

# Performing History in the Second Sophistic

Thomas A. Schmitz (Kiel)

Among the many aspects of cultural life in the Roman Empire, the Second Sophistic is certainly one of the most striking. A sophistic declamation was among the most powerful public events that could be witnessed in a Greek city of the Antonine era. Philostratus's *Lives of the Sophists*,<sup>1</sup> written probably in the middle of the third century, gives a fairly clear picture of how these displays of rhetorical virtuosity functioned. A sophist traveled from city to city, performing before dazzled crowds that were in some cases made up of several thousand people.<sup>2</sup> A large train of baggage-animals, horses, slaves and packs of dogs would accompany him. He himself would ride on a sumptuous chariot with silver-mounted bridles, or he would be carried in a luxurious litter, bedecked with expensive jewelry and elegant garments.<sup>3</sup> Crowds in the cities appreciated these extravagant appearances: when the famous sophist Alexander who was nicknamed “Clay-Plato” appeared in Athens, his audience was so impressed by his elegance that they uttered a low murmur of approval even before he began to speak.<sup>4</sup>

The ensuing display of eloquence generally consisted of two parts. At first, the speaker would pronounce a shorter introductory speech (sometimes referred to as προλαλιά in modern scholarship, but the term is not used in the ancient texts), which | often included praise for the city in which he was speaking.<sup>5</sup> After this, the real showpiece would follow, the so-called μελέτη. A number of these declamations was on mythological or imaginary themes, such as Dio Chrysostom's preserved speech “Troy was never captured” (or: ἼΙ Τρωικός ὑπὲρ τοῦ Ἰλίου μὴ ἀλῶναι) or Alexander's speech that urged the Scythians to return to their nomadic life (Philostratus, *VS* 2.5; 572 ὁ τοὺς Σκύθας ἐπανάγων ἐς τὴν προτέραν πλάνην). The fictional legal pleas that were so popular with Latin declaimers and audiences (as is shown by the elder Seneca's collection of *suasoriae* and *controversiae*) play a less important role in the Greek part of the Empire, but Philostratus has some examples. A μελέτη delivered by Antiochus comprised a plea for a eunuch who had killed a tyrant after his abdication (Philostratus *VS* 2.4; 569 τύραννον καταθέμενον τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐπὶ τῷ ἐκλελύσθαι ἀπέκτεινέ τις εὐνοῦχος ὑπ' αὐτοῦ γεγονῶς καὶ ἀπολογεῖται ὑπὲρ τοῦ φόνου).<sup>6</sup> However, by far the most important class of μελέται were historical declamations in which the speaker impersonated a well-known figure of classical Greek history. Our sources preserve a number of examples of such speeches; I will

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- 1 On the difficult problem of the number of authors named Philostratus and the attribution of their different works see Anderson [4:291–6] (on the *Lives of the Sophists*, hereafter *VS*, in general see 1–120), Rothe [96:1–5] and Flinterman [37:5–14].
- 2 For the number of listeners, see Dio Chrysostom 32.2 τοσαῦται μυριάδες ἀνθρώπων (“so many tens of thousands of people”), 32.20, Epictetus 3.23.19, 35, Aristides 51.31–2; cf. Reardon [92:93–6]; Pernot [88:445–6] and my *Bildung und Macht* [103:160–1]. In his review of my book, Nesselrath [77] rightly cautions against accepting the sophists' claims about the size of their audiences at face value.
- 3 See Philostratus *VS* 1.25; 532, 1.25; 537, 2.10; 587; cf. Epictetus 3.23.35.
- 4 Philostratus *VS* 2.5; 572.
- 5 On these introductions see Nesselrath [78:111–3]; Russell [98:77–9]; Pernot [88:557–68]; Anderson [5:53–5].
- 6 Most historians have disparaged the numerous speeches about tyrants and their crimes in the second sophistic as mere rhetoric showpieces, but Kennell [62:356] rightly reminds us that “Greek tyranny in the Roman Empire was not a mere rhetorical fiction. It was a rhetorical and cultural reality.”

quote only a few of them. Aristides declaimed on the topic “Demosthenes advises the Athenians to mutiny while Alexander is in India” (Aristides 50.18 Κ Ἀλεξάνδρου [...] ἐν Ἰνδοῖς ὄντος συμβουλεύει Δημοσθένης ἐπιθέσθαι τοῖς πράγμασιν); Hippodromus of Larissa impersonated Demades who, in the same historical situation, discouraged the Athenians from revolting (Philostratus *VS* 2.27; 620 ὁ Δημάδης ὁ μὴ ξυγχωρῶν ἀφίστασθαι Ἀλεξάνδρου ἐν Ἰνδοῖς ὄντος). A pair of speeches of Polemo has been preserved: two fathers of heroic Athenian warriors who have been killed in the battle of Marathon quarrel about who should be allowed to pronounce the funeral oration for the dead.<sup>7</sup> Not only were the orators expected to take into account the historical details of the situation as well as the character and the emotions of the figure they were representing, they also had to imitate the language that was spoken in the classical period, half a millennium ago. They had to employ long obsolete forms and they had to be careful to use only words that were attested in classical authors. The *Ars rhetorica* which has been transmitted under the name of Aristides states unequivocally: “Concerning style, I | want to emphasize that you should use neither verbs nor nouns except those in the [classical] books” (περὶ δὲ ἐρμηνείας τοσοῦτον ἂν εἴποιοι μὴτε ὀνόματι μὴτε ῥήματι χρῆσθαι ἄλλοις πλὴν τοῖς ἐκ τῶν βιβλίων [...]; 2.78; p. 103.18–104.4 Schmid). Furthermore, the speeches were supposed to be extemporized, not prepared in advance or learnt by heart. The ancient sources tell us that several sophists merely pretended to be improvising. When Philagrus was in Athens, he declaimed a speech that he had already published in written form (whereupon the students of Herodes Atticus who were attending his performance began reading out the text aloud and thus embarrassed the sophist).<sup>8</sup> Rhetorical handbooks taught strategies on how one could pretend to be extemporizing.<sup>9</sup> It is impossible to assess to what extent sophists bypassed the difficulties of their formidable task by employing such tricks, yet there can be no doubt that in the judgment of their contemporaries, extemporaneous speeches (τὸ θεῖως λέγειν, as Philostratus called them) were most valued.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, it was at least assumed that the sophist would be extemporizing. It will perhaps be easier to understand the constraints that these speakers had to undergo if we transpose these rules to our own time. A modern sophist would have to improvise a speech on a topic such as “Thomas More disapproves of the politics of Henry VIII.” He would have to be careful to attend to every historical detail and to use only words and forms paralleled in the works of a handful of sixteenth-century authors (Thomas More himself being among them). His audience would expect him to command a wide range of topics of Renaissance English history; they would propose one such topic on which he would improvise after a few minutes of meditation.

Moreover, many members of the audience were quite familiar with the rules and pitfalls of sophistic declamations because they were themselves sophists, teachers or students of rhetoric. These people were not moved by friendly feelings towards the speaker: Plutarch (*De audiendo* 5; 39 d–40 a) gives a vivid account of these envious listeners who are waiting for an occasion to belittle and ridicule the sophist. After the declamation proper, these critics would cross-examine the speaker on points of vocabulary, grammar, or style; a long and sometimes contentious discussion would ensue.<sup>11</sup> It is obvious that extemporizing a long speech under these circumstances was a most difficult exploit, and Polemo is hardly exaggerating when he likens the sophist’s stage fright to the gladiator’s fear of death (Philostratus, *VS* 1.25; 541; quoted below).

These sophistic declamations have long been an embarrassment for literary and cultural history.

7 On these declamations, see further Russell [98], Kennedy [61], Desideri [31:59–61], Reader/Chvála-Smith [91], Swain [109:92–6] and Schmitz [103:198–205].

8 Philostratus, *VS* 2.8; 579–80; cf. Ameling [2:1.132–3] and Russell [98:80–1].

9 Ps.-Hermogenes *Meth.* 17; p. 433–4 Rabe; cf. Alexander, *Fig.* 1.2; p. 3.14.6–8 Sp.; Anonymus Seguerianus *Ars* 97 (p. 1<sup>2</sup>.369.15–16 Sp.); ps.-Hermogenes *Inv.* 4.3; p. 180.1–3 Rabe and Tiberius *Fig.* 17; p. 3.66.29–30 Sp.; further Pernot [88:433–4] and Schmitz [103:120–3].

10 Philostratus *VS* 1.18; 509. Cf. Schmid [102:1.36–8], Rothe [96:51].

11 See Schmitz [103:114–27].

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Why would brilliant orators waste their time and their skills on such | frivolous and hackneyed exercises? Why would audiences want to listen to these lucubrations that were so “profoundly uninterested in the realities of here and now”?<sup>12</sup> Do we have to assume that a whole society was infatuated with the ivory tower and reveled in nostalgia for the past? For obvious reasons, this interpretation is not satisfactory. In this paper, I will therefore propose a new approach to this strange cultural phenomenon and try to understand the sophistic declamations as performances. Until now, in the study of Greek literature, the concept of performance has mostly been used for studying Greek drama and archaic poetry. However, during the last decades, the notions of performance and performativity have drawn ever-increasing attention in contemporary cultural studies and have provided new frames of reference for looking at texts and other cultural products. This new approach has been described as being situated at “the oblique intersection between performativity and the loose cluster of theatrical practices, relations and traditions known as performance.”<sup>13</sup> As this definition implies, the new performance studies take their cues from two different domains. On the one hand, there is a long tradition of performance criticism in the field of theater and art, especially for modern and postmodern performance art where the artifact is precisely the performance, often involving the artists’ bodies. On the other hand, performativity is a concept developed by the British philosopher John Austin. In a series of lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955 and published posthumously as *How To Do Things with Words*,<sup>14</sup> Austin distinguished between constative and performative utterances. Philosophy had long considered the constative use of language as the norm: language makes statements about extralinguistic reality that are either true or false. In his work, Austin considers a set of linguistic utterances that escape this dichotomy. The sentence “I pronounce you husband and wife” is neither true nor false; instead, it performs or tries to perform an action. Hence, it can be successful or unsuccessful, or, as Austin labeled it, felicitous or infelicitous. Whether the sentence succeeds or not depends on the context of its utterance. Spoken by a minister to a couple, during a ceremony in a church, these words have a good chance of being felicitous; in other circumstances, they will probably misfire.

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Recent studies have shown new ways of combining the theatrical and the linguistic aspect of performativity.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the most exciting work has been done in | the field of queer theory. Judith Butler, for instance, has shown that gender should be regarded as something which we neither “have” nor “are,” but which we produce through our very acts and words. “Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.”<sup>16</sup> To the extent that such performatives are social constructions, they involve convincing an “audience” of the appropriateness of our gender roles; hence, they can be felicitous or infelicitous.

In this paper, I propose to view the sophistic declamations as performances. The short description given above shows the obvious affinities between the sophists’ appearance and theatrical practices. Not only were declamations sometimes produced in theaters,<sup>17</sup> being a sophist entailed the creation of a public *persona* in a histrionic display. For this creation to be convincing, it had to be accompanied by constant self-fashioning. In her brilliant contribution to the study of the second sophistic, Maud Gleason has shown that this self-fashioning involved the entire body of the sophist. His body became

12 Perry [89:295]; cf. Reardon [92:76], Gascó [44:44] or Nicosia [79:93].

13 Parker/Sedgwick [85:1].

14 Austin [9].

15 I quote just a few examples which seem especially interesting: Parker/Sedgwick [86], Phelan [90] (on performance in contemporary art), Diamond [32], Carlson [27], and Benston [12] (the introduction to a whole issue of *PMLA* dedicated to performance).

16 Butler [24:136].

17 See Philostratus, *VS* 2.5; 571.

a reflection of social values such as status, education, and gender-roles.<sup>18</sup> Contemporary texts show that the ancients were well aware of this theatrical aspect. Plutarch, e.g., advises a young man who wants to be a politician that he will have to live his whole life as it were on stage, and that accordingly, he will have to be careful to model and fashion himself.<sup>19</sup> Of course, in the face-to-face society of an ancient city, this was true for all members of the social élite, but sophistic declamations concentrated and intensified this aspect of theatricality.

Furthermore, I want to argue that declamations can profitably be studied as performances in the wider sense presented above. Every sophistic declamation was an arrogation of power, and the speaker had to make sure that he would get away with it, that the audience would subscribe to his authority and accept the *persona* he created. Our ancient sources contain a number of anecdotes which reveal that audiences were sometimes unruly and less than impressed by the authoritarian *persona* of the speaker. (And the fact that we mostly learn about the most successful and dazzling sophists only warrants the assumption that such incidents must have been more frequent than these sources suggest.) This arrogation of power could thus be successful or unsuccessful, and I will attempt to analyze the conditions which determined its felicitousness and the strategies that the sophists deployed in order to ensure their success. I will propose to view history as an important part of this arrogation of power. By imitating the language and rhetoric of their classical forebears, the sophists laid claim to their authority; they were trying to become “classics” in their own right. But sophists were not merely drawing upon history as a preexisting source of power, they were performatively producing this power by endowing history with authority. I will thus argue that the sophistic displays were an important mechanism for the creation of a meaningful past which we call “history.” If we view the Second Sophistic in this context, we will understand why its practitioners enjoyed such long lasting and widespread popularity. Sophists were not living in total isolation from the society that surrounded them; rather, they were fulfilling important political and societal functions in their world.

One last methodological caveat: it should be evident that the term “performance” is less an ontological than a functional concept. It makes little sense to ask whether the sophistic declamations “really were” performances or not. All I want to claim is that they can be described *to function* as performances, that performativity is an important aspect of them. As is well known, Austin himself collapsed the neat distinction between constative and performative utterances at the end of his lectures.<sup>20</sup> When we analyze sophistic declamations as performances, we are abstracting from the full phenomenon and looking at one of its characteristics at the expense of many other dimensions. Ultimately, this reduction can only be justified by the results it entails. I hope my discussion will show the rich possibilities of this heuristic means.

### The Power of Discourse

The heading of this first part of my paper is somewhat ambivalent: what does “power of discourse mean”? Is it the discourse that somehow wields power? Or does somebody exercise power by means of discourse? Who gets to appropriate this power, and how does this person gain and retain it? These are some of the questions that I want to answer in the following section.

Looking at a sophistic performance as a whole, we can see that it allowed an individual to command an immense amount of discursive power. The declamation produced a position in which

18 Gleason [47]; see also her [48].

19 Plutarch, *Præcepta ger. reip.* 4; 800 b: αὐτὸς δ' ὥσπερ ἐν θεάτρῳ τὸ λοιπὸν ἀναπεπταμένῳ βιωσόμενος ἐξάσκει καὶ κατακόσμη τὸν τρόπον.

20 Austin [9:147]: “Furthermore, in general the locutionary as much as the illocutionary is an abstraction only: every genuine speech-act is both.”

the sophist would speak before a huge silent crowd, captivating it by his rhetorical virtuosity; it created a stage on which the sophist could enact his superior education and rhetorical skill. Our ancient sources show that the sophists had a vivid perception of this “intoxicating sense of power that surged through the performer as he mastered the crowd.”<sup>21</sup> Philostratus tells us that Polemo felt superior to cities, not inferior to emperors and equal to the gods; when he addressed an audience in Athens, he did not compliment the public (as was usual), but instead gave a provocative display of his self-confidence: “People say that you Athenians are accomplished judges of oratory. I will find out” (*VS* 1.25; 535: ὑπέρφρων γὰρ δὴ οὕτω τι ὁ Πολέμων, ὡς πόλεσι μὲν ἀπὸ τοῦ προὔχοντος, δυνασταῖς δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ μὴ ὑφειμένου, θεοῖς δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἴσου διαλέγεσθαι. [...] εὖ γιγνῶσκων ὅτι τὰς Ἀθηναίων φύσεις ἐπικόπτειν χρή μᾶλλον ἢ ἐπαίρειν διελέχθη ὧδε· φασὶν ὑμᾶς, ὦ Ἀθηναῖοι, σοφοὺς εἶναι ἀκροατὰς λόγων· εἴσομαι.).

Most of the well-known sophists came from very distinguished and wealthy families; some had political careers that took them to the highest political offices, up to the consulship, as was the case for Herodes Atticus and Antipater of Hierapolis.<sup>22</sup> Hence, these men could derive their feeling of superiority from many sources. We should also bear in mind that sophists could wield very real political power. On some occasions, sophists would not recite fictitious pleas or historical declamations, but speeches on present political topics that tried to influence their audiences. Thus Dio Chrysostom delivered speeches on the need for unity (ὁμόνοια) (*or.* 38–41) or on the ideal emperor (*or.* 1–4).<sup>23</sup> Greek cities also employed sophists as ambassadors either to other Greek cities or to the Roman authorities.<sup>24</sup> Yet the most typical sophistic activity was the historical declamation. In this case, the speaker’s authority was also produced in and by the context of the communication. Only the fact that there was a societal convention for sophistic declamations allowed an individual to emerge as the subject of these utterances, to step forth as a speaker endowed with authority. It is thus this convention which produces the power of discourse; the individual holds this power merely vicariously and for a limited period of time.

Austin’s insistence that the conventionality of a performative is a precondition for its felicitousness has been taken up by later studies of speech acts. In his famous reading of Austin, Derrida has demonstrated that Austin’s concept of conventionality can be expressed as iterability: a speech act can only succeed when it can be repeated, quoted and misquoted.<sup>25</sup> Every single instance evokes the whole chain of quotations and embodies the authority of the whole tradition.

Hence, performance criticism has rightly observed that the authority of the speech act transcends the mere presence of its utterance. As Butler writes,<sup>26</sup> “The illocutionary speech act performs its deed *at the moment* of the utterance, and yet to the extent that the moment is ritualized, it is never merely a single moment. The | ‘moment’ in ritual is a condensed historicity: it exceeds itself in past and future directions, an effect of prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of utterance.” Many speech acts signify this embodiment of accumulated authority by exterior symbols. A judge wearing his robe signals that his authority to pronounce a sentence is derived from the tradition of his office, that he is merely holding this power as a representative of this tradition. Hence, I disagree with Butler when she writes “that a performative ‘works’ to the extent that *it draws*

21 Gleason [47:xx], cf. 25–6. See also Schmitz [103:209–14].

22 On the political careers of sophists see Nicosia [79:102–5]; the prosopographical information on the sophists has been conveniently collected by Bowersock/Jones [17].

23 The standard account of Dio’s political involvement is Jones [57]; on this type of sophistic activity see also Fein [35:280–2].

24 See Millar [74:385] and Bowersock [15:44–6], with the important objections of Bowie [19:32–8]. A particular impressive example has been analyzed by Keil [60].

25 Derrida [29]. Although I accept Derrida’s original deconstruction of Austin’s distinction between “authentic” and “parasitic” speech acts, I do not endorse the consequences he tries to draw from it, especially in his reply to Searle’s critique of his position. On the acerbic debate between Derrida and Searle see Dosse [34:2.54–6].

26 Butler [25:3], cf. 50–1.

and covers over the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized.”<sup>27</sup> In fact, many performatives do not “cover over” their conventionality; instead, they highlight and emphasize it to bolster their authority. It could be argued that the lavish staging of sophistic declamations described above is a manner of emphasizing this historicity. On the one hand, it served to highlight the wealth and social status of the speaker; on the other hand, it made him recognizable as somebody who was entitled to seize this conventional authority, to take the floor and perform before an amazed audience. By these exterior symbols, every speaker manifested his right to embody the discursive power that the convention created.

This process can be described as “filling the subject of the utterance.”<sup>28</sup> The first person is an empty sign that needs to be defined by the content of the message and its context. The exterior symbols of tradition and authority were mechanisms that helped filling this void even before the utterance proper had begun. Yet the sophists were not content with reaping the benefits of this accumulated power of their performances. As I have mentioned above, in their declamations, they actually embodied the great figures of the past; at least for the duration of their speeches, they turned into these classical authorities.<sup>29</sup> Every sophist had many times enacted the role of Demosthenes, had spoken before King Philipp of Macedonia or the Athenian assembly.<sup>30</sup> It is important to note that in these speeches, the personality of the sophist would completely disappear behind the figure he was embodying; when he said “I,” this pronoun referred to, say, Demosthenes, not to himself. This impression of the sophist giving way to his classical ancestor was amplified by the archaizing idiom he spoke. The Atticist language would only allow him to utter words which his predecessors had sanctioned, thus removing him from the present time and making him a mere mouthpiece of the past.

It is easy to dismiss this identification with his role as something that every actor senses. However, people in the Antonine era took it more seriously than most actors do. Speakers took names such as “Demosthenes” (*IG* 3.1129) or “Isocrates” (*FD* 3.2.98 and L. Robert, *Bulletin épigraphique* 1949.233), and honorific titles such as “second Homer” were bestowed upon individuals such as Iulius Nicanor in Athens (*IG* 2<sup>2</sup>.1069.6; 3788 and *EM* 13215) or Aelius Paeon (*ISideBean* 107.10).<sup>31</sup> | For Herodes Atticus, it was obviously the greatest compliment to be called “one of the ten” (viz., orators of the classical canon).<sup>32</sup> We have to keep in mind just how much authority people of the imperial era ascribed to this classical past.<sup>33</sup> As Fernando Gascó rightly remarks, “Se trata de un pasado que se hace presente de una forma ubicua, explícita, voluntaria. El pasado clásico al que recurren los miembros de la Segunda Sofística es seleccionado, segmentado, escogido con cuidado y termina convirtiéndose en algo más que en un recurso literario. Llegó a ser un argumento de autoridad con el que se podía reconvenir a alguien, articular procedimientos expresivos, trazar proyectos o presentar modelos artísticos, políticos o sociales.” By embodying figures of the classical past, the sophists appropriated this authority. If we analyze this as another device of filling the empty subject of the utterance, we observe that a sophist could assert his authority only by becoming someone else. Sophistic performances, then, created a position that enabled the performer to appropriate and

27 Butler [25:51] (her italics).

28 For this notion, cf. Barthes [10:131–2] (the essay “The Discourse of History” was first published in 1967).

29 Cf. Gascó [44:52–3].

30 Boulanger [13:52]: “[...] il n’est pas de sophiste qui n’ait joué maintes fois le personnage de Démosthène.”

31 Another person named Demosthenes occurs in the inscription published by Wörrle [120:4–16]; see further Schmitz [103:139] with n. 9. On Iulius Nicanor see Habicht [49], on Aelius Paeon see Fein [35:118–26]. The poet Heraclitus of Rhodiapolis was called “the Homer of medical poetry” (*JGR* 3.733 = *TAM* 2.910); cf. Oliver [83]; Bowie [20:69–70]. On the phenomenon see further Robert [94:7.581–4]; Bowie [21:202–3], Ameling [3] and Schmitz [103:46 n. 25].

32 Philostratus *VS* 2.1; 564 βρώσης δὲ ἐπ’ αὐτῷ τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ καλοῦσης αὐτὸν ἕνα τῶν δέκα. Cf. Lucian, *Scyth.* 10 παιδεία δὲ καὶ λόγων δυνάμει τῇ Ἀττικῇ δεκάδι παραβάλλοις ἄν “concerning education and eloquence, one could compare them to the ten Attic orators.”

33 Gascó [44:43].

commandeer the discursive power of the classics by assuming an alien *persona*.

I have so far analyzed the ways in which sophistic performers put the power of discourse to their use. Now, it is time to look at the reverse of the situation. Discursive power put constraints on the performers; these constraints worked on many levels. Even if we subscribe to the negative judgments about sophistic declamations, we cannot but be impressed by their rhetorical virtuosity. A sophist had to know and follow a huge number of intricate and difficult rules. A glance at private documents (especially letters preserved on papyri) from the imperial era demonstrates that the everyday language of this period was quite remote from that of the fifth and fourth centuries BC.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, mastering the Atticist idiom required years of arduous training beginning in early childhood, as a passage in Sextus Empiricus (*adv. mathemat.* 1.41) shows. Papyri have preserved school exercises that drilled students in the use of the dual number or the optative mode.<sup>35</sup> The second century saw a whole industry of rhetorical handbooks and Atticist lexica that catered to the growing demand of people seeking instruction in the correct use of language.<sup>36</sup>

On the level of each performance, this societal emphasis on a certain type of education was reflected as a series of rules severely restricting what was considered “appropriate language.” This amounts to a kind of censorship that, as performance criticism emphasizes, does not merely regulate what an individual can and will say on certain occasions, but effectively defines “the social domain of speakable discourse.”<sup>37</sup> Only what falls inside this domain is perceived as meaningful and intelligible speech at all; outside of it lies the wilderness of the Other: “*To embody the norms that govern speakability in one’s speech is to consummate one’s status as a subject of speech.* ‘Impossible speech’ would be precisely the ramblings of the asocial, the rantings of the ‘psychotic’ that the rules that govern the domain of speakability produce, and by which they are continually haunted.”<sup>38</sup>

The second sophistic presents an excellent example for the working of such mechanisms. If somebody who did not master the Atticist idiom had tried to speak during the declamations, his utterance would not have been recognized as comprehensible speech. Hence, we should take seriously Aristides’s assertion that the uneducated Cynics were “more speechless than their own shadow” (3.672: ἀφωνότεροι τῆς σκιᾶς τῆς ἑαυτῶν). For educated people like Aristides, speaking correct, i.e., Atticist Greek was the very “definition of culture” (1.322–330: ὄρος παιδείας); therefore, the Cynics, “who make more mistakes than words” (3.664: πλείω μὲν σολοικίζουσιν ἢ φθέγγονται), just do not utter intelligible language. Every new performance would reenact these rules of exclusion, thus making them appear natural and obvious. By repeating and ritualizing this restriction of the domain of speakability, sophistic performances not only confirmed the privileged status of the Atticist idiom, they also bolstered the monopoly on public discourse that the educated upper strata of society possessed. Butler has accurately described this kind of censorship as “a productive form of power: it is not merely privative, but formative as well. [...] censorship seeks to produce subjects according to explicit and implicit norms, and [...] the production of the subject has everything to do with the regulation of speech.”<sup>39</sup> By delimiting the domain of speakability, these rules establish a position that allows certain individuals endowed with the necessary prerequisites to step forth as the subject of a sanctioned form of discourse, to define their own role and to embody authority. |

34 A comparison between the vocabulary and morphology in private documents of the second century AD and classical Greek can be found in Schmitz [103:75–8].

35 See Theon, *Progymn.* 5; p. 2.101.9–14 Spengel; cf. Anlauf [7:47 n. 107], Brinkmann [23:151] and Meier-Brügger [72:1.144–5].

36 On Atticist lexica, see Dihle [33], Sirago [106:298] and Alpers [1].

37 Butler [25:133].

38 Butler [25:133]; her italics.

39 Butler [25:133].

## Performances as Crises

However, this last point also demonstrates that ritualized repetition of rules and exclusions is necessary for the authority and censorship to remain binding. Rituals that are not performed lose their societal power; linguistic rules that are not confirmed by repetition will soon be considered ineffective. “Because the action of foreclosure does not take place once and for all, it must be repeated to reconsolidate its power and efficacy. A structure only remains a structure through being reinstated as one.”<sup>40</sup> Hence, performance criticism considers every performance a crisis involving a twofold risk. On the one hand, the performer is put to the test. Will she or he be able to meet the demands of the situation, adapt her or his discourse to the exclusionary rules, embody authority in the required manner and thus make the performance felicitous? On the other hand, the performance is also a crisis for the norms and institutions themselves. As we have seen above, they require constant repetition in order to retain their authority. Every performance can thus change these norms, invalidate them or shift the overall meaning of the underlying convention. One of the advantages of looking at rituals as performances is that it helps explain change. The crisis of a performance can end either way, it can corroborate the norms or weaken them, as Butler has shown in her discussion of J. Derrida’s and P. Bourdieu’s theories.<sup>41</sup> The following pages will study the ways in which the sophistic declamations can be seen as crises and the strategies that were applied to ensure their success.

I will begin with the former risk involved in a performance, the possibility of the performer failing to muster authority. As we have seen, sophists had to observe a huge number of linguistic rules. Every speaker had to do his best to conform to these norms, to give credence to his claim of embodying classical authority. It is obvious that this goal could never be completely achieved. Despite all their ostentatious self-confidence, sophists must have been conscious of the five hundred years that separated them from the classical period. Our sources show that this feeling of insufficiency and belatedness was widespread during the Antonine era. Dio Chrysostom flatly states that the Athenians of his time are “unworthy of their city and of the repute of their forebears” (31.117: ἐγὼ δ’ εἰ μὲν τις ἢ τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις ἐπιτιμῶν λέγει ταῦτα, καὶ δεικνὺς οὐκ ὄντας ἀξίους τοὺς ἐνοικοῦντας τῆς πόλεως οὐδὲ τῆς δόξης, ἣν οἱ πρότερον γενόμενοι κατέλιπον [...], καλῶς αὐτὸν ἡγοῦμαι λέγειν.). Similar doubts haunted even the most successful performers. In a passage reminiscent of Kafka, the rhetorician Longinus comments that “we do not have authority over the rhetorical law, but the law has authority over us” (p. 1<sup>2</sup>.189.22–23 Spengel: οὐ γὰρ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ὁ νόμος τῶν λόγων, ἀλλ’ ἡμεῖς ἐπὶ τῷ νόμῳ). In a similar vein, Theon writes that students should have the classical authors as “correctors” (διορθωταί).<sup>42</sup> These “correctors” clearly are hypostatized and personalized versions of the numerous mechanisms that regulated and restricted the speakable discourse; they also betray the overbearing sense of inadequacy which sophists sometimes felt. Their productions could never really measure up to the law, could never be identical with the normativeness of classical discourse.<sup>43</sup> Even an Herodes Atticus could merely be “like Demosthenes,” but he could never really *be* Demosthenes (Philostratus *VS* 1.25; 539 Ὀλυμπίασι δὲ βοησάσης ἐπ’ αὐτῷ τῆς Ἑλλάδος, “εἷς ὡς Δημοσθένης,” “εἶθε γάρ,” ἔφη, “ὡς ὁ Φρύξ,” τὸν Πολέμωνα ὧδε ἐπονομάζων [...]. “When at the Olympic Games all of Greece acclaimed him, crying ‘You are like Demosthenes,’ he replied ‘If only I were like the

40 Butler [25:139].

41 Butler [25:146–52].

42 2; p. 2.72.9–15 Spengel: πολὺ δ’ ὠφελιμώτερον καὶ τὸ προστάττειν τοῖς νέοις γράφειν εἰς τινα προβλήματα τῶν ἤδη τοῖς παλαιοῖς ἐξεργασμένων [...], μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ποιῆσαι τοῖς ἐκείνων αὐτοὺς ἐντυγχάνειν, ἵν’ εἰ μὲν ὁμοίως εἴεν γεγραφότες, πεισθῶσιν· εἰ δὲ μή, ἀλλὰ διορθωτὰς ἔχοιεν αὐτοὺς τοὺς παλαιοὺς. “It is far more useful to have the students write on subjects which have already been treated by the classical orators and after that make them encounter the original texts. If they have written similarly, they should be convinced, otherwise, they should at least have the classical authors themselves as correctors.”

43 See Butler [25:151].



Phrygian,’ calling Polemo by this name.”).<sup>44</sup> Our ancient sources show that the contemporaries of the sophists were aware of these shortcomings. The grammarian Phrynichus (who advocated particularly strict linguistic rules) clearly enjoys listing some of the worst mistakes that even famous sophists such as Favorinus and Polemo made.<sup>45</sup> Sophists were known to be quarrelsome, so if a speaker blundered during his improvisation, he had to expect acerbic criticism. Many declamations were followed by long and acrimonious discussions, which were even considered a hallmark of sophists.<sup>46</sup> Under these circumstances, it was hardly an exaggeration when Polemo compared the gladiator’s fear before the mortal combat to a sophist’s feeling before the declamation (Philostratus *VS* 1.25; 541: ἰδὼν δὲ μονόμαχον ἰδρῶτι ρέομενον καὶ δεδιότα τὸν ὑπὲρ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀγῶνα, οὕτως, εἶπεν, ἀγωνιᾶς ὡς μελετᾶν μέλλον. “When Polemo saw a gladiator sweating and fearing the fight for his life, he said, ‘You are agonizing like someone who is about to declaim.’”).<sup>47</sup>

It was precisely the ostentatious display of discursive power that jeopardized the sophists’ authority by accentuating the gulf between their pretensions and the classical norms they were trying to attain. In some instances, the performance was infelicitous; the sophist could not live up to his rules and thus failed to conjure the conventional authority. One particularly striking example is related by Lucian. A sophist performed in Olympia. Instead of extemporizing, he delivered a speech that he had prepared long before. But the audience noticed the trick and showed its despise openly. “There was much laughter from the public. Some of them glared at the man from Patras, showing that they were aware of his role in the deceit; others recognized what he was saying and during the whole recitation paid attention to nothing but to testing each other’s memories, whether they could identify from which of the contemporary sophists he had gleaned his words.” (*Pseudologista* 5–6: Γέλωτος δὲ πολλὴ παρὰ τῶν ἀκουόντων· καὶ οἱ μὲν ἐς τὸν Πατρέα ἐκείνον μεταξὺ ἀπροβλέποντες ὑπεδήλουν ὡς οὐ λέληθε συμπράξας αὐτῷ τὴν ῥαδιουργίαν, οἱ δὲ καὶ αὐτὰ γνωρίζοντες τὰ λεγόμενα παρ’ ὄλην τὴν ἀκρόασιν διετέλεσαν ἐν τοῦτο μόνον ἔργον ἔχοντες, ἀλλήλων πειρώμενοι ὅπως μνήμης ἔχουσι πρὸς τὸ διαγιγνώσκειν ὅτου ἕκαστον ἦν τῶν ὀλίγων πρὸ ἡμῶν εὐδοκιμησάντων ἐπιταῖς καλουμέναις μελέταις τῶν σοφιστῶν.) The sophist’s failure to pull it off is exacerbated by the noticeable chasm between his poor performance and his high pretensions (he was declaiming before the assembly, the πανήγυρις, at Olympia, nothing less; he wanted his listeners to believe that he was extemporizing and that he was able to treat any topic which the audience gave him). Lucian is particularly critical of the fact that he was not really imitating the classical authorities, but was plagiarizing contemporary sophists. Therefore, the speaker is a very example of the fashionable sophist as caricatured by Lucian himself in his *Rhetorum praeceptor*. This impostor wants to become a perfect orator within one day (15) and therefore takes “the highway of rhetoric” (11: τὰ τέθριππα [...] τοῦ λόγου), not the steep and crooked way which demands the labor of actually reading the classical authors (9–10). Accordingly, his instructor advises him, “Do not read the classics, this prattler Isocrates or this boorish Demosthenes or this frigid Plato. Rather read more recent speeches, especially these so-called declamations” (17: ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀναγίγνωσκε τὰ παλαιὰ μὲν μὴ σύ γε, μηδὲ εἴ τι ὁ λῆρος Ἴσοκράτης ἢ ὁ χαρίτων ἄμοιρος Δημοσθένης ἢ ὁ ψυχρὸς Πλάτων, ἀλλὰ τοὺς τῶν ὀλίγων πρὸ ἡμῶν λόγους καὶ ἅς φασὶ ταύτας μελέτας [...]). Speakers such as the ones criticized in these passages by Lucian cannot live up to the classical norms, and their individual failure is highlighted by the general expectation that sophists *should* embody (or at least try to embody) classical authority. We can thus say that the more discursive power is at stake, the more difficult it becomes for the

44 A similar comparison with Demosthenes can be found in Aristides 50.19 K. See also the anecdote quoted above, n. 32: Herodes could be “one of the ten” only in a metaphorical sense, his impersonation of classical authority would always fall short of the real classical forebears.

45 Phrynichus *Eclogae* 140, 141, 396.

46 See, e.g., Plutarch *Tuend. san.* 16; 131 a; Lucian *Rhet. Praec.* 22; Philostratus *VS* 1.8; 491; cf. Gleason [47:27–8], Schmitz [103:114–27].

47 On the sophists’ stage fright, see further Pernot [88:447–8].

individual performer to attain the stature to shoulder this large amount of power.

Apart from individual failures, performances are subject to other, even more important risks. Even if a performer succeeds in evoking the appropriate authority, the public could refuse to accept its legitimacy or relevance. Performance criticism has therefore rightly emphasized the importance of “the role of silent or implied witnesses [...] or the quality and structuration of the bonds that unite auditors or link them to speakers.”<sup>48</sup> Implicitly or explicitly, every performance “depends [...] on the tacit requisition of a third person plural, a ‘they’ of witness—whether or not literally present”; it “evokes the presumption, but *only* the presumption, of a consensus between speaker and witnesses.”<sup>49</sup> This interpellation of a community of witnesses constitutes the crisis of the performance. Making a performance felicitous presupposes common values and conventions, yet at the same time, such common values need to be produced performatively. Accordingly, every single performance tests the strength of those communal ties. Will they suffice to produce a discursive authority strong enough so that all participants submit to it, or will they break, jeopardizing the success of the performance and ultimately the legitimacy of the underlying values? |

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Those who want to adopt the role of the subject in such situations generally anticipate this strain and act accordingly. They develop strategies that intend to create emotional ties between speaker and audience. Sophistic performances are a particularly apt example for the study of such strategies. Above all, sophists liked to emphasize the “Greekness” of their audience. With all due attention to the problems that such an anachronistic analogy poses, we may compare this emotional tie to modern patriotism or nationalism. When Aristides addresses the inhabitants of Rhodes, he stresses their “pure extraction”: “it might be childish to talk of these things to other people, but it is not superfluous to mention them to you since you are pure Greeks and have been brought up in these things from your earliest childhood” (24.23; καὶ ταῦτα πρὸς μὲν ἄλλους τινὰς διεξίεναι μειρακιῶδες ἂν ἦν ἴσως, πρὸς δὲ ὑμᾶς καθαρῶς ὄντας Ἕλληνας καὶ τεθραμμένους ἐκ παιδῶν ἐν τούτοις οὐκ ἄχρηστον.). This is a typical instance of the rhetorical use to which this feeling of togetherness is put. The speaker exploits his listeners’ pride of their origin and education to justify the reprimands that he will address to them shortly.

We have to bear in mind that the Greekness thus evoked is of a specific kind. It is culturally defined, as numerous ancient texts show. Historians such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*ant.* 14.6.6) or Plutarch (*fort. Alex.* 1.6; 329 c) give us explicit accounts of this Greek self-definition.<sup>50</sup> A telling example is Philostratus’s use of words like Ἕλληνες or τὸ Ἑλληνικόν: they regularly have the meaning “students of rhetoric,”<sup>51</sup> thus conveying the idea that only those who have a certain degree of education can legitimately aspire to be called “Greeks.” Hence, the expression τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων can signify “Greek culture, Greek learning.”<sup>52</sup> A passage in Dio Chrysostom explicitly quotes the underlying ideology: “nothing but education and rhetoric befits the sons of the Greeks” (Ἑλλήνων δὲ παισὶ [...] οὐκ ἄλλο ἤρμοζεν ἢ παιδεία καὶ λόγος).<sup>53</sup> When we observe that even novels casually mention the cliché of the intimate connection between Greekness and education,<sup>54</sup> we can indeed |

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be certain that this idea was firmly established in the minds of people living in this era.

During the second and third centuries AD, Greeks had numerous reasons to derive a positive identity from their heritage and especially their superior culture. On the one hand, this sort of national

48 Parker/Sedgwick [85:7].

49 Parker/Sedgwick [85:8–9].

50 Cf. Palm [84:14], Nikolaidis [80], Humbert [56], Bowie [18] and Schmitz [103:175–81].

51 Ἕλληνες: *VS* 2.5; 571 (twice); τὸ Ἑλληνικόν: 2.10; 588; 2.26; 613; 2.27; 617. Cf. Flinterman [38:150], Koniaris [64:100 n. 29], Follet [39:206], Russell [98:84 n. 51]: “The use [...] reflects the ‘nationalist’ flavour of the sophists, who saw themselves in a very special sense as custodians of the heritage of classical Hellas.”

52 E.g., Philostratus *VS* 1.7; 488, cf. Aristides 3.605 L.-B. τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων πράγματα.

53 Dio Chrysostom 32.3; cf. 31.163, 36.18, 48.8.

54 Chariton 2.5.11, 7.6.5; see Bowersock [16:41–2]; on similar passages in Heliodorus cf. Swain [109:117–8].

pride compensated for the political irrelevance of Greek cities in the Roman Empire—Greeks were keenly aware that the most important decisions were being taken in Rome.<sup>55</sup> However, we should be careful not to confuse this cultural compensation with feelings of resentment. Older scholarly works sometimes claimed that many Greeks, especially intellectuals, were “enemies of the Roman order” and expressed their animosity obliquely in such references to their superior culture.<sup>56</sup> More recent studies rightly emphasize that we hardly find any trace of anti-Roman sentiments and that, as Christopher Jones writes about Dio Chrysostom, “The kind of Hellenism he preaches is one that does not conflict with Roman supremacy, but is approved by the Romans.”<sup>57</sup>

On the other hand, people in the eastern part of the Roman Empire were surrounded by an enormous number of public discourses that tried to create and enhance such a feeling of cultural identity. Although these efforts were certainly welcomed and encouraged by political authorities in Rome, we should be wary to speak of “propaganda”: this modern term implies a degree of conscious manipulation that was probably absent from ancient efforts of creating a coherent self-image. One of the most important forms of public discourse was the Panhellenion, a religious organization of Greek cities founded in 131/2.<sup>58</sup> Membership in this prestigious association was restricted to cities that could prove their Greek descent. This institution reminded Greeks of their common heritage. It caused cities throughout the Greek-speaking world, particularly in Asia Minor, to prove their Greek origins by discovering or inventing their mythological or historical past.<sup>59</sup> An especially conspicuous form of this endeavor was the “mushrooming of ‘diplomatic activity’ between cities, which seems to have followed the league’s foundation.”<sup>60</sup> Cities of less than certain Greek descent would send envoys to more ancient and prestigious cities, preferably of the mainland, to establish a tie of “kinship” (συγγένεια) that would bolster their claim to be Greek. Inscriptions show that such envoys would give public lectures on the results of their explorations and negotiations, thus presenting a powerful public discourse that encouraged its listeners to derive civic pride from this idealized version of their past.<sup>61</sup> This phenomenon is closely connected with the so-called πάτριον-historians.<sup>62</sup> These writers studied local mythical and historical traditions, emphasizing the glorious past of their cities and encouraging their fellow-citizens to seek their identity in this heritage. Nothing but scattered fragments of this type of historical account has been preserved, but these meager remains are sufficient to provide us with a glimpse of a whole industry of historians.

All these phenomena formed a network of public discourses that inspired citizens to derive their self-image from the same sources that created authority in the sophists’ performances. Even ordinary people thus identified with the glorious past of Greece, with its cultural heritage and especially its great literary figures. If this strategy succeeded, chances for the performance’s felicitousness were good. If listeners refused to accept the speaker’s appeal to classical figures as a source of authority,

55 Cf. Bowie [22], De Blois [28], Woolf [119], esp. 125–6.

56 See Fuchs [41], especially 49–54 n. 59–65, Peretti [87], MacMullen [70:244], Walbank [112:160–3].

57 Jones [57:35], cf. id., [58:126–30], Forte [40], Nutton [82], Méthy [73].

58 On the Panhellenion, cf. Spawforth/Walker [107] and [108], and the important study by Jones [59], who rightly emphasizes that the initiative for founding this institution came from the Greeks themselves and was only approved by Hadrian. The archeological evidence is studied by Willers [118].

59 According to Hall [51:338], a similar explanation can be found for the process “by which many traditional mythical figures were brought into connection with foreign peoples and places [in the sixth century BC]. This process was associated with Greek colonization, as the poet-genealogists sought to provide their Hellenophone public, now spread over all corners of the Mediterranean, with mythical progenitors and founders who had prefigured their own activities in foreign parts.”

60 Spawforth/Walker [108:103], cf. Robert [95:86–7], Weiß [114], Scheer [100:67–70].

61 Cf. the inscriptions recording the diplomatic activities of Hiero Lysimachus in Sidyma (*TAM* 2.1.174) and of P. Anteiou Antiochus in Aegeae (published in Robert [95:78–80]). See further Robert [94:7.423–4], Weiß [115], 189 and 205 n. 92 and Schmitz [103:205–9].

62 See, e.g., Weiß [116].

they were forced, at the same time, to refuse the positive self-definition they were offered by so many different powerful discourses. This explains why sophistic performances were successful over such a long period of time; it also helps us understand why they were bound to lose their discursive authority as soon as large strata of the population derived their self-image from sources other than this tradition, such as the religious identity that early Christianity or mystery-cults offered. In this case, the crises of sophistic performances would increasingly end in infelicitous speech acts as speakers failed to interpellate their audience, create the necessary | feeling of togetherness and transform the institution’s discursive power into authority for themselves.

### Conclusion: History as Performance

We have seen that history is in many ways at the core of the second sophistic. In conclusion, I want to argue that understanding this cultural movement will help us comprehend how history was perceived in the Antonine period. Our English term “history” combines two elements that Greek separates.<sup>63</sup> On the one hand, it designates “a chronological record of events, often including an explanation of or commentary on those events,” on the other hand, it also signifies “the events forming the subject matter of a historical account.”<sup>64</sup> Ancient Greek, on the other hand, kept these meanings separate. For the historical account, we have the word ἱστορία, the more general συγγραφή or the catchall term λόγος.<sup>65</sup> The events themselves were most commonly designated by the word τὰ γεγενημένα or τὸ γενόμενον.<sup>66</sup> A sentence such as ἀποφανῶ οὔτε τοὺς ἄλλους οὔτε αὐτοὺς Ἀθηναίους περὶ τῶν σφετέρων τυράννων οὐδὲ περὶ τοῦ γενομένου ἀκριβὲς οὐδὲν λέγοντα (Thucydides 54.1) would roughly translate as “I will demonstrate that neither the other people nor the Athenians themselves say anything accurate about their own tyrants or their history.”

This Greek way of separating the historical account and its raw material, as it were, can heighten our awareness of the problems which the concept of history and historicity present. We could couch the difference between the undifferentiated multitude of past events on the one hand and the discourse about this past on the other in Aristotelian terms as one between matter and form. In this interpretation, the past would be an unproblematic prediscursive entity, which would then be made intelligible by human discourse. However, such an interpretation has come under attack during the last two decades: for a while, a pantextualism, which could vaguely be labeled “poststructuralist,” appeared as a fashionable critique of this position. Jacques Derrida’s provocative affirmation that “there is nothing outside of the text”<sup>67</sup> | seemed to warrant the assumption that extratextual reality simply does not exist. Today, hardly anyone would subscribe to this extreme stance—the tree in the forest does indeed fall even when nobody is watching. Yet in a less radical form, the argument of an all-encompassing textuality ought to be taken seriously. One of the functions of history is to decide which past events constitute historical facts at all and which ones need to be excluded from the field of study, which ones are memorable and which ones are not. To this extent, history construes

63 See Meier [71:258]. On the difference between our modern and the ancient concept see Koselleck [65].

64 The quotations are from *The American Heritage College Dictionary* (3rd ed., Boston 1993) 644. The French word “histoire” and the German “Geschichte” have a similar range of meanings.

65 See *LSJ* 842 s.v. ἱστορία II “written account of one’s inquiries, narrative, history,” 1661 s.v. συγγραφή II 1 “that which is written, writing, book, esp. in prose: history, narrative,” 1058 s.v. λόγος V 3 “historical work.”

66 *LSJ* 349 s.v. γίγνομαι I 3 “the facts, the past.”

67 Derrida [30:158, 163]. It should be emphasized, however, that with this provocative statement, Derrida meant to show the difficulty of reaching the referents via the linguistic sign, not to deny the existence of reality. Later accounts of deconstruction made Derrida’s statement sound more unambiguous, e.g., Leitch [69:58]: “The world is text. Nothing stands behind. [...] There are no facts as such, only assemblages. There is always already only interpretation.” Against, see the more circumspect explanation in Norris [81:146–58].

its own object, its own past, as has convincingly been argued by Hayden White.<sup>68</sup> For the past (τὰ γεγενημένα) to be intelligible, to become history in the full sense of the word, it has to be shaped by discursive strategies.

What needs to be explored is the nature of these strategies. Of course, different cultures produce different strategies; of course, the same culture can host a wide variety of discourses, some of which may be competing or contradicting each other. To quote just two recent examples: Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* and the discussion about Afrocentrism in the US, the debate about Jonathan Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* in Germany<sup>69</sup> have both shown that what is at stake in defining the way we look at the past, is the power of dominating the discourse in our present society. We have to acknowledge that only a small part of these discursive strategies aims at finding the truth about the past. Even if we accept for the time being that there is such a thing as a disinterested search for the truth, it is obvious that most discourses and counter-discourses construe their versions of the past with specific ends in mind.<sup>70</sup> Again, this is not meant as a justification for a postmodernist irrationalism in which all versions and interpretations of the past are equally valid and "true." What I want to emphasize instead is that among the multitude of discourses present in a society, the truth-claim of a "scientific" historicism can at best be described as marginal, and, at worst, irrelevant. This is certainly the case today; it is even more evident for the period that interests us here. As Glen Bowersock has written about the second century, "History was being invented all over again; even the mythic past was being rewritten, and the present was awash in so many miracles and marvels that not even the credulous or the pious could swallow them all."<sup>71</sup> To be sure, the Thucydidean search for historical truth existed in Greco-Roman antiquity.<sup>72</sup> Yet those who wanted "to know how it really was," to quote Leopold von Ranke's famous expression, were always a tiny minority compared to, on the one hand, the number of people who studied and talked about the past for certain purposes such as moral instruction, religious edification, rhetorical argumentation, or political identity and, on the other hand, the huge majority of those who just consumed these historical narratives.

History can thus be said to be a product of these different discourses. By speaking or writing about the past on certain social occasions, certain people of a certain social status create a coherent view of the past, a meaningful history. Obviously, the first example that springs to mind is that of professional historians of whom there was abundance in the second and third centuries AD.<sup>73</sup> Yet historiography is only a small part of the strategies by which societies produce history. As the analysis above has shown, the second sophistic was another important means by which the society of the Antonine age claimed a remote past (the classical era of Greek, half a millennium ago) as their own history. By emphasizing the exemplary and normative nature of classical language and culture, by putting classical authority to contemporary use, sophists created a Greek identity that was based on a particular interpretation of the past. We will understand this effect better if we put the second sophistic in the context of other cultural productions that pursued similar projects. Numerous written texts and oral traditions shape our view of the past without being "historical" in the narrow sense of the word—we can think of poetry, inscriptions or folk-tales. Such accounts of the past are all the more powerful by delivering their historical messages as an apparently unintentional

68 White [117:66].

69 On Afrocentrism, see Lefkowitz [67]; on Goldhagen see Shandley/Riemer [105].

70 See, e.g., White [117:99]: "History ('the past') had always been studied under the press of imperatives of either a generally cultural or specifically extra-historical kind down to the nineteenth century: philosophical, pedagogical, rhetorical, religious, political, and so on."

71 Bowersock [16:2].

72 See Momigliano [75:497–9] = [76:258–9]. On the theoretical debate in antiquity between this pragmatic school of historiography and the "ideological," Isocratean form see Gentili [45]. However, even the pragmatic historians ultimately wanted to teach future politicians how to calculate future events and thus served utilitarian purposes; cf. Rechenauer [93].

73 For an excellent overview see Hose [55]; an interesting case study can be found in Andrei [6].

by-product. This is even more obvious in non-verbal discourse. Its seemingly accidental, undirected nature surreptitiously transmits a strong message about the past and makes it socially intelligible. Three examples of such non-verbal mechanisms will help us see the second sophistic in the proper perspective.

The first phenomenon I want to mention has recently been analyzed in an article by T. S. Scheer.<sup>74</sup> In a temple of Apollo in the city of Sicyon, an exhibition of relics served as a kind of museum. The heroes with whom these objects (like weaponry or armors) were said to be connected were all linked to the city's past. This material heritage constituted a discourse about the past because the context surrounding it suggested a certain reading. These were not just random objects collected in a fortu-  
 89 itous way, they suggested that in these artifacts, the glorious past of the city was still alive, that it was  
 90 significant even in the present. Hence, these relics served a purpose similar to the πάτρια-historians mentioned above. They encouraged viewers to acknowledge that their own existence was influenced by this past. The second example is more commonplace. During the imperial period, Greek cities liked to put symbols of their mythical or historical past on the coins they minted.<sup>75</sup> One particularly striking instance are coins from the Lesbian city Mytilene which show the local poetess Sappho with the caption Ψάπφω.<sup>76</sup> The inscription uses the long extinct Aeolian dialect and thus reminds everybody who looked at the coin of the great literary tradition of the island. Again, this was a tangible medium that encouraged its "audience" to see the alleged past of their city as a meaningful, coherent history that was relevant to their present. My last example is Pausanias's description of a public ceremony in Sparta: "To the west of the marketplace there is a cenotaph for Brasidas, the son of Tellis. Close to it there is the remarkable theater, built of white stone. Opposite the theater, there is a monument for Pausanias, who led the Spartan forces at Plataea, and on the other side a monument for Leonidas. Each year, they pronounce speeches about them and they organize a contest in which only Spartans may compete [...]. There is also a stele with the names of all who have fought against the Persians at Thermopylae" (Pausanias 3.14.1: ἐκ δὲ τῆς ἀγορᾶς πρὸς ἥλιον ἰόντι δυόμενον τάφος κενὸς Βρασιδᾶ τῷ Τέλλιδος πεποίηται· ἀπέχει δὲ οὐ πολὺ τοῦ τάφου τὸ θέατρον, λίθου λευκοῦ, θεᾶς ἄξιον. τοῦ θεάτρου δὲ ἀπαντικρὺ Παιουσανίου τοῦ Πλαταιᾶσιν ἡγησαμένου μνημᾶ ἐστὶ, τὸ δὲ ἕτερον Λεωνίδου – καὶ λόγους κατὰ ἔτος ἕκαστον ἐπ' αὐτοῖς λέγουσι καὶ τιθέασιν ἀγῶνα, ἐν ᾧ πλὴν Σπαρτιατῶν ἄλλω γε οὐκ ἔστιν ἀγωνίζεσθαι [...]. κέται δὲ καὶ στήλη πατρόθεν τὰ ὀνόματα ἔχουσα οἱ πρὸς Μήδους τὸν ἐν Θερμοπύλαις ἀγῶνα ὑπέμειναν). This description shows again the ways in which local identity was constructed via historical discourse. The marketplace in Sparta with its monuments reminded all passers-by of the glorious classical past of their city (which had become an insignificant backwater in the days of Pausanias). The exclusionary contest with its speeches on the local heroes demonstrated that this past defined the contemporary community: only Spartans could lay claim to these forebears. Public space and public ceremony marked the relevance of the past for the present.

I have chosen these examples because they are targeted at wide audiences. It is difficult to assess how many people actually read historical accounts like those of Herodian or Dio Cassius (or listened to public readings of these accounts); we cannot even estimate the level of literacy in the ancient  
 90 world with any degree of accuracy.<sup>77</sup> These relics, coins and ceremonies, however, were directly  
 91 available even to those who could or would not read books. Shaping the general perception of what constituted history, they represent a non-verbal, truly public discourse.

It is in the context of such productions of history that the functioning of the second sophistic

74 Scheer [101].

75 See Harl [53:76]; Weiß [115:182–7], id., [114], id., [116]. It should be mentioned that this is a practice which began much earlier, in the Hellenistic period, but became more common in the second and third centuries.

76 *BMC Troas, Aeolis, Lesbos* 200 Mytilene # 165, 167, 169; cf. Pollux 9.84.

77 See the thorough treatment of the question in Harris [54]; cf. the essays collected in Beard [11].

should be seen. Like the Spartan ceremonies described above, sophistic declamations created a feeling of community that was grounded in the glory of the classical past. Like everyone who looked at the images on the money in his hand, those who listened to sophistic declamations were not aware of being informed about the past. Most of them were merely looking for entertainment, and for inhabitants of a city in the Eastern part of the Empire, a sophist's performance must have been a fairly common form of pastime. Like the relics in Sicyon's "museum," the declamations emphasized the relevance of the glorious, classical past to the present. This relevance was actualized in the sophist who impersonated the authority of the classics.

Every society has a wide variety of mechanisms for the production of history available. These mechanisms allow individuals to experience their lives as meaningful, to perceive themselves as members of a community whose formation was necessary because of historical progress. Different mechanisms have been prevalent in different societies and different periods. This paper attempted to show that for the Greek society of the Imperial period, the second sophistic was one of the most public and hence most important ways of producing history. It should be obvious that sophists were not historians; they were not exploring the past for its own sake. Their declamations had to adhere to minimum standards (they could not, e.g., make Demosthenes the Athenian leader in the battle of Marathon), but they were entitled to certain licenses.<sup>78</sup> Nobody seems to have taken offense when Polemo, in one of his declamations, made the Great King witness the battle of Marathon.<sup>79</sup> We have no means to assess to what extent such historical inaccuracies were tolerated, but I think it is fair to conclude that the sophists' public did not expect them to adhere to strict rules of historical evidence. We can perhaps compare modern historical novels or motion pictures,<sup>80</sup> where a certain fictionalization is admissible, too, and where it would be equally difficult to give hard and fast rules.

Furthermore, I want to emphasize that sophistic declamations did not merely manipulate a somehow preexisting tradition. They rather created a heritage and thus fabricated a past that tied the speaker and his audience into a community.<sup>81</sup> The performativity of sophistic declamations played a significant role in this process. Embodying the authority of the classical era, the sophists gave their public a tangible sign which manifested the greatness and normativeness of the classical heritage, | thus allowing them to make this glorified past into a meaningful and coherent explanation of their own existence. The sophists' prestige and the institution's discursive power entailed and reinforced each other. Sophistic declamations, then, were not merely a nostalgic form of escapism; their production of history served important purposes in society. It is perhaps true that no community of human beings can live without this sense of tradition which we call "collective memory,"<sup>82</sup> and indubitably, the Greek culture from its earliest stages was fascinated by the questions of origin and history.<sup>83</sup> By supplying this need for history, the performances of the sophists attracted large audiences and managed to succeed for such a long time. Only if we understand this function will we be able to put the second sophistic into the context of its society and to explain its appeal to its contemporaries.

78 See Schmitz [103:201–5].

79 Polemo 2.61; at 1.43, he rightly implies that Darius received the news of the defeat in the Persian capital.

80 I owe this comparison to a private communication by C. P. Jones, September 1, 1998.

81 Cf. Desideri [31:69]: "[...] la storia [...] non deve essere solo un racconto, ma insieme uno specchio in cui riconoscersi e su cui misurarsi: un fattore di identità, individuale per Plutarco, collettiva per Dione, il quale è certo consapevole del fatto che il 'grande passato,' storico e letterario, è l'unico reale motivo di unità del mondo ellenistico, che può essere accettato anche da popolazioni non greche."

82 See the seminal study by Halbwachs [50]; Assmann [8].

83 For an overview, see van Groningen [111].

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