ART, AUTONOMY, PHILOLOGY: RESEARCH PARAMETERS

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> "In effect, the idea of critique is meaningful only when there is a difference between a desirable and an actual state of affairs." Luc Boltanski, Ève Chiapello: *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999)

INTRODUCTION

This short paper outlines the basic working definitions of the research project "The Arts of Autonomy: Pamphleteering, Popular Philology, and the Public Sphere, 1988–2018", funded by a Starting Grant from the European Research Council. These definitions outline our object of study and impact the general orientation of our research.

Why do some texts become the object of intense public discussion? How does the public identify the polemical content of pamphletary statements, and how does the public rationalize and discuss these statements? What can the literary humanities contribute to our understanding of such "pamphletary events" in the public sphere?

In the last three decades, the spectacular resurgence of pamphleteering as a mode of political address has been correlated with the resurgence of polemical speech and assertions of autonomy in public discourse. Since the Dreyfus Affair and Émile Zola's "J'accuse...!" (1898), short, partisan, and incitative texts have been a vital medium of modern public intellectuality.[1] More recently, however, the increased recourse to legal procedures in case of offense or injustice has contrastively brought out the pamphlet's ability to institute discursive standards, behavioral expectations, and norms in the public sphere. This project argues that pamphleteering is one of the crucial discursive forms in contemporary public discourse and that its systematic study as a literary and rhetorical form is essential in order to gain an understanding of the formation of opinion and policy in Europe and the United States. We study "pamphletary events", i.e., events which unfold in the public sphere and which engage both a pamphletary text and interpretative competences widely distributed among the general reading public.

This project addresses three crucial scholarly desiderata. First, most scholarly accounts of modern pamphleteering predate the generalization of internet access, anonymous online commentary, and interlinking. In these earlier accounts, modern pamphleteering is a monological speech act in a liberal public sphere, with all the exclusionary effects this conception entails. This project argues against this conception and for an approach that takes both the universal online accessibility of polemical pamphleteering and its transformation into a dialogical tool as its historical premise. Secondly, earlier accounts of pamphleteering attribute a degree of historical efficacy to the pamphlet yet tend to do so on theoretical or formal grounds.[2] This project argues against this conception

1 See especially Michel Winock's seminal study: Michel Winock: *Le siècle des intellectuels*, Paris: Seuil (1997).

2 David Forgacs: "Fascism, Violence and Modernity", in: *The Violent Muse: Violence and the*

and for a contextual history of pamphleteering that studies its concrete political agency by considering the short-delay responses given to its pamphletary claims by reading publics. Finally, earlier accounts of pamphleteering emphasize its prophetic individualism and remote humanitarianism. This project argues against this conception and seeks to understand how groups that form around one or multiple experiences of social domination make use of pamphleteering to autonomously advance collective claims *on their own behalf*.

THE PAMPHLET: A FUNCTIONALIST DEFINITION

Any cultural taxonomy involves complex arguments as to the relevant properties of the objects to be identified and classified. The pamphlet is an eminent case in point, as most pamphlets do not self-identify as such. This project reframes pamphleteering as an *event in the public sphere*, rather than as a literary genre or form.[3] Against formalist definitions of the pamphlet,[4] we expand the literary ontology of pamphleteering to include the public responses given to a pamphletary text, producing "pamphletary events" that imprint subjects of debate or controversy on the public sphere.

We reject text length, publication format, and generic self-descriptions (a nominal "manifesto," an "open letter," "novel," or "poem" may be a pamphlet) as decisive criteria: We study the pamphlet as a literary mode, a type of literacy, and a moment in the public sphere.

We suggest four basic criteria that literary texts must meet in order to be considered as relevant sources:

The *first generic criterion* concerns the implied audience of pamphletary writing. We define pamphletary writing as one which explicitly addresses an audience rhetorically construed as one or multiple social totalities: The individual, empirical reader[5] is addressed as a member of a social group or collective audience. These audiences are either implied in the very title of these pamphlets (for example Stéphane Hessel's *Indignez-vous!*[6]) or in their argumentative content (for example Mesut Özil's 3000-word resignation from the German Football Association posted on Twitter, which polemicized on the double-bind of being a bi-national member of a national sports team[7]), or in their thematization of the concrete geographical and social generality of their addressees (for example Ted

Artistic Imagination in Europe, 1910–1939, ed. by Jane Howlet, Rod Mengham, Manchester: Manchester University Press (1994), pp. 5–21.

3 See for instance: Alexandra Halasz: *The Marketplace of Print: Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997).

4 Joad Raymond: *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2003).

5 Fredric Jameson: *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1981), p. 174.

6 Stéphane Hessel: *Indignez-vous!*, Montpellier: Indigène éditions (2010).

7 Mesut Özil: "Meeting President Erdogan", in: *Twitter*, https : / / twitter . com / MesutOzil1088/status/1020984884431638528 (July 22, 2018).

Kaczynski's "Industrial Society and its Future",[8] published in 1995). The pamphlet is a *society-at-large* discourse.

The *second generic criterion* pertains to the political intentionality of the pamphlet. Pamphlets must radically contest an established normative order and simultaneously uphold the abstract value of normativity itself, that is, they must argue, polemicize, or campaign in favor of a normative *change* and the acquisition or modification of *rights*. Because pamphlets are particularly prone to becoming the object of institutional control, censorship, expurgation, or indexation, this ambiguous attention to norms is often expressed in legal terms. Pamphletary statements are often written in light of their "social efficacy." As such, pamphleteers dispense with rhetorical strategies that would undermine this efficacy should 1) their pamphletary statements be brought in as legal or deliberative evidence by an institution *whose legitimacy they recognize* in the context of 2) a legal or sociopolitical procedure *which might reasonably contribute to the material advancement of their pamphletary claims*. The pamphlet has become one of the main means of public contestation and transformation of established normative orders.

The *third generic criterion* concerns the temporal frame of pamphletary statements. Pamphlets explicitly address the present and conceive of the present as a generalized addressee. In other words, the social totalizations implied in pamphletary statements are conceived of as being contemporary with these pamphletary statements themselves. This does not necessarily imply a narrowing down of the temporal horizon of these statements, which often support their claims with historical arguments, and make prophetic or conjectural claims about future consequences of past and present actions.

The *fourth generic criterion* attributes a high degree of agency to the addressees of pamphletary statements. We conceive of the term "pamphlet" as a predicate implicitly or explicitly *attributed by the audience* to statements that circulate in the public sphere: pamphlets are pamphlets because they are recognized and treated as such by reading publics. We suggest two second-order criteria that condition this identification:

> a) Pamphlets must be serially and transversally transmitted among the public, that is, they must to some degree become *viral*, at least in the sense that they become accessible to readers not originally addressed by the pamphlet itself,
>
> b) they must trigger specific individual and collective modes of literacy intent on normalizing their polemical content.

Some statements become "pamphlets" despite differing self-descriptions. Conversely, some statements explicitly intended to be perceived as pamphlets may

8 Reprinted in: Theodore J. Kaczynski: *Technological Slavery: The Collected Writings of Theodore J. Kaczynski, a.k.a. The Unabomber*, ed. by David Skrbina, Port Townsend: Feral House (2010), pp. 36–120.

best be described as "failed pamphlets" in that they fail both to be acknowledged as such and to trigger public discussions of their claims.

In all but a few notable exceptions, the pamphlets studied in the context of our Research Group fulfill all four of these criteria.

PAMPHLETARY EVENTS

We overturn the prevalent definition of the pamphlet; we study pamphletary statements as *pamphletary events*. We hereby modify the prevalent scholarly conception of the ontology of literary discourse in that we reject phenomenological approaches to textual reception and claim that pamphletary events make literature observable as a social fact. In the wake of the universalization of internet access, scholarship has increasingly addressed the reading and interpretative patterns of "ordinary readers," as distinct from specialist forms of literacy. This project conceives of the pamphlet as a two-fold "pamphletary event" which takes place in the public sphere, comprised of the pamphletary statement itself and of its active reception by reading publics.

Scholarship has noted the pamphlet's propensity to reach widely scattered segments of the reading public. Pamphlets go viral through reproduction and intertextualization (print), and interlinking and commentary (online), leaving traces that can be studied with accuracy: We can trace how pamphletary statements emerge from their original, local contexts and become the object of large-scale interest. In fact, the history of pamphleteering is inextricably linked to the concept of virality, which has itself become one of the recurrent terms used to characterize the contemporary public sphere, especially in light of the ongoing generalization of internet access.

What can the traces left by viral pamphletary propagation tell us about the public sphere? Media studies and political theory emphasize how "gatekeeping" drives information flows in networks: some network actors, either individual, collective, or institutional, have a strong impact on how, when, if, and how often statements are shared across networks.[9] In these models, gatekeepers function as restrictive instances who actively inhibit selected information flows. Contrastively, this project studies the constructive function of gatekeepers in the development of partial, temporary public spheres, or *deliberative clusters*, creating provisory "safe havens" for the reception of contentious claims. By using a historical methodology and focus, we describe how and when these clusters become permeable and let pamphletary statements spread to other, larger deliberative groups, producing identifiable textual traces.

9 Karine Nahon, Jeff Hemsley: *Going Viral*, Cambridge: Polity Press (2013), pp. 57–60.

POPULAR PHILOLOGY

This project contributes to the current cross-disciplinary project to redefine "philology" as a broader set of interpretative and critical competences. We understand "popular philology" to be a type of *literacy* more widely disseminated among the public than is commonly understood under the rubric of philological methodology, academic literary theory, and specialized reading dispositions.[10] Popular philological competences include, but are not limited to, the ability to broadly assess the assertiveness, vehemence, spreadability, attributability, and addressability of pamphletary statements.[11] We take a bottom-up, quotidian, and hence "popular" approach to the social uses of reading and interpreting texts.

By studying popular philological literacy during major discursive crises, this project contributes to the emerging "civic turn"[12] in the philological humanities. So far, the intersection between civic competences and popular literacy has been addressed by way of canonical historical examples, for instance by describing the popular, non-specialist perception of early twentieth-century novels in the context of the democratization of literature and the emergence of paperback publishing.[13] This project challenges this approach by addressing the intrusion of literature into contemporary public discourse triggered by pamphletary events, thereby testing the disciplinary hypothesis of the value of philological competences for the evaluation, normalization, or radicalization of polemical claims in the public sphere.

The pamphlet is eminently suited for the study of popular philological competences because its reception entails several major philological-interpretative skills. Scholarship has noted that most pamphletary statements explicitly rouse their readers to take action on behalf of a group or a cause; in this model, the efficacy of the pamphlet is limited to its material, concrete effects on social history.[14] Indeed, scholarship has tended to overlook the fact that most pamphlets do not produce social upheavals, revolutions, or secessions, while remaining socially efficacious by other means: The reception of pamphletary statements entails a form of *generic irony* that enables the transformation of incitative calls into discursive material that is suited for deliberation. The pamphlet's actionist or activist horizon is discursivized and its often massively ideological content is segmented into distinct claims by reading publics. This exercise in ideological decomposition is often the product of collective efforts: Reading communities and heterogeneously assembled individuals collectively offer affirmative substantiations or counterarguments to pamphletary statements. This project produces contextual analyses

10 A disciplinary position which has, in turn, produced several polemical statements, most notably: Sheldon Pollock: "Philology and Freedom", in: *Philological Encounters* 1 (2016), pp. 4–30.

11 See also: David Karpf: *Analytic Activism: Digital Listening and the New Political Strategy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2016), pp. 95–120.

12 Peter Brooks, Hilary Jewett (eds.): *The Humanities and Public Life*, New York: Fordham University Press (2014).

13 Rosa A. Eberly: *Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres*, Urbana: University of Chicago Press (2000).

14 Nicholas Hengen Fox: *Reading as Collective Action: Text as Tactics*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press (2017), pp. 53–70.

of pamphletary events and describes both how pamphletary statements trigger public debates and how popular literacy uses external pamphletary statements in order to advance claims in the public sphere.

We describe and analyze "slices" of evolving public opinion on specific pamphletary statements, rather than the general evolution of public opinion or public "mood"[15] on often loosely circumscribed subjects of debate, as is prevalent in hedonometric studies. We define popular philology as a form of attention that can be studied by using twelve evaluative variables. We define these observable variables of literacy as:

Spreadability: perceived likelihood of a pamphletary text or pamphletary fragment (accusations, revelations, calumny, "*mot juste*") of "going viral"

Vehemence: perceived radicality of pamphletary statement

Figurativeness: perceived degree of the non-literality of vehemence (variable 2), implying corresponding degrees of generic irony and interpretative competence

Literariness: perceived degree to which figurativeness can be attributed to aesthetic strategies

Assertiveness: perceived degree of affirmative, as opposed to argumentative, substantiation

Familiarity: perceived degree to which a pamphletary statement is representative of an already familiar political tradition or social cause

Embeddedness: perceived degree to which a pamphletary statement has received public recognition as a subject of debate or ground for activist measures

Attributability: perceived degree to which authorship can be ascertained

Addressability: observable degree to which second-order statements are voiced *as* implied or explicit addressees

Feasibility: perceived ability to give course, institutionally or non-institutionally, to measures proposed by a pamphletary statement

Desirability: perceived benefit of measures proposed by a pamphletary statement

15 Johan Bollen, Alberto Pepe, Huina Mao: "Modeling Public Mood and Emotion: Twitter Sentiment and Socio-Economic Phenomena", in: *Proceedings of the Fifth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, Palo Alto: AAAI Press (2009), pp. 450–453.

Legality: perceived position of pamphletary statement and pamphletary aims with respect to established normative orders

These variables derive from the mixed methodology we use and are operative in the relevant disciplines. Variable 1 is operative in literary and media studies, as well as in subdisciplines such as network aesthetics.[16] Variables 2 to 9 are operative in aesthetics, the philological humanities, and neighboring disciplines. Variables 8 to 12 are operative in the social sciences, marketing analysis, and legal studies. All variables have their own historicity. We evaluate every second-order statement with respect to as many of these twelve variables as can be reliably assessed. By including variables that are explanatory as to the agency or potential agency of pamphletary statements, we describe contemporary pamphleteering as a social practice, and describe how readers apply forms of popular literacy in order to crystallize their aspirations and demands.

LITERATURE AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION

Cultural historians have developed complex accounts of the origins and transformations of cultural forms, practices, and patterns: the multiplication of *novelistic devices* in the 18th century, for instance, or the standardization of *point of view* in the 19th century, the empirical correction of pictorial *point-projection perspective* in the Renaissance, or the effects of *mechanical reproduction* on the consumption of culture have all been the object of sustained critical attention and patient pedagogical labor. Their tacit – and correct – implication has long been taken for granted across disciplines in the humanities: cultural forms are the products of historical processes.

As objects of *social* history, however, these forms raise several important problems which cultural history has paid little attention to. Thinking about the *social uses* of cultural forms oversteps questions that pertain to the historical origins, transformations, valuations, or eventual demise of specific cultural practices. Studies of the social uses of literature also move beyond questions of *representation* and *performance*, which have been dominant paradigms in literary history for so long that they often seem to be perceived as self-evident, near-natural categories.

Hence, a social history of cultural forms entails a decisive shift of emphasis in historical methodology: It tends to think of cultural forms as objects of instrumental reason, that is, as tools, weapons, or tokens that are employed for specific ends. There is, of course, a very significant overlap of both historical traditions, and clear conceptual demarcations are difficult to establish. For all practical matters, they are also of little import for concrete historical scholarship. There is, however, a general shift in the kinds of questions we think are worth asking about cultural forms in general and the social uses of literature in particular.

16 Patrick Jagoda: *Network Aesthetics*, Chicago: University Press of Chicago (2016), pp. 181–219.

In fact, scholarship knows next to nothing about how and why populations (be they citizens or not) resort to literary texts to actively make use of their social agency, that is, to engage in political and social processes. We have no consistent account of how populations *use* literary discourse to pursue strictly instrumental goals, such as securing civil rights, obtaining territorial autonomy, or enforcing legal changes. We know populations do, yet we know neither how nor why they resort to literature to demand or enforce normative changes in the first place. We also have few concrete descriptions of how ordinary, non-professional readers make sense of literary discourse: The overwhelming majority of literary scholarship tacitly invokes a professional, highly literate reader (often, and with good reason, an implied "peer-reviewer"), rather than "ordinary" readers who have had little or no formal training in the interpretation and evaluation of texts.

How do people perceive, discuss, and evaluate imaginaries displayed by pamphlets? Literature as a social institution vouchsafes a range of attitudinal dispositions and heuristic habits that are essential to any social history of political contestation. Polemical literary claims, once effectuated by reading publics, make literature observable as a social fact.