rede: Celans Geopoetik". *Geopoetiken. Geographische Entwürfe in den mittel- und osteuropäischen Literaturen*. Ed. by Sylvia Sasse/Magdalena Marszałek. Berlin: Kadmos, 2010, pp. 115-31; idem. *Celans Lanzen. Entwürfe, Spitzen, Wortkörper*. Zürich: diaphanes, 2020, pp. 53-73; and, with special focus on Celan's understanding of lyric as a planetarian form of possible dialogue, Peter Brandes. "jenseits des Weltgrats" (annot. 18).

dialogic, a quality for which lyric was once appreciated as 'educational', also with regard to judgement and value.[20]

The 'experience' of lyric, moreover, is not just an aesthetic or epistemological one, but also an existential one. For Audre Lorde, poetry is not art in the sense of luxury. Rather, from a marginalized, Black feminist position, Lorde understands poetry as a necessity in a singular as well as a broader political sense, as an enabling strategy of alignment and agency to come to terms with and name unendurable sociopolitical conditions (which are also mirrored in the inner self).[21] But if this re-orientation of the lyrical, from within *W*Orten*, is to be planetary in character and not limited to what is commonly understood as 'Europe' or 'the West', it is also necessary to consider *the history of* philology. Historically, philology has been used to categorize and place languages and different subjectivities within a temporal, geographical, and ethnicized hierarchy, and in this way also assigned different (degrading) nuances of value to differently differentiated 'cultures' and 'languages'. This is an issue that needs to be problematized before we turn to how a different understanding of lyric as 'world theory' and philological acumen might be posed.

Old Philologies and New Turns

In the 19th century, philology was dominated by scholars who asserted biologized and racialized theories of languages and 'language-families'. As a result of such racialized and hierarchized constructions of language-histories, languages were associated with distinct racialized subjectivities. This development also influenced what became a 'valid' and valuable 'canon' of 'knowledge'. Accordingly, in the development of a 'European' canon and epistemology, 'knowledge' has been linked to the construction of a *white* 'European' subjectivity of Christian heritage that produces 'knowledge' and predominantly mirrors *white*, male, 'Christian', '(Western-)European' thought.[22] These implicit structural conditions in philology, though epistemologically and politically significant, remain unresolved and framed by these images.[23] On the one hand, philology seemed

20 Culler. *Theory* (annot. 18), p. 2, 36. See also Paul Losensky. "Persian Poetry". *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Ed. by Greene, Roland/Stephen Cushman/Clare Cavanagh/Jahan Ramazani/Paul Rouzer/Harris Feinsod/David Marno/Alexandra Slessarev. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012, pp. 1021-1024, here p. 1024; and Ramazani. *Poetry* (annot. 18), p. 249.

21 Audre Lorde. "Poetry is Not a Luxury". [1977] *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*. By Audre Lorde with a preface by Rent Eddo-Lodge and an introduction by Sara Ahmed. London: Silver Press [2007] 2017, p. 8.

22 See in this regard for example Siraj Ahmed. *Archeology* (annot. 3), pp. 30ff.

23 Cf. Edward W. Said. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London, New York: Penguin Books, [1978] 1991, pp. 122ff. and Andrew N. Rubin. "Orientalism and the History of Western Anti-Semitism: The Coming End of an American Taboo". *History of the Present* 5.1 (2015): pp. 95-108, here pp. 100ff. In such philologist categorizations, languages that have coexisted for long periods of time remain

to stand for "a science of all humanity". On the other hand, it divided humanity "into superior and inferior races".[24] Following from this, specific subject-formations emerged, for example that of the 'Semite/Jewish/Arab/Muslim/Hindu' among others. I call these *orienticate subjectivities*. *Orienticate* refers, on the one hand, to the different constructions of *orientalized* bodies and subject formations that are all linked to 'the Orient'. On the other hand, the term refers to the different ways in which such orientalized subjectivities have been placed in specific positions in discourse (and subsequently the material world), and in dividing and opposing roles, for example, that of the Jew/Arab and Hindu/Muslim. Furthermore, the term signifies the different ways in which people from such *orienticated subject-positions* have been trying to deal with and negotiate inferiorizing, orientalizing, and racializing theories and their imagery. Finally, in the contexts of such a discursive and material praxis, the term *orienticate subjectivities* also refers to resistant positionalities that have been trying to carve out space for liberating and visionary knowledge formations and notions beyond such reductions, divisions, and reifications. *Orientication* is thus understood as an epistemological *re*turn that does not refer to 'the Orient', but to the subversion of orientalizing discourses and to liberating, anti-dominant *re*orientations in thought and praxis from different orientalized positionings.

Philology, too, has been dealt with from these angles. Philology as a 'humanistic science', or rather a 'humanistic formation of knowledge', can lend itself to different theories. It can use language(s) for epistemological, historical, and philosophical formations of thought that are regressive. But it can *also* be used to change our world *differently* in engaged ways. Edward W. Said's plea for *the return to philology* can be understood in this sense.[25] Such a critical return to philology can also be observed in the work of the German Szondian literary studies scholar Achim Geisenhanslüke, who follows the traces of a Nietzschean

strangely segregated. For example, the separation in so called 'Euro-Indian' 'language families' on the one hand, and 'Semitic' languages, on the other hand, overlooks the intertwining and influence between these so called 'families', which had already formed – to carry on this image – 'hybrid' entities; concerning 'Persian', in which the Afghan lyric discussed below is written, for instance, this historically bound, intrinsic inter-relatedness is not only the case with Turkish and Mongolian languages, but also regarding Arabic, which continues to exert a considerable influence. Interestingly, and according to more recent textual findings, it was not only Arabic but also the Hebrew alphabet, in which 'Persian', quasi 'from below', was first put into writing. See Ludwig Paul. *A Grammar of Early Judaeo-Persian*. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2013; idem. (ed.). *Persian Origins – Early Judaeo-Persian and the Emergence of New Persian*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003. These are all instances that question straightforward categorizations of so called 'language families' and racialized geographical placements of people according to this 'logic', the way it is still predominantly often thought of today, making such claims once again untenable.

24 Said. *Orientalism* (annot. 23), pp. 133f.

25 Edward W. Said. *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. 58ff.

philology and the work of Peter Szondi, among others.[26] Challenging Eurocentric theories of 'knowledge', 'humanism', and 'reason', and using other entry points to rethink such concepts, Geisenhanslüke discusses deconstructive as well as hermeneutic dimensions of reading and insights from critical theory, especially those of Adorno and Benjamin.[27] Following Szondi, furthermore, Geisenhanslüke claims that philology and philosophy belong together. In one of his recent works, in particular, he pursues this philosophic-philological connection within an epistemology that ensues from the poetics of the lyrical text itself.[28]

Of especial interest to me is what Geisenhanslüke calls a 'poetology of non-knowledge' (*Poetologie des Nichtwissens*).[29] The concept of non-knowledge is used by Geisenhanslüke to assert a critical stance toward conventional assumptions found in mainstream discourse, which he refers to as the 'hegemonic claims' (*Herrschaftsansprüche*) of modern reason.[30] The same logic applies to Geisenhanslüke's examination of the poetical structure of epistemology in lyrical works. In *Am scharfen Ufer*, Geisenhanslüke explores non-knowledge in relation to the lyrical text.[31] Geisenhanslüke's approach can be understood as a poetological theory of an oscillation inherent in the poetical instances of lyric: Lyrical meaning unfolds in-between different (philosophical, rhetorical, psychological) textual formations on the one hand, and an allegorical and unavailable element that is also built into the poetical interstices of the lyrical text on the other hand.

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26 While their approach is embedded in critical theory, it also goes in the direction of Black and postcolonial critiques. See for example Sylvia Wynter's "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation: An Argument". *The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003): pp. 257-337; Scott/Wynter. "The Re-Enactment of Humanism" (annot. 12); Anibal Quijano. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America". *Nepantla* 1.3. Trans. by Michael Ennis (2000): pp. 533-580.

27 Geisenhanslüke. *Der feste Buchstabe* (annot. 2).

28 Geisenhanslüke. *Am scharfen Ufer* (annot. 18), pp. viii-xi.

29 Achim Geisenhanslüke. *Dummheit und Witz: Poetologie des Nichtwissens*. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2011, p. 11.

30 Ibid.

31 Geisenhanslüke. *Am scharfen Ufer* (annot. 18). The study aims to critique Heidegger's readings of Friedrich Hölderlin, and to free Hölderlin and poetic writing from Heidegger's intellectual grip and monolithic and appropriating national(-istic) understandings. The work pays attention to the poetological epistemology and aesthetics that Hölderlin develops in his poetic work. See ibid., p. ix. This is a question that Geisenhanslüke also tackles from different angles in some of his other, more recent works. In *Narben des Geistes: Zur Kritik der Erfahrung nach Hegel*. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2020, for instance, he examines Hegel's approach to the mind as a dialectic that, in contrast to Kant's, unites the dichotomy that the latter perceives in the aesthetic and reason-bound dimensions of representation (*Darstellung*). Geisenhanslüke's emphasis on Hegel's pursuit of the aesthetic and Hölderlin's philosophical utterances brings Hegel's philosophical writing closer to Friedrich Hölderlin's poetic writing. Consequently, the writing of the two thinkers appears as two distinct forms of aesthetically and philosophically informed poetics. Ibid., pp. 7ff.

It is from this *moving oscillation* that lyric derives its epistemological meaning.[32] Before I allude to this aspect, I will first discuss Geisenhanslüke's poetological approach in more detail.

Towards a Poetological Philology?

Geisenhanslüke seems to propose a form of close reading of the lyrical text that centralizes the aesthetic acumen of the poetic textual insights and imagery to come to knowledge as an affirmative oscillation between processes of knowing and not-knowing, and between the known and surprise. In this sense, his approach is at the core of a turn to philological acumen: It looks at the poetological meanings of the text without depoliticizing them and by paying attention to the question of historical context and questions of subjectivity. This approach invites to tackle the problem of form and content through the ways language is used and allowed (and not allowed), literally, to *take place* as a knowledge formation. It can be perceived as a philological turn that challenges philology, making it a critical endeavor that helps to uncover and disassemble epistemological structures:

Firstly, it focuses on the imagery, rhythm, and rhetoric of language, and how these are set into work. Secondly, it follows Szondi's critical approach to classical philology, which rejects a programmatic ahistorical reading that merely seeks to overcome and 'translate' historical distance.[33] It thirdly emphasizes Szondi's approach to philology in considering the historical *location*[34] of the reading and not only of the written text, and, at the same time, paying tribute to the aesthetic dimension of the (literary) text.[35] In addition, its poetological rationale differs diametrically from the ambiguous, and at least partially racializing philological concerns of 19th century European accounts, as already critically discussed by Edward W. Said.[36] Rather, and in parallel with postcolonial thinking, this

32 Instead of using the word 'ignorance' for the German word *Nichtwissen*, I prefer to use the term non-knowledge. In doing so, I want to stress Geisenhanslüke's definition of the term as a liminal expression between knowing/knowledge and not-knowing. The term 'ignorance' does not encompass this liminal aspect, but rather refers to a lack of knowledge. Cf. Achim Geisenhanslüke/Hans Rott (eds.). *Ignoranz, Nichtwissen, Vergessen und Missverstehen in Prozessen kultureller Transformationen*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008, pp. 7-14.

33 Peter Szondi. *Einführung in die literarische Hermeneutik: Studienausgabe der Vorlesungen*. vol. 5. Ed. by Jean Bollack/Helen Stierlin. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, [1975] 2012, p. 19.

34 By using the word *location* instead of 'context', I want to emphasize what Szondi implicates here, which is not only the historical and thus political context of reading, but also the subjectivity of the reading position; cf. ibid., pp. 9-26.

35 Szondi. *Einführung* (annot. 33), p. 25. See also Geisenhanslüke. *Der feste Buchstabe* (annot. 2), pp. 32ff.

36 Edward W. Said. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983, pp. 268-89, and idem. *Orientalism* (annot. 23), pp. 123-48.

approach can be conceived of as what Said, in his posthumously published work *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2003), called a *return to philology* from a critical humanist stance. In this later work, Said emphasizes (and this is what he may share with Geisenhanslüke) an appreciative Nietzschean approach to language and philology as a "science of reading" that is "paramount for humanistic knowledge".[37] Following Erich Auerbach, Said links language to humanist thought, while being aware that 'humanism' in a fixed, classical sense has always been critically viewed from (feminist and queer) Black, Jewish, and postcolonial angles criticizing its entanglement with colonialist, genocidal, and exploitative forms of thought and practices; at least since the so-called linguistic turn, 'humanism'[38] has, finally, been complicated within critical and anti-colonial epistemes. What is interesting in Auerbach's and Said's approaches as two important pioneers in Comparative Literature, however, may not be whether and in what ways philology is rooted in history, which they both stress anyway; what they emphasize by considering literature and philology is rather that the world is *made*, and that it is therefore possible to de-construct and restructure it. This is an attitude that pays attention to the possibility of agency – and this is especially valuable as both Auerbach and Said develop this empowering position while they are in exile, and thus out of a state of affectivity, out of mourning, and nostalgia, but maybe also (precisely because of that) out of care: Languages harbor images, *Vorstellungen,* how these restructurings may develop and look like within the possibility of a different humanist envisioning. What they propose, then, is the allegory of a *chance* to think alliances and critique differently.

This quest for a renewed power-sensitive philology and humanism traceable in Auerbach's and Said's approaches, thus, envisions other, ethically informed epistemologies of 'humanist thinking' with regard to the relation and becoming of the self and the other and the workings of literature and theory in close consideration of the historical conditions in which writing and reading are performed. This applies, finally, to Geisenhanslüke's approach as well. On the one hand, it emphasizes the politics of reading that any contact with language indulges in, on the other hand, the question of the epistemology of the lyrical text remains central.

37 Said. *Humanism* (annot. 25), p. 58.

38 It is tedious to discuss here the term 'posthumanism', which has its own pitfalls regarding power-relations, supremacist thinking and problems of subjectivity. For a discussion of Auerbach's importance for and influence on Edward W. Said's understanding of philology, see Evgenia Ilieva. "Said, Auerbach, and the Return to Philological Hermeneutics". *The European Legacy – Toward New Paradigms* 25.2 (2020): pp. 134-153. Said's high esteem for Auerbach as a scholar, critical thinker, and 'humanist' can also be sensed in his acknowledgment of Auerbach's work, especially in *Humanism* (annot. 25), p. 85-118, where one chapter is devoted to Auerbach and his ideas around 'humanism', as well as Auerbach's most well-known, major work *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur*. Bern: Francke, 1946.

This approach to lyric can be regarded as a theory that does not impose itself through inductive assertions of 'truth'.[39] Lyrical writing is considered as a form of theorization, as insightful reflection, and 'knowledge', instead of being reified as an object of (philosophical or philological) study. Such an approach also forestalls the categorization of other languages and forms of writing as 'unscientific', 'less true', 'unclear', or 'obsolete'. I am seduced to describe this within an 'ornamental' language that, at least in German, is often relegated to 'the Orient' and disparaged as 'flowery language' (*blumige Sprache*): Like gaining honey, be(e)-like, from a flower meadow, it is a non-violent[40], critical but cautious approach to reading (not only literature) that remains open to the dialogue with the other, and yet, since it also harbors instances and sites of unavailability, always forms an external, critical place to theorizing as well as to itself.

This renewed approach to the poetics of language helps to free other languages from fixed (orientalist or otherwise derogatory) categorizations and considerations, and to carve out epistemological space to critically (re-)consider different forms of writing for their poetic and epistemological insights. It differs from a more common understanding of close reading in two ways: On the one hand, it does not read the literary text from a given programmatic meta-angle (Marxist, psychoanalytical, materialist, etc.). On the other hand, it does not reduce the text to itself within a text-immanent reading. Rather, the philosophic, theoretical, linguistic, rhetorical, political, and aesthetic instances contained in the lyrical text are considered for further thought; in this way, instances of association, and what could be called *improvised thinking*, can be centralized for further, freer, outside the box readings. Such an approach looks at the deconstructive, poetic, and epistemological conjunctions of the text, and what the text affirmatively says within its different instances, within the historical dimensions of the writing and reading processes, all of which are not expected to be conclusive or exhaustive. It thus at once tackles two inter-related issues. In a narrower sense,

39 In this sense, it can be regarded as a *weak theory* in Sedgwick's understanding. A weak theory emerges within a local context. Rather than to enforce its 'knowledge' out of a tautological and reductive reasoning, the way suspicious, 'paranoid' 'strong theories' do, weak theories work together with 'strong theories' but do not claim to be of an all-encompassing 'truth' or to be complete; rather, they are understood to be more processual and attentive within close readings. Cf. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2003.

40 Judith Butler distinguishes between nonviolent (collective) acts and the aggression and (bodily) force that these acts may encompass. Cf. Judith Butler. *The Force of Nonviolence*: *An Ethico-Political Bind*. London/New York: Verso, 2021, p. 23. Maybe reading can as well be considered as such an act of force on both sides of the encounter, however conscious or unconscious it might be. Any relation to an other, therefore, I think, must consider relationality and transgression. Any relation is caught on the threshold of non-violence, with a hyphen, and therefore should be open to negotiation and dialogue, and without enforcing some form of truth, however difficult that may be(-come), even when reading dominant, dogmatic, or canonized texts.

as mentioned above, it helps to question and illuminate forms of intellectual othering, racism, devaluation, and (orientalist) exclusion that would fall under categories such as 'flowery', 'unserious', 'unintellectual', 'emotional', 'sentimental', 'pathetic', or simply 'literary'. In this sense, it is also a *critical re-turn* to different forms of orientalism and orientalizing discourses, as well as to the poetics of a language that is formally *made* to *appear* 'objective', 'prosaic', 'normal', 'universal', and, therefore, allegedly without a subject and position (of speaking).

In a broader sense, the critical, yet unenforced aspects and utterances that a poetic (con-)text proposes as possibilities of knowledge, as well as the aesthetic values of the text, can both be considered and understood as intellectual avenues of (critical) thought. Furthermore, it allows to look at the aesthetic value that is inherent in philosophical texts as the suppressed and yet still discernable components through which the text is stabilized or can be deconstructed. In this sense, it is a (re-)consideration of methodological and epistemological thought within the parameters of a text's poetics, that is, its theoretical, affective, sensual, and narrative economy. This reconsideration is a form of close reading that draws insights from the poetics of the text without distilling its poetic elements and manifold meanings. Furthermore, it offers a possibility for re-orientations not only in philology, which is historicized and viewed for its political aspects, but also in defining lyric, situating both within history, time, and space, while allowing their poetic function to be extended to other forms of thought, imagery, and to the contemporary.

Poetological Readings of the Danube

In *Am scharfen Ufer*[41], Geisenhanslüke follows Hölderlin's orientation towards 'the East'. In his poem *Der Ister,* Hölderlin's lyrical I wonders about the course of the Danube. Geisenhanslüke seems to follow these lyrical reflections along the flow and the direction of this and (sometimes confluent) other streams, rivers from within the poem, a journey that "does not lead to home (*in die Heimat*), but to the foreign (*in die Fremde*), as the place of an always already vulnerable encounter of the self with itself (*Selbstbegegnung*) [...]".[42] In this wandering along the imaginary of the poem, the foreign becomes the previously undetected place in one's own self, a place that is interrelated with oneself, and is not somewhere

41 This discussion of non-knowledge, 'West' and 'East', and self and other that is centralized here for the purposes of this text, is more a byproduct, side-effect or surplus (depending on how one wants to understand it) of Geisenhanslüke's study that is more concerned with Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin, and Hölderlin's relation to ancient Greece, the latter's search for poetic (and political) authenticity, their place in (German) history, as well as the relation between philosophy and literature. It is therefore an implicit pursuit of how to read literature in the context of a conjoined world or world literature. See for a further discussion of Geisenhanslüke's Szondian approaches and his elaborations on this matter Geisenhanslüke. *Der feste Buchstabe* (annot. 2), pp. 30-54.

42 Geisenhanslüke. *Am scharfen Ufer* (annot. 18), p. 165.

in the outside. The river's geography rather hints at the self's own undetected, maybe hidden, spots. There is also a risk detectable in Geisenhanslüke's reading of the river's path and in this encounter. It is the possibility of self-destruction (*Zerstörung*), of losing oneself, and, only subtly perceivable, also the need and uncertainty to find another self.

> The closing line "Was bleibet aber, / stiften die Dichter" does not serve a causation of being, but the self-assurance of a lyrical I, which, following the heroic example of seafaring, exposes itself to the risk [...] of a voyage that leads not to the homeland, but to the foreign as the place of an always vulnerable encounter of the self with itself, which is only immune to destruction insofar as the poet's own language, bound to the present, remains.[43]

Both movements in between which the lyrical I seems to delve thus are sublated in the lyrical language as the knowing form of non-knowledge. The poem in this sense becomes a receptacle of a path of thinking, preserving a journey along the river that retains its indeterminate dialogic voice.

The flow of the *Ister*, according to Geisenhanslüke's reading, appears to be ambiguous. It does not allow for definitude. It is slow (*Gemächlichkeit*) and seems to come from the 'East', but also appears to go back 'eastwards'.[44] It seems as if it would itself wander and ponder, looking for almost forgotten directions and connections, opening up (the) (it-)self to the possibilities of not-knowing. Geisenhanslüke links the slowness of the poem's river implicitly to an inner and outer search that seems to convolute and disembogue in the lyrical form. While the river – as if going back eastwards, not-knowingly – seems to look out for its 'oriental' 'origins' in the geography of the earth, it also seems to begin a search within itself and to question its self as some kind of 'origins'. In this search for the past, the lyrical voice enters the threshold of modernity – a trajectory that refers back to an *other* outside of the self, rather than to the self: "On the way to the origin, towards the East, *Der Ister* [...] performs that re-turn, which is inscribed in modern poetry as a caesura".[45] There is thus a form of fissure retained in the poetic words, which the lyrical I, not-knowingly, makes known, and which signals the imprint of connected passages of a self to an other. These connected passages happen on both mappings: the inner psychic map of the self as well as the outer geographical map that is inscribed in the material world. The world and the word become intertwined and one in each other's voicing in the lyric, although it is not clear what the river inscribes in the wor(l)d – its movements

43 Ibid. "Die Schlusszeile 'Was bleibet aber, / stiften die Dichter' dient nicht der Stiftung des Seins, sondern der Selbstversicherung eines Dichter-Ich, das sich dem heroischen Beispiel der Seefahrt folgend dem Risiko [...] einer Fahrt aussetzt, die nicht in die Heimat, sondern in die Fremde als den Ort einer stets gefährdeten Selbstbegegnung führt, die vor Zerstörung nur insofern gefeit ist, als dem Dichter, die eigene, an die Gegenwart gebundene Sprache bleibt".

44 Ibid., p. 78.

45 "Auf dem Weg in den Ursprung nach dem Osten vollzieht *Der Ister* [...] jene Umkehr, die der modernen Dichtung als Zäsur eingeschrieben ist". Cf. ibid., p. 78.

remain obliged to a sphere of non-knowledge, unattainable for the lyrical voice to determine. Its inscription seems like an inner and outer geo*graphy* that connects the 'East' and 'West'. In contrast to the Rhine which does not make it 'to Asia', it turns out well for the Ister, Geisenhanslüke muses. Although it is unclear what it looks for, it can continue its journey: "The Danube cuts through the rock, forms furrows in the earth as if inscribing it with characters, making its way to the East. From its humble beginnings, it develops a long-lasting force, establishing a passageway that runs throughout Europe".[46]

In Geisenhanslüke's reading, the 'oriental' (*das Orientalische*), the possible eastern source of the *Ister*, is in this way (re-)inscribed into the dualism of 'East' and 'West', 'past' and 'future'. It overwrites them, literally and geo-graphically. Rather than aiming to acquire knowledge, the lyrical voice tracks how the river seems to not-knowingly know. This not-knowing search is linked to an unsettling wandering of the flow of the river, a space with its own geo-*graphy* that has written itself otherwise in the earth, and in the question where the lyrical presence of language in the text runs to – at the end of the lyric there is only non-knowledge.[47] In this poetic re-reading of non-knowledge symbolized as a river's path, non-knowledge thus does not stand for itself, is not so much the philosopher's quest for knowledge, disguised as the literary critic's endeavor. Non-knowledge rather appears here as a movement that is woven in the historical presence (*Gegenwärtigkeit*) of the lyrical I, and within the texture of nature-culture, questioning, from a quasi-eco-critical stance, the subjectivity of the writing subject and fixed understandings of 'knowledge'. Non-knowledge appears as a possibility of insightful search and as an ingredient part of the eco-*logized* and geo-*graphed* materiality that the (poetic) wor(l)d re-writes between 'nature-culture'; it is a search that takes its unguaranteed insights from this interwoven contextuality, while responding with the echo of the lyrical form in a shifting, movingly moved self within and outside of the lyric.[48]

This double reading of the earth – its lyrical formation in Hölderlin's writing as well as in Geisenhanslüke's tracking of the lyrical text – opens up an approach to the value of 'things' that is not planted in a colonial ground of exploitation. It is a (use-)value of awaiting. In following the earth, head bent, the lyrical voice awaits a response from the river. Instead of a desire to dominate, it surrenders to

46 "Die Donau durchsticht den Felsen, bildet wie Schriftzeichen Furchen in der Erde und macht sich so auf den Weg in den Osten. Aus ihren bescheidenen Anfängen heraus entwickelt sie eine langanhaltende Kraft, die einen Gang begründet, der quer durch Europa verläuft". Ibid., p. 80.

47 Ibid., p. 80-88.

48 This quite thin book also comprises other accents that feed into this painted-like theory-scape and should be of interest to all those working on the highly influential and highly hyped and liminal space of French–German philosophizing and its US-American offshoots, but also to those whose work comprises (feminist) post- and decolonial approaches in the humanities and social sciences; noteworthy among other threads is, for example, a reading of Henri Meschonnic as a sign post within and after deconstruction; see Geisenhanslüke. *Am scharfen Ufer* (annot. 18), pp. 113ff.

the earth-language, to the murmuring dialogue with the river. The (use-)value of this river-language, the double reading seem to say, is not *zweckdienlich*, bound to a specific purpose, and yet valuable because of its not-knowing that opens up other possibilities of 'progress' and inscriptions of the wor(l)d. Its value and usefulness must not be sought out. Rather, it resides already in the movement, in the not-knowing in-between-place of the dialogic. Such a reading is affine to a non-exploitative possibility to understand, and to understand value.[49] Spivak argues for an understanding of Marx's notion of value as a per se possibility, untied to structures of capital, which are also essential to conceive the value of the work of theory as counterintuitive:

> In keeping with this methodological proviso, and still undoing the use-value/exchange-value split, Marx offers a few counter-examples. Keeping just value for the découpage of his labor theory, he consigns value-at-the-origin to Nature, where the possibility of measure exists as the incommensurable. Thus, the very first counter-example – earth and air – has incommensurable use-value because human labor has not gone into its making. This, one may say, remembering the Aristotelian notion of theory, is the birthless, unphrasable end of the forms of appearance of value. [...] Marx indicates the need to assume *Nutz* – sheer usefulness – in use as well exchange, so that it cannot be kept separate for use-value alone. This hint of the complicity (folded togetherness) of usefulness and the abstract measurability of value is unfortunately not clear in [Engel's] English translation.[50]

The 'air', 'soil', and river that Geisenhanslüke wonderingly follows from within Hölderlin's lyric amounts to such an incommensurable value-gain that lyric offers within a more planetarian thinking of 'world theory', which overwrites hitherto divides in language and discourse.

This multilayered unfolding puts not-knowing within a scheme that can be thought of as a signifying, lingering structure of the produced knowledge. Such a reading opens up the possibility to regard 'the East', and more generally, the mapping of the wor(l)d differently, as *geo-graphical* unfinished conversations without fixed conclusions. The not-knowing movement and wandering/wondering dialogue with the other are what is upheld and stressed. A *reparative reading* ensues in this way, which resides in the liberating and healing ability of the lyrical text to open up unforeseen epistemological paths, on something resembling equal grounds that does not end in consumable formations of 'knowledge', but in the much more fragile and humble invitations for unfinished dialogues. The wa/ondering of and in the text becomes a mapping out and opening up of other possibilities of becoming, of connectivity, of thought, and interrelation between what is regarded as 'East' and 'West'. This orientation along the Danube and towards an other geo*graphy* from out of the poem can be taken for a critical

49 Marx states that "[a] thing can be a use-value without being a value". "This is the case", he further claims, "whenever its utility to man is not mediated through labor. Air, virgin soil, natural meadows, unplanted forests, etc. fall into this category". Marx qtd. in Spivak. "What is Left of Theory?" (annot. 2), p. 194.

50 Ibid., p. 195.

form of engagement with orientalism from out of *orienticate positionings*, and furthermore, for other forms of dialogism that are not bound to the 'East' and 'West' dichotomies, and binarisms, but to lyric as another 'earth' of encounter and formations of 'knowledge'.

In this sense, Geisenhanslüke's poetologically inspired approach towards lyric implicitly follows a Saidian critique of Orientalism by looking at the prepositions of Western epistemology from a critical philological, Szondian approach[51], albeit one that intermingles binaries. 'East' and 'West', 'north' and 'south' rather become the language of the earth and, in this sense, become one text. Not only is the poetic text (re-)read, but notions and images (about the other and the self) are also tackled. The lyrical I seeks a dialogue with the river, along new paths that run at the poem's geologized 'earth' and interlinks outer and inner routes. This river-*ology*, reading along the river, can be understood as a (future-related) cartography of eco-*logical planetarian*, *down to earth* inter-relations as fluent junctions between and *within* the self and the other.

(Transnational feminist) Decolonial epistemologies, too, can be understood (and developed) as such free-floating rivers, *drives*, in the 'affective economy'[52] of poetological non-knowledges, which are wor(l)d structuring, yet do not adhere to specific presumed *-isms*, but rather to 'world theories' and geo*graphies* that attempt to find new ways and entry points to and orientations in thought in order to change the materiality of what has become (our perceptions of) 'reality'.

Against the backdrop of this poetological reading, and from an *orienticate positioning*, I shall read an Afghan lyrical text and ask how it can be conceived as such a poetical place that lends itself to an example of 'world theory'. A genesis of non-knowledge as a theory of lyric and as an 'event for itself'[53] can be discerned, allowing other understandings of different concepts such as freedom, sovereignty and subjectivity become graspable.

Lāla-ye Āzād – *The Free Tulip*

In recent years, within the growing field of Afghanistan Studies, scholars have paid closer attention to Afghan literatures and the use and function of literature in Afghanistan and the Afghan diasporas.[54] Contemporary Afghan

51 Geisenhanslüke. *Am scharfen Ufer* (annot. 18), p. x.

52 Ahmed. *Cultural Politics of Emotion* (annot. 9), p. 117.

53 Culler. *Theory* (annot. 18), p. 35.

54 Studies on Afghan literatures are still rare, and in most occasions have been conducted predominantly within the field of 'Iranian Studies', which focuses mainly on Iran. Although formerly understood as a 'linguistic' designation, the term 'Iranian' represents its own historical trajectory that is caught in pejorative political regional, orientalist, colonial, and philologist presumptions, in which other parts of the region, besides Iran as it is today, remain marginalized. See Wali Ahmadi. "Exclusionary Poetics: Approaches to the Afghan 'Other' in Contemporary Iranian Literary Discourse". *Iranian Studies* 37.3 (2004): pp. 407-429; Wali Ahmadi. *Modern Persian Literature in Afghanistan: Anomalous Visions of History and Form.* London: Routledge,

literature, lyrics and poetry, too, have gained some attention and have been discussed.[55] The main focus here is on diasporic internet-entries and publications, while the long history of lyrics – Sufi-poetry – that is set to music, as well as literature in other Afghan languages other than Persian and Pashto are still desiderata.[56] Poetry and lyrical texts have a long history in Afghan contexts and can be regarded as common and popular artistic forms of expression that are

2008; Aria Fani. "Divided by a Common Tongue: Exclusionary Politics of Persian Language Pedagogy". Ajam Media Collective, May 10, 2015, https://ajammc.com/2015/10/05/exclusionary-politics-persian-language-pedagogy. More ancient literatures of the Central/Southeast Asian region, subsumed under the term 'Persian literature', are, therefore, frequently, associated almost exclusively with Iran, making modern Iran the country of 'Persian Literature'. 'Persian' derives possibly from the European term for 'Farsi', going back to the Greek name *Persis* for this central, Southeast Asian region. *Fārsī* is thereby often regarded as an (accepted) Arabic alteration of formally *Pārsī* (as there is no *p* in the Arabic alphabet). See Kamran Talattof. "Social Causes and Cultural Consequences of Replacing Persian with Farsi". *Persian Language, Literature and Culture: New Leaves, Fresh Looks*. Ed. by Kamran Talattof. London, New York: Routledge, 2015, pp. 216-228. Within more modern understandings, 'Persian' is classified in Darī, Fārsī, and Tojikī. While Tojikī refers to 'Persian' spoken in Tajikistan and is written in the Cyrillic alphabet, Fārsī is used for 'Persian' spoken in Iran, a unifying, standardized Tehrani dialect that was introduced in Iran in the 20th century within nation-building efforts. In Afghanistan, the term Darī is officially used for 'Persian', which is the most widely spoken language and one of the three official languages of Afghanistan besides Pashto and Uzbakī; a development that, as in Iran, must also be seen within nationalistic aspirations. It represents mainly the standardized dialect spoken in Kabul. Darī is often anachronistically also referred to as *fārsī-ye darī*. 'Darī' and 'Fārsī' are both old terms, dating back to at least the 8th century as mentioned by Ibn al-Muqaffa' (pp. 724-759). Both terms, 'Darī' as well as 'Fārsī', were frequently used and allegedly already distinct language variations in that time. 'Darī' is, thereby, connoted to court-language and the language of literature/poetry, while 'Fārsī' is regarded as representing the language of the religious Zoroastrian texts. 'Darī' was the first language-variation that was put to writing and is believed to be close to the Dari written, pronounced, and spoken in contemporary Afghanistan. Cf. Mehr Ali Newid/Peter-Arnold Mumm. *Persisches Lesebuch: Fārsī, Darī, Tojikī – Originaltexte aus zehn Jahrhunderten mit Kommentar und Glossar*. Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2007, p. 1.

55 Zuzanna Olszewska. "A Hidden Discourse – Afghanistan's Women Poets". *Land of the Unconquerable: The Lives of Contemporary Afghan Women*. Eds. Jennifer Heath/Ashraf Zahedi. Oakland: University of California Press, 2011; idem. *The Pearl of Dari: Poetry and Personhood Among Young Afghans in Iran*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015; Anders Widmark. "The View from Within: An Introduction to New Afghan Literature". *Words Without Borders*. May 1, 2011, https://wordswithoutborders.org/read/article/2011-05/the-view-from-within-an-introduction-to-new-afghan-literature (24.07.2016).

56 One of the few exceptions in this regard is a recent anthology that follows the *ghazal* traditions in Afghanistan. See Paul Smith. *Anthology of the Ghazal in the Sufi Poetry of Afghanistan*. With translation and introduction by Paul Smith. Victoria: Australia [2008] 2015.

cherished across lines of 'ethnicity', belonging, gender, sexual orientation, different languages, and age, and often considered as the most accomplished form of art.[57] Poetry is also valued for its explicit and implicit forms of 'knowledge'. This is also traceable in the poetic performances and recitations that are often *closely listened* to. This *close listening* shows itself in often joyful-nostalgic exclamations like "*wāh-wā*!" or "*bah-bah*!" that accompany lyrical recitations and reading circles, as affective and epistemological responses and resonances that the lyrical performance sets into work. In this way, the different philosophical, sensual, and affective reverberations that the poetic text unleashes "as propositions about our world"[58] keep their not-knowing instances of wonder and seem to be acknowledged on a collectively or singularly evoked level of performativity and orality. Instances of knowing, coming to knowledge, and not-knowing, at least, can in this way be assumed to be understood as valuable, meaningful, and critical parts of thought and 'knowledge' that show themselves in lyric.

My aim is not to represent, anthropologize, or exoticize (Afghan) traditions of lyricism and lyrical performance. I rather speculate about similar features and effects that lyric is capable of unleashing in its manyfold forms of expressive utterances in which its multiple affective, epistemological, sensual, and psychological traits, which make lyric so significant as an infinite realm of 'theory' may be perceptible in such responsive instances. In Afghan and Persian speaking contexts, theoretical traits of lyric are widely discussed. One reason for the theoretical and philosophical contents of lyric is seen in the historical development of the different sciences; because earlier scholars were often poets themselves, their intellectual and epistemological propensities and artistic faculty, too, traveled in between their different works. Another reason for the theorizing and philosophical contents of lyric is seen in its politically more secure status. Lyric has offered a safer ground for the articulation of political ideas and critique that could not be pronounced in other, disciplinary realms.[59] Moreover, lyric per se, although it has specific contexts, cannot be reduced to historical, philosophical, ideological, or *geo-logic*al understandings.[60] All these aspects of lyric, as a mingling of everyday wisdom, subject-related experiences, political pressures, unconscious traits, and philosophemes render poems into dense, conglomerated instances of

57 See Olszewska. "A Hidden Discourse" (annot. 55); Losensky. "Persian Poetry" (annot. 20), p. 1024; Anders Widmark. *Voices at the Borders, Prose on the Margins: Exploring the Contemporary Pashto Short Story in a Context of War and Crisis.* Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2011, pp. 50ff.

58 Ibid., p. 34.

59 See for example Aghle Soo'orkh. "Brarasīandesha-hā-ye falsafī dar sher-e Bedel-e Dehlawī". *Markaz-e hekmat wa khazāna-ye 'aql (falsafa wa adabī)*, http://aghlesooorkh10109088.blogfa.com/post/20 (13.06.2023); Latīf Nāzemī. "Ibrahīm Safā: Sha'er-e dard-āshnā-ye talkhkām". *dūīche wele darī* (14.04.2007), https://www.dw.com/fa-af/ابراهیم-صفا-شاعر-درد-آشنای-تلخکام/a-3163790 (21.06.2023); Yamā Nāsher Yakmanesh. "Man *Lāla-ye Azādam*". *Etela'āt-e roz*. (sonbola/19/2022), https://www.etilaatroz.com/153844/من-لالهی-آزادم (15.06.2023).

60 It is these aspects of the lyric that Ramazani also stresses for transhistorical and transnational explorations of lyric; cf. Ramazani. *Poetry* (annot. 18), pp. 245ff.

non-knowledge, which is, I think, what makes lyric so meaningful as 'a world' of 'theory'. These aspects of lyric that I identify as instances of non-knowledge in Afghan lyric are, of course, not a characteristic of Afghan poetry. They are not much different from what Culler calls the "watchword of Anglo-American New Criticism", according to which the last lines of Archibald MacLeish's poem *Ars Poetica* – "A poem should not mean / But be" – functions as a code to approach poems.[61] Implicitly, this points to lyric as a form of 'non-knowledge', effective through its allusive and encompassing threads inherent in the words and the play of the orchestration of those words along conventionalized meanings. It is a form of performed epistemology that shows itself in lyric and that Walton, for example, calls "thoughtwriting": "We tend to perform poems as we read them, to pronounce the words ourselves, sometimes read them aloud [...]. People memorize poems or parts of them, and recite them on other occasions [...]".[62] Walton also points out that the significance of lyric lies especially in this 'philosophical', reflective, theorizing faculty:

> Poets contribute original ideas, fresh insights, perspectives, points of view that may be new to the reader, as well as giving readers words with which to understand and explore them [...] in using them, readers may achieve drastically new insights or find themselves adopting or trying on previously unimagined points of view.[63]

The knowing and not-knowing attributions of words are simultaneously re-invoked in lyric and reverberate from them. They engender insights and are also palimpsestic reminders of insights, and they express, at the same time, *current* impressions and thoughts. Thus, different past, present, and future formations of thought are united in them. Moreover, as Culler points out, lyric comes with a tone of address, it has a "presence of enunciation".[64] This form of address unleashes at the same time a space for dialogue and encounter with others. "The radical of presentation in the lyric is the hypothetical form of what in religion is called the 'I–Thou' relationship".[65] This space of alterity, in accordance with Geisenhanslüke's approach to lyric, also makes space for non-knowledge as a form of 'knowledge' that is dialogic and that presupposes the autonomy of an other who may or may not respond. But this space also engenders a sphere in which the listener/reader becomes a witness to the relation of a self to an other. As Culler suggests, "[t]o invoke or address something that is not the true audience, whether a muse, an urn, Duty, or a beloved, highlights the event of address itself as an act, whose purpose and effects demand critical attention".[66] Lyric in

61 Jonathan Culler. "Lyric Words, not Worlds". *Journal of Literary Theory* 11.1 (2017): pp. 32-39, here p. 33.
62 Walton, Kendall. "Thoughtwriting – in Poetry and Music". *New Literary History* 42.3 (2011): pp. 455-476, here p. 468.
63 Ibid., pp. 468-472.
64 Culler. "Lyric Words" (annot. 61), p. 38.
65 Northrop Frye qtd. in ibid.
66 Culler. *Theory* (annot. 18), p. 187.

this way functions as a *periperformative*[67], as indirect utterances of performativity which rather than to authorize and enact through the performance, create possibilities for reflection and learning outside of themselves. This may be a common feature of literature (language?) generally, but nowhere might it be more explicit than in the immediate addressing and dialogic of lyric.

The Afghan poem that I want to attend to in the following is written in Persian/Darī. Against the backdrop of orientalist assumptions about the flowery of 'Oriental' languages and poetry, as mentioned above, I cannot withstand to let, indeed, a flower speak. The excerpt is from the poem *Lāla-ye āzād* (*The Free Tulip*).[68] Is there a *tertium comparationis* between this poem and Hölderlin's – beyond the attempt of a (decolonial or, I would prefer to say more generally: anti-dominant) Geisenhanslükean poetological reading? As I hope may become more explicit below, a bundle of affinities between the poets and the poems seem to lurk there somewhere in between the lines of their lives and words, their worlds, if one chooses to care enough and remain open to the lyrics' and lyricists' spatial and temporal discordances. It may be that the two poems and poets, both, are not-knowingly searching for the same things, without knowing what these might be, and thus may speak the same language in the end (as a beginning), despite their different spatial and temporal configurations; two same languages that remain different, like rivers and flowers along the fields. They both may have learned and therefore use the multitude, globose language of the earth, which is one running always in the same, and simultaneously in different, narrower directions, and remains different, as if wor(l)ds apart, united in a spherical contemporaneity that is independent of it. Both poems seem to move between more traditional and modern forms of poetry, trying to read the traditional in a new light and to illuminate other aspects of ancient forms. Both seem to move in a transition of sociopolitical time between hope and despair. Both poems seem to want to find another world, one, that speaks another language, outside of what is offered as explications and explanations. Both are interested in an *other*, listening to those who seem mute or just subtly whispering, not to understand, but to wonder about what they may want to say. Both poems may be experiencing and expressing some form of attachment and proximity to the other, just for itself, beyond relationality, and yet seem to melt with the other in this form of *close listening* that translates the absorbed reverberations into familiar words, which change, obtain another *clang*, and invite the self to question itself. Other languages, thus, beyond our common understandings of language, are beheld and transcribed into more common languages, which, in both poems, may have the potential – and maybe without any intention – to alter our perceptions. What both poems thus might be expressing beyond non-knowledge may be the possibility of a lyrical *epistemology of proximity* beyond language and understanding (*Verständigung*).

67 Sedgwick. *Touching Feeling* (annot. 39), p. 72-79.

68 The translation is mine, and I have tried to preserve the tonality of the rhythm and meaning; while the metric gets lost here, unfortunately, I hope it can still be sensed in the transcription of the poem.

Lāla-ye āzād is a *ghazal*, a classical amatory ode genre, most often compared to sonnets, that speaks of loss and separation.[69] *Ghazals* usually consist of independent, at least two hemistich-couplets (*bayt*) with similar rhyme and meter as well as a common theme and are with up to 12 couplets (consisting of two hemistiches each) quite short. *Lāla-ye āzād* is written in two hemistiches as rhymed couplets, alike in meter, and is 11 couplets long.[70] Unlike classical *ghazals* that are rather allusive in tone, and in which love and the beloved one are thematized, *Lāla-ye āzād* is more modernist in tone; it is quite concrete and held in a plain prose, and rather than to speak about an other, appears to center upon itself, in search for its own subjectivity. The Afghan-German cultural critic and author Jama Nasher Yakmanesh in fact considers this trait in *Lāla-ye āzād* as a first philosophic problematization of modernist understandings of individualism in Afghanistan, which are taken up in a poem rather than in philosophic discourse due to political reasons.[71] According to Yakmanesh, the poem is outstanding, unusual, and subversive in this regard as it uses the generic form of the *ghazal* but interprets it anew through its content and in opposition to other more modernist contemporaneous conventions.[72] *Lāla-ye āzād* deals with the self-description/meditation of a desert-tulip. As though it has been asked why, it is there, all alone and by itself, or as though someone has addressed it to learn whether it wants to join those other tulip flowers in the gardens and fields, or as though it muses along its own monologic thoughts, trying to understand itself. This poem is written by the Afghan writer, poet, musician, and political thinker M. Ibrāhīm Safā (1907-1980). Safā was born into a progressive, politically committed family that was seen with suspicion by different regimes of the time.[73] He was also subjected to imprisonment for almost fourteen years, from the age of

69 While the *ghazal* is often dated back to 7th century Arabic poetry that became common across Central and Southeast Asia in the 12th century via Sufi traditions, Paul Smith ascribes it to Persianate court-lyric before Islam and to love songs sung by minstrels from "the early days of Persian history" as a tradition that was passed on. Paul speculates that it is due to this ancient performative quality of the lyric that later *ghazals* by Ḥāfiẓ, Sa'adi, and others were put into music in Afghanistan, Iran, and the Indian sub-continent and became songs. Cf. Smith. *Anthology of the Ghazal* (annot. 56), p. 7.

70 Tulips have a special meaning in Afghanistan due to their natural occurrence, especially in the northern city of Mazār-e Sharīf. The new year celebration of *Nawroz* (lit. 'new day') around the 21st of March is therefore also called *mel-e* or *jashn-e gol-e surkh* (festive of the red flower/tulip). Besides roses in classical poetry, especially in modernist Afghan lyric and literature, narcissus (*gol-e nargis*), tuberose (*gol-e mariam*), and above all tulips (*gol-e lāla*) are the flowers most often thematized.

71 Yakmanesh. "Man *Lāla-ye āzādam*" (annot. 59).

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid. His father, Amir Habibullah Khan, was a political figure in the higher service of the Sultanate and an opponent of the British colonialist politics. Caught between different political parties, he was imprisoned twice. Safā and two of his brothers belonged to a critical, pro-constitutional political movement and are often also described as of progressive, liberal, freedom-seeking thinking. While his older brother had to face a prison sentence of 18 years in prison, his younger brother was

26 to 40. Safā was learned in Arabic, which he had acquired from an early age, as well as in Urdu. At sixteen, he went to India for four years to receive training in telecommunication; there, he also learnt English and became acquainted with European/Western philosophy. Safā had offices in different ministries, and later worked as a journalist and also translated works.[74] His primary focus remained, however, the arts; besides poetry, he was also a musician.[75] Safā has left behind two volumes of poetry, a philosophical treatise and a longer essay on Afghan literature that is part of one of the few and much recognized Afghan compilations of the time on Afghan literary works.[76] Nazemi adds that, even though Safā's poetry tended to follow the *ghazal* format, he did not adhere to a traditional writing style, instead employing a simple and everyday language in his verse. Three poets are named regularly as sources of influence and inspiration for Safā: Hafiz, Bedel of Dehli (Bedel-e Dehlawī) or just Bedel (1642-1720), a major figure in the Southeast Asian, Persian speaking and Afghan literary traditions, who is still little known in the West and renowned for his philosophical poetry, as well as, finally, the Southeast Asian philosopher, poet, and politician Sir M. Iqbāl Lahorī (1877-1938).[77] *Lāla-ye āzād* was composed into a song by

sentenced to death. In the later years of his time in prison, Safā had some liberties and had access to works of poetry and musical instruments.

74 Cf. ibid.; see also Nāzemī. "Ibrahīm Safā" (annot. 59).

75 Safā received lessons from the musician Khalīfa Qorbān Alī in Kabul's ancient and notorious artist's quarter, *Kharābāt*. He played two classical instruments, Dilrobā and Robāb, and also sang, albeit in private circles with other artists and close friends, as was (and still is) not unusual among Afghan musicians and lyricists; cf. Yakmanesh. "Man *Lāla-ye āzādam*" (annot. 59).

76 One of the poetry volumes collections, was published by Safā himself under the title *Nawā-ye kohsār*; it is without publication date and place; Nazemi, though, dates it back to 1950 and assumes that it was published in Karachi. *Lāla-ye āzād* was first published in this book under the title *Nawā-ye nāla* (*The Call of Sorrow*). According to Yakmanesh, the poem became known under the title *Lāla-ye āzād* as part of a Darī reader for the 7th grade. Today, it is also included in the Darī book for the 6th grade under this title, as well as, in an abridged form, in the Pashto introduction to Darī literature for the 8th grade. The second volume of his work is published in an anthology of Afghan poetry, edited by the *Association of Afghan Writers*, which includes 88 poems of Safā. The name and publication date of the anthology are not mentioned by Nazemi. Cf. Nāzemī. "Ibrahīm Safā" (annot. 59); see also Yakmanesh. "Man *Lāla-ye āzādam*" (annot. 59). Safā's more philosophical book is titled *Tahlīl wa esteqrār wa metodologī*. Kābol: Matbaʿa-ye ʿŪmūmī, 1951. According to Nazemi, Safā was proficient in Aristotelian philosophy. See for Safā's extensive essay on Afghan literature, idem. "Adabyāt-e Afghānestān az soqut-e Badīolzamān tā zohūr-e Muhammadzaī-yī-hā". *Tārikh-e adabyāt-e Afghānistān*. Authored by Mir Gholām M. Ghobār/M. Alī Kohzād/Alī M. Zehmā/Alī A. Naʾīmī/M. Ibrāhīm Safā. Kabul: Anjoman-e Tārīkh, 1952, pp. 243-326.

77 Iqbāl Lahorī is mentioned at the beginning as well as the end of Safā's poetry compilation. But unlike Iqbāl, who muses along quite religious images of the self and love-themes, Safā, while alluding to Iqbāl's similar themes and using the same meter and rhythm in *Lāla-ye āzād* as in one of Lahorī's poems, differs from Iqbāl, according

the musician Abdelghafūr Brishnā (1907-1974).[78] The song probably dates back to the 1950s. The first interpretation of the song was provided by the vocal duo Abdelwahāb Maddadī & Azādah (Habība Anwarī), Azādah being one of the pioneering female singers in Afghanistan.[79]

In *Lāla-ye āzād*, although a lyrical I speaks, it is not clear whether it is the tulip itself that speaks or an observer, narrator, or transmitter, the wind for example. However, in-between the speaking lyrical I and the words that seem to translate the desert-tulip's quiet movements in the wind into a lyrical text at the liminal of not-knowing, an "effect of voicing" and "aurality"[80] is created. The free tulip appears as the figuration of non-knowledge, knowing and not-knowing at the same time. It seems to have knowledge about itself and others. And yet, it also

to Yakmanesh, as if he wanted to re-write it, subtly shifting the ideas to other, more open, modernist uses and understandings. Cf. Yakmanesh. "Man *Lāla-ye āzādam*" (annot. 59), see also Nāzemī. "Ibrahīm Safā" (annot. 59).

78 While it was sung in private performances by Brishnā, the first official recording by *Radio Afghanistan*, initiated by Brishnā, is dated back to 1969. The poem became especially known, after it was put into music and played on the radio. Cf. Yakmanesh. "Man *Lāla-ye āzādam*" (annot. 59). Yakmanesh points out that Safā also wrote lyrics for the still famous Iranian women singers *Googoosh* and *Haideh*, and that he curated a musical performance in commemoration of the politician Jamāl od-Dīn-e Afghānī at the University of Kabul.

79 Many other musicians, too, have featured the song along the years. While in 2020 it was performed by Tahmina Arsalan (the song can be viewed on YouTube under the URL https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkfkzDc2WSE (08.07.2022) in April 2021, the original recording by *Madadi & Azadah* was uploaded on YouTube, too. This version can be seen at the URL https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPHFZExw6a8 (08.07.2022). The video clip is a composition of postcards and photos that show Afghanistan and Kabul in the 1940s to 1970s. The comments on YouTube disclose a quite nostalgic response. One commentary conflates the meaning of the song to a lost 'time', a historical period that symbolizes political as well as psychic stability, by writing: "We still breathe from that era (*mā hanuz az ūn dawrān nafas mekashem* ما هنوز ازاون دوران نفس میکشیم)". The comment forms an equally poetically informed, 'not-knowing' response that stays in touch with the music, images, and text, thinking/theorizing along them in this one sentence, without propounding any form of positivistic 'knowledge' or certainty. What is conveyed is an affective tone, which mirrors an insight that comes from the experience of loss. In doing so, the comment generates a poetic relation to the lyric as well as to a 'time' (presumably) forever lost, and the nostalgia that this loss entails: the loss of loved ones, of one's home, one's language(s), of familiar sights, sounds and tastes, a possible future in that place, as well as the awkward, nightmarish state of helplessness and witnessing that sticks to the modernist experience of diaspora. In the dialogic response, time thus is marked by loss and filled with trauma and the ambiguous experience of survival in a diasporic life. And yet, it is still the memories of that vanished time, the comment seems to say, that give impetus for living on and envisioning another time to come. See for an overview of the production history of the song, the roles, and biographies of Maddadi and Azādah, as well as Brishnā, Yakmanesh. "Man *Lāla-ye āzādam*" (annot. 59).

80 Culler. *Theory* (annot. 18), p. 35.

occupies a place that is regarded as irrelevant, as a space of poverty, ignorance, and death, a place of nothingness. As it speaks out from this space of presumed not-knowing, its words come across as the ignored knowledge of silence that indicates acts of violence and domination. As Geisenhanslüke points out: "A poetics that engages with the genealogical question of the connection between power and language is less satisfied in the archaeology of knowledge than in the genealogy of non-knowledge, which focuses its attention on the question how the subject is constituted in language".[81] Here, too, in this apparent discourse of the free tulip, a form of non-addressing shines through that subversively establishes subjectivity beyond the reach of power. I will refer here to the first and last five stanzas of the poem:

من لاله ی آزادم خود رویم وخود بویم
در دشت مکان دارم هم فطرت آهویم
آبم نم باران است فارغ ز لب جویم
تنگ است محیط آنجا در باغ نمی رویم
از خون رگ خویش است گر رنگ به رخ دارم
[...]
از سعی کسی منت بر خود نپذیرم من
قید چمن وگلشن بر خویش نگیرم من
بر فطرت خود نازم وارسته ضمیرم من
آزاده برون آیم آزاده بمیرم من

Man lāla-ye āzādam khūd royam-u khūd boyam
Dar dasht makān dāram ham-fiṭrat-eāhūyam
Ābam nam-i bārān ast fārigh ze lab-e joyam
Tang ast muḥīt-e ānjā dar bāgh name-royam
Az khūn-e rag-e khesh ast gar rang ba rukh dāram
[...]
Az sa'y-e kase minnat bar khūd napazīram man
Qayd-i chaman-u gulshan bar khesh nagīram man
Bar fiṭrat-e khod nāzam wārasta zamīram man
Āzāda borūn āyam āzāda bimīram man

I am a free tulip I come about by myself I have my own fragrance
My place is in the desert I share the essence of the deer
The moisture of rain is my water away from the river bank
Too narrow is the milieu there I cannot grow in the garden
It is from my own veins if I wear a color on me
[...]

81 "Eine Poetik, die sich auf die genealogische Frage nach dem Zusammenhang von Macht und Sprache einlässt, erfüllt sich weniger in der Archäologie des Wissens als vielmehr in der Genealogie des Nichtwissens, die ihr Augenmerk auf die Frage richtet, wie sich das Subjekt in der Sprache konstituiert". Geisenhanslüke develops this question along a critical reading of Lacan's psychoanalytic poetics, Derrida's critique of psychoanalysis as a meta-discourse, and Foucault's genealogy of power that forecloses literature. Cf. Geisenhanslüke. *Textkulturen* (annot. 2), p. 83.

To the efforts of others, I don't want to be indebted
The confinement of the meadows and flowerbeds I do not bear
Graceful I am in my own way unbound my interior
Free I come into being free I die

These verses may echo any form of singularity and being in the world.[82] They not only depict the existence of a plant, but also have the ability to elucidate the existence of a human being, albeit representing life at the margins of existence. The lyrical I can be taken to symbolize a pure impression of life generally, but it also depicts the singularity of abandoned life. This self, however, deserted and without protection, does not feel lost, but privileged and closer to the meaning of life, or rather to a meaningful life. Places of abundance and possibility, in contrast, are understood as narrow and unfree, as well as illusionary and immature.

While the lyrical I, with the image of the deer, soberly admits to be vulnerable, timid, and exposed, it also seems to be enjoying and valuing the experience of such a life. It prefers its austere location to the lush of the meadows. It portrays a life at the limit of death. The desert symbolizes insecurity, lack, scarcity, uncertainty, life, and, thus, not-knowing, in which, however, a defined, aware, and free speaking inner self is placed. The tulip prefers the state of an endangered self, that the desert represents, in contrast to the density of affluence and the alleged safety of the flower meadow at the river bank, which it believes to be lost. It is not bare life that is romanticized. Rather, the poem problematizes the faculty of perceptivity and cognition. Compared to the possibilities of an oversaturated life, it endorses and cherishes a form of knowledge and perception that comes from scarcity rather than affluence. The poem thus articulates a theory of knowledge that is bound to non-possession, that is free. Rather than approving 'indigence' as a value in itself, the lyrical I valorizes it as an asset and presupposition of freedom. Materiality and affluency are thus separated from 'knowledge', and the production of knowledge is linked to a state, a way of life, of scarcity and non-knowledge. Implied in this theory of 'knowledge' that the lyrical I voices is a rejection not only of material affluence, but also of the affluence of dogmatic 'knowledge' that does not reflect upon itself and that is a mark of the structure of 'affluent knowledge' and its production. 'Knowledge', it seems to say, means knowledge that comes with conditions of scarcity. But it is a scarcity that is regarded as richness. This knowledge-theory of scarcity thus depends on the choice to gather knowledge from out of the richness that comes with lack. Lack allegorizes a source for acquiring knowledge. The poem places the tulip within a space of grandeur, acknowledging its sensibility and awareness, letting it speak back and speak for itself.

82 There is an interesting affinity between this free tulip and Immanuel Kant's wild tulip, the figuration of his aesthetic theory, which he develops in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), most famously captured in the phrase *purposiveness without purpose* (*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*). It is possible that Safā was aware of this. But this remains speculative for the time being. However, once one is familiar with both texts, it is difficult to avoid the impression that *Lāla-ye āzād* is a subversive response to Kant, or that it could be read as such.

In this image, scarcity as well as affluence and safety change their meanings without becoming one another's opposites; they rather open up thought within a frame that embodies non-knowledge and alleged simplicity as wealth. What matters, rather, is a discursive space in which the desert-tulip can enunciate its perception without being subsumed under a form of poverty and indigence; it centers upon itself, taking in the conditions of its life as important experiences of not-knowing, of knowing, and becoming, understanding itself as the most essential: as part of the air and earth to which it presumably recurs. The free tulip, then, is not free in the sense of outlawed placelessness, it is always part of the earth in which it exists; no matter how barren that place might be, it will nourish its knowledge and voice.

The tulip enunciates its knowledge, sings a song, regardless of whether it is heard by the gossiping flowerbed or not. Unawareness and ignorance are linked to knowledge, ingrained with affluence, prosperity – and dogma. This could be read as an echo of silenced spaces and of entities that represent fetishized, objectified reifications (also in academic and sociopolitical discourses), and put into specific (botanic or otherwise disciplinizing) contexts.

In this light, lyric creates a place within dominant discourse, in-between words, where reified entities can subtly speak back and attain a voice of their own. Thus, an objectified, silenced thingness is transformed into a speaking subjectivity that frees itself from the captivating discourse that begirds it. Freedom here means to free oneself from the presumed knowledges that others have accumulated from positions of affluence and alleged power. Freedom means speaking for oneself, from one's own position, regardless of how impoverished, untidy, and unsightly this position may seem. The poem voices a theory of knowledge that is linked to the richness and aesthetic of the minimum, of not-knowing and not-having. This voice does not need the gossip and (false) promises of the river bank (power?) – or to be acknowledged by it – in order to live. Instead, it appears as if the flowerbed is lost and forlorn, swamped at the river bank, unable to reflect on meaning, significance, and itself. In addition to providing a space for *freedom from* conventionalized thinking and a place for *freedom to* think otherwise[83] within interchangeable but distinct, encapsulated moments, the lyrical voice also questions the power of power. What is power, the desert tulip seems to ask, if it all comes down to living and dying in one's own sense and senses? The freedom that it seems to suggest appears as a sense of freedom that resides in an entity, a corpus, not somewhere outside of it. Evocations of the mechanisms of an encompassing system of power/'truth' are in this way rendered as mere phantasy and set against radical singularity.

The free tulip retains an inner place, an inner home, from where its internal agency and freedom emanate with the uncertain act of reflection and sensuality, independent of economies of knowledge, or the distribution of affluence, or the compulsion to be heard and acknowledged. It can be presumed that the tulip is

83 Hannah Arendt. "The Freedom to Be Free". *New England Review* 38.2 (2017): pp. 56-69.

neither heard nor acknowledged, except maybe by its own voice, an inner, inaudible non-knowledge.

Conclusion

There is thus a subtle echo of ethics emanating from the two poems as a repository of not-knowing that demands thoughtfulness in an unspoken way: Both poems give voice to unheard forms of language and propositions of knowledge, and open up thought and imagery at their (theoretical and philosophical) limits, depicting entities that are known yet unknown to us, and as a rule seen and unseen. The knowledge that they may emit is not heard and not listened to, they seem to caution us, and what *a* waste that is, and what *waste* rather may be – not 'to see'. In both poems, then, non-knowledge is not only introduced as a source of abundance. Both poems also reflect on what 'ignorance' and what 'knowledge' may be. These might be, the poems seem to suggest, different forms of waste, missing any kind of 'truth', any 'essence', 'essence' as such, maybe. But this poetological inclination to hear the other is pursued in a way that can be described as dialogic – which not only encompasses the possibility to respond, but also the faculty to listen to, to *almost* become the other – a process in which the self seems to vanish *almost* completely into the other, and from this liminal space, the poems clang, in their own transformed languages, the distant chimes of another language and the language of an other. These entities, which can be read as figurations of otherness as such, of absolute difference, are not studied and fancied as desirable objects, objectified, and utilized for philosophizing, but, as in Hölderlins's poem, *faced*, spoken to, sought within the self, and accompanied along their 'course' – in all its possible meanings, which entails not only 'stream' but also 'learning', and in unenforced and unprescribed ways. In the same vein, the desert tulip, a small entity as if in solitary confinement, in a plain, waste of land, pitied maybe, overlooked, unremembered, and unnoticed, is given particular attention – beyond the vocabulary of voluble voices and meanings. In this way, a space is carved out from which the tulip can be heard, maybe mistranslated and with missing words, but, nevertheless, as a possibility of another melody. Not only the meanings of rivers, but also of this specific river, and that singular tulip, and thus the value of singularity, are molded within other arcane understandings that remain unconsumable and at the brink of vanishing, just like the flow of the river's course, and the tulip's silent movements in the wind. Non-knowledge then, both poems seem to suggest, has other inscriptions, another texture. And yet, it is amenable and everywhere to be read, and to become an other in the process of its infinite readings.

The epistemology of proximity as a possible trait of lyrical language can be regarded as a form and content of unclosed, unbound, sometimes associative thinking that harbors an infinite kaleidoscope of possibilities to shape knowledge and make known, in synchronic and diachronic ways, and without limiting the mound of meanings, that it, nevertheless, generates. Within such an

approach, a "free entering" of thought[84] can be understood as a practice of theory that lies in the scarce economy, and yet rich non-knowledge of lyrical texts. In this sense, lyric can be understood and considered as 'democratic', always in the process of 'democratizing criticism and theory'[85], one that cherishes 'life' as such, and the moments of it, that treasures it everywhere in all beings, like the earth does with all its entities, like a parent, just for their mere being, and in this sense, their mere 'beauty', to prosper – and, in this way, to prosper itself.

This poetology of lyric requires slow, inclusive, and responsive steps that, instead of reaching final conclusions, allude to a realm beyond the certainties of knowledge. A poetological consideration of the non-knowledge of lyric, its unwitting possibilities of knowledge, can be seen as a cautious approach to theories of knowledge that are always at the verge of failure and revision. It enables us to consider other(-ed) and marginalized epistemologies in different languages as equally relevant possibilities of and for thought and allows for an inclusive openness to think "theory" from within different (con-)texts. It allows for silent and silenced forms of knowledge to emerge, and to be seen as forms of knowledge and learning on the move, oscillating between processes of knowing and not-knowing. In this sense, lyrical theory can be understood as a critical, yet unenforced, interventionist stance against regressive and dogmatic discourses and political practices.

Such an approach is an exit and entry point at the same time: Although we are contaminated by aporias, ambiguities, and double binds, we are not necessarily usurped by them. The specter of non-knowledge that resides in and emanates from lyrical theorizing can be regarded as a poetological trait that looks *for other epistemologies* in words to envision other wor(l)ds, and to theorize our wor(l)ds otherwise. The not-knowing agency of lyrical thinking not only creates a relation with an other, but also a linguistic ornament, a poetical formation, in which 'the wor(l)d' is subtly arranged in a slightly, almost imperceptibly different way. It thus follows the rationale of an attentive aesthetic of careful slowness.

84 Culler. *Theory* (annot. 18), p. 35.

85 'Democratic' and 'democratizing' not as something there and given, and not in numbers, not as a form and abstraction, but as a specter of becoming, and opening, in subjective and societal ways, and also as a shadow in the horizontal zone that keeps haunting us, and as long as it haunts us, there is hope (and fear) that things can change – they can also change in other directions, 'democracies' others, which limit and close – that spirals of exclusion and domination can find, even if only within contingencies to be constantly fought for an exit way to something other, that is generic in difference (and against and always at the brink of the risk of what Jacques Derrida calls the 'suicidal' quality of 'democracy'). This, according to Derrida at least, would be only one "on the condition of thinking life otherwise, life and the force of life." Jacques Derrida. *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 33; Said. *Humanism* (annot. 25), p. 71; see also Stathis Gourgouris/ Obrad Savić. "Poetics and the Political World – Obrad Savić interviews Stathis Gourgouris Part II". *Los Angeles Review of Books,* 27 May 2015, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/poetics-and-the-political-world-obrad-savic-interviews-stathis-gourgouris-part-ii (15.01.2023).

The non-knowing poetology of lyric, in its unenforced way, therefore, remains always and everywhere a witness, and attentive to what happens – and as such maybe *the* form of critical (literary) theory per se.

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