

## Zukunftsphilologie: Revisiting the Canons of Textual Scholarship

### Lecture cum Seminar

Thursday, November 17, 2011, 16.00 – 19.00

Freie Universität Berlin, Raum J 23/16, Habelschwerdter Allee 45

**Ananya Vajpeyi**

(University of Massachusetts / Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi)

## Ferdinand de Saussure and Modern Phonemics: The Role of Sanskrit

**Chair: Prashant Keshavmurthy**

(Zukunftsphilologie Fellow 2011-12 ( McGill University))

This paper makes two related claims:

One, that Ferdinand de Saussure's conception of the signs of language was consistent with his conception of its phonic units, and that in fact his structural linguistics appears to have developed out of his effort to theorize the fundamentals of phonology and phonemics.

Two, Saussure's theorization of phonology yielded for the 20th century "the phoneme", an idea no less revolutionary for subsequent linguistics than the one yielded by Saussurean semiology, namely, "the sign". But what becomes clear from the Saussurean archive, which was until recently almost entirely unpublished, is that his phonological theory was constitutively informed, if not directly an outcome of, his life-long study of Sanskrit.

Ananya Vajpeyi's paper draws on her pre-doctoral research for a master's thesis written at Oxford University and revised at the University of Chicago (1995-1997). The thesis was titled, "*Les semences du temps: Ferdinand de Saussure and the Role of Sanskrit in the Construction of a "Modern" Linguistics*" (Oxford 1996). Saussure's (then) unpublished papers that she used for her research were housed in the archives of the University of Geneva, as well as at the Houghton Library at Harvard University. Some of the same materials have now been published in: Simon Bouquet and Rudolf Engler, ed., *Ferdinand de Saussure: Writings in General Linguistics* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

**Background reading:** Davis, Anna M. "Saussure and Indo-European Linguistics", in *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure* (Carol Sanders, ed.), Cambridge University Press (2004). Pages 9-29.

**Ananya Vajpeyi** teaches South Asian History and Asian Studies at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. Her research focuses on the intellectual history of South Asia, including the history of modern linguistics and its antecedents in Europe's encounter with Sanskrit, which is the theme of her Zukunftsphilologie Lecture-cum-seminar.

She was educated at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, at Oxford University, where she read as a Rhodes Scholar, and at the University of Chicago. She has taught at the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, and at the National Law School of India in Bangalore. She has been a fellow at the School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University in Washington DC, the Center for the Study of Law and Governance at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, and at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. She is spending the academic year 2011-12 at the Center for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi.

Dr. Vajpeyi's first book, *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India* is forthcoming from Harvard University Press in 2012.

#### **Lecture-cum-Seminar**

The Lecture-cum-Seminar series is a central element of the scholarly program of the Zukunftsphilologie project. It is conceived as a working seminar of 3 to 5 hours. The lecture (ca. 45-60 minutes) is meant to introduce the audience to the research problem and provide the general analytical and theoretical framework for the topic. This is followed by a practical seminar, wherein the speaker demonstrates his or her case by reference to texts in the original language and in English translation. It is hoped that this Lecture-cum-Seminar series, a combination of theory and a direct engagement with texts, will enable scholars to examine the comparative aspect of the problematic without neglect of the local and singular nature of the texts examined.

#### **Zukunftsphilologie: Revisiting the Canons of Textual Scholarship**

The project Zukunftsphilologie endeavours to promote and emphasize primary textual scholarship beyond the classical humanistic canon. In an age of advanced communication, intellectual specialization, and unprecedented migration of knowledge and people, the discipline of philology assumes new relevance. Zukunftsphilologie aspires to support research in neglected varieties of philology with the explicit aim to integrate texts and scholarly traditions from Asia, Africa, the Middle East as well as from Europe itself.

Zukunftsphilologie refers to the polemic between the classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz and Friedrich Nietzsche around the method and meaning of classical studies. As a project it sees itself as part of a growing trend towards a more global intellectual history. It is inspired in particular by the work of Edward Said and Sheldon Pollock.

In order to promote historically-conscious philology, Zukunftsphilologie will foster research in the following areas: genealogies and transformations of philological practice, philology's place in the system of knowledge (e.g. its relation to science, theology and jurisprudence), and philology and the university. Furthermore, Zukunftsphilologie aims to support critical reviews of historical and philological practice. In revisiting important „philological wars“, the goal is not to merely evaluate the argumentative worth of these debates, but to reflect on the wider cultural and political context in which these „philological wars“ emerged and how they have shaped our knowledge of the past.

The project Zukunftsphilologie is co-directed by Angelika Neuwirth, Manan Ahmed and Islam Dayeh (all Freie Universität Berlin) and is associated with and located at the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School for Literary Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. Zukunftsphilologie is a project at the Forum Transregionale Studien.

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For more information on the Forum please see

- [www.forum-transregionale-studien.de](http://www.forum-transregionale-studien.de)

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