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›I cannot endure to read a line of poetry‹. The Text and the Empirical in Literary Studies

> But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry: I have tried lately to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. (Darwin 1958, 113)

> ›Science‹ in the public domain was made of symbolic material, and thus always already literary. Huxley could not help but be literary when imagining science's contribution to culture's ›hothouse‹, or network of symbolic bonds and inventive possibilities. (Amigoni 2007, 27)

The editors of the *Journal of Literary Theory* have invited me to reflect on the role ›the empirical‹ plays in the disciplinary conceptualisation and the practices of literary studies. In the pages of this journal, the term ›empirical‹, in the understanding of the proponents of the approach variously styled as ›neo-naturalist‹, ›cognitive‹ or ›neuroaesthetic‹, has been used in a very specific sense, namely, relating to the experimentally tested findings of evolutionary psychology, cognitive psychology and neurobiology. The empirical data referred to are thus the neurological processes happening in the brains of readers (there seems to be less interest in the brains of authors) and serve as a new basis for understanding the psychological processes involved in the act of reading. Gerhard Lauer begins his thought-provoking article »Going Empirical. Why We Need Cognitive Literary Studies« with two related observations that together point to what he considers a paradoxical blind spot in literary studies. While »literature is a psychological phenomenon«, simultaneously »modern empirical perspectives on the psychology of literature have been almost completely edged out of the field« (Lauer 2009, 145). As Lauer claims, to establish – or rather, re-invent – literary studies on the grounds of cognitive empirical approaches based on neurological data would significantly transform the understanding of the discipline and its relation to other disciplines. The rhetoric in this and other contributions to the controversy (e. g. Eibl 2007) suggests that the two approaches are incompatible. On the one hand, there are the ›hard-nosed‹ cognitive literary studies, closely allied with the empirical human sciences, and self-styled as the (only) ›scientific‹ approach in the humanities. On the other hand, there are lit-

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erary studies based on hermeneutic and historical methods, described by the ›cognitivists‹ as traditionalist and ›soft‹ (in German academic debates, the disparaging ›feuilletonistisch‹ is a favourite term). Lauer tells us that we have to choose between these two antithetical conceptualisations of the discipline, and that only the first one will be viable.

Against this apodictic claim, I suggest that first, the opposition between historical literary studies – not only using a historicist methodology, but understood as a discipline determined by and implicated in historical and social processes – and cognitive literary studies seemingly situated ›outside history‹ is far less clear-cut than Lauer suggests. The division of the pursuit of knowledge into the separate areas of the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences has its institutional and ideological roots in the reorganisation of the universities in the nineteenth century (see Lepenies 1985). None of these three academic fields is ›pure‹, unaffected by social conditions and institutional history. One should perhaps add that the controversy in *JLT* reflects the institutional positioning of the contributors, coming mostly from German Studies. ›Germanistik‹ has absorbed theories such as cultural materialism to a far lesser degrees than English Studies; in consequence, polemics against Literature with a capital L are much more provocative in the German(ist) than the anglophone context.

Second, I think that the biggest difference between the two approaches consists in their research interests: cognitive literary studies want to know why the human species invented literature in the first place, what general anthropological function it serves, and what are the hard-wired neurological processes that enable cognition, imitation and intersubjectivity, all part of the comprehension of literature. For such universalist interests the question why, for example, Shelley used an irregular metre in his sonnet »Ozymandias« is completely irrelevant. This, however, is precisely what interests the ›particularist‹ school: How do semantic and formal aspects of a given text interrelate? What is the difference between this poem and that? Is a text fully determined by its historical and cultural context, or is it possible that the creative space of fiction constitutes a moment of alterity »outside the horizon provided by the culture for thinking, understanding, imagining, feeling, perceiving« (Attridge 2004, 19)? How does fiction *differ* from other signifying practices?

Lauer states that hermeneutic literary studies are *only* interested in understanding particular texts. By contrast, I argue that they take individual texts as their starting point, but mostly in order then to pursue wider questions, sometimes even to end were cognitive literary studies start: with a question about the anthropological functions and ›uses‹ of literature (see Felski 2008). Hermeneutic and cognitive literary studies are, so to speak, walking in different directions, but (still) along the same road. From this assumption follows my third suggestion: rather than to argue that cognitivists should take the high road of true science while historicists go on staggering on the low road of hermeneutic interpretation, we should join forces. Both approaches have their methodological and theoretical strengths as

well as weaknesses. Together, they could indeed contribute to an exciting remapping of the literary field. In fact, only together can they explore the ›big question‹ that haunts the human sciences as well, the interdependence of nature and culture.

1.

One sort of data we have to deal with in literary studies is words. One needn't subscribe to poststructuralist concepts of sliding chains of signifiers to be aware that words are notoriously slippery customers, shifting their meanings more quickly than the most unstable kinds of molecules. To grasp the semantic layers a word has accumulated over time, the scholar trained in literary studies in English (as is my case) will turn to the *Oxford English Dictionary* that gives us the different historical meanings as well as examples of (written) usage. In the case of the adjective ›empirical‹ and the noun ›empiricism‹ (there is no real equivalent to the German ›Empirie‹), it is surprising to see, considering the importance of empiricism in the British scientific tradition, how pejorative meanings preponderate. The first two definitions of ›empirical‹ relate to medical practice: »**1.** *Med.* **a.** Of a physician: That bases his methods of practice on the results of observation and experiment, not on scientific theory. **b.** Of a remedy, a rule of treatment, etc.: That is adopted because found (or believed) to have been successful in practice, the reason of its efficacy being unknown«. Further, it concerns a person »**2.** [t]hat practices physic or surgery without scientific knowledge; that is guilty of quackery.« The third definition is more general but equally sets up the empirical in contradistinction to ›science‹: »**3.** In matters of art or practice: That is guided by mere experience, without scientific knowledge; […] Ignorantly presumptuous, resembling, or characteristic of, a charlatan.« Only the fourth definition is fairly neutral: »**4.** Pertaining to, or derived from, experience«, but even here, in an example relating to chemistry, ›mere enumeration‹ is viewed rather unfavourably as lacking »any theory of the mode in which [the constituents of a compound] are grouped«. A glance at the definitions of ›empiricism‹ does not greatly change the picture. The first again relates to medicine and links empirical approaches to »unscientific practice«; the second, the one that is pertinent to the present debate, describes empiricism as »[t]he use of empirical methods in any art or science« and, in philosophy more particularly, as »[t]he doctrine which regards experience as the only source of knowledge«.[1]

[1] Evidently, the *OED* offers a limited view of empiricism, based on everyday and literary usage. For the meanings of the term in the history of philosophy, see ›Empeiria‹ and ›Empirismus‹, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 478. In the Platonic tradition, *empeiria* (everyday knowledge) is of lesser value than the knowledge gained through art (*techné*) and rational thought. Only with the Baconian research programme, the New Science, and with Locke in particular is empirical observation endorsed as a valid method of cognition, in contradistinction to the Cartesian method of deduction.

It is interesting to note that the empirical here means the very opposite of its usage in Lauer's article. Taken together, the definitions given in the *OED* posit empirical practice as ›mere‹ fact-gathering, lacking guidance by first principles and categorically opposed to deductive theorising. In consequence, empirical methods are unreliable, in uncomfortable proximity to quackery, because »the reason of [their] efficacy [is] unknown«. The conclusions reached on the grounds of empirical observation therefore remain on the level of the particular and never reach the level of a general law. This is precisely the accusation Lauer directs at the ›non-empirical‹ methods of traditional literary studies: they are particularistic, they are »focused on close readings of single texts«, and they have no interest in the »prototypical features [of] literature« (Lauer 2009, 149). By contrast, empirical approaches in the sense of neurologically founded explanations are said to have a more precise, universal explicative power because they allow an insight into the black box of the human brain.

A first conclusion to be drawn at this stage is perhaps that the meaning of empiricism is less clear than it seems. It is worthwhile to keep in mind that ›empirical‹ and ›scientific‹ are not synonyms. In addition, the advocates of cognitive literary studies are not, I presume, pure empiricists in the sense that they allow experience as the only source of knowledge. Since they are interested in universals, they must combine the knowledge gained from experiments with deductive reasoning. There is no other way to arrive at universal principles. Finally, in order to bridge the gap between biological observation and cultural explication many representatives of this approach combine the knowledge transferred from the neurosciences with theoretical models that have been elaborated without any recourse to neurology whatsoever. An example is Massimo Salgaro's article in this journal, which not only combines Lauer's neuro-cognitive approach with Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory, but even declares that »[t]here is no rift or opposition between Iser's phenomenological descriptions of reader response processes and Lauer's neurologically founded analysis of the reader« (2009, 162). This may come as a surprise to some scholars working in the tradition of the Constance School. Salgaro suggests that Iser and Lauer are just interested in different aspects of reader response: »While Iser, on the one hand, studies textual structures that constitute the appeal structure of a text, Lauer, on the other hand, focuses his attention on the cognitive and emotional achievements, which these texts are expected to trigger in the reader.« (ibid.) However, this difference is crucial. Iser precisely pays attention to the structure of *individual* texts. While reader response theory can be applied to the texts formerly known as the classics as well as to supermarket romances, the ›horizon of expectation‹ established by *Don Quixote* or *Tristram Shandy* on the one hand and supermarket romances on the other hand will differ significantly. Conversely, for Lauer literature is a »continuum« ranging from oral practices and games to Goethe, Shakespeare and Tolstoi (2009, 151). This continuity – which, as such, I don't dispute – seems to imply that there is no need to take differences between authors,

genre and media, or even – o dreaded word! – aesthetic differences, into consideration. This is the crux in the controversy between cognitivists and historicists (see Kelleter 2007, 164 – 173). And yet, the difference between Iser and Lauer regarding the status of the literary text need not preclude a productive application of both. By combining these two approaches, Salgaro seeks a way of mutual enrichment for cognitive and hermeneutic literary studies.

In the other ›camp‹, ›traditional‹ literary scholars may be particularists, interested in singular readings of single texts, but this does not necessarily mean that they are engaged in unfounded speculation. While hermeneutic literary studies may indeed profit from the repeated injunctions, issued by cognitivists and philologists, to put their practices on a more rigorous methodological footing, there certainly are well-established schools within the field that are empirical in the sense of using considerable amounts of (textual) data. In addition, approaches other than cognitive literary studies are ›scientific‹ in the German sense of the word, described by Frank Kelleter in the article that sparked this controversy as »transparent terminology, verifiability of claims, self-reflexivity about instruments and aims, coherence in argumentation, precision and economy in expression, appropriateness of methods to chosen object« (2007, 155). Approaches that make an extensive use of large corpora are, for example, scholarly editing and textual criticism, huge, often collective endeavours in which all editions, textual variants and commentaries accumulated around the work of an author are collected, compared and commented in turn. If one is of the opinion that descriptions of anthropological universals are the only ›scientific‹, and therefore the only interesting, aims of academic life, one may conclude that the energy invested in comparing manuscripts, quartos and folios is misdirected and, in fact, an expression of the bourgeois fetishisation of work and author. However, that scholarly editing not only works with large data collections, but also constitutes a methodologically rigorous academic practice is, I think, indisputable.

The difference between this philological example and empiricism in cognitive literary studies lies in what is considered as ›data‹. And here I would claim that ›going empirical‹ does not have to be restricted to ›using results acquired in natural science with the help of experiments‹, nor even to ›using results acquired in the social sciences based on statistical methods‹. The verbal artefacts that constitute the object of literary studies are certainly culturally constructed and contested. To understand them, more is needed than quantifiable observations: experience in reading, cultural knowledge and something as elusive, and as important in any cognitive process, as intuition. This does not mean, however, that cultural configurations are somehow chimerical and completely elude the grasp of detached, precise, coherent analysis, and in addition, that the results of such analysis are utterly beyond intersubjective communication.

2.

What is the object of literary studies? Most academics working in the field would answer that it is ›the text‹, and that it is their principal aim to make sense of particular texts, or of texts in relation to other texts, or of texts in relation to their particular period and culture. Although this is a sweeping generalisation that includes as different, and as mutually inimical, approaches as New Criticism, Structuralism, Poststructuralism and New Historicism, most practitioners in this academic discipline would agree that it is an organised chain of signifiers known as a poem, a drama or a novel, as *The Waste Land* or *Hamlet* or *Great Expectations*, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* or *Mouse* or *Batman Returns*, that constitutes the object of analysis, the ›thing‹ that has to be looked at, taken apart and put together again in a way that yields meaningful conclusions. As my last set of examples shows, over the past decades the field has been extended to include not only the works of the ›Great Tradition‹ from Beowolf to Virginia Woolf, but also works of a popular and entertaining nature such as detective fiction, graphic novels and comics. This broadening of the concept of literature has been accompanied by reflections on the processes that constitute ›literature‹, ›the canon‹ and value judgements in general (see Guillory 1993, Winko 1996). Both the resulting revision of set reading lists – which now routinely include formerly devalued genres as well as writings by women and minority groups – and the disciplinary self-reflection that accompanies it are, I would claim, positive transformations of literary studies.

However, certain adverse consequences result from the changes in the field in the past decades, such as the loss of a common ground of reference and the dominance of theory at the expense of familiarity with primary literature (see Kelleter 2007, 156). Scholars representing the most diverse ›schools‹ within the humanities echo Kelleter's plea for a greater methodological awareness and analytical competence. This includes concepts a self-respecting academic would not have dared to utter a few years ago otherwise than to condemn them as Western patriarchal constructs: objectivity, universalism and the belief in a reality that is not purely the result of linguistic and cultural constructivism. Today, scholars in various areas of research – e. g. narratology (Fludernik 1996) and gender studies (Fausto-Stirling 2000, Grosz 1994; see Richter 2005) – are exploring ways to place their work on a broader empirical footing, including the cognitive foundations of human signifying practices. This shift does not mean the return to naïve essentialism, a belief in the unmediated presence of ›the real‹. But it entails a recognition that constructivism is not unlimited (see Belsey 2005), and that the sustained reflection on the interaction between the empirical object and its discursive representation has become inescapable. Concomitantly, and partly fuelled by research in cognitive psychology, we have seen a growing interest in intersubjective communication. The striving for a position of reflective distance on one's social or cultural positioning

is increasingly perceived as a prerequisite for the continuing communication within the humanities, and between the humanities and the other disciplines (Anderson 2006, 1–2).

A lot, then, is going on in the field regarding its methodological and theoretical repositioning, including a critical reassessment of the poststructuralist heritage. Yet Gerhard Lauer argues that the transformation of literary studies, and its pursuit of a status as science, should be much more fundamental. In his view, traditional literary studies have a severely limited, and limiting, scope: »There is no obligation to continue the historical restriction of literary studies as a discipline to the clashing of a great book with a great mind« (Lauer 2009, 151). It is a long time since I have heard literary studies defined in this way. The deconstruction of the canon, and with it the end of the idea that ›great books‹ are categorically different from other kinds of writing, is one of the enduring changes within the field, in fact a legacy of the critical theories of the 1980s and 1990s. But Lauer goes even further:

> [C]ognitive literary studies use experimental methods of the empirical human sciences as well as statistical and corpus-based methods. Exactly because issues in cognitive literary studies so closely overlap with research in cognitive and evolutionary anthropology, developmental and infant psychology as well as comparative ethology, research on teaching and learning, the neurosciences and even primatology, the methodical standards are based on these human sciences. Cognitive literary studies will thus find its cooperation partners rather in these areas than in the historical-hermeneutic fields and will consequently be extended further and further into the field of human science. And that will most likely have consequences for the social function of this newly positioned discipline, which will have little relation to the bourgeois traditions it substantially owes its rise to. (ibid.)

›Going empirical‹ in Lauer's sense would thus have »a fundamental impact on the self-conception of a discipline« (152). While the experimental human sciences are flourishing and hermeneutic literary studies are stagnating, the latter adopt, as Lauer suggests, an ineffectual ›wait-and-see‹ attitude, thereby missing a historical opportunity of revitalisation and liberation: »I think the opportunity to release literary studies from its bourgeois conventions and to open it up for fascinating and innovative issues […] is worth every effort« (ibid.). I wonder whether literary studies under the aegis of experimental methods, having said goodbye to its bourgeois roots, will be aristocratic or proletarian.

In these asides against the bourgeoisie it becomes evident that Lauer's juxtaposition of hermeneutic and cognitive literary studies rests on an implicit social distinction: the former are seen as complicit with a specific class investment, with ›bourgeois conventions‹, while the latter are presumed to be somehow class-neutral and disinterested. I will not recapitulate here the substantial body of work done by Raymond Williams and others on literature and class. Suffice it to say that, if the rise of English as an academic discipline – and in analogy, German language and literature at German universities – is intertwined with the interests of the middle class, the discipline also has a long history of critical self-awareness of these roots.

Conversely, modern science did not develop in a socially neutral space, either. The professionalization of scientific disciplines in the nineteenth century had much to do with bourgeois values such as respectability, propriety and self-control (see Dawson 2007). These attributes of the scientist's persona were presented as the prerequisites for as well as the results of »the disinterested study of empirical facts« (ibid., 13), and concomitantly, constituted the grounds for the social and cultural authority of science. As Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have shown, nineteenth-century epistemology echoed the metaphors of industrialism, insisting on self-denial, patience and industry as the prime virtues of the scientists, thus connecting ›objectivity‹ with the »doctrine of science as endless work« (2007, 230). However, these »humdrum, mechanical associations« were connected with »the rather more elevated self-image of the man of science« (ibid.), a hero combining energy and courage with self-sacrifice, as part of a strategy pursued by scientists such as Thomas Henry Huxley and Herrmann von Helmholtz to establish science as authoritative in a lively competition with the humanities.

This institutional history of the humanities and the sciences continues to provide the framework, and the rhetoric, for programmatic controversies today. Occasionally, the exchange in *JLT* is reminiscent of the debates on liberal education vs. scientific studies in the nineteenth century. The proposed methodological switch to neurological experiments seems to echo Huxley's bid to »seek for truth not among words but among things« (1880, 233). However, we need words to discuss things. And words, every literary scholar – and hopefully, every scientist – should know, do not constitute a neutral medium to express ›things‹. The belief that ›real‹ empirical science gives us access to ›truth‹ is not only epistemologically naïve. It also posits, despite its talk of a nature-culture continuum, nature as the ultimate ground of life, and in consequence narrows down the possibilities to explore precisely the *interaction* between nature and culture, between things and words.

3.

The strategic positioning of the discipline apart, what is at stake in this controversy is the fundamental reformulation of the epistemological aims of research – and consequently, the very *raison d'être* – of the humanities. When Lauer invites us to »go […] to the lab« (2009, 152) in order to find universal laws rather than particular interpretations, he is in fact proposing a transition from what in the theory of science are called the ›ideographical‹ disciplines to the ›nomothetical‹ disciplines. Like the whole debate on science and the humanities, these terms originate in the period when the transition from ›natural history‹ to ›science‹, and the subsequent institutional reorganisation of the universities along the lines of faculties and disciplines as we still know them, was about to be completed. In a foundational lecture, the German philosopher Wilhelm Windelband distinguished between the ›sciences of the

law‹ (Gesetzeswissenschaften) and the ›sciences of the event‹ (Ereigniswissenschaften) according to the formal character of the knowledge they were pursuing. The former, the nomothetical disciplines, were, as Windelband's neologism suggests, interested in ›positing (universal) laws‹; their empirical methodology was subordinated to this universalist principle:

> What does the methodological affinity between psychology and the sciences consist in? Evidently in the circumstance that the one as well the other identify, collect and analyse their facts exclusively from the perspective and with the purpose of understanding the general law to which these facts are subordinated. (›Worin besteht denn die Verwandtschaft der Psychologie mit den Naturwissenschaften? Offenbar darin, dass jene wie diese ihre Tatsachen feststellt, sammelt und verarbeitet nur unter dem Gesichtspunkte und zu dem Zwecke, daraus die allgemeine Gesetzmässigkeit zu verstehen, welcher diese Tatsachen unterworfen sind.‹ [Windelband 1894, n.p.; my translation])

In contradistinction, the ideographical disciplines are defined by their aim to ›describe the particular‹:

> In contrast, the majority of those empirical disciplines otherwise also called the humanities are resolutely geared to the full and comprehensive representation of a particular, more or less extensive occurrence of a singular reality limited in time. On this side, too, the objects and the specific techniques employed for their comprehension are of great variety. […] But the epistemological aim is in each case to reproduce and understand a figure of human life that has presented itself in a singular reality, in this, its effective factuality. (›Dem gegenüber ist die Mehrzahl der empirischen Disciplinen, die man wohl sonst als Geisteswissenschaften bezeichnet, entschieden darauf gerichtet, ein einzelnes, mehr oder minder ausgedehntes Geschehen von einmaliger, in der Zeit begrenzter Wirklichkeit zu voller und erschöpfender Darstellung zu bringen. Auch auf dieser Seite sind die Gegenstände und die besonderen Kunstgriffe, wodurch man sich ihrer Auffassung versichert, von äusserster Mannigfaltigkeit. […] Immer aber ist der Erkenntniszweck der, dass ein Gebilde des Menschenlebens, welches in einmaliger Wirklichkeit sich dargestellt hat, in dieser seiner Tatsächlichkeit reproducirt und verstanden werde.‹ [ibid.])

For our purposes it is interesting to note that Windelband bases his differentiation neither on a distinction between different objects – the same object can be analysed from a nomothetical or an ideographical perspective – nor on methodological distinction per se. For him, natural sciences and humanities are both empirical, since both kinds of disciplines collect and analyse data – only the subsequent use that is made of them, and the final aims of research, are categorically different. A given literary text, great or otherwise, can thus be analysed with regard to its individual style and its historically and culturally specific properties, or with a view to giving insight into the universal anthropological functions of literature. Both aims are equally valid. But the research questions framing these projects and the resulting methods of analysis are different.

What is even more important for the argument I want to make is the fact that Windelband does not posit a hierarchy between these two types of knowledge. Even if in logics the most general axiom serves as the point of departure for subordinate reflections, the singular fact or anomaly is of equal relevance. The understanding of

induction, the epistemological foundation of any empirical method, has been developed through »the particular work of the exploration of nature, being refined and increased from special problem to special problem« (›in der Einzelarbeit der Naturforschung, von Sonderproblem zu Sonderproblem sich verfeinernd und steigernd‹). In fact, in order to achieve a »lebendige Gesammtanschauung« (›a vivid and comprehensive view‹), that is, transdiciplinary integration of different branches of knowledge, the two fields are interdependent. The ideographical disciplines need universal principles which they can only borrow from the nomothetical disciplines. Abstractions and generalisations constitute the basis for differentiation and selection, for imposing order on empirical chaos. But concomitantly, ultimate value judgements are founded in the singular and particular: »The singularity, the incomparability of an object constitute the roots of all our emotive appreciation of values.« (›In der Einmaligkeit, der Unvergleichlichkeit des Gegenstandes wurzeln alle unsere Wertgefühle.‹) The validity of the particular is not cancelled out by its subsumption under the universal. On the contrary, universal laws that are not tested against the particular, and that ignore the historically specific realisations of anthropological constants, will be reduced to »trivial commonplaces« (›triviale Allgemeinheiten‹).

For the present debate, Windelband's argumentation is relevant in two respects. In the first place, he points to the intrinsic motivation of the pursuit of knowledge: the desire to understand the human condition, or ›life‹ – the continuity of nature and culture – in all its aspects, in its universal framework as well as its particular, contingent realisations. Without this encompassing curiosity, and without a concomitant love and respect for the object of knowledge, the scientific endeavour becomes a rather sterile and self-serving exercise. It is significant that Windelband includes affect (›Wertgefühle‹) in his conception of a science that is not purely quantitative but connected to aesthetic and, ultimately, ethical judgements.

The second point concerns the extrinsic aspect, the positioning of the disciplines: Windelband's insistence on the epistemological complementarity of science and the humanities can be a starting point to rethink interdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinary cooperation that is not only motivated by the external logic of research proposals, but by a genuine desire for conversation, is predicated on the difference between disciplines. If the human sciences, together with cognitive approaches in linguistics and literary studies, are well-adapted to provide answers about universals, it is the humanities that are by definition and tradition equipped to analyse the special case, the case that possibly does not fit into the statistical mean – and therefore, may be a starting point to frame innovative research questions. Science promises closure; the humanities, never satisfied, offer the endless proliferation of new questions. This is not their weakness, but their strength. If our aim is a concept of interdisciplinarity in which the humanities are not just the handmaiden of science, but a partner of equal value, then it is this strength, this peculiarity that we should put forward.

4.

The antagonistic rhetoric in some contributions to this exchange – counterbalanced by pleas for a continuing »culture of arguments« (Endres 2008) – betrays, I believe, a deep-seated anxiety concerning the situation of the humanities in general. The small coin of cultural capital in academia is no longer erudition, demonstrated in weighty, magisterial studies. Reputation, an important incentive for academics, is gained through the participation in large interdisciplinary research networks which in turn generate great amounts of external funding. The formats of such superprojects, whether the ›Sonderforschungsbereiche‹ and ›Exzellenzcluster‹ in Germany, the Swiss ›National Centres of Competence in Research‹ or the ERC Advanced Grants, are patterned on the collaborative research models of natural science where specialisation has reached such a high degree that individual research has become almost impossible. Unsurprisingly, the sciences are more successful in competing for funding of this kind. Since academic culture in an important, and highly visible, sector of research is thus dominated by the sciences, the adaptation of scientific research methods looks like the royal road to greater success for the humanities as well. Is it really?

In lieu of a summing-up, I would like to propose a few theses:

1. One of the challenges literary studies have to meet is not only the interdisciplinary transfer of knowledge, but as importantly the *intra*-disciplinary exchange between different theoretical and methodological schools. Hopefully, advocates of the cognitive and hermeneutic approaches will seek their cooperation partners not only outside the discipline, but also within. This implies that, while criticism of methodological and argumentative shortcomings is necessary and should be welcome, the participants in this debate should resist being overly prescriptive regarding the fundamental research interests of the other side.
2. From my own (hermeneutic, historicist, particularistic) perspective, I would argue that the insights gained in constructivist theories should not be entirely repudiated. While the radical position that there is ›nothing outside the text‹ may no longer be tenable, and in fact may no longer be terribly exciting and ›subversive‹, the insight into the situatedness of individuals, texts and human artefacts in a particular language, culture and historical situation is still valid. Even if we accept a biological and physiological foundation for our anthropological predispositions, the realisations of these dispositions vary greatly, and with Windelband (and with Darwin, who always had a great interest in the particular, in variations as well as the underlying laws) I would insist that the concrete historical phenomenon is as worthy of intellectual pursuit as the universal law.
3. Far from thinking that the formal expertise of literary studies has become redundant, I believe that it should be recovered and strengthened. The ability to an-

alyse ›the content of the form‹ (White 1987) is a competence that distinguishes literary studies from all other disciplines. In this respect, I am concerned about what the advocates of cognitive literary studies are prepared to give up. Formal and stylistic analysis, the analysis of rhetorical tropes, the analysis of narrative structures and poetic devices play as insignificant a role in Lauer's model as generic and historical differences. Is this turning away from the formal features of texts a symptom of an underlying dislike of literature, akin to the older Darwin's aversion against Shakespeare? Lauer's belittling of the single text seems to suggest it is. This is not simply a matter of personal predilection, but reflects the changes in literary studies regarding its object of research. If researchers and teachers have lost their interests in texts, how can students be motivated to engage with complex and challenging readings? What needs to be addressed by the discipline is not only the question of methodology, but the issue of motivation and of affect, positive and negative, towards the object.

4. The advocates of cognitive literary studies embrace with enthusiasm the ›truly scientific‹ methodology of the neurosciences. Do scientists respond with equal fervour? In other words, are they really interested in a discipline that adopts their methods, but with less competence? Within the cognitive model, literary studies will always remain on the receiving side. Why don't we rather offer with greater confidence what we *have* to offer, namely our formalist competence in analysing not only historical configurations, but the process of signification itself, the way humans produce meaning in language?
5. In all likelihood, the transition from an ideographical to a nomothetical framework would entail that literary studies adopt the forms of academic communication prevalent in the sciences. If the aim is no longer to understand and describe a particular phenomenon in all its specificity and richness, its singularity and originality, but to subsume all elements of a category under a general law, graphs and statistics will replace narrative discourse as the established form of academic communication in the humanities. But as Hayden White has argued, »narrative is a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted« (1987, 1). This, then, is a – very powerful – universal we would be giving up. Literary ›scientists‹ would stop writing books, and instead present their condensed results in short, often co-authored papers. Some may respond to this development with relief, but others will feel that it still is our business, bourgeois and old-fashioned as it may seem, not only to read single books, but to continue to write them. At least this is what I believe, but then I am not a scientist, but a scholar.

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