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Philosophical Archeology in Theoretical and Artistic Practice

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in Visual Arts

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to examine *philosophical archeology* and the feasibility of knowledge that derives from researching it simultaneously through theoretical and artistic practice.

Philosophical archeology essentially embodies one's relation to history and historiographic research—a research methodology at the core of which lies a “historical *a priori*”, that which a priori conditions the historical development of a phenomenon. However, this research conceives of philosophical archeology more broadly, as a multifaceted term that traverses the discourse of the humanities at large.

By pursuing this doctoral research, my original contribution to knowledge is twofold: (1) I historicize philosophical archeology—a term that has been in use throughout humanities-based research since 1793, when it was formulated for the first time in this manner; and (2) expanding on its history, I show how, in the broader context of contemporary art and particularly in my artistic practice, philosophical archeology is conceived and carried out as a *modus operandi*.

Section I outlines philosophical archeology in theoretical practice. Based on Giorgio Agamben's oeuvre (and the work of other pertinent thinkers), it explicates Agamben's conception of *messianic time* that in turn conditions his conception of history. Messianic time is conceived as the paradigm of historical time par excellence, mainly drawing on Saint Paul's text *Epistle to the Romans* (and in reference to Agamben's work on it, *The Time that Remains*) and Walter Benjamin's text “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” The concept of messianic time is further elaborated by discussing (under the framework of aesthetics) Benjamin's method of montage that likewise contributes to his theory of historical signature/consciousness.

Section II is an integral component of my thesis exhibition titled *Philosophical Archeology Space 2009–2019*—a space that is constituted as, and by, philosophical archeology in my ongoing artistic practice; this archeological/historiographic operation, in the framework of artistic research, resulted in the identification of three *signatures* comprising the (material-

based) “historical *a priori*” of my artistic practice. The section contextualizes archeological orientation in contemporary art, and examines whether philosophical archeology (as artistic *modus operandi*) is in a position to distend history and historiography rather than vice versa.

Lay Summary

This doctoral research revealed philosophical archeology to be multifaceted—it is a research methodology (a historiographic framework) in the humanities at large, which essentially embodies one’s relation to history and historiographic research; a metaphor (allegory); (art) content or subject matter as well as a material-based historiography or method of historical inquiry in art; a critical force that conceives of its (past) objects as (future) prototypes or blueprints; and, lastly, philosophical archeology embodies a certain (messianic) conception of time that conditions a conception of history. The originality of philosophical archeology, as a critical methodology, does not necessarily stem from the nature of its tools, but from the integration of threads drawn from various disciplines and broad fields of knowledge.

The first section explores philosophical archeology in theoretical practice. As a historiographic methodology in use throughout research across the humanities at large, philosophical archeology aims at researching the “historical *a priori*” dimension of a certain historical phenomenon, a dimension that cannot be identified as the phenomenon’s diachronic origin, but as an active tendency within it that conditions its development in time.

The second section explores philosophical archeology in artistic practice. In its first part, the historiographic turn in contemporary art, characterized by the metaphor of the archeological dig and the need to look backwards, is depicted as contributing to artists’ historical consciousness and in particular with regard to the societal knowledge economy. The second part unfolds from my artistic work, where I ask: What is an origin? I inquired into the concept of the origin as such, but also into my personal origin: what gave birth to, and still commands, my personal identity and meaning as self; what conditions my artistic engagement in the world, and how? In this inquiry, I practiced philosophical archeology—a research methodology that is nowadays associated mostly with the theoretical work of Giorgio Agamben; however, in this research, I applied this methodology both theoretically and artistically as two different but complementary means of generating knowledge.

Keywords

Philosophical Archeology, Giorgio Agamben, Messianic Time, Artistic Research, *Arche*, Historiography, History, Archeology, Historical *a priori*, Walter Benjamin, Archive, Index, Art Epistemology, Philosophy of History, Methodology, Montage, Constellation, Japanese Washi Paper, Signature, Artistic *modus operandi*, Installation Art, Fragment, Analogy, *Denkbild*, Representation, *document/monument*, Storytelling, Photo-litho printmaking, Collage, Emmanuel Kant, Michel Foucault, Voice, Sound.

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Preface

In his opening remarks to *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, Giorgio Agamben claims, building upon an idea by Ludwig Feuerbach, that “the genuine philosophical element in every work, whether it be a work of art, of science, or of thought, is its capacity to be developed.”¹ It is a tensive element within the work, a seed encapsulating future realizations, whose unique nature enables its interpreter to also become its developer.

Upon encountering Agamben’s book for the first time, I identified this very element in it. This element was referred to by the descriptor “Philosophical Archeology”—a term that today is associated, to a large extent, with the work of Agamben, who identifies his overarching research methodology as philosophical archeology and is working tirelessly to systematize it. Though this is only a partial definition of its multifaceted nature, philosophical archeology essentially embodies one’s relation to history and historiographic research—a method of historical inquiry at the core of which lies a “historical *a priori*” (conceptually tangential to the *arche*), that which a priori conditions the historical development of the phenomenon, whether this phenomenon is an objective, historical one or a subjective self.² Initially, philosophical archeology seemed pertinent to my scholarly work and—of at least equal importance—echoed central concerns of my ongoing artistic practice. As my interest in it deepened, I identified an unexpected but nonetheless evident correlation between Agamben’s philosophical archeology and my own research methodology, albeit worked out by different means and in the different but tangential discourse of visual art. It was as if, similarly to Agamben but unknowingly, I was exercising an artistic *modus operandi* as philosophical archeology. I asked myself: What conditions (as an *arche* or “historical *a priori*”) my artistic engagement in the world, and how? Thus, philosophical archeology was selected as the Archimedean point of this present study; a study that is therefore both objective and subjective, since, and in accordance with

1 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 7.

2 Overall, this research conceives of philosophical archeology more broadly (the complexity of which will gradually be revealed as the research unfolds): it is, as said, a research methodology (a historiographic framework) in the humanities at large; a metaphor (allegory); (art) content or subject matter; a material-based historiography; a critical force that conceives of its (past) objects as (future) prototypes or blueprints; and lastly, philosophical archeology embodies a certain conception of time that conditions a conception of history.

Agamben, “[I]t is never the emergence of the fact without at the same time being the emergence of the knowing subject itself.”³

The (above-mentioned) methodological correlation is also the reason that led to the theoretical aspect of this doctoral thesis pivoting on Agamben’s œuvre. Due to the methodological, philosophical, and historiographic characteristics of philosophical archeology, theorizing it means (for me) not to write, as if externally, about philosophical archeology, but to make it (with words), to do it in practice (through language). In this sense, Agamben’s corpus also becomes the site (or the research object) where I practice and execute philosophical archeology in writing, where I use language as an artistic medium—a performance that illuminates the development of philosophical archeology, and the manner in which it is constituted, within Agamben’s own multilayered, extensive corpus. Thus, I apply the logic of philosophical archeology onto itself.

This form of archeological production parallels the ways in which I work in the studio as an interdisciplinary artist; and specifically, it shows itself in the way that I produced the thesis exhibition.⁴ Therefore, the other aspect of this doctoral thesis (that is, the thesis exhibition) aligns with my ongoing artistic practice, which includes projects on historical accounts, archives and documents, acts of excavating and unearthing, memorials and testimonies, as well as processes of reconstruction and reenactment. What they all share is not only storytelling, but also history telling (of self and other). This is equally true also in regard to this artistic project on philosophical archeology.

The two-fold orientation of my research (theory on the one hand, practice on the other) does not necessarily entail a dichotomous or binary conception of its subject matter; rather, I research philosophical archeology both theoretically and artistically as two different but

3 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 89.

4 The exhibition shows a large-scale installation comprised of interdisciplinary mediums. The gallery is divided into two parts: an archive and its index. The archive, delimited in roughly one-third of the exhibition space, is not fully accessible. A perforated metal door blocks the physical entry to the archive, so that one can merely view and listen to (remotely behind the door) what is inside. The archive contains previous works of mine: some of these works are boxed, some are fully exhibited, and some are displayed in a manner in between. The index, situated in the main part of the gallery space, is a series of photo-litho prints (Japanese Washi paper sheets, 30 x 55 in. each) infused with collage work, sounds, and ephemera, forming a constellation rendered and conceived by archeological art-making.

complementary ways of generating knowledge. The relationship between the theoretical and artistic knowledge-generation methods—or, in other words, the precise dialogue between the exegesis and artefact—could effectively be described as one of analogy or parallelism. Both avenues of research equally investigate philosophical archeology, albeit from different orientations, and thus can be seen as two tensive polarities comprising one, unified (bipolar) forcefield of research that is measured, echoing Agamben’s wording, “not by extensive and scalable magnitudes but by vectorial intensities.”⁵

These polarities form a certain congruence. The studio work cannot become a translation or merely a realization of theory in the discourse of art, and vice versa, a theory to come cannot retrospectively explain or illustrate the artistic practice or body of work it refers to. The theory is not an inquirer who sounds out a meaning supposedly concealed in material practice; and, likewise, the studio work is not a vehicle to illustrate predefined answers to questions.

Additionally, the relationship between theory and studio work cannot constitute itself hierarchically—both realms are equally important and should be seen as complementary to one another rather than as cancelling each other out. The challenge is to find the right way, the suitable balance, that will enable both of their own, distinct operative spaces while, at the same time, allowing each part to positively contribute to the needs of the other part. Both are parallel responses in the research of philosophical archeology, like light rays aligned in parallel, communicating as collimated spirits in non-linear time.

Certainly, there are limits to this research. The discussion is chronologically framed—it begins with the first appearance of philosophical archeology (as a term, in 1793), and ends (though not concluded) with present time. Additionally, the discussion of philosophical archeology in the field of contemporary art is based on my own artistic *modus operandi*, although it is contextualized more broadly in order to correspond and resonate with works of other artists. This delimitation results from the inability to include all the artistic embodiments of philosophical archeology to date.

5 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 20.

Part I (of section I) outlines philosophical archeology in theoretical practice. It is particularly based on Giorgio Agamben's œuvre (which characterizes his research methodology as philosophical archeology), but, in order to thoroughly historicize philosophical archeology's development in time, the outline also includes various references to other pertinent thinkers (Kant, Overbeck, Nietzsche, Benjamin, Foucault, to name a few) who practiced philosophical archeology in their writings.

A few questions guide this part: What is the Agambenian research methodology of philosophical archeology? What comprises it? How does it operate? What does it result in? What can it take as a subject? What enables and prevents it? Can one trace its history within Agamben's œuvre or within others? What exactly does it consist of that can further be developed?

One distinct quality of this part (as well as of Section I) is its textual structure. It is comprised of five continuous paragraphs (1.1.1–1.1.5), and a series of nine subsequent glosses that are integrated throughout. The readers are expected, once arrived at a gloss mark (a red in-text hyperlink), to skip forward and read that certain gloss; and once finished, to return back to the point in the text from which they “departed” and continue the reading. These glosses (in accordance with, as noted above, the Agambenian/Feuerbachian idea of the encapsulated philosophical element that awaits its development) comment on key issues that are crucial to a thorough comprehension of

philosophical archeology.⁶

The glosses are marked with a descriptive title as well as with an image or graphic sign; this sign has a two-part structure: it is comprised of the letter “aleph” (the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet) and a certain vocalization point/mark (one out of roughly eleven marks of the Hebrew grammar that, when combined with one of Hebrew’s four *matres lectionis*, form the vowels in the language). Beyond the tribute it pays to Agamben’s use of the “aleph” in his writing, these glosses’ form of marking has another aim that can be efficiently explicated by referring to the following text.

An interview with writer Edmond Jabès (conducted by artist Bracha Ettinger Lichtenberg) opens the accompanying catalogue to the exhibition *Routes of Wandering: Nomadism, Journeys and Transitions in Contemporary Israeli Art* (1991). In her preface to the interview, curator Sarit Shapira writes:

Jabès’ texts are a succession of fragments that purport to be quotations from ‘texts’ from different times and places, which are printed at times with spaces between them that separate and fragment them; the sequence of the text is impaired also in the parts attributed to Jabès himself—because they are written in a technique that sabotages development of any kind, that mixes together different levels and kinds of language, and uses diversified generic formulas. ... [I]n this way his writing concretely demonstrates the openness of the text—not only towards all prior texts, but also to the text that will be written out of it, in an act analogous to reading it. All active reading of this kind not only unites the foreign linguistic elements and fills the gaps in the text; all *reading* is also *tearing*, which echoes the breakage in the tablets of the covenant and the prolonged tearing that characterizes the history of the Jewish people. ... [H]is view of the break as the source of all things and of the point as the minimal graph from which speech and writing grow, each time anew, brought Jabès close to the Kabbalah.⁷

6 Commentary is a discussion or expansion of a text in the form of writing (glosses, annotations) or images (diagrams, miniatures) as features that can form part of the original program of work, but which can also take a secondary or extraneous nature. A gloss is a marginal or interlinear annotation of a word or wording in a text, commenting on, elucidating, or translating those of the main text. In the history of commentary, glossing, and marginalia, the gloss (as an ancient genre of writing) is a creative form of intellectual work. The gloss focuses, in most cases, on a single object, formally shaping itself to its object while preserving the object’s structure. The gloss forms a relationship of “continuing discontinuity” with its object; it digresses from it in order to open it from within. The gloss multiplies and synthesizes meanings, ideas, and references without necessarily revolving around a central thesis, providing interpretive and philological access into its object.

7 *Routes of Wandering: Nomadism, Journeys and Transition in Contemporary Israeli Art*, 255.

In the interview, Jabès says:

I see my books as a cycle of gathering cycles, in which the last circle is a point. This is a reference to the Kabbalah, where it says that God, to manifest Himself, will reveal Himself as a point. I think this is marvellous, because the point in Semitic writing is the vowel. Hence, the point, which is at the end, is the center, is the vowel.

Ettinger Lichtenberg: Why is the point a vowel?

Jabès: Because if you put three points under the consonant it'll be 'eh', and if you put one point below it'll be 'ee'. In writing, it's the point. It's marvellous. The point is the meaning of the word. It's the very life of the word. Without vowels it's impossible. All the writing is only consonants, it's like the name of God, unpronounceable.^{8 9}

Part II (of section I) begins with the tenth gloss. It is an explication of Agamben's conception of time that conditions his conception of history; this conception of time is also a system of thinking. The evolution of the Western conception of time, from ancient to present time, is surveyed and a definition of an authentic conception of time is attempted—for Agamben, this means *messianic time*. Messianic time is discussed as the paradigm of historical time par excellence (as a time characterized by a cessation and by its redemptive quality) mainly through Paul's text *the Epistle to the Romans* (and in reference to Agamben's work on it, *The Time that Remains*) and Walter Benjamin's text "Theses on the Philosophy of History."

Benjamin's work serves as a further elaboration on the concept of messianic time. His philosophical conception of history is articulated in the broader context of his thought, and, principally, the aesthetic dimension and the possibility of redemption it might offer. This part thus continues with an outline of Benjamin's method of montage as it is practiced—both in theory and in practice—in his writing and through the Agambenian perspective of it. The montage formulates Benjamin's theory of historical

8 Ibid, 248.

9 In "Hebrew Grammar," Spinoza writes about vowels only in passing: "[A]mong the Hebrews vowels are called souls of letters, and letters without vowels are bodies without souls." (Spinoza, "Hebrew Grammar," 588.)

signature/consciousness and the methodological idea of “dialectical image” as a visual vocabulary. The montage’s pertinent relation to Benjamin’s conception of language is also discussed in the last, eleventh gloss. The Benjaminian image is explored as an image of thought and as an image that is used in the discourse of aesthetics. The gesture of the artist is discussed in this sense as well, with a nod to its possible epistemological implications based on Agamben’s text *Taste*.

Section II is an integral component of my thesis exhibition. Its title, *Philosophical Archeology Space 2009–2019*, is a paraphrase of Joseph Beuys’s pioneering work *Das Kapital Raum 1970–1977*, made for the Venice Biennale in 1980. Referring to Karl Marx’s magnum opus *Das Kapital*, Beuys’s work renders, in practice, a theoretical thought. Eugen Blume and Catherine Nichols (who curated Beuys’s work to the exhibition *Capital: Debt, Territory, Utopia*) write: “Art is not only the object of a historical discipline that systematises, classifies and interprets works created over a long period, but also of philosophy, which conceives the special essence of art as a challenge to thinking.”¹⁰ Moreover, Beuys’s work is constantly and non-linearly developed—it is “a field of action, a transformative terrain that unfolds in the space, in the opening, between the words Beuys kept permanently separate, between Kapital and Raum.”¹¹ In this sense, the thesis exhibition I present is likewise (to use Alan Badiou’s words) a “thinking through a form of thought,”¹² a space that is constituted as, and by, philosophical archeology in my ongoing artistic practice: it is an archeological/historiographic operation, in the framework of artistic research, that resulted in the identification of three *signatures* comprising the (material-based) “historical *a priori*” of my practice, projects, and exhibitions.¹³

The discussion in section II (part of the discussion of philosophical archeology in artistic practice at large) is framed in the context of what seems to be a historiographic turn in contemporary art, where “the one sector of culture most commonly associated with looking

10 *Capital: Debt, Territory, Utopia*, 14.

11 Ibid.

12 Quoted in *Capital: Debt, Territory, Utopia*, 14.

13 In the documentation and articulation of my work, I always refer to (installation-based) exhibitions as “fields” in order to emphasize (what I hope is) their exploratory, open-ended, and stratifical character.

forward should appear so consumed by a passion for looking not just the proverbial other way but in the opposite direction—*backwards*.”¹⁴ Part I of this section thus offers a contextualization of the archeological orientation in contemporary art with several references to works of other artists that are pertinent to the discussion.

The following questions reverberated in the making of *Philosophical Archeology Space 2009–2019*: If examined from the perspective of contemporary art practices, is philosophical archeology at all a research methodology that (in part or entirely) can or should be rethought, executed, or transformed into the different but related discourse of art? In what sense could philosophical archeology be artistically used, or, better, regenerated as an integral, organic part of artistic practices and productions? How can an artistic act interpret and develop philosophical archeology (as a relation to history), both theoretically and in practice? And consequently, how will it influence the knowledge generated relationally at the intersection of the foregoing discourses of the humanities?

With the intention to illuminate philosophical archeology as a *modus operandi*, and to examine whether this artistic practice is in a position to distend history and historiography rather than vice versa, these questions are addressed by the process of making the exhibition—by deciding upon (and constructing) the two-part structure of the exhibition (archive and index), by choosing the previous artworks to be included and the way to exhibit them, by the materials I used in the process (sound included), by the staging of the archive and its positioning, by lighting, etc.

Furthermore, productive insights opened up by these questions are offered throughout this section and (perhaps particularly) by the commentary in part II of section II (2.2.3) where, as a supportive element to the exhibition, these insights are reached (in the tradition of glossary) as part of a “creative form of intellectual work.”

Lastly, this section is also rendered partly as dossier that, due to the structural nature of *Philosophical Archeology Space 2009–2019*, is a decade-long documentary (visual images and sonic compositions) comprised by the various works included in the archive.

14 Roelstraete, “Field Notes,” 15–16.

Section I—Philosophical Archeology in Theoretical Practice

Part 1—Philosophical Archeology in Giorgio Agamben et alia

1.1.1

Chapter 3 of Giorgio Agamben’s book *The Signature of All Things: On Method* is titled “Philosophical Archeology,” and outlines an overarching research methodology that essentially embodies one’s relation to history and historiographic research. § [Agamben’s Methodology]

Philosophical Archeology, as Agamben acknowledges, has developed based on a series of philosophical ruins in which “Jottings for the Progress of Metaphysics,”¹⁵ Immanuel Kant’s appendix to his own treatise of 1793, is considered to be its point of departure inasmuch as the term appears there for the first time.

Kant’s essay struggles between, on one hand, the empirical, temporal nature of historical inquiry, and specifically, the history of philosophy that presents the empirical and thus contingent, successive order of how thinkers philosophized up to the present; and, on the other hand, the rational and necessary order of philosophical concepts, the ahistorical nature of philosophical thought or, in other words, the unconditional and thus *a priori* nature of a philosophical history of philosophy. A philosophical history of philosophy is thus conceived as a special kind of historical inquiry that becomes possible, in Kant’s words, “not historically or empirically, but rationally, i.e., *a priori*. For although it establishes facts of reason, it does not borrow them from historical narrative, but draws them from the nature of human reason as philosophical archeology [*als philosophische Archäologie*].”^{16 17} Thus for Kant the idea of philosophical archeology entails coming to

15 Kant, “What real progress has metaphysics made in Germany since the time of Leibniz and Wolff?,” 413–424.

16 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 81; Kant, “What real progress has metaphysics made in Germany since the time of Leibniz and Wolff?,” 417.

17 A philosophical history of philosophy, in this regard, is already discussed (albeit somewhat interchangeably or as a philosophical ruin) in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), where it is referred to as the “History of Pure Reason.”

know the means and ways by which philosophy is articulated by reason itself, as well as to know the history of philosophy as it is determined by the necessity of *a priori* principles.

Because philosophical archeology is not merely an empirical history, but also one that becomes possible *a priori*, and since philosophizing (specifically, in this case, about the history of philosophy) is a gradual development of human reason that could not have begun upon the empirical path, it fundamentally implies that (due to its paradoxical element) archeology runs the risk of lacking a beginning and putting forth, as Kant writes, “a history of the thing that has not happened.”¹⁸ Thus we can derive, Agamben deduces, that as an *a priori* history (which is, after all, a historical practice), philosophical archeology’s origin, the *arche* it seeks, can never be given in chronology nor be dated since it coincides with the complete development of reason; in other words, it is an *arche* that will be given in its totality only at the end of philosophizing, while currently its history is the history of the thing that has not happened. Philosophical archeology is therefore a historiography of an incomplete gradation (a series of historical ruins, science of ruins—“ruinology” in Agamben’s words) rather than of a given empirical whole, whose object or *archai* “exist only in the condition of partial objects or ruins ... given only as *Urbilder*, archetypes ... that can never be reached ... and serve only as guidelines.”¹⁹ ²⁰ § [First Beginning] and § [The Before of the Book]

1.1.2

The archetypal and unreachable characteristics of the *arche*, as herein conceived, imply that every authentic historical inquiry contains an “essential dishomogeneity,” a constitutive gap between the *arche* it investigates (made of ruins or archetypes, not given

18 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 81; Kant, “What real progress has metaphysics made in Germany since the time of Leibniz and Wolff?,” 419.

19 Ibid, 82.

20 In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes about the attempt to draw the architecture of all human knowledge, “which at the present time, since so much material has already been collected or can be taken from the ruins of collapsed older edifices, would not merely be possible but not even be very difficult. We shall content ourselves here with the completion of our task, namely, merely outlining the architectonic of all cognition from pure reason.” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 692–93.) Additionally, in regard to a future task that is currently left open, he writes: “I will content myself with casting a cursory glance from a merely transcendental point of view, namely that of the nature of pure reason, on the whole of its labors hitherto, which presents to my view edifices, to be sure, but only in ruins.” (Ibid, 702.)

in its totality within chronology) and the phenomenon's factual origin. § [Dishomogeneity]

This idea, according to Agamben, forms the basis of Foucault's essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971) where Genealogy [whose model Foucault finds traces of in Nietzsche, particularly in *Human, All Too Human* (1878), *The Gay Science* (1882) and *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887)] is positioned against "the search for an 'origin'."²¹ At the historical beginning of things, the Genealogist will never find "[T]he 'inviolable identity of their origin.' ... [W]ill never neglect as inaccessible all the episodes of history.... [W]ill cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning.... The genealogist needs history to dispel the chimeras of the origin."²² The true object of Genealogy (or genealogical research) is thus not the exact essence of things but, following the logic of the "essential dishomogeneity," what Foucault calls "descent" or "emergence, the moment of arising," which is qualitatively different from the empirical origin and what follows it historically. The question remains: what kind of object is "the moment of arising," and where exactly is it located if never at the "non-place of the origin"? § [Genealogy]

Agamben traces the discussion of Genealogy's dishomogeneity (beyond Foucault and Nietzsche) back to the German theologian Franz Overbeck. According to Overbeck, Genealogy's research object of "the moment of arising," which is a fringe or heterogeneous stratum within the life of a historical phenomenon, "is not placed in the position of a chronological origin but is qualitatively other."²³ In his research on the origin of the patristic literature, he names it "prehistory" (*Urgeschichte*), although the prefix "pre" should not indicate chronology; it need not be understood as the most historically ancient past, since prehistory's past is not homogeneous with history's past and "is not tied to any specific site in time." The original (somewhat untranslatable to English) German prefix "Ur" is more apt in this instance since it is better equipped to convey prehistory's fundamental character, which is to be "the history of the moment of arising" rather than the history of its development, as well as the idea that prehistory is "a constitutive heterogeneity inherent in historical inquiry itself, which each time must confront a past of a, so to speak, special type." This means, for Overbeck, that every historical phenomenon

21 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 83.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid, 85.

splits itself into prehistory and history according to a qualitative difference that is not time-dependent—a differentiation that is based on their different *qualities* thus requires “different methodologies and precautions.” Agamben brings as an example to this required precaution the case of the division between the religious and the profane juridical spheres: should we hypothesize the existence of a more archaic stage beyond both spheres in which they supposedly are not yet separated, we will in fact be at risk of projecting upon the presupposed unified phase the characteristics defining both spheres, characteristics “[W]hich are precisely the outcome of the split. Just as ... [W]hat stands prior to the historical division is not necessarily the sum of the characteristics defining its fragments. ... In this sense, too, prehistory is not homogenous with history and the moment of arising is not identical with what comes to be through it.”²⁴

The distinction between prehistory and history means that the historical efficacy of a phenomenon is bound up with this distinction, and that the dishomogeneity of every historical inquiry is thus a subjective datum that is, according to Agamben, embedded within the inquiry and guides it. Engaging this constitutive heterogeneity is crucial for whomever wishes to practice historical research, and can be carried out as a critique of tradition and sources. This critique concerns, above all, “the mode in which the past has been constructed into a tradition,” not in terms of chronological projections, but in terms of the very structure of historical inquiry. It constitutes a critical view on a certain tradition in which the withdrawal to the past will eventually coincide with “renewed access to the sources” (previously unattainable due to the mechanism of “canonization” in Overbeck’s terms) and will thus enable new epistemological possibilities in the present. According to Agamben, however, it is impossible to gain a renewed access, beyond tradition, to the sources without putting into question the very historical subject who seeks access: “What is in question, then, is the epistemological paradigm of inquiry itself.”²⁵

Archeology is thus a historical inquiry that has to do with the moment of a phenomenon’s arising, and that must engage anew with the sources and tradition, must confront the various mechanisms through which tradition regulates and conditions what it

24 Ibid, 90.

25 Ibid, 89.

transmits; it is a practice that eventually determines “the very status of the knowing subject” because the moment of arising is situated at a threshold of undecidability between object and subject, thus is both subjective and objective: “It is never the emergence of the fact without at the same time being the emergence of the knowing subject itself: the operation on the origin is at the same time an operation on the subject.”²⁶ The emergence of a historical phenomenon (its moment of arising, its *arche* as we have outlined it thus far) that archeology seeks to reach cannot be localized in a remote past nor beyond this in a metahistorical, a-temporal structure. It represents a present and operative tendency within the historical phenomenon that conditions and makes intelligible its development in time. As Agamben concludes: “It is an *arche*, but, as for Foucault and Nietzsche, it is an *arche* that is not pushed diachronically into the past, but assures the synchronic comprehensibility and coherence of the system.”²⁷ § [*arche*]

1.1.3

The term “archeology,” which nowadays is largely associated with Foucault’s investigations, appears in his texts (albeit in a somewhat different form) already in the preface to his renowned early work *The Order of Things* (1966). § [*Archeology*]

Archeology is presented there as an investigation into a dimension that is at once paradigmatic and transcendent, a kind of “historical *a priori*” where knowledge finds its structure and conditions of possibility (via the differentiation in the French language between *connaissance* and *savoir*). § [*Historical a priori*]

This “historical *a priori*” dimension manifests the history of (a certain) knowledge’s conditions of possibility; it is an epistemological field that Foucault termed *episteme*: not so much a place where ideas are historically revealed, but where an inquiry attempts to discover “on what basis knowledge and theory became possible; within what

26 Ibid. For a discussion of subjectivity, in the context of philosophical archeology, see de Libera, *Archéologie du sujet I: Naissance de sujet*; and Dolgopolski, “Who Thinks in the Talmud?,” 7–11.

27 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 92. Agamben exemplifies in due course a few possible manifestations of this arche: “The archē is like the Indo-European words expressing a system of connections between historically accessible languages, or the child of psychoanalysis exerting an active force within the psychic life of the adult, or the big bang, which is supposed to have given rise to the universe but which continues to send towards us its fossil radiation.” (Ibid, 110.) These examples are already given in an earlier text from 2008 (originally in Italian): Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language: An Archeology of the Oath*, 10.

space of order knowledge was constituted; on the basis of what historical a priori ... ideas could appear,”²⁸ in other words, an unconscious category of the intellect that conditions the formation of knowledge.

Foucault’s oxymoronic “historical *a priori*” attempts to underscore, according to Agamben’s interpretation, that (although conditioning the historical experience) it is not a metahistorical origin that founds and determines knowledge, but the *episteme* is itself a historical practice.²⁹ That is, “The a priori that conditions the possibility of knowledge is its own history grasped at a specific level.”³⁰ It is a concrete, ontological level of existence, a “brute fact” of its existing in a given time for a given society, “or, to use the terminology from the Nietzsche essay, the brute fact of its ‘moment of arising’ (or, in Overbeck’s terms, its prehistory).”³¹

Yet how could the *a priori* itself be embedded in an historical constellation? And how is it possible to gain access to it? Agamben asserts that the idea of the “historical *a priori*” as such originates more from Marcel Mauss’s discussion of the idea of *mana* in his book *A General Theory of Magic* rather than from Kant’s philosophical archeology:

Mauss defines this historical transcendental as ‘an unconscious category of understanding[,]’ ... suggesting in this way that the epistemological model required for such knowledge cannot be entirely homogeneous with that of conscious historical knowledge.... But as with Foucault, it is nevertheless clear that for Mauss the a priori, though conditioning historical experience, is itself inscribed within a determinate historical constellation.... In other words, it realizes the paradox of an a priori condition that is inscribed within a history and that can only constitute itself a posteriori with respect to this history in which inquiry—in Foucault’s case, archeology—must discover it.³²

28 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 93.

29 In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, the “historical a priori” is described as a term that “does not elude historicity: it does not constitute, above events, and in an unmoving heaven, an atemporal structure: it is defined by the group of rules that characterize a discursive practice: but the rules are not imposed from the outside.” (Lawlor, *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, 203.) The original text appears in: Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 126–131.

30 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 93.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid, 94. The “historical a priori” is thus a form of conceptual analysis, but not in a timeless manner because concepts have their being in historical sites—as Ian Hacking writes of concepts: “The logical relations between them were formed in time, and they cannot be perceived correctly unless their temporal dimensions are kept in view.” (Hacking, “Historical Ontology,” 598.)

1.1.4

Agamben claims that Foucault did not question the unique temporal structure that seems to be indicated by the idea of a “historical *a priori*.” Yet the past that is in question here, echoing previous ideas of such past that we have seen so far (such as Kant’s, Nietzsche’s, and Overbeck’s) is “a special kind of past that neither precedes the present chronologically as origin nor is simply exterior to it.”³³ In his attempt to articulate the specific temporal structure of this past, Agamben assembles a series of paradigmatic examples out of which I will concentrate on a few distinctive ones.

The first example, relatively limited in scope, is that of Henri Bergson’s conception of the phenomenon of *déjà-vu* as it appears in his book *L’Énergie spirituelle* (1919). Bergson understands *déjà-vu* as a phenomenon in which memory does not follow perception chronologically, but occurs simultaneously with it, and thus is able to produce “false perceptions” that he defines as “a memory of the present.” This is a kind of memory that “is of the past in its form and of the present in its matter.”³⁴ Similarly, according to Agamben, the condition of possibility in the “historical *a priori*” that the archeologist is seeking to reach is not only contemporary with the present and the real, but is an inherent and continuous part of them. The temporal structure of the “historical *a priori*” exemplifies a unique conception of the past that therefore enables the archeologist pursuing such an *a priori* to “retreat, so to speak, towards the present.” It is as if every historical phenomenon splits into prehistory and history (“a history of the sources and a historical tradition”), which are “in actuality contemporaneous, insofar as they coincide for an instant in the moment of arising.”³⁵

Similarly, another example (as a matter of fact, merely a note in Agamben’s text, but an important one in the overall context) concerns Walter Benjamin’s suggestion (in convolute N—Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress) that “the entire past must be brought into the present in a ‘historical apocatastasis’.”³⁶ Benjamin’s reference to

33 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 94.

34 Ibid, 95. A further discussion of *déjà-vu*, in the context of the philosophy of history, appears in Virno, *Déjà Vu and the End of History*.

35 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 95.

36 Ibid; Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 459.

eschatological reality (when a restitution of the origin will take place at the end of time), while characterizing it as historical, means a temporal structure that is similar to the “historical *a priori*.”

Lastly, an elaborated example to the temporal structure of the (“historical *a priori*”) past is that given by the work of the Italian philosopher Enzo Melandri. Reflecting upon the philosophical relevancy of Foucault’s archeology, writes Agamben, Melandri notices that while the codes and matrices of our culture are usually explicated by referring to a higher code that includes a mysterious explanatory force (this is the model of the “origin”), Foucault’s archeology suggests to reverse the process, or better, “to make the explication of the phenomenon immanent in its description.”³⁷ This means refuting any metahistorical structure (or metalanguage in Foucault’s case due to the centrality of language in his perimetric analysis) and, instead, favouring the model of the “historical *a priori*” while seeking (Melandri) to analyze its structure “vis-à-vis the Freudian opposition between the conscious and the unconscious.” In order to perform his analysis—ultimately in order to arrive at his own conception of archeology—Melandri first departs (just as Foucault) from a point rooted in Nietzsche, in particular his concept of “Critical History,”³⁸ indicating a history that criticizes and destroys the past in order to enable the life in the present.³⁹ However, Melandri, according to Agamben, generalizes Nietzsche’s concept by connecting it to Freud’s concept of regression, thus granting his concept of archeology (which is based on a “Dionysian” regression in time) the role of the healer or the redeemer. Melandri writes:

[Critical history] must retrace in the opposite direction the actual genealogy of events that it examines. The division that has been established between historiography and actual history is quite similar to the one that, for Freud, has always existed between the conscious and the unconscious. Critical history thus has the role of a therapy aimed at the recovery of the unconscious, understood as the historical ‘repressed.’... [This archeological process] consists in tracking genealogy back to where the phenomenon in question splits into the conscious and the unconscious. Only if one succeeds in reaching that point does the pathological syndrome reveal its real

37 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 96.

38 Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 57–125.

39 Ibid, 67.

meaning. So it is a matter of *regression*: not to the unconscious as such, but to what made it unconscious.⁴⁰

In contrast to the pessimistic vision of regression (which is “incapable of overcoming the original infantile scene”), Melandri’s archeology seems to be capable of a regression back to the point where the dichotomy between history and historiography (or conscious and unconscious when he relates his discussion to psychoanalysis) was produced, a regression not to a previous state (bringing the repressed back to consciousness) but to the moment which constituted it as such, to “the source of the split.” In this sense, it is the opposite of rationalization, an archeological operation, Agamben quotes, that “requires a ‘Dionysian regression’ ... To understand the past, we should equally traverse it *à reculons* [i.e., backwards].”⁴¹ This “Dionysian regression” is an advance in time, a singular manifestation of the past’s temporal structure, that turns its back to its final destination. It is the inverse, complementary advancement to that of the *Angelus Novus*—Walter Benjamin’s well-known advancing “angel of history” described in his ninth thesis on the philosophy of history.⁴² While Benjamin’s angel advances towards the future as it gazes at the past, Melandri’s angel regresses towards the past as it gazes at the future. Both advance towards an unidentifiable final destination—though we know that the destination of these two images of historical process is the present. At the end point of the archeological regression, at the point where the split (between conscious and unconscious; historiography and actual history) produces the condition of our present experience, we realize that our way of representing the moment before the split is governed by the split itself, and that we should not presuppose or expect (or try to represent) a kind of “golden age” beyond the dichotomy that is devoid of repressions. Rather, “before or beyond the split, in the disappearance of the categories governing its representation, there is nothing but the sudden, dazzling disclosure of the moment of arising, the revelation of the present as something that we were not able to live or think.”⁴³ § [The Contemporary]

40 Quoted in Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 97.

41 Ibid, 98.

42 Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 253–265.

43 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 99.

1.1.5

If we have conjured a somewhat psychoanalytic vocabulary, it is to help us form an analogy to the archeological regression. The idea, writes Agamben, that the present might be given in the form of a “constitutive inaccessibility” is bound up with Freud’s theory and understanding of what repression essentially means. In the context of psychoanalysis, repression is discussed through the event of trauma according to which an experience is repressed due to its traumatic character or because the conscious mind is unable to accept its consequences. Throughout the latent period of its repression, as if it had never taken place, the event nonetheless keeps on living, somewhat in secrecy, only to reappear later on in the form of “neurotic symptoms or oneiric content.” Only a successful analysis, according to Freud, can go beyond the symptoms back to the repressed event and heal the patient. The present’s form of “constitutive inaccessibility” is further supported by the (psychoanalytic) idea, set forth by Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, that latency is constitutive of historical experience and that “the traumatic event is preserved and experienced precisely and only through its forgetting.”⁴⁴ In other words, the inherent latency, the inherent forgetting, within the traumatic experience itself, made it available to be experienced from the outset. This is the trauma’s historical power, and thus “history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence.” From these ideas (and previous ones we mentioned, such as Bergson’s conception of *déjà-vu*), Agamben concludes, with reference to archeology, that both memory and forgetfulness

are contemporaneous with perception and the present. While we perceive something, we simultaneously remember and forget it. Every present thus contains a part of non-lived experience. ... This means that it is above all the unexperienced, rather than just the experienced, that gives shape and consistency to the fabric of psychic personality and historical tradition and ensures their continuity and consistency.⁴⁵

In both cases (of psychoanalysis and archeological regression), the past, which was never

44 Quoted in Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 101.

45 Ibid.

really experienced and therefore “technically cannot be defined as ‘past’,” remains as a present—either in the form of neurotic symptoms (as in the Freudian schema) or, in the case of Genealogy, in the form of canonization that only patient work that focusing on “the moment of arising” (rather than searching for an origin) can gain access beyond tradition. Yet in contrary to the analytic work of psychoanalysis which, if successful, withdraws to the originary event and brings back to consciousness all the content that has been repressed in the unconscious, the archeological regression withdraws further and reaches “the fault line where memory and forgetting, lived and non-lived experience both communicate with and separate from each other.”⁴⁶ In its withdrawal, genealogical inquiry does not search for the phenomenon’s origin but focuses on its “moment of arising”; it does not wish, as in Freud, to restore a previous stage but, as Agamben writes:

to go back not to its content but to the modalities, circumstances, and moments in which the split, by means of repression, constituted it as origin. ... It does not will to repeat the past, ... it wills to let it go ... in order to gain access beyond the past to what has never been. ... Only at this point is the un-lived past revealed for what it was: contemporary with the present. It thus becomes accessible for the first time, exhibiting itself as a ‘source’.⁴⁷

For Agamben, this is why contemporaneity is rare and difficult, and why archeology constitutes the only path of access to the present.

Agamben’s analysis thus far showed us that in regard to the specific temporal structure implicit in philosophical archeology, we deal not so much with a past (in its conventional sense) but with a “moment of arising,” and that the access to it (within the “historical *a priori*” dimension) can only be obtained by returning back to the point where it was covered over and neutralized by tradition (or in Melandri’s terms, to the split between conscious and unconscious, history and historiography): “The moment of arising, the *arche* of archeology is what will take place, what will become accessible and present, only when the archeological inquiry has completed its operation. It therefore has the form of a past in the future, that is, *future anterior*.”⁴⁸ Gaining access to the present, beyond memory and

46 Ibid, 102.

47 Ibid, 103.

48 Ibid, 106.

forgetting (or rather “at the threshold of their indifference”), beyond their inverse, reciprocal operation on (and in) time, is archeology’s aim; and that is why the space opened towards the present is “projected into the future” while intertwining with it. Once the archeological work has cleared away the blocked access to history, the future will be realized as a “past that will have been”; the *arche* will become accessible once it is realized as the past that “will have been,” and only in this form “can historical consciousness truly become possible.”⁴⁹

The relation between archeology and history becomes clear, writes Agamben, by realizing that archeology moves backward through the course of history, representing a regressive force that retreats towards the point “where history becomes accessible for the first time, in accordance with the temporality of the future anterior.”⁵⁰ Only then will this relation [just as in the Abrahamic theological doctrines where the work of redemption precedes in rank that of creation (while making it comprehensible and meaningful), and even though seems to follow the latter it is in truth anterior] reveal itself as an archeological *a priori* condition that is embedded within history, making it possible. It is a relation of separation and, at the same time, unification. Benjamin, writes Agamben, “made redemption a fully historical category,” making clear that “not only is archeology the immanent *a priori* of historiography, but the gesture of the archeologist constitutes the paradigm of every true human action.”⁵¹ § [Messianic Time and History]

49 In summation, at the end of chapter 3, Agamben once again stresses the *arche*’s most crucial characteristic. The *arche* that is in question in philosophical archeology is to be understood (from the perspective herein proposed) not as a given nor a substance locatable in a chronology, but instead as an operative force within history (e.g., an Indo-European word, the child of psychoanalysis, the Big Bang, etc.), a field of bipolar historical currents “stretched between anthropogenesis and history, between the moment of arising and becoming, between an archi-past and the present. And as with anthropogenesis, which is supposed to have taken place but which cannot be hypostatized in a chronological event—the *arche* alone is able to guarantee the intelligibility of historical phenomena, ‘saving’ them archeologically in a future anterior in the understanding not of an unverifiable origin but of its finite and untotalizable history.” (Ibid, 110.)

50 Ibid, 107.

51 Ibid, 108.

⌘ [Agamben's Methodology]

I

For Agamben, method and theory (and likewise practice and theory) are inseparable as each theory contains within itself the way or path to itself. Theory, he marks, is practice thus any proper destruction (during the investigation) is also a construction; they are also inseparable.⁵² First methodological principle.

Moreover, “method shares with logic its inability to separate itself completely from its context. There is no method that would be valid for every domain, just as there is no logic that can set aside its objects.”⁵³ Second methodological principle.

The third methodological principle, modestly ascribed to Walter Benjamin, is that “doctrine may legitimately be exposed only in the form of interpretation.”⁵⁴ It is in the context of this principle that Agamben frames his scholarly relatedness to Foucault’s work, as well as what may appear to be, across *The Signature of All Things*, as nothing more than (though erudite) “investigations on the method of Michel Foucault,”⁵⁵ but in reality is much more.

Foucault once commented that his “historical investigations of the past are only the shadow cast by theoretical interrogation of the present.”⁵⁶ Accessing the present is possible only by following the shadows these interrogations cast on the past. Foucault often draws relationships between his archeology and historical inquiries—for him they are distinct but also connected; archeology needs history and vice versa. This is likewise for Agamben, in accordance with philosophical archeology’s meditation on the relation between history and

52 Agamben conceives of practice, however, as preceding theory, as he writes: “Anyone familiar with research in the human sciences knows that, contrary to common opinion, a reflection on method usually follows practical application, rather than preceding it.” (Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 7.) This statement can be compared with Claude Lévi-Strauss’s statement: “The truth of the matter is that *the principle underlying a classification can never be postulated in advance*. It can only be discovered *a posteriori* by ethnographic investigation, that is, by experience.” (Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 58.)

53 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 7.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Quoted in Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, 53. See also Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*, 1. Elsewhere Agamben remarks: “I tend to work in crepuscular regions, at sunset, where the shadows are very long. For me they reach into the deepest past. There is no great theoretical difference between my work and Foucault’s; it is merely a question of the length of the historical shadow.” (Quoted in De La Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction*, 246.)

archeology. He writes: “[E]very inquiry in the human sciences—including the present reflection on method—should entail an archeological vigilance. In other words, it must retrace its own trajectory back to the point where something remains obscure and unthematized.”⁵⁷ Fourth methodological principle.

According to the fifth methodological principle, which further explains Agamben’s position on the interlocutory role of the interpreter, “the genuine philosophical element in every work, whether it be a work of art, of science, or of thought, is its capacity to be developed, which Ludwig Feuerbach defined as *Entwicklungsfähigkeit*.”⁵⁸ This German expression is ambiguous: it signifies both a passive capacity as well as an active capacity; an expression that forms a buffer zone or a no man’s land that cannot be exclusively appropriated by author or reader, original or annotated text.⁵⁹ Because of this principle, putting one’s finger on a clear difference between the author of the work and its interpreter “becomes as essential as it is difficult to grasp.”⁶⁰ Elsewhere Agamben writes:

Why does this search for the element liable to be developed fascinate me? Because if we follow this methodological principle all the way, we inevitably end up at a point where it is not possible to distinguish between what is ours and what belongs to the author we are reading. Reaching this impersonal zone of indifference, in which every proper name, every copyright, and every claim for originality fades away, fills me with joy.⁶¹

In his lecture “What is a Paradigm?,”⁶² Agamben refers to the work’s capacity to be developed as an adequate representation or definition for philosophy at large—something that exists in literature, art, or science, which lacks a concrete territory in and of itself, but nonetheless exists as an element to be developed within them.⁶³ Philosophy always exists in exile and requires to be assembled. For Agamben, the methodological principle of

57 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 8.

58 Ibid. For further references Agamben makes to this idea see Agamben, *I Luoghi della Vita*; and Agamben, *Intervista a Giorgio Agamben: dalla Teologia alla Teologia Economica*.

59 Agamben, “Un Libro senza Patria,” 45.

60 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 8.

61 Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale*, 34.

62 “What is a Paradigm?,” YouTube video, 9:36, “European Graduate School,” March 26, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9Wxn1L9Er0>.

63 For Agamben’s pertinent definition of philosophy—as-intensity, see Agamben, “Philosophy as Interdisciplinary Intensity.”

Entwicklungsfähigkeit corresponds with Benjamin's idea of messianic time that is prevalent throughout the length and breadth of "secular time," or to the hermeneutical idea according to which one is required to understand a certain author more than the latter understands itself.⁶⁴

II

In his introductory notes to Agamben's book *Potentialities*, Daniel Heller-Roazen highlights one of the systematic pillars of Agamben's methodology—the Agambenian method thinks the historical and the philological as inseparable. Referring to Benjamin's concept of "redemption," and his prefatory notes to the "Theses on the Philosophy of History,"⁶⁵ the Agambenian historical method is always involved, writes Heller-Roazen, "in a messianic moment of thinking, in which the practice of the 'historian' and the practice of the 'philologist,' the experience of tradition and the experience of language, cannot be told apart."⁶⁶ In this moment, the past is saved not in its past form, but in being transformed into something that never was, in being read as "what was never written."

The transmission of tradition, for Agamben, is conditioned by the transmission of language. Every communication between human beings must presuppose the fact *that there*

64 Considered from a historical perspective, the Agambenian methodology is in this sense part of a corpus of techniques of interpretation. This corpus, which can be dated back to the Greek grammarians, was somewhat in suspension throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was relaunched not before the nineteenth century. As Foucault indicates in "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx", the corpus opened up once again the possibility of interpretation and hermeneutic. This new possibility, still relevant today, is characterized, according to Foucault, by the way these techniques of interpretation (including that of Agamben) were able to range signs "in a much more differentiated space, according to a dimension that could be called that of depth." (Foucault, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx", 272.) The interpreter is, for example as per Nietzsche, "the good excavator of the lower depths," (Ibid, 273) thus the signifier "archeology" (in philosophical archeology) makes evident its belonging to this tradition. Another aspect that characterizes the techniques of interpretation, according to Foucault, emphasizes the idea that interpretation became an infinite task since signs are linked together in an inexhaustible network framed by an irreducible gaping and openness. This aspect of incompleteness of interpretation "is found once again ... in the form of the refusal of beginning." (Ibid, 274.) Agamben's methodology, as we shall see in due course, renounces the beginning much in the same way as Foucault's or Nietzsche's, but simultaneously renders it a categorically discoverable within, and at the end of, its archeological dig.

65 "Historical method is a philological method, a method that has as its foundation the book of life. 'To read what was never written,' is what Hofmannsthal calls it. The reader referred to here is the true historian." (quoted in Agamben, *Potentialities*, I.) The quotation refers to Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. I, pt. 3, 1238.

66 Quoted in Agamben, *Potentialities*, 1.

is language,⁶⁷ for without it there is no transmission nor signification, and it is this fact that cannot be communicated in the form of statements. Statements are possible only after speech has already begun. Philology, as Agamben states in *Infancy and History*, from the outset has the role of abolition between the thing to be transmitted and the act of transmission, “and since this abolition has always been regarded as the essential character of myth, philology can thereby be defined as a ‘critical mythology’.”⁶⁸

“What was never written” in all communication (linguistic and historical), according to Agamben, is the fact that there is language, and the fact that it was never written derives from the fact that it can enter into “writing” only in the form of a presupposition. Yet this fact can be “‘read’: exposed, it can be comprehended in its existence as potentiality.”⁶⁹ “To read what was never written” means to bring back everything that has ever been said to the event of its taking place, to its pure potentiality. Language, in Benjamin’s terms, is thus “redeemed”; though brought to its pure potentiality, speech has nothing to say.

Reduced to its speechless capacity for speech, the pure existence of language shows its own potentiality for expression, it shows its own existence, that there exists a medium in which communication takes place, and that what is communicated in this medium is not one thing or another but communicability itself. To examine the pure existence of language, free from any form of presupposition, is to consider a community inconceivable according to any representable condition of belonging, a “coming community” without identity defined by its existence in language as irreducible, absolute potentiality.

III

In addition to its archeological element, the Agambenian method consists of two other intertwining elements: the paradigm and the signature.⁷⁰

67 This claim is echoed throughout Agamben’s books *Infancy and History*, *Language and Death*, *The Sacrament of Language* and *What is Philosophy?* as well as in his essays “The Idea of Language” and “Philosophy and Linguistics,” (Agamben, *Potentialities*, 62–76) to name a few.

68 Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 146.

69 Quoted in Agamben, *Potentialities*, 22.

70 See Watkin, 2014 (a and b).

1) Agamben's dealing with paradigms (or prime examples)⁷¹ begins specifically on the background of the discussion of the relationship between the whole and the part, the common and the proper, or the general and the particular.⁷² This antinomy of the general and the particular "has its origin in language,"⁷³ where we name a particular object and by that transform it into a member of a general class defined by a property held in common. This procedure closely resembles the formation of political communities, thus both politics

71 For a discussion of the paradigm as a particular mode and function of a historical example see *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, 119–137. Additionally, Agamben dedicates the first chapter of *The Signature of All Things: On Method* to the question "What is a paradigm?" where he attempts to clarify a few misunderstandings or criticisms raised against him on the account of using facts as metaphors and vice versa, thus failing to act as a responsible historian. However, he insists on using concrete historical examples as paradigms that attempt to articulate a broader set of problems.

72 This relationship is also known in interpretive processes of knowledge as the hermeneutic circle—the idea that the part can be understood only by means of the whole and every explanation of the part presupposes the understanding of the whole; or in other words, that knowledge of a single phenomenon presupposes knowledge of the whole (and vice versa), thus a paradox prevails and the epistemological procedure cannot begin.

Agamben refers to the idea of the hermeneutic circle a few times throughout his oeuvre, often in an attempt to come to terms with its interpretive complexity, which adheres as a challenge to the human sciences at large.

In his essay on Aby Warburg's research methodology, "Aby Warburg and the Nameless Science," for example, he explains that philological and historical disciplines consider the hermeneutic circle to be the epistemological process that is proper to them and is the foundation of all hermeneutics. However, contrary to the common belief, this is not necessarily a vicious circle that sabotages processes of knowledge (it is, he claims, in fact the rationality of the humanities) because if this science wants to remain faithful to its own law, it needs to "stay within it in the right way" (as per Heidegger). The passage from the part to the whole (and back) never returns to the same point; at every step it broadens its radius, discovering a higher perspective that opens a new circle: "The curve representing the hermeneutic circle is not a circumference ... but a spiral that continually broadens its turns." (Agamben, *Potentialities*, 96.)

In *The Signature of All Things: On Method* this theme is interrogated once again specifically in the context of the current discussion, that is, the paradigmatic method. Tracing the hermeneutic circle in the discourse of Philology, from Georg Anton Friedrich Ast to Martin Heidegger, Agamben emphasizes the latter's crucial contribution to understanding the hermeneutic circle not as a vicious circle but as a virtuous one: "Grounding this hermeneutical circle in *Being and Time* on pre-understanding as *Dasein*'s anticipatory existential structure, Martin Heidegger helped the human sciences out of this difficulty and indeed guaranteed the 'more original' character of their knowledge." (Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 27.) However, Agamben claims, if the interpreter's activity is always already anticipated by a pre-understanding that is elusive, it seems as if the inquirer must be able to recognize in phenomena the signature of a pre-understanding that depends on their own existential character, thus "the circle then seems to become even more 'vicious'." (Ibid.) The *aporia*, according to Agamben, is resolved if we understand that the hermeneutic circle is, in fact, a paradigmatic circle: "There is no duality here between 'single phenomenon' and 'the whole' as there was in Ast and Schleiermacher: the whole only results from paradigmatic exposition of individual cases. And there is no circularity, as in Heidegger, between a 'before' and an 'after,' between pre-understanding and interpretation. In the paradigm, intelligibility does not precede the phenomenon; it stands, so to speak, 'besides' it (*para*). ... The phenomenon, exposed in the medium of its knowability, shows the whole of which it is the paradigm. ... With regard to phenomena, ... it stands neither in the past nor the present but in their exemplary constellation." (Ibid, 27–28.)

73 Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 9.

and language are caught between universality and singularity. The concept of the paradigm nonetheless escapes this antinomy: “Neither particular nor universal, the example is a singular object that presents itself as such.”⁷⁴ An example is simultaneously both a simple member of a set and the defining criteria of that set. By providing its own criteria of inclusion, the example remains ambiguously positioned alongside the class of which it is most representative, neither fully included in a class nor fully excluded from it. The paradigm is always both suspended from its group and belonging to it. Thus, the separation of exemplarity and singularity is false or impossible. All groups are immanent to their paradigmatic members, never presupposed.⁷⁵

Based on Aristotle’s description of the special logical movement of the example (which he distinguishes from both induction and deduction),⁷⁶ Agamben writes that the paradigm constitutes a peculiar form of knowledge that calls into question the particular-general relation as a model of logical inference. The paradigm is a mode of knowledge that moves between singularities. It refutes the general and the particular as well as dichotomous logic in favour of a bipolar analogical model.⁷⁷ As the example moves from particular to particular, its epistemic character remains unconnected to general categories of any kind, thus must be understood as analogical inasmuch as analogy is a cognitive process in which particulars are associated without reference to generalities. The example is the deactivation of a particular from its normal usage such that it both constitutes and makes intelligible “the rule of that use, which cannot be shown in any other way.”⁷⁸ Paradigms make intelligible the analogical form of knowing, which can neither be explained with reference to an origin nor conveyed by way of rules. Herein lies its power to illuminate the present.

74 Ibid, 10.

75 Agamben further discusses the relation between an example and an exception in Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 21–23.

76 Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, 69.

77 Paradigms do not constitute the transfer of meaning, but rather an analogical model. Analogy refers to the third order of relationality; metonymy is relation due to proximity (or contact); metaphor due to meaning transfer; while analogy is a deactivated relationality where it is neither proximate nor transferable, but a mix of both occupying a space of suspensive mediation. Analogical paradigm is the process by which identity and difference (or common and proper) is suspended in a state of indispensability.

78 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 18.

Following Agamben, a paradigm is at once embedded in a given historical situation and a tool for better understanding ‘the present situation.’ These paradigms must then walk a fine line between past and present, and for this reason they require the most careful understanding—at once historical and hermeneutical—if they are to achieve their end.⁷⁹

In other words, paradigms draw on historical occurrences of the past, while being crystallized and concretized in the real time of the present, though directed towards a future point in time when the (future) present will be rendered inoperative and free to be reused.

2) Signature is the mode of distribution of paradigms through time and discourses, thus it is the exposition of intelligibility (the signature is akin to the paradigm and contains a few elements that refer back to the logic of the paradigm). It is characterized by a signatory displacement: “Signature is something that in a sign or concept marks and exceeds such sign or concept, referring it back to a certain field without leaving the semiotic to constitute a new meaning... [S]ignatures move and displace concepts from one field to another, without redefining them semantically.”⁸⁰ Signatures operate as pure historical elements precisely because they connect different fields and times.⁸¹ In their historical work, signatures function “anachronistically” as they operate outside or against chronology. The signatures function on the basis of random interconnectedness, where one does not identify a mythic origin but determines when signs first emerged on the horizon of perceptibility.⁸²

A signature guides the interpretation of a sign or a concept in a specific direction, similarly to Benjamin’s idea of “secret indices,”⁸³ where the past carries with it a secret index to be deciphered in the present when perceived.⁸⁴ The meaning of a signature is not

79 De La Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction*, 350.

80 Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 4. “Oikonimia,” one of the book’s themes, for example, is a signature whose meaning remains the same but whose location alters (domestic-theology-politics). More broadly, Foucault’s Archeology; Nietzsche’s Genealogy; Derrida’s Deconstruction and Benjamin’s Theory of Dialectical Images are all “sciences of signature.”

81 On what claimed to be the Heideggerian precedent (*Spur*) to the Agambenian concept of signature, see Östman, “Philosophical Archeology as Method in the Humanities. A comment on Cultural Memory and the Problem of History,” 84–86.

82 Collili, *Agamben and the Signature of Astrology: Spheres and Potentiality*, 24.

83 Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 390.

84 Collili, *Agamben and the Signature of Astrology: Spheres and Potentiality*, xvi.

found in the sign or the semantic meaning, but in the manner in which the signature allows things to be said or understood. The signature has a specific origin, a historical “moment of arising,” and a large number of historical presentations, all of them paradigmatic.

Additionally, a system of reading signs is based on signatures where the relationship between them is not that of cause and effect but of resemblance and analogy. For Agamben, a signature is not a sign but that element which makes the sign intelligible. The signature is a sign without a content and thus gives rise to a pure identity deprived of any meaning or signification.⁸⁵ The relation between the signature and the thing that it semiotically marks is analogical—this is why signatures, which (according to the theory of signs) should appear as signifiers, always already slide into the position of the signified. Thus, “*signum* and *signatum* exchange roles and seem to enter into a zone of undecidability.”⁸⁶ The signature is an impotentiality that permits potentiality to be altered through a movement to actuality (without actuality being a semiotic fullness). This movement brings two major Agambenian concepts together: the logic of potentiality (which includes impotentiality) and the ontology of potential.⁸⁷

The common-proper relationship is also at work within the relationship between paradigms and a signature. The metaphysical tradition presents any concept as a split structure (or as a bi-conceptual structure) between two heterogeneous elements: the common (unconditional power, founding element, signature) and the proper (singularity, a series of subsequent, dependent elements or paradigms, what's founded), which appears to actualize this original element. Thus, research into a certain phenomenon reveals a multiplicity of paradigms that can be organized under a single overarching concept (signature) such as power, language, potentiality, poetry, life, etc.

85 The idea that the signature is a pure, historical, and self-referential element brings to mind Pierre Nora's conception of “Lieu de mémoire” (Site of Memory), according to which a site of memory does not have a reference in reality; in other words, it is the reference of itself, a sign that points merely to itself as a sign in its pure state. This does not mean, according to Nora, that a site of memory lacks content, physical presence, or history, but what constitutes it as a site of memory is also the same thing that “de-historicizes” it as such. Thus, a site of memory is of a twofold character: a site of excess, sealed within itself, within its identity, folded around its name, and simultaneously attentive to reverberated space of its meaning. (Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*.)

86 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 37.

87 Collili, *Agamben and the Signature of Astrology: Spheres and Potentiality*, 8.

This structure is illogical, paradoxical, and self-negating due to the common's self-founding fiction of presence. For example, what seems to be the founding element of the law is a product of the law itself. The common founds the realm of the proper, which itself invents the constant need for a fiction of foundation through the modes of its operation.

Our ability to distinguish between the common and the proper becomes confused in a space that Agamben constitutes as a zone of indifference. There, we can no longer point to that which is the common and that which is the proper, and which one of them is the founding element. At this place, the energy of this dialectical system is eliminated because it depends on oppositional difference. This could be said to be the case for any metaphysical concept of Western thought, since any concept is traditionally split, as we state above, into two elements (common-proper). A system that depends on the common-proper distinction becomes inoperative once this distinction breaks down. The signature is the act of presenting as necessary what is, in fact, an historical contingency, thus rendering it inoperative (in other words, rendering Metaphysics indifferent)—and such escape from false necessities—is Agamben's aim.⁸⁸

Thus, this structure can become inoperative by (1) showing that its illogical; (2)

88 In this sense, Agamben's methodology has a very precise and ambitious aim—to paradigmatically trace the *arches*, as identity-difference constructs (or signatures), in order to suspend them, and thus to render historiography (as a mode of metaphysical signature) indifferent; or in other words, to render indifferent the two oppositional methods of Western epistemological thought: logical deduction and empirical induction. Agamben's methodology tries to go beyond the metaphysics of presence and difference through an archeological excavation of paradigms; thus, through the exposition of paradigmatic order and its signatory distribution (through common-proper dialectics), it tries to render inoperative the conditioning, binary logic of Western thought. Moreover, Agamben's claim that all concepts (signatures) are historically contingent and not logically necessary also applies to the very concept of "difference." Thus the "common" and the "proper" are not actual, existent ontological or transcendent states, but a result of the philosophy of difference. In contrast to the somewhat overly common interpretation of Agamben's aim, his work (in my view) does not offer merely a negative or nihilistic critique, but wishes to constitute an epistemology that tries to allow us to see things differently than we are usually forced to.

Another way to speak about Agamben's attempt to articulate a philosophy that is based on a different type of logic is perhaps offered by David Kishik in his book on Agamben. He writes: "Though he usually immerses himself in meticulous and systematic scholarly studies, Agamben likes to present his findings in the form of miniature sketches, images, or scenes—each of which can stand both still and alone. When he collects these vignettes into a monograph, they sometimes resemble a flip book, which gives the fleeting illusion of a moving image by the quick turn of the pages with the thumb and index finger. ... Agamben speaks about 'brachylogy as a form of philosophy' without developing this idea any further. Brachylogy comes from the Greek *brakhus* and *logos*, or 'short speech.' ... But if we consider this concept in logical rather than grammatical terms, ... [B]rachylogy could also be said to stand for a form of philosophy without logical operations (*not, and, or, if/then*).... This is ... that his thought does not pretend to lead us from point A to point B by means of an argumentative apparatus." (Kishik, *The Power of Life*, 62–63.)

demonstrating that every concept, being historically contingent, operates as a founding fiction of oppositional division, but nonetheless has an origin that can be revealed and thus will become inoperative; and (3) identifying the constant communication between the common and the proper (the identity-difference opposition), and the way to suspend the difference between them. Nonetheless, Agamben's attempt to free our intelligibility from our dependency on the structure of identity-difference does not necessitate the messianic future return to an ideal state of pre-divisive unity.

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§ [First Beginning]

It should be noted that in an earlier text Kant argued that a history of the first development of any phenomenon that has its original predisposition “in the nature of the human being” (reason, freedom, etc.) is fundamentally different from the history of the phenomenon “in its progression, which can be grounded only on records.”⁸⁹ Attempts to outline the *first beginning* of a certain (natural) historical phenomenon may legitimately include [the insertion of] conjectures regarding the phenomenon’s *arche*, “insofar as *nature* makes it,”⁹⁰ since it can be based on experience as we assume it “was not better or worse than what we encounter now,” thus the beginning need not be invented by fiction. This, however, will be an illegitimate act in relation to outlining the *first beginning* of the history of human deeds since “to let a history *arise* simply and solely from conjectures does not seem much better than to make the draft for a novel.”^{91 92}

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89 Kant, “Conjectural beginning of human history (1786),” 163.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 For a complementary discussion of the end of all things and phenomena (and therefore of history), see Kant, “The End of All Things (1794)”.

§ [The Before of the Book]

“To let a history [of human deeds] *arise* simply and solely from conjectures does not seem much better than to make the draft for a novel.”⁹³

In his relatively short meditations on literature, compiled under *The Fire and the Tale*, Agamben refers to Roland Barthes. Referring to any creative work, Barthes highlights the problem of the relation between “the fantasy of the novel” and the preparatory notes and fragments, and about the similar relation between the fragmented novel and the proper novel. The period that precedes the finished work is named by Agamben, paraphrasing Barthes, as “the before of the book”⁹⁴—a limbo, pre- or sub-world of fantasies, sketches, notes, copybooks, drafts, and blotters.⁹⁵ The problem with this world, according to Barthes, is that it is “poorly defined, and poorly studied”; to that Agamben adds that our culture is not able to give it “a legitimate status nor an adequate graphic design.”⁹⁶ The reason for this cultural situation stems from the thesis, put forward by Agamben, that “our idea of creation and work is encumbered with the theological paradigm of the divine creation of the world,” according to which the world was created *ex nihilo* in an incomparable manner, and not only that, but was also instantaneously accomplished without hesitation and through an immediate act of the will. God thus had no preparatory draft nor initial matter for creation; and in fact, the very problem of the “before of the creation” is, in theology, a forbidden topic.⁹⁷ In Romanticism we find the idea that fragments and outlines were superior to the completed work, and for this reason writers intentionally left their writings

93 Kant, “Conjectural beginning of human history (1786),” 163.

94 Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale*, 84.

95 Perhaps the most outstanding example for that, in modern literature, is by another author closely related to Agamben’s thought—Walter Benjamin. Volume IV of Benjamin’s *Gesammelte Schriften* (Collected Writings) presents a mass of preparatory notes, quotations, photographic and bibliographic citations that were collected in preparation for his *Arcades Project*, and were never assembled into coherent, finished narratives.

96 Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale*, 84.

97 The theological traditions, both Christian and Jewish, refer to this problem. In the Christian tradition (having a Platonic origin and exerting its profound influence on the Renaissance conception of artistic creation) God always had an “outline” of the “ideas of all the creatures he then created,” (Ibid, 85) always possesses something that precedes creation, an immemorial “before” the work that was eventually accomplished in the biblical Hexameron. The Cabalistic tradition understands creation *ex nihilo* to mean that nothingness is the matter with which God made its creation, that the divine work “is literally made of nothing.” (Ibid.)

in a fragmented form.⁹⁸ The way in which we conceive the identity of the work has transformed radically in recent decades, a tendency that can be witnessed in the field of “ecdotics” (the science that deals with the edition of texts) where, in comparison with the past when the aim was the reconstruction of a single definitive critical text, nowadays we encounter the reproduction of all the layers of the manuscript without distinguishing the different versions. Thus the “text” becomes an infinite temporal process, towards both past and future, whose interruption at a certain historical point is purely contingent.⁹⁹ The caesura that ends the drafting of the work does not confer on it a privileged status of completeness; it just constitutes it as another fragment of a potentially infinite creative process. The “so called completed work is distinguished only accidentally from the uncompleted one.” If each version of the work is a fragment, we can speak also about “the after of the book,” that is, the process of retraction to previous “finished” works and the reworking of them in order to amend their flaws or clarify their meanings and aims.¹⁰⁰ This is the other side of the theological paradigm of divine creation according to which creation is an infinite continuous process that, if stopped by God, will be destroyed.

The ontological status of the book and the work is governed by insufficient categories that our culture has accustomed us to think with. From Aristotle onwards, according to Agamben, we think of the work (*ergon*) by relating two concepts: potentiality and actuality, virtual and real. We tend to think the potential and virtual as the “before of the work” that precedes the actual and real (completed) work. This means that in notes or outlines “potentiality has not been transferred to the act ... [and thus remains] unrealized and uncompleted.”¹⁰¹ But, Agamben asks, “[I]s it not the case that every book contains a remainder of potentiality, without which its reading and reception would be impossible?” A work whose creative potentiality was totally exhausted would not be work but “ashes and sepulcher of the work.” If an author can go back to his work, the reason is not, like the Romantics believed, that the fragments are more important than the work itself, but that

98 This idea is described in Edgar Wind’s essay “Critique of Connoisseurship” (Wind, *Art and Anarchy*, 30–46.)

99 In accordance with Cézanne’s formula that “one never finishes a painting, but simply abandons it.” (Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale*, 89.)

100 Augustine’s *Retractationes* (of 427) and Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* (of 1888) are just two of the most famous examples.

101 Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale*, 93.

the experience of matter (or for the ancients, potentiality) is immediately perceivable in them.

The implications of the materiality of the book are vast and extend to both historical directions. The book as we know it today appeared in Europe between the fourth and the fifth century. The *codex* (technical term for book, introduced with Christianity) replaces the *volumen* and the scroll (the norm in Antiquity). The disappearance of the volume also reflects the conflict between the church and the synagogue: the Torah as a *volumen* as opposed to the New Testament as a book (a shape no different than any profane book). The codex introduces the page which was a real material and spiritual revolution for the West. The unrolling of the volume revealed a homogeneous and continuous space, while the codex presents a discontinued, delimited unity. This implies a different conception of time: from the cyclical (of Antiquity) to the linear (of the Christian world). Time of reading reproduces the time of life.¹⁰²

[Continue Reading]

102 For a detailed discussion of how in the early centuries AD the roll was replaced as the vehicle for literature by the codex, see Roberts and Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex*.

§ [Dishomogeneity]

The idea of “essential dishomogeneity” mirrors the old philosophical problem of discontinuity. From its ontological perspective, we recall Jabès’ view of the break as “the source of all things”. In the context of the following discussion, that is, a Foucauldian epistemological context, the problem of discontinuity establishes the background against which Foucault’s archeology (and later genealogy) must be thought, since his selection of different “moments” and the concentration on precise historical timeframes serve as the essential support for his analyses. The discontinuity element of Foucault’s archeology (which is characterized as Foucault’s research methodology at least up until the beginning of the 1970s) designates not a historical investigation in the formal sense (a reconstitution of a historical field, outlining the continuous evolution of ideas), but, by bringing together diverse dimensions together, an attempt to “obtain the conditions of emergence of discourses of knowledge in general in a given epoch.”¹⁰³ Such an attempt emphasizes the emergence of the new rather than the rediscovery of former conditions of possibility: “It is a discourse of historical emergence rather than philosophical origin.”¹⁰⁴

[Continue Reading]

103 Howard, “Archeology and/or Genealogy: Agamben’s Transformation of Foucauldian Method,” 41.
104 Lawlor, *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, 201.

§ [Genealogy]

I

In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Genealogy is described as “gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. ... [It is a practice that] must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history.”¹⁰⁵ Foucault distinguishes, among the terms employed by Nietzsche, between *Ursprung* (which is reserved, somewhat ironically, for “origin” albeit negatively) and the two terms that are more exact than *Ursprung* in recording the true object of Genealogy: *Herkunft* (“descent”) and *Entstehung* (“*emergence*, the moment of arising”).¹⁰⁶

The Genealogist who examines the descent (with its “subtle, subindividual marks”) constructs “cyclopean monuments,”¹⁰⁷ not by a regression in time in order to restore “an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of oblivion,” nor by an attempt to demonstrate “that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present,”¹⁰⁸ but by revealing “the myriad events through which they were formed,” and

105 Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 369.

106 Ibid, 373 and 376 respectively.

107 Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 370. Foucault quotes Nietzsche’s term from *The Gay Science* (1882).

108 Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 374. Although both Foucault’s and Agamben’s Genealogies attempt to offer (among others and in this context) a critique of the present, it seems as if Foucault’s critique is driven more by social, political, and historical aspirations rather than by ontological or metaphysical ones (in the manner that Agamben seems to attempt, although he does share with Foucault a clear, critical aspiration for a political reform that results from a methodological, genealogical intention).

However, both thinkers seem to disagree, or at least differ, over the importance of time (its structure and the role of its three traditional components of past, present, and future) to the process of Genealogy, whether time (in fact, the past) “actively exists in” and “secretly animates” the present (as per Agamben, although as we will see later on, he does not consider this past a “usual” past) or functions otherwise (as per Foucault, and in accordance with his claims that the Genealogist does not have much interest in restoring discontinuities or his wish to maintain the myriad events “in their proper dispersion”).

maintaining these events “in their proper dispersion” only to realize that “truth or being lies not at the root of what we know and what we are but the exteriority of accidents.”¹⁰⁹ The search for the descent does not wish to secure foundations, but conversely to “disturb what was previously considered immobile ...[,] to fragment what was thought unified”¹¹⁰; and if the Genealogist “listens to history,” he finds that “there is ‘something altogether different’ behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence,” that their origin has no inviolable identity. Thus the Genealogist rummages in history, in the “concrete body of becoming,” not searching for any “distant ideality of the origin”¹¹¹ as the metaphysician does, but for all the imprints left on the historical body up to the point of its destruction.

Genealogy (“seen as the examination of *Herkunft* and *Entstehung*”¹¹²), writes Foucault, as opposed to history in the traditional sense is, for Nietzsche, a kind of “historical sense” that, contrary to a form of history that reintroduces a “suprahistorical perspective” and strives for a presentation of completed development based on its “belief in eternal truth, the immortality of the soul, and the nature of consciousness as always identical to itself,”¹¹³ can evade metaphysics if it refuses the certainty of absolutes; but if otherwise, if “mastered by suprahistorical perspective,” it can be bent by metaphysics to its own purposes. “The traditional device for constructing a comprehensive view of history

Agamben will assert that Foucault never really questioned the implicit temporal structure of the “historical a priori” (Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 94), a claim that can further illuminate this difference between the two thinkers, at least from the perspective of Agamben’s archeology (on the basis, as will become evident later on, of its future anterior’s movement in time). One notices, however, that in his work *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, Foucault discusses (to some extent) the problem of temporality in relation to Kant’s thought and specifically to the idea of the *a priori*. There Foucault ponders the account of time Kant proposes in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, “transforming it from a pure form of intuition—a transcendental condition of all possible experience that can be known a priori—to a dispersed framework that ‘harbors and reveals’ relationships that are both ‘openings’ and ‘bond.’” (Foucault, *Introduction to Kant’s Anthropology*, 92.) Assuming that the original form of the a priori is this dispersed temporality, then “it is reasonable to assume that Foucault found something like the historical a priori in his studies of temporality in Kant’s *Anthropology*.” (McQuillan, “Philosophical Archeology and the Historical A Priori: From Kant to Foucault,” 152.) In other words, Foucault seems to defend the view that Kant’s *a priori* is originally temporal, and that in its temporal form “the a priori disperses the synthetic activity of transcendental subjectivity.” (Ibid, 156.)

109 Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 374.

110 Ibid, 374–375.

111 Ibid, 373.

112 Ibid, 379.

113 Ibid.

and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled.”¹¹⁴ Historical sense, as opposed to a historical tradition that aims at “dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity,” deals with events “in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations.”¹¹⁵

II

For Foucault, one of Genealogy’s leading goals is to show specifically how the various “ways of life” come to be as they are and how they oppressively marginalize other people. The context of *Entstehung* (“*emergence*, the moment of arising”) is that of power dynamics, systems of subjection and dominations, and it is “always produced in a particular state of forces”¹¹⁶ where a battle was won against certain concrete conditions: “[e]mergence is thus the entry of forces.”¹¹⁷ A second leading goal is to develop interruptive knowledges that can lead to liberating options for those marginalized people. Having its roots in Nietzsche’s thought, Foucault’s Genealogy accepts the former’s insight that “formations of knowledge and values are always also formations of power (in Foucault’s jargon, formations of power relations)”¹¹⁸; thus knowledge creation is a phenomenon that must be described in terms of power. Archeological and genealogical studies are not mutually exclusive in Foucault’s view; rather their different emphases are mutually supportive (“Archeology focuses on the emergence and formation of various mutational, regulatory, and guiding structures. ... Genealogy focuses on relations of power and their dynamic mode of operation”)^{119 120}, thus Foucault’s Genealogy has both political and ethical dimensions.

114 Ibid, 380.

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid, 376.

117 Ibid, 377.

118 Lawlor, *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, 165–174.

119 Ibid, 170.

120 Foucault’s methodological critique (and the relationship between his conceptions of archeology and genealogy) is likewise referred to as follows: “Rather than transcendental, the criticism will be *archeological* in its method and *genealogical* in purposes. The term ‘genealogy’, clearly derives from Nietzsche, becomes necessary to the completion of the ‘excavation’ carried out in the universalizing mechanisms of our knowledge in the search of what is contingent and empirical in them.... The conclusion will be, as we read in the introduction to *L’usage des plaisirs* (published in 1984, the year of Foucault’s untimely death): finally ‘free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently’.” (Malinconico, “The Concept of Philosophical Archeology in Kant and Foucault,” 64–65).

Stephen Howard reflects upon the relation between archeology and genealogy in Foucault as well as in Agamben, in an attempt to articulate the influence of Foucault's method on Agamben's work (especially since the latter formally declares such influence, being a stepping stone for his own methodology, in the preface to *The Signature of All Things*).

Howard's argument¹²¹ is as follows: although Agamben claims to develop Foucault's archeological and genealogical methodology at large (mainly in Foucault's works on governmentality, power and biopolitics), the fact is that Agambenian methodology deviates significantly from Foucault's.

In *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1970–1971* (which marks Foucault's methodological shift around 1976), Foucault defines Genealogy as the coupling together of the two elements of what he terms "subjugated knowledge," that is, the buried historical conditions of possibilities of modern institutions (on the one hand) and disqualified knowledge of marginalized subjects (on the other hand). This coupling of, in other words, scholarly erudition and local memories "allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics."¹²² The aim of Foucault's Genealogy is to de-subjugate historical knowledges, to reactivate local knowledges against scientific hierarchization of knowledge, to free subjugated knowledge from its marginalized position and reactivate it for political ends. Foucault succinctly summarizes the relation between archeology and genealogy: "Archeology is the method specific to the analysis of local discursivities, and genealogy is the tactic which, once it has described these local discursivities, brings into play the subjugated knowledges that have been released from them."¹²³ Genealogy demands relentless erudition because it first requires archeology's technical analysis; and after the analysis unveils the buried conditions of what had become the norm, genealogy then connects this analysis to the reactivation of marginalized knowledge. Foucault, as we have seen, builds upon Nietzsche's idea of *Entstehung* by claiming that *Entstehung* is the "entry of forces" and

121 Howard, "Archeology and/or Genealogy: Agamben's Transformation of Foucauldian Method," 27–45.

122 Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 8.

123 Ibid, 10–11.

“play of dominations,”¹²⁴ thus norms have history and arise in particular contexts. The insurrection of subjugated knowledge made possible by the genealogical combination of archeological erudition and a politically motivated reactivation of marginalized knowledge.¹²⁵

Throughout his entire œuvre and specifically in *The Signature of All Things*, Agamben conflates archeology and genealogy; and his understanding of these terms distances his methodology from Foucault’s. Although Agamben claims that their methodologies differ only in terms of the length of the historical shadow rather than in anything essential and intrinsic to their corresponding methodologies, it seems as if Agamben remains, methodologically, within the archeological period of Foucault’s thought. Agamben’s patient scholarly attention to literary sources and manuscripts amounts to Foucault’s idea of the work of the archeologist. If this is true, asks Howard, can Agamben “be accused of ultimately indulging in what Foucault called the ‘great, tender, and warm freemasonry of useless erudition’?”¹²⁶ His answer is no; and to demonstrate this, he looks into Agamben’s method as manifested in *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, highlighting the political significance of Agamben’s conflation of archeology and genealogy (and thus showing that he is not merely an archeologist in Foucault’s sense).

Agamben’s work in *The Highest Poverty* demonstrates that he does not subsume genealogy under archeology, but draws the two methods into equivalence or understands them as indistinct. In this book, Agamben had a political ambition—to return to a path not taken in the history of the West, to reactivate a conception of “use” that was available to the Franciscans but which they failed to develop. He accomplishes this through an archeological reading of texts, a scholarly operation that should be in itself political. In what manner is this operation political? The answer lies, according to Howard, in the *methodological* importance of Benjamin to the Agambenian method (even though it might

124 Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 377.

125 Agamben, as we will see, stresses the temporal issue and puts an emphasis on Foucault’s discussion of emergence (*Entstehung*), citing Franz Overbeck as the source to Foucault’s replacement of “origin” with “emergence.” Prehistory, Agamben will claim, is “the history of the moment of arising” [*Entstehungsgeschichte* (Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 85)], thus Overbeck’s idea of prehistory amounts to Foucault’s historical *a priori* in terms of being that which conditions knowledge in a given historical epoch.

126 Howard, “Archeology and/or Genealogy: Agamben’s Transformation of Foucauldian Method,” 35.

seem, in *The Signature of All Things*, that Foucault has the most significant influence; thus Foucault is less the source of Agamben's method than the subject of interpretation).

Benjamin provides not only Agamben's undiscussed methodological principle (as stated in the introduction to *The Signature of All Things*), but also the key to Agamben's interpretation of the Foucauldian method. Agamben's Benjaminian principle of "messianic-time" or "now-time" (explained and elaborated in a later part of this thesis) entails that archeology (the patient, erudite attention to dusty texts) can itself have political effects, thus no further genealogical step is required (in contrast to Foucault's approach that combines, in his *Genealogy*, archeological erudition with the reactivation of marginalized knowledge). Howard writes: "In Agamben's conflation of Foucault's archeology and genealogy, subjugated knowledges are reactivated not through genealogies of modern institutions and forms of knowledge; but through the archeological analysis itself."¹²⁷ Agamben and Foucault differ in their account of the forces of history: for Foucault these are contingent forces, which determine the historical shift in the meaning of our notions, real forces that are the struggle of power; for Agamben the force of history is not a real, historical struggle over meaning, but rather the force of the *arche* (as origin) itself, which is neither chronological nor empirical. Agamben's archeology and genealogy is thus an interpretation of Foucault's methodology conditioned by the influence of Benjamin. Agamben's (Benjaminian) interpretations of the methodologies of archeology and genealogy conflate what in Foucault are two distinct approaches. Foucault's *Genealogy* aims for a more direct political intervention than his archeology by "saving" oppressed knowledge, while Agamben's detailed readings manifest an archeological method that intends to be in itself political without the need for a further genealogical step. Although Agamben considers Foucault and Overbeck to be his sources for the concepts of "origin" and "emergence," which underpin his philosophical methodology, Howard's claim is that they stem more from Benjamin (specifically Benjamin's idea of "messianic-time" and the eruption of the past into the present in an object's "now if knowability"). Agamben's methodological transformation of Foucault requires the acceptance of Benjamin's conception of history if it is to share the political ambitions of Foucault's

127 Ibid, 41.

Genealogy.

[Continue Reading]

§ [arche]

I

In *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (originally published, in French, in 1947 as *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*), Alexandre Kojève puts forth the somewhat ironic idea that *Homo sapiens* has reached a final moment in its history in which there are only two possible options left open for it: on one hand, the “Post-Historical Animality” exemplified, according to Kojève, by the American way of life (this was just an ironical-metaphysical remark) and, on the other hand, what he called “Japanese Snobbism,” by which he meant a continuation of historical rituals devoid of any historical content.¹²⁸ We can try to imagine a third possibility of a relation to the past beyond Kojève’s two suggestions, one in which a culture remains human, even after its history has supposedly finished, because it is able to confront its own history in its totality, and find a new life in it. This is a conception that finds a historical phenomenon most interesting and alive when it is, in fact, finished. Once the history had reached its fulfillment, it can gain a new life precisely because one has managed to remain in the correct relationship with it, thus the ability to remain in a relation to the past means it is still alive and becomes present again.

II

This idea approximately resembles Walter Benjamin’s idea of “the now of legibility” or “the now of knowability.” Agamben explores this Benjaminian concept in relation to the *arche* (or the origin) in his essay “Walter Benjamin and the Demonic: Happiness and Historical Redemption,”¹²⁹ where two forms of historical consciousness are depicted: one that understands all human work (and the past) as an origin destined to an infinite process of transmission “that preserves its intangible and mythic singularity”; the other, as the inverted specular image of the first, liquidates and flattens out the singularity of the origin “by forever multiplying copies and simulacra.”¹³⁰ These attitudes are not in opposition but

128 For a further discussion see Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 60–62; and Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*, 1.

129 Agamben, *Potentialities*, 138–59.

130 Ibid, 155.

rather are two faces of a cultural tradition in which the content of transmission and transmission itself are so irreparably fractured that this tradition can only ever repeat the origin infinitely or annul it in simulacra. The origin itself can be neither fulfilled nor mastered, the idea of the origin contains both singularity and reproducibility, and as long as one of them remains in force, writes Agamben, “every intention to overcome both is doomed to fail.”¹³¹ It is as if for Benjamin the revolutionary value that is implicit in the image of the eternal return can exasperate mythical repetition up to the point of bringing it to a halt.

In his book *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin conceives of the origin not as a logical category but as a historical one:

Origin [Ursprung], although an entirely historical category, has, nevertheless, nothing to do with genesis [Entstehung]. The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis. That which is original is never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual; its rhythm is apparent only to a dual insight. On the one hand it needs to be recognized as a process of restoration and re-establishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete. There takes place in every original phenomenon a determination of the form in which an idea will constantly confront the historical world, until it is revealed fully, in the totality of its history. ... The category of the origin is not ... a purely logical one, but a historical one.¹³²

131 Ibid.

132 Quoted in Agamben, *Potentialities*, 156.

The idea of origin here is tangential to Goethe's concept of *Urphänomen*.¹³³ It is not a factual event nor a mythical archetype, but rather a vortex in the stream of becoming, manifesting itself through a double structure of restoration and incompleteness. In the origin, there is a dialectic that reveals every original phenomenon to be a reciprocal conditioning of "oneness" and repetition. In every original phenomenon, what is at play is an Idea that confronts the historical world until it is completed in the totality of its history (the theory of origin is tied to the theory of Idea).¹³⁴

Benjamin speaks about his concept of origin as a transposition of Goethe's *Urphänomen* (which belongs to the domain of nature) to the domain of history; in other words, origin is in effect the concept of *Urphänomen* extracted from the pagan context of nature and brought into the Jewish context of history.

Benjamin's explicit morphological awareness enables him to oppose the historical-chronological genesis to the morphological origin. This opposition highlights a possible polar tension working within the concept of temporality and/or that of history: on one hand, there is the historical dream of the traditional, historical quest for the first element of the

133 Goethe's morphology, emanated from his research on nature (which is as important as his literary research or poetic work), is conceived via three domains: Botany (*The Metamorphosis of Plants* of 1790); Osteology (*First Draft of a General Introduction to Comparative Anatomy* of 1795); and Theory of Colours (*Theory of Colours* of 1810). Common to all these domains is a particular way of seeing, a certain taming of the gaze exemplified by the following maxim (#1137): "The highest stage is seeing as identical what is different." (Goethe, *Maxim and Reflections*, 141). The form (the "morpheme") is not only a visible object, but also the visible phenomenon and the ideal structure within it. It is the condition of possibility inherent to the phenomenon itself. This is the famous concept of *Urphänomen*—a theme that is visible only through its infinite variations. In the botanical realm, Goethe refers to the *Urphänomen* in Kantian terms, calling it a "transcendental leaf" (one cannot present a manifestation of a transcendental structure but can nevertheless recognize it in all botanic phenomena as the theme of their variations); in the osteological realm, the *Urphänomen* is the "original vertebra" whose transformation gives existence to all possible forms of bones, including the skull.

Goethe's morphological gaze exerted its influence also on the humanities at large, becoming a methodological model in the 1920s. A few examples include: Oswald Spengler's cultural morphology of *The Decline of the West*; Lucian Blaga's *Original Phenomenon*; Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*; André Jolles' *Simple Forms*; Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*; and Ludwig Wittgenstein's anthropological *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*. These studies share a common feature—a consideration of the relationship between the ideal and the phenomenal level, not as a mutual opposition but as mutual codetermination, a reciprocal relationship between idea and phenomenon or empirical level. (Minotti, "Origin vs Genesis: Warburg and Benjamin in the Footsteps of Goethe's Morphology.")

134 In this theory, the exposition of the Ideas and the salvation of the phenomena are simultaneous and merge in a single gesture. In philosophy, for Benjamin, the concept of Being (at issue in the Idea) is not satisfied by the phenomenon until it has consumed all its history, thus the phenomenon does not remain the same (as singularity) but becomes what it was not (totality). "To save phenomena in the Idea (to expose the Idea in phenomena)," writes Agamben, "is to show them in their historical consumption, as a fulfilled totality. To show this in the work of art is the task of criticism." (Agamben, *Potentialities*, 157.)

iconic linear chain from which every other element can be drawn through proper transformation; on the other hand, the morphological gaze presents a radial structure where the various manifestations gather around the *Urphänomen* in a non-linear manner.

Agamben revisits the Benjaminian concept of the origin-as-vortex in “Vortexes,”¹³⁵ beginning with a similar, slightly deviated statement:

The origin [*Ursprung*] stands in the flux of becoming as a vortex and rips into its rhythm the material of emergence [*Entstehung*]. ... On the one hand, that which is original wants to be recognized as restoration and reestablishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something incomplete and unconcluded. There takes place in every original phenomenon a determination of the figure in which an idea will constantly confront the historical world. Origin is not, therefore, discovered by the examination of actual findings, but it is related to their pre- and post-history. The category of origin is not therefore, as Cohen holds, a purely logical one, but a historical one.¹³⁶

Origin, for Benjamin, does not precede phenomenon’s becoming nor is separated from its chronology; and although it autonomously dwells in it, it also and at the same time derives its matter from it. Origin accompanies historical becoming, and like a vortex, is still present in it. The whirling origin that archeological investigation tries to reach, writes Agamben, is an *arche*, a “historical a priori that remains immanent to becoming and continues to act in it. Even in the course of our life, the vortex of the origin remains present until the end and silently accompanies our existence at every moment.”¹³⁷ For Agamben, the “correct” relation to the past¹³⁸—this dialectic in the origin—echoes the *arche* in archeology, which

135 Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale*, 57–62.

136 Ibid, 58–59.

137 Ibid, 59–60. Likewise, relating (in a few pages earlier) to the becoming of man, or subjectivity, Agamben writes: “In an important book, Simondon wrote that man is, as it were, a two-phased being, which results from the dialectic between a non-individuated part and an individual and personal part. The pre-individual is not a chronological past that, at a certain point, is realized and resolved in the individual: it coexists with in and remains irreducible to it.” (Ibid, 44.)

138 A relation to the past can yield a characterization of the whole category of “Identity.” Identity does not necessarily mean a substantial concept, just a temporal relation to the past, something that has to do merely with time. A relation to the past implies a certain temporal structure; a relation to one’s past implies a certain movement in time, and only this movement is important (not the fact that time is supposedly comprised of three elements, past, present, and future). (See Shlomo Pines, *La Liberté de Philosophe: De Maimonide à Spinoza*.) Pines’ idea deprives the movement to the past from any substantiality (political, cultural, etc.), and just considers the simple movement in time (to the past) as being constitutive for man, and the only essential element.

is not simply a historical fact that exhausts itself (as it is situated in a chronology) nor a meta-historical archetype, but something immanent within history, internal to it, which cannot coincide with a precise chronological moment nor is simply a historical fact given in chronology.

III

This conception is evident in the *arche*'s double meaning (in Greek)¹³⁹ which has its origin in the theological idea according to which God created the world but also continuously governs it. The word *arche* entered philosophical language approximately with Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle historically innovated the use of the concept in the sense of uniting both meanings into the same single abstract concept, and until the end of antiquity it remained “a technical term for designating the constitutive, abstract, and irreducible element in being, becoming, and knowing,”¹⁴⁰ an abstract element that cannot be surpassed. The doctrine of origin, for Aristotle, “is a doctrine of a material substance from which things arise in order to return to it as to their primordial element,”¹⁴¹ but the *arche* itself is not an entity (nor supreme being) that creates and governs change, “but only the common trait of the different types of causes.”¹⁴²

Jewish identity, according to Pines, should be regarded more as a problem rather than a fact, since identity is no longer a substance that one can define and limit, but a complicated lace among cultures. In other words, Jewish identity is not a continuity, but a lace that each time is woven among different cultures. This theory can be applied to any cultural identity, and nowadays in Europe the issue of continuity (as part of the identity of cultures) is a problem and should not be taken for granted or as a given. Cultural identity in present-day Europe is, as we witness, discontinuous and fragile.

139 “The term *archè* in Greek means both ‘origin’ and ‘command.’ To this double meaning of the term there corresponds the fact that, in our philosophical and religious traditions alike, origin, what gives a beginning and brings into being, is not only a preamble, which disappears and ceases to act in that to which it has given life, but is also what commands and governs its growth, development, circulation, and transmission—in a word, its history.” (Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 275; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1276.) See also Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*, 51–54.

In “On the Being and Conception of *Physis*,” Heidegger writes that the Greeks usually hear two things in the word *arche*: “[T]hat from which something takes its egress and inception,” and at the same time, “that which, as such egress and inception, at the same time reaches beyond whatever emerges from it, thereby dominating it.” (Heidegger, “On the Being and Conception of *Physis*,” 227.) *Arche* thus means both inception and domination inseparably.

140 Schürmann, *Heidegger On Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, 97. In the domain of being, the *arche* is a substance that begins and commands everything; in the domain of becoming, the *archai* are the causes; and in the domain of knowledge, they are the premises on which cognition depends.

141 Ibid, 99.

142 Ibid, 105.

In the second half of the twentieth century, three important attempts were made to theoretically wedge this dual meaning of the *arche*. The first was that of Reiner Schürmann in his interpretation of Heidegger in *Heidegger On Being and Acting: From Principals to Anarchy* (*Le principe d'anarchie: Heidegger et la question de l'agir*, 1982). He tried to separate the two meanings of the *arche*, to reach an *arche* only as a pure coming to being (to the present) without any pretention of commanding an historical development. This is, according to Schürmann, an anarchical interpretation of Heidegger, as Heidegger (perhaps paradoxically) was trying to reach an anarchical principle that would not command any historical development. The second attempt (and second interpretation of Heidegger) was that of Derrida, and his idea/methodology of deconstruction. He also tried to separate the origin from its commanding function, but unlike Schürmann, who opposed the two, Derrida put in question the notion of the origin. For Derrida there is no origin, only trace, but precisely because of that, one can infinitely deconstruct. The third possibility of dealing with this dichotomy or duality comes from Foucault and his idea of the historical *a priori*: Foucault's critique of the origin in history and the favouring of the idea of the "point of emergence," that is, the point when something appears with no consequences or aspirations of commandment. He draws this idea most probably from Husserl's in *Origin of Geometry*, but while for Husserl this idea (of the historical *a priori*) means a universal category, for Foucault this implies a very concrete meaning (for example, the Indo-European language as an historical *a priori*: it is *a priori* because it makes understandable concrete historical phenomenon, and it is historical not because we have a written evidence of its existence but because we have to presuppose that it had existed).

IV

The earlier remark that the word *arche* was introduced into philosophical jargon roughly in the times of Plato and Aristotle requires slight amendment, since one can retrace its appearance even farther back in time. In his essay on the *arche* (and its relation to the *apeiron*, the infinity, and the current socio-political order in the West), Stathis Gourgouris maintains that the word *arche* first appears as a philosophical principle in the well-known

Anaximander fragment,¹⁴³ written around 570 BCE (although the word itself is already present in textual traces going back to Homer), where it is conjugated with a new concept: *apeiron* (infinity). Reading Anaximander's fragment, Gourgouris makes the clear argument: "[T]he notion of *archē* (origin and rule) is first used philosophically in order to identify what has no origin and no end and over which there can be no rule."¹⁴⁴ He thus establishes two essential elements: The first is that the *arche* is infinite but at the same time is understood as the source of all things, a source not external to all things since (as finite things) they eventually decay and return to become source again. Source is not *Ursprung* in terms of being the one and only origin, but "an infinite space of interminably enacted beginnings of an indefinite array of 'things' that have one thing in common: they terminate."¹⁴⁵ The *apeiron* is not only limitless, but also cannot be completed; the infinite is also incomplete. Thus, the paradox is that the incomplete/infinite enables the emergence of the complete/finite, an emergence that is a disturbance of the infinite, thus "the finitude of existence is thus justified by its very violation of the infinite."¹⁴⁶ The infinite (*apeiron*) is not only the unlimited and incomplete, but also whatever exceeds experience (*peira*) and cannot be empirically determined. Thus, the infinite (*apeiron*) cannot be empirically known; it is interminable and indeterminable—it has no *telos*, no finality, no termination: "it lacks de-finition, de-limitation, de-termination."¹⁴⁷ The second of Gourgouris's elements is that the disturbance of the infinite by finitude also means that the infinite is not omnipotent, for it is thus crossed by time. Time decays things and by doing so opens infinity to their re-admittance and return; thus, the infinite source is "a sort of repository, a burial ground, of what has come into the world and has gone out of it."¹⁴⁸ The condition

143 "Among those who say that the first principle [*archē*] is one and movable and infinite, is Anaximander of Miletus. ... He said that the first principle [*archē*] and element of all things is infinite [*apeiron*], and he was the first to apply this word to the first principle; and he says that it is neither water nor any other one of the thing called elements, but the infinite is something of a different nature, from which came all the heavens and the worlds in them; and from which things are generated in their substance and to which they return of necessity when they degenerate; ... for he says that they suffer retribution [*dikēn*] and give recourse [*tisin*] to one another for justice [*adikian*] according to the order of time ... , putting it rather poetically." (Quoted in Gourgouris, "archē," 9.)

144 Gourgouris, "archē," 9.

145 Ibid, 10.

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.

148 Ibid. Ground, writes Gourgouris, is merely metaphorical, for the *apeiron* rests on nothing and is abyssal and void.

of things entering the world, and necessarily going out of it, constitutes injustice (*adikia*). In other words, “time itself constitutes an injustice, which the infinite, though an *archē*, can neither overrule nor alleviate.”¹⁴⁹ Worldly things unsettle the “cosmic balance” that the relation between infinity and time attempts to maintain [that is, infinity holds together a balance of contentious forces, where one *kratos* (power) cannot overcome another], since matter is subject to time and thus defies the infinite, but simultaneously, matter returns to infinity and thus defies time. “This unsettling of balance, this injustice, is life itself—the tragic life, from which there is no redemption.”¹⁵⁰ This archaic Ionian imaginary, writes Gourgouris, for which finitude itself constitutes an injustice,¹⁵¹ provides justice (*dikē*) by determining that one makes its own limits in the course of life, “while submitting unredemptively to the ultimate limit of death.”¹⁵² Throughout man’s life, potentially unlimited, one’s infinite imagination partakes in the abyssal infinite, and therefore is required to authorize one’s own limits, to create or *poietize* (*poiein*) these limits.

Gourgouris quotes Jean-Pierre Vernant’s reading of Aristotle¹⁵³ regarding the *apeiron*, according to which infinity is not another force in the cosmos, but the intermediary between the elements, what exists in the middle (*meson*) of them: “[T]he mediating space of the elements—the *medium* of a limitless abyssal terrain—on which the limit and capacity for self-limitation in every element is tested ... [:] the limitless is a mediatory field that enables limits to be self-instituted.”¹⁵⁴ Thus, the importance of the middle (*meson*) is not only figurative, as a mediatory space, but should also be considered in geometric terms, as a central space from which all elements are equally distanced due to the balance they are forced to maintain at all times; the geometrics of *meson*, of mediation and middle, thus “irrevocably alters an understanding of *archē* as the fixed point of origin and primary rule.”¹⁵⁵ Not only is the *arche* not constituted as a primordial whole, but simultaneously it

149 Ibid.

150 Ibid.

151 “It is not death that signifies injustice, because this thought leads to the desire for an afterlife. It is life itself that signifies injustice because it interrupts the universal infinite fold. Finite creatures come into being and then this beautiful and perfect, even if incomplete, infinite is disrupted. Our death is retribution for the fact that we have come to be.” (Ibid, 14.)

152 Ibid, 11.

153 Vernant, *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, 205.

154 Gourgouris, “archē,” 12.

155 Ibid, 15.

is cleft and permeated, and this condition renders it as a condition of mediation. “The *archē* becomes a shared space of mediation that thereby disrupts the constitution or reconstitution of absolute singular (literally monarchical) rule/origin,” and moreover, “the *archē*’s interminable generation from the matrix of the infinite is preserved by finitude, the same finitude that its necessity is expressed by the ‘ordinance of time.’”¹⁵⁶

V

In *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben advances the claim that the structure of the *arche*, in Western culture at large, is determined and constituted by a “structure of exception”; in other words, the structure of exception has been revealed more generally to constitute in every sphere the structure of the *arche*. According to this idea, the originary structure of Western culture consists in an *ex-ceptio*, in an inclusive exclusion of human life.¹⁵⁷ The dialectic of the foundation that defines Western ontology is understood only as the function of this exception: “The strategy is always the same: something is divided, excluded, and pushed to the bottom, and precisely through this exclusion, it is included as *archè* and foundation.”¹⁵⁸ The mechanism¹⁵⁹ at work is always the same [whether in relation to the juridico-political (*State of Exception*); or between rule and governance and between inoperativity and glory (*The Kingdom and the Glory*); or between the human being and animal (*The Open*)]: the *arche* is constituted by dividing the factual experience and pushing down to the origin—that is, excluding—one half of it in order then to rearticulate it to the other by including it as foundation. Thus, for example, “the city is founded on the division of life into bare life and politically qualified life, the human is defined by the exclusion-inclusion of the animal, the law by the *exceptio* of anomie, governance through the exclusion of inoperativity and its capture in the form of glory.”¹⁶⁰ If the structure of the

156 Ibid, 16–17.

157 In the context of the *Homo Sacer* project, this was evident in relation to politics, where “life is not in itself political—for this reason it must be excluded from the city—and yet it is precisely the *exceptio*, the exclusion-inclusion of this Impolitical, that founds the space of politics.” (Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 263; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1265.)

158 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 264; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1266.

159 In Agamben, the mechanism of exclusion is constitutively connected to the event of language: the *ex-ceptio*, the inclusive exclusion of the real from the logos and in the logos, is the originary structure of the event of language.

160 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 265; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1267.

arche of our culture is such, claims Agamben, then philosophical archeology is not a matter of thinking new articulations of the two elements (playing them against each other), nor a matter of an archeological regression to a more originary beginning: “[P]hilosophical archeology cannot reach a beginning other than the one that may perhaps result from the deactivation of the machine (in this sense first philosophy is always final philosophy).”¹⁶¹

Moreover, according to Agamben, the anarchist tradition and (parts of) twentieth-century thought are pertinent but insufficient attempts to go back to a historical *a priori* in order to depose it. The practice of the artistic avant-garde and political movements of our time was often a miserably failed attempt to actualize a destitution of work, an attempt that ended up recreating in every place the museum apparatus and the powers that it pretended to depose, “which now appear all the more oppressive insofar as they are deprived of all legitimacy.”¹⁶² If it is true that the bourgeois is the most anarchic (Benjamin) and that true anarchy is that of power (Pasolini), then the thought that seeks to think anarchy (as negation of “origin” and “command,” *principium* and *princeps*) remains imprisoned in endless *aporias* and contradictions. “Because power is constituted through the inclusive exclusion (*ex-ceptio*) of anarchy, the only possibility of thinking a true anarchy coincides with the lucid exposition of the anarchy internal to power. Anarchy is what becomes thinkable only

161 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 265; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1267. Colin McQuillan advances the claim that, according to Agamben, once one recognizes the structure of inclusion/exclusion that operates in our construction of the image of the past, one frees oneself from its supposedly tyrannical conditioning for the present moment, no longer understands it as an inheritance that must be carried into the future, thus archeology presents the past “as a work of fiction.” (McQuillan, “Philosophical Archeology in Kant, Foucault, and Agamben,” 43.) McQuillan mentions the etymological origin of “fiction,” that is, the Latin *fingere*, which means “to touch,” but also “to shape” and “to form” (these being actions at the basis of any fiction). This recognition is the concrete meaning of redemption in Agamben, according to McQuillan, as it “unworks” the distinctions that organize our life and opens it to new possibilities.

162 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 275; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1275.

at the point where we grasp and render destitute the anarchy of power.”¹⁶³ ¹⁶⁴

[Continue Reading]

163 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 275; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1276.

164 Agamben thinks the *arche*, in the anarchic context, also in relation to perhaps two of the most anarchic institutions ever to exist—Christianity and Capitalism. The intimate connection Agamben draws between Christianity and Capitalism [a parasitical one, in fact, on behalf of the latter which he defines as “a religion in which faith—credit—has been substituted for God. Said differently, since the pure form of credit is money, it is a religion whose God is money” (Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*, 70)] is made to emphasize the an-archaic nature of both institutions. This connection, according to Agamben, reveals itself most clearly with respect to time and history. Attesting its religious character in any sphere of experience, “Capitalism has no *telos*; it is essentially infinite yet, ... always in the act of ending.” (Ibid, 74) Thus, since it can never really end, “[C]apitalism also does not know a beginning; it is intimately an-archaic yet, precisely for this reason, always in the act of beginning again.” (Ibid, 75) This is the an-archaic, anarchic essential characteristic of capitalism, “which is perhaps the most anarchic power ever to exist, in the literal sense that it can have no *archē*, no beginning or foundation.” (Ibid) And lastly, “Capitalism inherits, secularizes, and pushes to the extreme the anarchic character of Christology.” (Ibid, 76)

§ [Archeology]

In *Thinking Through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question*, Leonard Lawlor claims that French philosophy in the sixties felt a need to rethink history without end and without origin. Perhaps for the first time in the history of philosophy, he writes, an entire system of thought was governed by a profound spatiality that came to be known as “transcendental topology,” or, in other words, “archeology.”¹⁶⁵

The word “archeology” belongs (at least philosophically) to Michel Foucault, but no less, also to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who characterized his own thinking using the same terminology already in the fifties. Merleau-Ponty’s proximity to Foucault lies in a concern for the profound spatiality of “archeology” that is characterized by a lack, gap, hollow, or divergence. An increasing distance between them lies in their characterization of this lack in terms of transcendence or immanence. Philosophy of immanence is based on three propositions: (1) the world is all that exists, is the entirety of existence, and for us, this entirety is the only horizon that can be known; (2) existence is the only source to any moral decrees, to legitimacy of political power, etc.; and (3) recognizing and assimilating the previous two propositions is the only available key for liberation that humans are capable of. There exists a philosophy of immanence that we can name “dogmatic” (Spinoza, Hegel, or the pantheistic religions are just a few examples) and another that we can name “critical,” which first and foremost recognizes human finitude and the incapability of our reason to reach the absolute, while recognizing that this immanence is finite rather than infinite. If we seriously consider the idea of finite immanence, we must also remain open to a dimension of transcendence which appears as a question rather than answer, an empty dimension of transcendence devoid of substances or ideas, whose sole function is to reflect back at us the sheer fact of the finitude of our existence. One does not address this dimension by speech but by silence, and this is where the primary distance between our French protagonists fundamentally manifests itself. Despite this distance, both Foucault and Merleau-Ponty put the past at the centre of their archeological projects, a past that is still effective, still present, a past that “has always already been present,” thus a past that

165 Lawlor, *Thinking Through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question*, 24–31.

was never present, a past free for the future.

But as in most cases where we can identify someone who preceded the supposedly first one to have conceptualized a certain matter, the case of the kind of past we are here interested in is no different. This past is, more or less, what Kant (1724–1804) called “a priori,” what Husserl (1859–1938) called “transcendental subjectivity” or “Phenomenological Archeology” (including Eugen Fink’s writings on Husserl), and what Freud (1856–1939) called “the unconscious.” These three thinkers thus constitute the prehistory of the concept of “archeology.” Therefore, a concise summation of their ideas of archeology is apposite and will be carried out in reverse chronology in order to come full circle to Kant, who is the main influence on Foucault’s concept of archeology [though Foucault is not always in keeping with Kant, and at times even contradicts Kant and Husserl (for example, his accusation of phenomenology being a “transcendental narcissism” or his wish to “free history from the grip of phenomenology.”)]¹⁶⁶

According to Lawlor, by means of investigating the past, archeology concerns itself in the transformation of the present. This concern comes from psychoanalysis (which is concerned, among others, with curing the hysteric, and not for investigating the past for its own sake), thus paradoxically archeology is, in fact, interested in the future. This means another two characteristics of archeology: on the one hand, as Freud says, the past that one returns to is always incomplete (and so the curing of the hysteria is always incomplete), thus the future cure is based (in addition to an incomplete past) on a reconstruction that is inventive; on the other hand, in order to find a future cure, the past must remain as a present and not really as a past—it must be conserved. Freud draws an analogy between the concept of the mind and ancient Rome, where everything is preserved, and thus the historical sequence of the mind is represented by juxtaposition in space; however, this is not a perfect analogy since in Rome there are intentional demolitions, whereas in the mind there are

166 Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 203.

unintentional traumas (that can destroy remains of the past).¹⁶⁷ Although the past has an incomplete nature, the past remains intact in the unconscious (the processes of the unconscious are timeless for Freud, thus we should accept that there is an absolute memory, memory not relative to consciousness). The idea of an absolute memory implies the fourth characteristic of archeology: the displacement of the conscious subject. The analyst is like an explorer who finds ruins and who can operate in two ways: either to ask the inhabitant (patient) about the history and meaning of these remains or to encourage the inhabitant to excavate the scene; then things are deciphered (Freud's slogan is "stones talk"). This leads to the fifth characteristic: the dead monuments that nevertheless speak.

In sum, the philosophical concept of archeology is characterized by the following: its investigation of the past concerns the future; the past it investigates is incomplete; yet, the past is conserved, juxtaposed, and simultaneous with the present; present consciousness is not the object of archeological investigation; and the object of interest is the monument that speaks for itself.

In his interpretation of Husserl, Fink defines Husserl's phenomenology in terms of the problem of Being or human access to Being through experiences. These experiences are not given (to consciousness) immediately but are mediated by tradition and forgetfulness, and in order to overcome this distance phenomenology engages in a regressive inquiry which aims at "re-establishing" what Fink calls "the initial knowledge forgotten in the buried traditions" and even aims at "returning to the immediate knowledge of the Being from which the traditions, even though they obscure, derived."¹⁶⁸ This regressive inquiry is not the psychological origin, a genesis of human thought, or psychological development. Instead, the phenomenological regressive's question concerning the

167 Freud elaborates on the archeological metaphor to explain psychoanalysis in his essay "Constructions in Analysis": "[The Psychoanalyst's] work of construction, or, if it is preferred, of reconstruction, resembles to a great extent an archeologist's excavation of some dwelling-place that has been destroyed and buried or of some ancient edifice. The two processes are in fact identical, except that the analyst works under better conditions and has more material at his command to assist him, since what he is dealing with is not something destroyed but something that is still alive ... But just as the archeologist builds up the walls of the building from the foundations that have remained standing, determines the number and position of the columns from depressions in the floor and reconstructs the mural decorations and paintings from the remains found in the debris, so does the analyst proceed when he draws his inferences from the fragments of memories, from the associations and from the behaviour of the subject of the analysis." (Freud, "Constructions in Analysis [1937]," 259.)

168 Lawlor, *Thinking Through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question*, 29.

beginning of knowledge attempts to grasp the human intellect in its movement towards the Being. The consciousness or subjectivity that phenomenology interrogates is transcendental and also includes the unconscious. Fink distinguishes *Wissen* from *Erkenntnis*, thereby anticipating Foucault's distinction between *savoir* and *connaissance*.

Kant speaks of archeology in (at least) three places: in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, the context is the "faculty of designation" and thus concerns signs; in *The Critique of Judgment*, he speaks about the "faculty of Nature" that concerns signs and traces (archeology of nature distinguishes from natural history—the first describes *past* genera and species and thus passes through signs and traces, while the latter describes *present* ones and takes place by means of intuition); and in *Progress in Metaphysics*, as we saw earlier, he distinguishes between a mere history of philosophy (which presents the empirical and thus contingent order of how thinkers philosophized up to the present) and a philosophical history of philosophy (which is rational and necessary, thus *a priori*). Thus, Kant's philosophical archeology concerns not the contingent, successive order of the history of philosophy, but the rational and necessary order of philosophical concepts. Yet this order would still be historical since it would account only for this factual or singular set of concepts. Philosophical archeology will constitute, with this necessary and yet factual order, a historical *a priori*. This archeology, like that of nature, will proceed not by intuition but by means of signs. Kant's concept of philosophical archeology implies that archeology is a method of reading signs.¹⁶⁹

The prehistory of the concept of archeology, before Foucault and Merleau-Ponty, is summed up by Lawlor as follows: (1) archeology concerns signs and traces of the past—that is—mediation, thus archeology is not a form of intuition but a form of interpretation or regressive inquiry; (2) in the reading of signs, consciousness is displaced towards the unconscious that precedes it and had been conserved, and thus is incomplete. Therefore philosophical archeology is a kind of an-archeology—the complete origin is missing; (3) archeology thus investigates the space of the unconscious, a spatial order that precedes

169 In his erudite book on Kant's methodology, Charles Bigger claims that although Kant destroyed traditional epistemology and metaphysics, he simultaneously offered a method for philosophy to advance in a new way which he termed "archeology." Archeology stresses the role of the imagination in the constitution of the world, not in the sense of formulating the world from its own constructs, but rather that the imagination is founded in participation or dwelling.

consciousness or empirical/psychological genesis, thus is an order that can be called *a priori*; (4) although prior, this order is not an abstract *a priori*, but an *a priori* for these singular historical facts or signs; (5) in the investigation of this historical *a priori*, archeology overcomes a kind of forgetfulness that implies it consists in memory; and (6) this memory is not really a memory of the past (it is not interested in the past for its own sake) but rather its interest is the future.¹⁷⁰

Archeology, in Foucault, means the description of a record. The word “record” does not designate a mass of texts that have been collected at a certain period for a certain social group, but means and entails a discussion of rules. These rules define the limits of the forms of expressibility, of conservation, of memory, of reactivation, and of appropriation—these are the rules that a certain archeology seeks to describe, and therefore to analyze, a discourse’s conditions of existence.¹⁷¹

In an interview, Foucault refers to his conception of archeology, understood as the science of an archive of a given period:

By archeology I would like to designate not exactly a discipline, but a domain of research, which would be the following: In a society, different bodies of learning ... refer to a certain implicit knowledge (*savoir*) special to this society.... This knowledge is profoundly different from the bodies of learning that one can find in scientific books, ... but it is what makes possible at a given moment the appearance of a theory, an opinion, a practice.¹⁷²

From this discussion derives the discourses’ status of potential knowledge. Thus the Foucauldian archeology means (in this sense, and not exclusively) an archeology of knowledge where the archeological metaphor signals knowledge as a substratum that “lies beneath a surface and needs to be uncovered before it can be understood.”¹⁷³ It is the

170 Lawlor, *Thinking Through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question*, 31.

171 Foucault and Lotringer, *Foucault Live*, 39–40.

172 Ibid, 13.

173 Lawlor, *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, 13–19. It should be noted that “understood” might not be the most accurate choice of words here, since Foucault himself is very precise about one’s conception of (or operation on) knowledge: “Knowledge [*savoir*], even under the banner of history, does not depend on ‘rediscovery’ ... knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.” (Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 380.)

practice of an inquirer that deals with contingent historical facts regarding systems of knowledge, essentially through their lingual manifestations in written corpuses. These are not the formal rules of language, but the material rules that condition what can be said about the domain in question and thus condition the boundaries of a given “historical mode of thought”¹⁷⁴ or what Foucault calls the *episteme*.

Generally the concept of *episteme* is understood not as a world view, theory, or framework, but a set of elements from which a variety of conflicting world views, frameworks, and theories can be developed; in other words, the *episteme* reflects the relation that exists between discourses (a term that differs from another Foucauldian term, the *Archive*, which designates the set that encompasses these discourses).¹⁷⁵ ¹⁷⁶ The historiographic method of archeology aims to reveal the differences or forms of non-identity between the discourses rather than an underlying common identity that unites them.

Foucault’s archeology of knowledge does not have a purposely epistemological aim (reflecting upon the nature of knowledge in general), nor is it “*épistémologie* in the French sense ... a philosophical account of the nature of scientific knowledge,”¹⁷⁷ rather it is a historical project that by going deep into a given field’s cognitive structure, into its level of *savoir* (rather than operating merely at the level of *connaissance*, that is, “the concepts

174 Foucault’s definition to “Philosophical Archeology” is the history of what makes necessary a certain form of thought [“L’histoire de ce qui rend nécessaire une certaine forme de pensée.”] (Foucault, *Dits et écrits II*, 211.)

175 Foucault defines the *Archive* as the ground rules that determine the appearance and disappearance of enunciations, and its analysis as the conduction of archeology. For further discussion, in this context, see Östman, “Philosophical Archeology as Method in the Humanities. A Comment on Cultural Memory and the Problem of History,” 81–84. Östman extracts, regarding Foucault’s methodology, the following: (1) the *Archive* is not a form of storage which is given a priori; (2) archeology is not the gathering of cultural traces; (3) archeology examines language as lingual events in reality, that is, conditions of possibilities; (4) the *Archive* is similar to the paradigm—neither a priori nor a posteriori but contemporary; and (5) archeology considers texts (or cultural artifacts at large) as *monuments* rather than *documents*.

176 Agamben directly discusses Foucault’s notion of the *Archive* in Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 143–6.

177 Lawlor, *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, 14.

and theories of particular sciences”),¹⁷⁸ also has epistemological repercussions.¹⁷⁹

At the level of individuals, the *episteme* “provides a place from which subjects speak and know,”¹⁸⁰ by limiting their potential for development. In *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault gives a methodological reflection designed to provide historical accounts that “are not centered around the activities of human subjects and ... have no place for a transcendental subject that is the source of historical meaning.”¹⁸¹

In his account of the “Foucauldian subject,” Alain de Libera maintains that an unequivocal link exists between Foucault’s rejection of the subject and his views on history; therefore criticizing (in the footsteps of Foucault) the role played by the sovereignty of consciousness (and by the sovereignty of subject) in history, and opposing the idea of continuous history. He quotes from *The Archeology of Knowledge* at length:

Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject — in the form of historical consciousness — will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode. Making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and all action are the two sides of the same system of thought. In this system, time is conceived in terms of totalization and revolutions are never more than moments of consciousness. In various forms, this theme has played a constant role since the nineteenth century: to preserve, against all decentrings, the sovereignty of the subject, and the twin figures of anthropology and humanism.¹⁸²

Thus, according to de Libera, Foucault’s archeology not only aims to free history from the grip of the twin figures, that is, the constituent consciousness, but also challenges the

178 Ibid.

179 “Foucault’s account of knowledge ... provides an alternative to the Cartesian assumptions of privileged subjectivity and fixed rationality. By situating knowledge in a setting of social practices, Foucault is able to provide a framework that makes discontinuity a possible fact and subjectivity a constituted item. It is this alternative conception of knowledge that is Foucault’s true contribution to epistemic theory.” (Wartenberg, “Foucault’s Archeological Method: A Response to Hacking and Rorty,” 357.)

180 Lawlor, *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, 16.

181 Ibid.

182 de Libera, “Subject (Re-/decentred),” 15; Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 12.

transcendental dimension as such.

[Continue Reading]

§ [Historical *a priori*]

The second part of *The Use of Bodies* (titled “An Archeology of Ontology”), Agamben’s final publication in his celebrated, decades-long series *Homo Sacer*, proposes to ascertain the current possibility to access first philosophy, or as Agamben synonymously paraphrases it, ontology.¹⁸³ ¹⁸⁴ First philosophy “opens and defines each time the space of human acting and knowing, of what the human being can do and of what it can know and say;”¹⁸⁵ however, this space, the access to first philosophy, at least since Kant, has become so problematic that it is thinkable, as per Agamben, only in the form of an archeology. In Agamben’s studies, any archeological movement necessarily involves a relation, or is necessarily executed in relation, to language (that is beyond the obvious fact that a theoretical study is usually realized in and through language), thus ontology is considered by him as the originary place of the historical articulation between language and world, and preserves in itself the memory of the anthropogenesis (the becoming human of the human being), of the moment when that articulation was produced.¹⁸⁶ Anthropogenesis is not a completed event of the past, but rather the event that never stops happening, a continuous process of the becoming human and remaining (or becoming) inhuman of the human being. First philosophy is the memory and repetition of this event: “it watches over the historical *a priori* of *Homo sapiens*, and it is to this historical *a priori* that archeological

183 Ancient and medieval philosophy defined Metaphysics according to its subject matter, thus interchangeably considered it as the science which investigates “being as such,” “the first causes of things,” and “things that do not change.” The origin of the word “metaphysics” is uncertain but most probably was given by the editors of Aristotle’s corpus to a series of fourteen books he wrote in order to distinguish them from his previous writings on physics (or nature); hence books that come, and should be read, after (meta) those of physics which are characterized by the centrality of the concept of “change”, the prime characteristic of nature. Thus, Metaphysics for Aristotle deals with all things unchangeable, and he identified first philosophy with “being as such.” At the seventeenth century, a shift occurred in the definition of metaphysics’ subject matter, as subjects previously considered under physics were now considered as conceived under metaphysics, such as mind-body relation or free will. Metaphysics becomes a general category for various, exclusively unclassified, philosophical problems. Roughly at the same time, in order to overcome the conceptual and categorical perplexity of classification, Ontology becomes the science that particularly investigates “being as such.”

184 This discussion, in fact, was already started in earlier works, especially in Agamben, *The Open*, 79–80.

185 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 111; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1127.

186 Elsewhere, Agamben writes: “[B]eing is the dimension opened to humans in the anthropogenetic event of language; ... being is always, in Aristotle’s words, something that ‘is said.’” (Agamben, *The Adventure*, 42.)

research always seeks to reach back;”¹⁸⁷ and additionally:

[w]hat is in question ... in the Aristotelian ontological apparatus—and more generally, in every historical transformation of ontology ... is the articulation between language and world that anthropogenesis has disclosed as ‘history’ to the living beings of the species *Homo sapiens*. Severing the pure existent (the *that it is*) from the essence (the *what it is*) and inserting time and movement between them, the ontological apparatus reactualizes and repeats the anthropogenesis event, opens and defines each time the horizon of acting as well as knowing, by conditioning, in the sense that has been seen as a historical *a priori*, what human beings can do and what they can know and say.^{188 189}

Shortly thereafter Agamben remarks succinctly: “In the preface to *Les mots et les choses* (1966), Foucault uses the term ‘historical *a priori*’ to define that which, in a determinate historical epoch, conditions the possibilities of the formation and development of knowledges.”¹⁹⁰ He continues (in a long footnote):

187 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 111; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1127.

188 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 128; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1143.

189 Why do we have the idea of historical *a priori*? Why does philosophy seem to need the historical *a priori*? And additionally, why is the historical *a priori* linked to language? In Agamben’s thought, the connection between the two indicates a definition of what is at stake in philosophy. The connection exists because philosophy is not simply a set of conceptual statements (doctrine, cognitive formulation), but is constitutively linked with the anthropogenesis, with the becoming human of man, and this archi-event (anthropogenesis) is the historical *a priori* of philosophy. First philosophy (or Metaphysics) has to do with the becoming speaking of the animal *homo*. Philosophy is a remembrance, each time, of the articulation between man and language and between language and the world. The word “remembrance” does not mean a memory in the common sense, but a repetition, a renewed experience, of the junction between language and man and between animal and man (between the inhuman and man; between becoming human in man). Anthropogenesis is the “archi” historical *a priori* since it is always in the process, we can never consider it as completed, we are always in the process of becoming human therefore we are always animals. Thinking (or philosophy) for Agamben means to experience anew the connection between becoming human and remaining inhuman (and therefore this connection is kept, in philosophy, in question). Thus, philosophical archeology is immanent and constitutive to philosophy; it means going back (archeologically) to the repetition and remembrance of this event.

190 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 112; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1127–28. The term “historical *a priori*” (which appears for the first time, in Foucault, in *History of Madness* (1961) albeit as “concrete *a priori*”) is used in *The Order of Things* to demonstrate that the prominent nineteenth-century discourses on life, labour, and language (biology, Marxism and linguistics, respectively) all emerge in the context of the same historical *a priori*: “the search for new practices of analysis in the wake of the epistemic breakdown of representation in the early modern period.” (Lawlor, *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, 201.)

More generally, Foucault is consistent in his conception and use of the term “historical *a priori*,” which is essentially used as part of Foucault’s critique of our modern conception of history as a continuous, dialectical, and above all, progressive process, otherwise referred to as the “philosophical myth of history.” (Aldea and Allen, “History, Critique, and Freedom: The Historical *a priori* in Husserl and Foucault,” 7.)

The expression is problematic, because it brings together two elements that are at least apparently contradictory: the *a priori*, which entails a paradigmatic and transcendental dimension, and history, which refers to an eminently factual reality. It is possible that Foucault had drawn the term from Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*, which Derrida had translated into French in 1962, but certainly not the concept, because while in Husserl the *historisches Apriori* designates a sort of universal *a priori* of history, it instead always refers in Foucault to a determinate knowledge and to a determinate time.¹⁹¹

The footnote continues—

And yet, if it does not in any way refer back to an archetypal dimension beyond history but remains immanent to it, its contradictory formulation brings to expression the fact that every historical study inevitably runs up against a constitutive dishomogeneity: that between the ensemble of facts and documents on which it labors and a level that we can define as archeological, which though not transcending it, remains irreducible to it and permits its comprehension. Overbeck (as was articulated, somewhat similarly, earlier) has expressed this heterogeneity by means of the distinction, in every study, between prehistory (*Urgeschichte*) and history (*Geschichte*), where prehistory does not designate what we usually understand by this term—that is, something chronologically archaic (*uralt*)—but rather the history of the point of emergence (*Entstehungsgeschichte*), in which the researcher must settle accounts with an originary phenomenon (an *Urphänomen* in Goethe's sense) and at the

“Although knowledge's pose of objectivity conceals the historical nature of Man from our normal view, Foucault's archeology is intended to provide a clear perception ... that allows us to see the entire framework of social institutions tied to the human sciences as a transient historical development. Foucault's view of the repressive nature of modern society makes this awareness of transience a liberating one.” (Wartenberg, “Foucault's Archeological Method: A Response to Hacking and Rorty,” 361.)

191 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 112; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1127–28. It can be argued that Foucault's conception of the historical *a priori* derives, not only from new approaches to the history of science developed by Bachelard and Canguillhem, and from Husserlian phenomenology, but also (and essentially) from the historical turn that German philosophy took around the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, beginning with Kant's idea of “philosophical history of philosophy” [first explicated in the first edition to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (though by the wording “history of pure reason”) and later in his essay of the “Progress of Metaphysics”] and subsequent developments by Karl Leonhard Reinhold and Hegel.

Foucault's archeology is similar to the philosophical archeology that Kant proposes in the sense that “instead of appealing to universal and necessary principles to explain the historical development of philosophy, Foucault reconstructs the order of scientific knowledge in different historical periods.” (McQuillan, “Philosophical Archeology and the Historical A Priori: From Kant to Foucault,” 153.) This Foucauldian archeological approach is a trace back to a small set of principles, and has resonance with Kant's essay on the “Progress of Metaphysics,” which suggests some *a priori* principles that make certain ways of thinking necessary.

same time with the tradition that, while it seems to transmit the past to us, ceaselessly covers up the fact of its emergence and renders it inaccessible. One can define philosophical archeology as the attempt to bring to light the various historical *a priori*s that condition the history of humanity and define its epochs. It is possible, in this sense, to construct a hierarchy of the various historical *a priori*s, which ascends in time toward more and more general forms. Ontology or first philosophy has constituted for centuries the fundamental historical *a priori* of Western thought.¹⁹²

According to Agamben, from an archeological perspective that herein attempts to reopen access to a first philosophy, the fact is that it is precisely the impossibility of a first philosophy that has become the historical *a priori* of the present time, beginning with Kant. This impossibility (which Kant called *Metaphysics*) is the true Copernican turn of Kantian critique (rather than the position of the subject).¹⁹³ Foucault, claims Agamben, had tried to rescue the survival of the impossibility of metaphysics with the stronghold of the transcendental (that is, “Being”), but the transcendental “necessarily entails a displacement of the historical *a priori* from the anthropogenesis event (the articulation between language and world) to knowledge, from a being that is no longer animal but not yet human to a knowing subject.”¹⁹⁴ First philosophy becomes philosophy of knowledge.

192 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 112; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1127–28.

193 Philosophy is not usually conceived in terms of the “archi” historical *a priori*, with the becoming human of man, mainly due to the current primacy of the cognitive paradigm in Western culture. Especially since Kant, philosophy has become a doctrine of knowledge or condition of knowledge, as if what is at stake in philosophy is the definition of the possibility of knowledge. We can think of the historical *a priori* as a specificity of individual philosophers. For example, Kant’s historical *a priori* is the impossibility of metaphysics (or the impossibility of first philosophy). Kant starts from the impossibility of metaphysics and tries in some way to make it possible again, but in order to do so he has to confine metaphysics to the transcendental, exclude it from any empirical and historical reality. This is the idea of the “Noumenon”—the space of metaphysics is a void space, transcendental space. Thus, by trying to save metaphysics, he in a way eliminated it, because philosophy after Kant was under the assumption that Kant had found a fortress in the transcendental, but this fortress eventually turned out to be a trap (as post-Kantian philosophers remained trapped in this fortress). Trying to escape from conceiving metaphysics as a concrete empirical science, Kant transformed metaphysics into the transcendental, but remained trapped in what he thought was a fortress. Philosophy, in the second half of the nineteenth century, until Heidegger, is an attempt to escape from the transcendental towards Ontology (for example, the work of Nietzsche, also with his attention to language, as well as consecutively, the linguistic turn as the historical *a priori* which substitutes for the transcendental).

In a way (as Agamben suggests us), our task today is to get rid of the transcendental and understand it in a different way. From a Kantian point of view, the experience of the transcendental is that of a void space that one cannot make any empirical statement about; on the contrary, we can say that the experience of language is an archeology, a concrete investigation of language, etc. No longer is the metaphysical space a void space, but now archeology can be considered as a proper metaphysical field.

194 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 112; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1128.

Philosophers such as Nietzsche, Benjamin, Foucault, and Benveniste sought a way out of the transcendental by shifting the historical *a priori* back from knowledge to language, by isolating each time a dimension that called into question the pure fact of language, the pure being given of the enunciated, before or beyond their semantic content. “The speaking being or enunciator has thus been substituted for Kant’s transcendental subject, and language has taken the place of being as historical *a priori*.”¹⁹⁵

Moreover, according to Agamben, language has superimposed itself over being. Language no longer functions as a historical *a priori* that determines and conditions the historical possibilities of speaking human beings, but becomes totally identified with being, puts itself forward as a neutral ahistorical or post-historical effectuality that no longer conditions any recognizable sense of historical becoming or any epochal articulation of time. This means that our time is not determined by any historical *a priori*; in other words, we find ourselves at a post-historical time. From this perspective, Agamben’s attempt is to trace out an archeology of ontology, or to make a genealogy of the ontological apparatus that has functioned as the historical *a priori* of the West.¹⁹⁶

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195 Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 113; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1129.

196 “The Aristotelian ontological apparatus, which has for almost two millennia guaranteed the life and politics of the West, can no longer function as a historical *a priori*, to the extent to which anthropogenesis, which it sought to fix in terms of an articulation between language and being, is no longer reflected in it. Having arrived at the outermost point of its secularization, the projection of ontology (or theology) into history seems to have become impossible.” (Agamben, *The Use of Bodies*, 133; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 1147.)

§ [The Contemporary]

An early indication for thinking about the time structure of philosophical archeology can perhaps be found in an earlier text by Agamben titled *What is the Contemporary?*¹⁹⁷ Constructing his arguments on the basis of Nietzsche's ideas of historical time, and specifically on Nietzsche's understanding of the contemporary as the untimely, Agamben writes that those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands; but precisely because of this condition, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time. Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. Those who coincide too well with their time, those who are perfectly tied to it in every respect, are not contemporaries precisely because they do not manage to see it, they are not able to firmly hold their gaze on it.

Those who are contemporary, according to Agamben, are the ones who firmly hold their gaze on their own time so as to perceive not its light but rather its darkness. To perceive this darkness is not a form of inertia or passivity, but rather it implies an activity and a singular ability. This ability amounts to a neutralization of the light that comes from present time in order to discover its obscurity, its special darkness. The ones who can call themselves contemporary are those who do not allow themselves to be blinded by the lights of the century, and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows cast by those lights, of their intimate obscurity. But there is a second, reverse and complementary movement or perception: it is to perceive, in the darkness of the present, the light that strives to reach us but cannot—this is what it means to be contemporary. It is, first and foremost, a question of courage because it necessitates the ability not only to firmly fix one's gaze on the darkness of the era, but also to perceive in this darkness a light that, while directed towards us, infinitely distances itself from us. Our time, the present, is in fact not only the most distant but that which cannot in any way reach us. Attempting to grasp it requires courage, and indeed as Agamben writes elsewhere (though in the broad context of the Church, in

197 Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, 39–55.

reference to Benedict XVI's resignation of office—only the second resignation in the history of the Catholic Church): “[C]ourage is nothing but the capacity to keep oneself connected with one’s own end.”¹⁹⁸

There is another aspect, according to Agamben, to this special relationship with the past in which we can see how contemporariness carves itself into the present “by marking it above all as archaic. Only he who perceives the indices and signatures of the archaic in the most modern and recent can be contemporary.”¹⁹⁹ Being *archaic* amounts to being close to the *arche*, that is to say, the special type of origin that was already herein discussed, an origin that is “contemporary with historical becoming and does not cease to operate within it, just as the embryo continues to be active in the tissues of the mature organism, and the child in the psychic life of the adult. Both this distancing and nearness, that define temporariness, have their foundation in this proximity to the origin that nowhere pulses with more force than in the present.”²⁰⁰ In order to “enter” the present, we must perform archeology, a practice that does not, however, regress to a historical past in a mere genealogical fashion, but returns to that part within the present that we are absolutely incapable of living:

What remains un-lived is therefore incessantly sucked back towards the origin without ever being able to reach it. The present is nothing other than this un-lived element in everything that is lived. That which impedes access to the present is precisely the mass of what for some reason (its traumatic character, its excessive nearness) we have not managed to live. The attention to this ‘un-lived’ is the life of the contemporary. And to be contemporary means, in this sense, to return to a present where we have never been.²⁰¹

However, we should not naively assume a supposedly one directional, archeological movement in time. Our conception of contemporariness must also assume time’s ability to re-penetrate or refold back onto itself as if formed by porous structure, that is, being able to think time as splitting into several times, thus introducing to it an essential dis-

198 Agamben, *The Mystery of Evil: Benedict XVI and the End of Days*, 16.

199 Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, 50.

200 Ibid.

201 Ibid, 51–52.

homogeneity, a kind of caesura in which time is being inscribed. But, claims Agamben, “precisely by means of this caesura, this interpolation of the present into the inert homogeneity of linear time, the contemporary puts to work a special relationship between the different times. If, as we have seen, it is the contemporary who has broken the vertebrae of his time, then he also makes of this fracture a meeting place, or an encounter between times and generations.”²⁰² Thus the contemporary is not only the one who manages (via the double, two-sided movement in time) to capture, in the present, the darkness and the light that can never reach its destiny, but is also:

the one who, dividing and interpolating time, is capable of transforming it and putting it in relation with other times. He is able to read history in unforeseen ways, to ‘cite it’ according to a necessity that does not arise in any way from his will, but from an exigency to which he cannot not respond. It is as if this invisible light that is the darkness of the present cast its shadow on the past so that the past, touched by this shadow, acquired the ability to respond to the darkness of the now.²⁰³

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202 Ibid, 52. Agamben, as we will see, identifies Paul’s messianic time (the “time of the now,” the being-contemporary with the Messiah) as the paradigm par excellence for this (chronologically indeterminate) encounter.

203 Ibid, 53.

Part II—(Messianic) Time—History—Aesthetics: from Saint Paul to Walter Benjamin

1.2.1

§ [Messianic Time]

Agamben's philosophical archeology, as it is conceived with its postulations and purposes, its paradoxical necessity and precarious logic, its temporal structure and spatial architecture, *archai* and multiple nows, constitutes a comprehensive conception of history that is based on, and determined by, a certain understanding of time deeper and more elaborated than revealed thus far. Paraphrasing Agamben's own words, we can therefore ask: what is the Agambenian conception of time that is profoundly implicit in the Agambenian conception of history?

In *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, Agamben addresses this very question to Marx in an attempt to clarify why historical materialism has failed to elaborate a conception of time that compares with its concept of history, and as a result, retained a conservative temporal framework which supposedly withheld the fulfillment of a promised, yearned revolution. Based on the assumption that every conception of history is accompanied by a certain experience of time that conditions it, and likewise that every culture adheres to a particular experience of time that requires a corresponding alteration of this experience once a new culture or revolution is undergoing, Agamben claims that Marx's dictum of "changing the world" also required the changing of time, a change that unfortunately never occurred since Marx made recourse to ancient theses and the concept of time dominant in Western culture. Eventually Marx harboured a revolutionary concept of history and a traditional experience of time: "The vulgar representation of time as a precise and homogenous continuum has thus diluted the Marxist concept of history."²⁰⁴

Thereafter, in order to show how Marx reached his conception of time, the (vulgarly

204 Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 91.

represented) time of the West is historically drafted (albeit briefly) by Agamben.²⁰⁵ He describes the evolution of the Western conception of time beginning with the Greco-Roman epoch, which conceived of time as circular and continuous: “Circular movement, which guarantees the unchanged preservation of things through their repetition and continual return, is the most direct and most perfect expression (and therefore the closest to the divine) of the zenith of the hierarchy: absolute immobility.”²⁰⁶ For example, in Plato’s *Timaeus*, time is measured by the cyclical revolution of the celestial spheres and defined as a moving image of eternity. Aristotle, in the *Physics*, confirms the circular nature of time which has no direction, no beginning, middle, or end; and in the *Problemata*, Aristotle concludes that from this perspective we cannot say whether one lives before or after, for example, the Trojan War.

However, the fundamental character of the Greek experience of time, which for two millennia dominated the Western representation of time, is its precise, infinite, quantified continuum. Aristotle defines time as “quantity of movement ... and its continuity is assured by its division into discrete instants [the now], analogous to the geometric point. ... The instant ... is a pure limit which both joins and divides past and future. As such, it is always elusive, ... in dividing time infinitely, the now is always ‘other’; yet in uniting past and future and ensuring continuity, it is always the same.”²⁰⁷ This is the instant’s paradoxically nullified character, and the basis for the radical “otherness” of time and for its “destructive” character.

Western man’s incapacity to master time and its obsession with handling it, according to Agamben, originate from this Greek conception of time as a quantified and infinite *continuum* of precise fleeting instants; thus man, based on this representation of time, has no real experience of historicity.²⁰⁸

Greek philosophy deals with time often through *Physics*—things in the world are “inside” time (that is objective and natural), each thing inhabits a place, so it inhabits time.

Time (with its destructive character), for the Greeks, destroys things. Thus,

205 For a tangential discussion, see Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, 139–63.

206 Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 92.

207 Ibid, 93.

208 See also Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, 195–202.

Herodotus in *Histories*, which marks the beginning of the modern conception of time, writes that he “puts forth the fruit of his researches, so that time may not erase men’s undertakings,”²⁰⁹ and by that confirms the ahistorical nature of the ancient concept of time.

The next major metamorphosis in the conception of Western time, analyzes Agamben, was initiated with the rise of Christianity. The Christian experience of time is the antithesis to the Greco-Roman one, as it conceives of time as a straight line. The world is created within time, from Genesis to the Apocalypse, while (according to French historian Henri–Charles Puech) “[i]ts duration comprises neither the eternal nor the infinite, and the events which unfold within it will never be repeated.”²¹⁰ Moreover, this conception of time has direction and purpose, and a central point of reference, that is, the incarnation of Christ. The eternal repetition of Paganism, where nothing is new, is replaced with the idea that everything happens only once, that every event is unique and irreplaceable. The history of humanity is the history of salvation and the progressive realization of redemption whose foundation is God.

Christianity, claims Agamben, thus lays the foundation for the experience of historicity, although the (ancient) idea of time as continuous and quantifiable has not been abolished, just displaced from the movements of the celestial stars to that of man’s interior duration. Nonetheless, “time thus interiorized remains the continuous succession of precise instants of Greek thought.”²¹¹ The ancient circular representation of Greek metaphysics returns to Christian thought: eternity, the regime of divinity, with its static circle, tends to negate the human experience of time; the discrete, fleeting instance intercepts the wheel of eternity.

A further development in the conception and representation of time, as Agamben describes it, was introduced by the modern age. The modern conception of time is a secularization of rectilinear, irreversible Christian time, albeit devoid of the notion of an end or any meaning except for regulating our sense of before and after. This homogeneous, rectilinear,

209 Quoted in Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 94.

210 Quoted in Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 94.

211 Ibid, 95.

and empty representation of time is a result of modern mechanics, which, according to Agamben, prefers rectilinear over circular motion. Notions of before and after were vague and empty for antiquity and for the modern they seem to have meaning in and of themselves.

As Nietzsche grasped:

the idea governing the nineteenth-century concept of history is that of 'process'. Only process as a whole has meaning, never the precise fleeting *now*; but since this process is really no more than a simple succession of *now* in term of before and after, and the history of salvation has meanwhile become pure chronology, a semblance of meaning can be saved only by introducing the idea [...] of a continuous, infinite progress.²¹²

Under the influence of the natural sciences, progress becomes the guiding category of historical knowledge, and behind the apparent triumph of historicism²¹³ in the nineteenth-century lies a hidden negation of history that is modelled on the natural sciences.²¹⁴

The last, crucial transformation (prior to Marx) occurred, as one can expect, with Hegel. Hegel based his idea of time on the Aristotelian model of the precise instant, conceiving the *now* as a point. This now ("which is nothing other than the passage of its being into nothingness" and vice versa) is eternity as true present. "The conjunction of spatial representation and temporal experience which dominates the Western concept of time is developed in Hegel as a conception of time as negation and dialectical dominion of space."²¹⁵ For Hegel, the instance (or time) is a negation of negation. "Time," he writes,

212 Ibid, 96–97.

213 "Historicism" refers to the study of the past in the past's terms; it seeks to understand the meaning and value of the past as it would have been understood at the time it happened. By contrast, "Presentism" (See Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experience of Time*) means to interpret and evaluate the past in terms of presently accepted values and understanding. Presentism holds that it is not possible to understand events in terms of their "historicity," while historicism holds that events can and should be understood in terms of their historicity. Historicity refers to the actuality and authenticity of events in the past. We can date an event in the past but our understanding of its meaning will be bound to the present point of departure from which we seek to understand it.

214 Lévi-Strauss thus argued for an idea of the discontinuous nature of historiography, against any objective historical continuity. He rejected the equation of history and humanity. This does not mean the abandonment of history but rather the achievement of a more authentic concept of historicity.

215 Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 96–97.

“is the thing existing which is not when it is, and is when it is not: a half-glimpsed becoming.”²¹⁶ In the Hegelian system, time is the necessity and destiny of the unfulfilled spirit, which must *fall* into time, and history is essentially a gradual process. “Like time, whose essence is pure negation, history can never be grasped in the instant, but only as total social process.”^{217 218}

Marx’s conception of history is different. He understands history not as something into which man *falls*, but as man’s original dimension as species-being, as being with the capability of generation, producing itself from the start as a universal individual. History is not determined (as in Hegel and the historicism that derives from him) by an experience of linear time as negation of negation, but by *praxis*, “concrete activity as essence and origin of man.”²¹⁹ *Praxis* is the founding act of history, the means by which the human essence becomes man’s nature and nature becomes man. History is man’s *nature*—man’s original belonging to himself. “*Man is not a historical being because he falls into time, but precisely the opposite; it is only because he is a historical being that he can fall into time, temporalizing himself.*”²²⁰

Agamben concludes the historical layout by claiming that although Marx never elaborated a theory of time adequate to his conception of history, it is clear that it cannot be reconciled with the Aristotelian and Hegelian concept of time as a continuous and infinite succession of precise instants. The fundamental contradiction of modern man is that he has yet to develop an experience of time adequate to his idea of history, thus man is split between his

216 Quoted in Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 98.

217 Ibid, 99.

218 In Agamben’s book *Language and Death*, the concept of negativity in Hegel’s thought is articulated. In a manuscript of 1803/04 and 1805/06, writes Agamben, Hegel describes the re-emergence of the spirit into light in the figure of consciousness. In the senses and in the imagination, consciousness has not yet come out into the light—it is still immersed in its “night.” He writes: “Man is the night, this pure nothing that contains everything in its simplicity, a realm endlessly rich in representations and images.... In phantasmagoric representations he is surrounded by night; suddenly a bloody head juts forth here, there another white figure, and just as suddenly they disappear. One glimpses this night when one looks into the eyes of another human—into a night, which becomes frightening; here each of us is suspended confronting the night of the world.” (Agamben, *Language and Death*, 41–42.)

219 Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 99.

220 Ibid.

being-in-time (as an elusive flow of instants) and his being-in-history (as the original dimension of man). The modern conception of history is twofold: diachronic reality and synchronic structure; and this double structure exemplifies the impossibility for man to take possession of his own historical nature.

In the timeframe depicted by Agamben, there were substantial attempts to criticize and challenge the common, dominant conceptions of time (respectively for each epoch), in particular the characterization of time as a “point”²²¹ alongside its properties of “continuity” and “quantifiability.” Agamben mentions just a few of these attempts, perhaps the ones most pertinent to his own thinking:

(1) In Gnosticism there appears an experience of time that is in radical opposition to both the Greek circular experience and the straight line of Christianity. It posits a concept whose spatial model can be represented by a broken line, thus striking against Antiquity’s unaltered duration, precise and continuous time. Based on Gnosticism’s (that is, as a religion) differentiation from both Greek cosmology and Christian redemption, the time of Gnosticism is an incoherent and inhomogeneous time: in an experience of interrupted time, when man (in a sudden act of consciousness) takes possession of its own condition of being resurrected, the Gnostic attitude is revolutionary as it “refuses the past valuing in it, through an exemplary sense of the present, precisely what was condemned as negative, ... and expecting nothing from the future.”²²²

(2) In Stoicism, too, we find a different conception of time, one that refuses the astronomical time of Plato’s *Timaeus*, an image of eternity, and the Aristotle’s notion of the mathematical instant. Against a homogeneous, infinite and quantified time that divides the present into discrete instants (thus producing an unreal time and an experience of deferral), the Stoics think of the experience of time as something neither objective nor removed from our control, but derived from the actions of man. Its model is the *kairos*,

221 The feature of the point (as a metaphysical-geometric concept) dominates Western thought in terms of the representation of time, and then is taken to be, as if in itself, the real time of experience. The concept of the instant as a “point” in time enables the opening through which the eternity of metaphysics insinuates itself into the human experience of time. Coming into conflict with this concept of the instant is the key to conceive a new idea of time.

222 Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 101.

“the abrupt and sudden conjunction where decision grasps opportunity and life is fulfilled in the moment.”^{223 224}

(3) In Heidegger, the critique of time as continuous and quantified is subjected to a radical critique in terms of repetition-destruction, which invades Western metaphysics as a whole. The originality of *Sein und Zeit* is that of the foundation of historicity alongside a more authentic experience of time. At the core of this experience there is no longer the precise, fleeting *instant* throughout linear time, “but the *moment* of the authentic decision in which the *Dasein* experiences its own finiteness, ... throwing itself forward in care, ... freely assum[ing] the destiny of its primordial historicity. Man does not fall into time, ‘but exists as primordial temporalization’.”²²⁵

Man can experience a new concept of time, in our time, according to Agamben. He gives a preliminary hint for this cognitive change—it might be (as an ancient Western myth makes it humankind’s original home) pleasure. Pleasure was understood by Aristotle as heterogeneous in relation to the experience of quantified, continuous time. The form of pleasure is perfect, whole, and complete, and does not occur in a dimension of time. Based on the postulate that the Western experience of time is split between eternity and continuous linear time, the dividing point through which the two relate is the instant as a discrete, elusive point. Pleasure is outside of any measurable duration but likewise its place is not in eternity. Against this conception there must be the true site of pleasure that is

223 Ibid.

224 Paul Chan portrays this concept clearly in his essay “A Time Apart.” He writes that *cairós* (or *kairos*) is a “time charged with promise and significance. ... time that saturates time,” as opposed to *chronos*, our familiar conception of time as measure, which is “a quantity of duration that changes in a uniform and serial order.” It is an empty time in the sense of time “without content or meaning beyond its own linear progressing.” *Kairos* designates the idea that time can be fulfilled and made anew through a rupture that crosses through it, radicalizing everything that happens thereafter. The relationship between *kairos* and *chronos* is not that of opposition, but “*chronos* is that in which there is *kairos*, and *kairos* is that in which there is little *chronos*,” thus *chronos* transforms into *kairos* by becoming a compressed form of itself: “In *kairos*, time is not kept: it is unleashed.”

Kairos also means the right time to act, an opportune moment, that becomes possible only “when time holds the most potential for change. ... when a crisis or rapture opens up and is catalysed with human will to create new potentialities.” Time holds import, writes Chan, only when something ends, thus apprehending one’s own end becomes a crucial task in the life of mortals. The fact that the end is ever near “charges every moment with promise and significance,” and propels the human “to find a shape of one’s own, before it is too late.”

225 Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 103.

neither precise, continuous time, nor eternity, but history. It is only as a source to happiness “that history can have a meaning for man. ... For history is not ... man’s servitude to continuous linear time, but man’s liberation from it: the time of history and the *cairós* in which man, by his initiative, grasps favourable opportunity and chooses his own freedom in the moment.”²²⁶ The full, discontinuous, finite, and complete time of pleasure is set against the empty, continuous, and infinite time of vulgar historicism; the chronological time of pseudo-history is set against the cairological time of authentic history.²²⁷

In a final return to Marx, true historical materialism (ideally) objects to continuous progress along finite linear time, and instead is ready to stop time because it acknowledges that pleasure is man’s original home. This is the experience of time in authentic revolutions, experienced as the halting of time and the interruption of chronology. Yet how can one conceive pleasure as a new conception of time, outside of both measurable duration and eternity? What is the pleromatic and cairological time of pleasure, appearing as the liberating time of history? What exactly does Agamben mean by “the halting of time”?

Agamben conceives of time (the authentic, liberating time of history) as exemplified by the idea of messianic time. Interpreted as the paradigm of historical time par excellence, messianic time is discussed, in Agamben’s corpus at large, based on a hybridization of two

226 Ibid, 104.

227 History for Agamben is further (and always) thought through the prism of language. In this sense, history means the exposition of a fracture produced through the discontinuity between language and speech, the semiotic and the semantic (in Benveniste’s terms), or sign system and discourse (in Foucault’s terms). Only because of this discontinuity man is a historical being. A human becomes a historical subject by removing itself from its wordless experience; this speechless moment remains in discourse as its condition of possibility, as the passage that shows the “fall” from pure language to the babble of speech. The transition from pure language to discourse marks a limit, which is history. By entering history man exposes the discontinuity of language and time, thus history is not a linear progression but made out of infinite gaps. Agamben’s use of paradigms shows this—the paradigm is neither diachrony nor synchrony but a crossing of the two. Like Foucault’s panopticon (which illustrates, at the same time, both the general functioning of Panopticism and the threshold of modernity), Agamben’s paradigms are analogical, moving from one singularity to the next. Their historicity resides in their immanent exposition as belonging to a group of historically specific singularities and, at the same time, their suspension of such belonging. History is a gathering, a relation that holds together individual images at an (ontological) zone of perfect equilibrium between generality and particularity. By grasping history’s discontinuities, historical inquiry sutures the phenomena that unfold through time, transforming the present into an emergent structure with an intelligible relation to its past. (Murray and Whyte, ed., *The Agamben Dictionary*, 92–93.)

illuminating historical manifestations of it: the one, in contemporary thought, is positioned in Benjamin; the other, as its origin, is traced back to an apostolic text of Paul.

In Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" one finds the idea of Jewish messianic intuition. In this text, Benjamin criticizes the conception of time that is based upon continuous and quantified properties, seeking a concept of history where instead of the nullified present of the metaphysical tradition, one can posit "a present which is not a tradition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop."²²⁸ Against the notion of historical progress, Benjamin puts forward the idea that makes the continuum of history explode; against the empty, quantified instant, he advances "the time of the now" constructed as a messianic cessation of happening. This "full time" is, for Benjamin, "the true site of historical construction."²²⁹ The messianic time of Judaism becomes (for Benjamin and others) a model for the conception of history. At this point it should be noted that the messianic is not a person, but an idea. The (Jewish) messianic concept means a defiance—it proclaims that the arbitrary historical circumstance that we find ourselves in is merely a coincidence and a temporary state. From creation to salvation, the belief is that everything could turn out otherwise; even if the present experience is difficult, it is not the end. The hope, the future, and the open horizon of potentiality signify the messianic idea.

We will come full circle back to Benjamin's understanding of the essence of history, but in order to do that, we first need to turn to that which Agamben identifies as the origin of Benjamin's conception positioned, as said above, in Paul. Agamben dedicates *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* specifically to the idea of messianic time. The book is based on a seminar given by Agamben in which, throughout its six days course, each day was dedicated to an individual part of the Epistle to the Roman's opening sentence: "*Paulos doulos Christou Iēsou, klētos apostolos aphōrismenos eis euaggelion Theou*" (Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart

228 Quoted in Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 102.

229 Ibid.

for the gospel of God.)²³⁰

The first day is dedicated to “*Paulos doulos Christou Iēsou*” (Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus) and opens with Agamben’s declaration that the book attempts, in part, to restore Paul’s Letters to the status of the fundamental messianic text for the Western tradition, since anti-messianic tendencies were operating (through translation and commentary acts) within the Church and the Synagogue in the past two thousand years. Both the Church and the Synagogue, according to Agamben, had a mutual interest to cancel out Paul’s Judaism, to “expunge it from its originary messianic context.”²³¹ For example, Jewish studies were until recently dominated, in regard to Paul, by Martin Buber’s book *Two Types of Faith* (1951), which advances a thesis that opposes the Jewish *emunah* (objective trust in the community, the faith *of* Jesus) to the Greek *pistis* (subjective recognition of a faith one judges to be true, the faith *in* Jesus), which is Paul’s faith. However, in recent years, scholars have re-examined Paul’s Jewish context and evaluated his letters as “the oldest and most demanding messianic texts of the Jewish tradition.”²³² In order to closely examine and demonstrate Paul’s Jewish messianic context, one needs to realize messianic institution’s paradoxical task of confronting an *aporia* concerning the very “structure of messianic time”—in order to understand the Pauline message, one needs to be able to fully experience such time; thus, we need to understand the meaning and internal form of the time he defines as *ho nym kairos*, “the time of the now,” then raise the question of how messianic community is possible.

The first step Agamben takes in the unfoldment of *ho nym kairos* (the time of the now) is to contextualize it in terms of language. Paul’s language (of the Letters) is Greek rather than translated Aramaic (as in Matthew and Mark); not belonging to any school or model, it “flows directly out of his heart” and is a “classic of Hellenism.” Paul was part of a Jewish diaspora community that thought and spoke in Judeo-Greek (as is the case with Ladino and Yiddish), read and cited the Torah in the Septuagint. The community was

230 Romans 1:1 (New International Version).

231 Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 2.

232 Ibid, 3. Among these scholars, Jacob Taubes (with his posthumous book *The Political Theology of Paul*) might be the most dominant voice for Agamben. Thus, *The Time that Remains* is dedicated in memoriam to Taubes.

subject to distrust since it was imbued with Greek culture and read the Torah in the language of Aristotle and Plato. “Yet,” claims Agamben, “there is nothing more genuinely Jewish than to inhabit a language of exile and to labor it from within, up to the point of confounding its very identity and turning it into more than just a grammatical language: making it a minor language, a jargon, or a poetic language. And yet, in each case it is also a mother tongue.”²³³ Being neither Greek nor Hebrew; neither *lashon-ha-qodesh* (Hebrew for “sacred language”) nor a secular idiom, is what makes Paul’s language so interesting and what allows for its relation to the structure of messianic time.

For Paul, as will become clear, the contraction of time (the “remaining” time) represents the messianic situation par excellence, the only real time. Agamben’s hypothesis supposes that the words of the incipit (first verse only, comprised of ten words in total: “Paulos doulos Christou Iēsou, klētos apostolos aphōrismenos eis euaggelion Theou”) contract within themselves the complete text of the Letter, recapitulate it (recapitulation is an essential term of the vocabulary of messianism). Thus, the understanding of the incipit guarantees the understanding of the text as a whole.

Language plays a significant role not only in the illumination of the opening sentence of the Romans but also for each individual word Paul makes use of. In the Hebrew context, the archetype for *metanomasia* (the changing of a name of a character) is found in Genesis 17:5, where God intervenes and changes the name of Abraham and Sarah by adding a single letter. Paul also changes his own name, from Saulos to Paulos, having, so it seems, a “new harmony” in mind—from Saulos, which is a regal name, to Paulos, which is insignificant, from grandeur to smallness (Paul in Latin means “small, of little significance”), defining himself as “the least of the apostles.” Paul is a surname, the messianic *signum* (surname; *ho kai* in Greek, or *qui et* in Latin, is the formula that normally introduces a surname, “who is also called”) that the apostle takes upon himself as he fully assumes the messianic vocation. Agamben writes: “*Metanomasia* realizes the intransigent messianic principle articulated firmly by the apostle, in which those things that are weak and insignificant will, in the days of the Messiah, prevail over those things the world

233 Ibid, 4–5.

considers to be strong and important.”²³⁴ The messianic separates the proper name from its bearer, thus we have only nickname or surname; Paul is also linked to the word *doulos*, “slave,” in the sense that slaves did not have any juridical status in antiquity, thus did not have a proper name. The apostle, like a slave, transformed from a free man into “the slave of the Messiah,” loses his name, thus calls himself by a simple surname.

Tracing the semantic history of the term *doulos* (servant, slave, the “slave of the Messiah”), New Testament lexicographers are habitually contrasting its juridical meaning (acquired in the classical world) to its religious connotation exemplified by the Hebrew word “Eved” (acquired in the Semitic world). In Paul, however, *doulos* refers to a profane juridical condition and the transformation this condition undergoes in relation to the messianic event. *Doulos* is opposed to *eleutheros* (free): “‘Slave of the Messiah’ defines the new messianic condition for Paul, the principle of a particular transformation of all juridical condition.”²³⁵

In the attempt to cancel out Paul’s Judaism, Agamben claims, language too plays a crucial role. From the Vulgate onwards, he writes, several terms are not translated from the Greek but are substituted with a loan translation: apostle for *apostolos*; evangel for *euggelion*; and Christ for *Christos*. One should remember that *christos* is not a proper name but is, already in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew term *mashiah*, Messiah. Paul is not familiar with Jesus Christ but rather with Jesus Messiah, and he never uses the term *christianos* (which at any rate only means “messianic”): “A millenary tradition that left the word *christos* untranslated ends by making the term *Messiah* disappear from Paul’s text ... We will therefore always translate *christos* as ‘Messiah’.”²³⁶

Agamben concludes the first (lecture) day as follows: “Our seminar ... seeks to understand the meaning of the word *christos*, that is ‘Messiah’. What does it mean to live in the Messiah, and what is the messianic life? What is the structure of messianic time?”²³⁷

The second day revolves around the word *Klētōs*. *Klētōs* means “calling.” It is positioned

234 Ibid, 10.

235 Ibid, 13.

236 Ibid, 16.

237 Ibid, 18.

at the centre of the verse, as a conceptual pivot, since the messianic calling is a central event in Paul's individual history. *Klēsis* (vocation, calling) indicates the particular transformation that every juridical status and worldly condition undergoes because of its relation to the messianic event. It is a change, almost an internal shifting of each and every single worldly condition by virtue of being "called." According to the apostle, this movement means a nullification (by vocation).

Paul's messianic life concerns the formula *Hōs mē* ("as not"), which is the ultimate meaning of *Klēsis*. Vocation calls for nothing and to no place, "*the messianic vocation is the revocation of every vocation,*"²³⁸ the vocation calls the vocation itself, as if it were an urgency that worked it from within and hollowed it out, nullifying it in the very gesture of maintaining and dwelling in it. This is what it means to live in messianic *Klēsis*.²³⁹

The meaning of comparison (or of the comparative), expressed by the particle *Hōs*, was for medieval grammarians not something of an expression of identity or simple resemblance, but rather was interpreted²⁴⁰ "as an (intensive and remissive) tension that sets one concept against another."²⁴¹ The Pauline *Hōs mē* is a special type of tensor; it does not push a concept's semantic field into that of another, but sets it against itself in the form of the "as not." Thus, the messianic tension does not tend towards elsewhere, nor exhaust itself in the difference between two things; according to the principle of messianic *Klēsis*, a condition is set in relation to itself, thus it revokes the condition and undermines it without altering its form—the messianic "makes it pass, ... prepares its end."²⁴²

In Paul, the messianic nullification performed by *Hōs mē* is completely inherent within *Klēsis* and does not happen to it at a second time, nor does it add anything to it. The messianic vocation is a zone of absolute indiscernibility between immanence and

238 Ibid, 23.

239 One of the important repercussions of vocation is that the voiding and transforming of every vocation frees it for a new usage. An ultimate experience (and experience of the last things) would entail experiencing penultimate things (which make up our everyday human and social condition) differently. Thus eschatology, as Agamben indicates elsewhere, "is nothing other than a transformation of the experience of the penultimate. ... Paul expresses the messianic relation between final and penultimate things with the verb *katargein*, which does not mean 'destroy' but, instead, 'render inoperative'." (Agamben, *The Church and the Kingdom*, 19.)

240 In the context of the "theory of intensive magnitudes," according to which every possible object of experience possesses a determinate "degree" of reality.

241 Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 24.

242 Ibid, 25.

transcendence, between the world and the future world. “Factual *Klēsis*,” writes Agamben, “set in relation to itself via the messianic vocation, is not replaced by something else, but is rendered inoperative.”²⁴³

Paul uses the term *chrēsai*, “make use,” in order to define messianic life in the form of the *as not*, thus to live messianically means “to use” *Klēsis*. Conversely, messianic *Klēsis* is something to use, not to possess. Paul contrasts messianic *usus* with *dominium*; thus, to remain in the calling in the form of the *as not* means never to make the calling an object of ownership, only of use. The messianic vocation is not a right nor an identity; it is a generic potentiality that can be used without ever being owned. To be messianic, to live in the Messiah, signifies the expropriation of any juridical-factual property (for example, free/slave, man/woman) under the form of the *as not*. As Agamben concludes the second day: “The coming of the Messiah means that all things, even the subjects who contemplate it, are caught up in the *as not*, called and revoked at one and the same time. No subject could watch it or act *as if* at a given point. The messianic vocation dislocates and, above all, nullifies the entire subject.”²⁴⁴

The third day reflects on the idea of separation, as exemplified by the word *aphōrismenos*, while relating this idea to Paul’s dialectic and the messianic event. *Aphōrismenos* is the past participle of *aphorizō* which means “separated.” Paul’s use of the word seems to be paradoxical since, on one hand, he characterizes his vocation in these words, referring to himself as the separated one, though on the other hand simultaneously calls for universalism, announcing the messianic end of all separation between Jews and pagans. How is it possible that Paul’s messianic announcement of non-division coexists with his self-definition as a “separated” one?

In order to understand the exact meaning of *aphōrismenos*, Agamben articulates the need to correctly situate the fundamental problem of universalism (or Paul’s supposed universalism and the “Catholic” vocation of the messianic community). *Aphōrismenos*, he writes, is the Greek translation to the Hebrew term *parush* or the Aramaic *p’rish*

243 Ibid, 28.

244 Ibid, 41.

(“Pharisee”). Paul denounces himself, being a Jew, as a “Pharisee,” that is, as someone who was separated. Pharisees were separated ones who “in distinguishing themselves from the mass while being essentially laypeople, insisted on scrupulous attention to rules of sacerdotal purity.”²⁴⁵ This is how they “separated” themselves from both pagans and *am-ha’aretz* (“the ignorant farmers who do not follow the law”). Pharisaism became a dominant class within Judaism around the end of the first century BCE, and distinguished itself from other factions by claiming that the law did not solely consist of the Torah (that is, as a written law) but also as the oral Torah (that is, in a tradition conceived as a “dividing wall” surrounding the Torah that prevents contact with any impurity).

By defining himself as *aphōrismenos* (“separated”), Paul alludes to his status as a “Pharisee,” referring and negating it in the name of another separation—no longer a separation according to the *nomos* (law), but to the messianic proclamation: “The wall that the messianic proclamation brings down, the one announced in *aphōrismenos*, is the same wall that the Pharisee had once maintained around the Torah in order to protect it from the *am-ha’aretz* and the *goyim*, the non-Jews.”²⁴⁶

The principle of the law is thus division. The fundamental partition of Jewish law is the one between Jews and non-Jews (in Paul’s words between *Ioudaioi* and *ethnē*). In the Torah, the concept of “people” is already divided between *am* and *goy* (the Septuagint translates *am* with *laos* and *goyim* with *ethnē*). The term *yehudi* (the Greek *Ioudaios*), which was once designated to the inhabitants of the kingdom of Juda, extends to all the members of the *am*. The term *ivri* (the Greek is *Hebraios*), which initially had a juridical overtone to it, designates in the rabbinical literature *lashon ha-qodesh* (“sacred language”) but was later on extended to the whole of Israel. Paul uses all three terms: *Israel*, *Hebraios*, and *Ioudaios*; thus, one can say that the name itself divides, that “the law constituting Israel as *am* is the principle of incessant division.”²⁴⁷

What is Paul’s strategy when confronting this fundamental division? How, from the messianic perspective, does he manage to neutralize the partitions of the law? This problem, according to Agamben, cannot be separated from the Pauline critique of the law,

245 Ibid, 45.

246 Ibid, 46.

247 Ibid, 48.

in which its *aporias* culminate in the messianic *theologoumena*. Confronting these partitions, Paul puts another division to work that does not coincide with the preceding ones, but that is not exterior to them either. The messianic aphorism works on the divisions of the laws themselves, imposing upon them a further cut, the cut of “flesh/breath.” Paul takes the fundamental division of the law, Jew/non-Jew, leaving no remainder or remnant, and further divides it in two via a new division, that of flesh/breath, a (new) division that divides the division itself. However, the messianic division introduces a remnant into the law’s overall division of the people, and Jews and non-Jews are constitutively “not all.” The significance of the “division of divisions” is that it involves an operation that divides the divisions of the law themselves, and renders them inoperative without ever reaching a final ground: “The messianic vocation separates every Klēsis from itself, engendering a tension within itself, without ever providing it with some other identity.”²⁴⁸

In order to illuminate this division, Agamben cites Maurice Blanchot, who writes: “Man is the indestructible that can be infinitely destroyed.”²⁴⁹ This paradoxical saying means that if man is indestructible, there is no human essence to destroy or recover, but if, at the same time, man can be infinitely destroyed, it also means that something other than this destruction remains, and that “man is this remnant.” In regard to Paul, there is no sense in speaking about universalism (thought of as a principle above cuts and divisions, and the individual as the ultimate limit of each division)—there is neither beginning nor end in Paul, only division of division, and then a remnant.

Paul receives the concept of the remnant from the prophetic tradition. The corresponding term in Hebrew is *she’ar* and *she’erit*. In this tradition the prophets address, supposedly, the whole of Israel but claim that only a remnant will be saved. The “remnant of Israel” is not a numeric remainder or portion, nor is it identical to Israel in the sense of survivals of a human catastrophe. The remnant “is closer to being a consistency or figure that Israel assumes in relation to election or to the messianic event. It is therefore neither the all, nor a part of the all, but the impossibility for the part and the all to coincide with themselves or with each other. *At a decisive instant, the elected people, every people, will*

248 Ibid, 53.

249 Quoted in Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 53.

necessarily situate itself as a remnant, as not-all.”²⁵⁰

This is the ultimate meaning of Paul’s aphorism (the messianic–prophetic concept of the remnant, his division of divisions): it is not a concept turning toward the future, but a present experience that defines the messianic “now”: “In the time of the now a remnant is produced.”²⁵¹

Paul’s dialectic brings three elements together without mediation. First, the all (*pas*), is the expression proper to the eschatological *telos*. At the end of time, as it is said, God will be “all in all.” Second, the part (*meros*) defines the secular world, the time under the law. Everything here is divided, is “in part.” Third, the messianic remnant that does not go beyond the part (as it results from the part’s division) is initially linked to this division. The messianic world, being the secular world, means that it is still in some way partial. “Nevertheless,” writes Agamben, “the remnant is precisely what prevents divisions from being exhaustive and excludes the parts and the all from the possibility of coinciding with themselves. The remnant is not so much the object of salvation as its instrument, that which properly makes salvation possible. ... The remnant is therefore both an excess of the all with regard to the part, and of the part with regard to the all.”²⁵² In the *telos*, when God will be “all in all,” the messianic remnant will exhaust its meaning, but in “the time of the now,” the only real time, there is nothing other than the remnant. Thus, the messianic remnant is the unredeemable that makes salvation possible.

On the fourth day, Agamben addresses the term *apostolos* (which, according to Agamben, is grammatically dependent upon *aphōrismenos* and defines its specific function). The meaning of *apostolos* comes from the Greek verb *apostellō*, to send forth. The apostle is an emissary of the Messiah Jesus and the will of God for the messianic announcement. The Hebrew antecedent found in lexicons is *Shaliah*²⁵³—a man who holds a mandate and is sent on his specific assignment (*Sheluhim*, in plural, are those who are sent to the Diaspora).

Why does Paul define himself as an apostle rather than a prophet? The explanation

250 Ibid, 55.

251 Ibid.

252 Ibid, 57.

253 The term *Shaliah* is essentially a juridical notion that in Judaism acquires a religious meaning.

to Paul's self-definition, according to Agamben, lies in the differences between the two figures. The legacy of the prophet (the *navi*) in Judaism, and in general in Antiquity, extends over the threshold of modernity and never completely vanished.²⁵⁴ The prophet has an unmediated relation to the "*ruah Yahweh*" ("the breath of Yahweh") and speaks on his behalf; the apostle, on the other hand, on his mission, searches independently for the words of the message. This is the first difference between them.

The second difference concerns their relation to the future: the prophet always speaks about a time to come, a time not yet present, while the apostle declares from the arrival of the Messiah, when prophecy is kept silent as it is now truly fulfilled. The time of the apostle is thus the present, and is the reason why Paul's technical term for the messianic event is *ho nyn kairos*, "the time of the now."²⁵⁵

The apostle must be distinguished from another figure, the visionary, with whom he is often confused, just as messianic time is often confused with eschatological time. The messianic announcement is often confused not so much with prophecy (which concerns the future) but with apocalypse (which contemplates the end of times). The apostle, however, does not live in the time of the *eschaton* (the end of time). The difference then between messianism and apocalypse, between the apostle and the visionary, is that the visionary sees the day of judgement, the last day, and describes what he sees, whereas the messianic is not the end of time but *the time of the end*.²⁵⁶ The messianic is the relation of every moment, every *kairos*, to the end of time and eternity. The apostle is not interested in the last day, but in the time that contracts itself and begins to end; or, in other words, the time that remains between time and its end. The messianic time, the time that the apostle lives in and is interested in, is neither the ordinary present (*olam hazzeh*, chronological time, the time between creation and the last day) nor the time that will come after the end of the world (*olam habba*, the time after the world, the apocalyptic *eschaton*).²⁵⁷ The

254 For instance, Aby Warburg marked both Nietzsche and Burckhardt as opposite kinds of *navi*, the first towards the future and the latter towards the past; Foucault defines the prophet as one of the four figures of truth-tellers.

255 In Judaism, prophecy is "something like a force or a tension that is in constant struggle with other forces that seek to limit it in its modalities, primarily in its time." (Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 60.) The first profound legitimate prophecy thus is time-marked with the destruction of the Temple in 587 BCE.

256 See also Agamben, *The Church and the Kingdom*, 8.

257 Greek-speaking Jews distinguished between *aiones*: *ho aion touto* (this aeon) and *ho aion mellon* (the coming aeon). (Agamben, "The Time that Is Left," 2.)

apostle is interested in the remnant, in the time that remains between the two times, “when the division of time is itself divided.”²⁵⁸ Therefore, messianic time should not be mistaken for eschatological time, thus making the specificity of what constitutes messianic time unthinkable. As opposed to attempts to understand the Christian conception of time (time oriented toward eschatological salvation, toward final end) as antithetical to modernity’s conception of time and history, Paul’s messianic time puts into question the very possibility of a clear division between the two worlds.

Additionally, the time between the Resurrection and the end of time (that is, the time that remains, the messianic time) means a radical transformation of our experience of time—it cannot be conceived in chronological terms but as time within (chronological) time, a time that transforms chronological time from within. Agamben writes (elsewhere): “On the one hand it is the time that time takes to end. But on the other hand it is the time that remains, the time which we need to end time, to confront our customary image of time and to liberate ourselves from it.”²⁵⁹ The time in which we believe we live in makes us powerless spectators of our own lives; the messianic time, however, is the time we ourselves are, when we grasp that we are nothing but that time. This is the only real time and to experience it we need to go through a transformation of ourselves and of our ways of living.

Agamben’s next step confronts the crucial need for an adequate representation of messianic time. How should this time be represented? The secular time, the *chronos*, spans from creation to the messianic event, that is, the resurrection of Jesus in which thereafter time contracts itself and begins to end. This contracted time, which Paul calls “the time of the now,” lasts until the *parousia*,²⁶⁰ the full presence of the Messiah, which coincides with the end of time (and which is nonetheless a point in time that remains indeterminate even if it is imminent). According to this description, messianic time does not however coincide with either the end of time nor with the secular chronological time (but is not outside the chronological time either). Messianic time is that part in secular time that undergoes an

258 Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 62.

259 Agamben, *The Church and the Kingdom*, 12.

260 “In Greek, *parousia* simply means presence (*par-ousia* literally signifies to be next to; in this way, being is besides itself in the present).” (Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 70.)

entirely transformative contraction. Thus, messianic time might be better represented as a “caesura which, in its dividing the division between two times, introduces a remainder into it that exceeds the division.”²⁶¹ In this schema, messianic time is part of secular time (but exceeds it chronologically), and at the same time, is part of eternity (but exceeds the future time). It is situated as a remainder with regard to the division between the two worlds. The problem with this representation of time is that it is based on spatial order (in the form of lines, points, and segments) that renders unthinkable the lived experience of time (the confusion between *eschaton* and messianic time is a prime example for that): spatial representations represent perfectly but make it also unthinkable; whereas reflecting upon the lived (or real) experience of time makes it thinkable but unrepresentable. Where does this gap between representation and thought, image and experience, come from? Is another representation of time possible?

In order to resolve this perplexity, Agamben draws on the idea of *operational time* (formulated in full by the French linguist and philologist Gustave Guillaume in his work *Temps et verbe*, which deals, in this sense, in the temporality of verbs). According to this idea, “the human mind experiences time, but it does not possess the representation of it, and must, in representing it, take recourse to constructions of a spatial order.”²⁶² The representation of time as an infinite line made out of two segments (past and future) separated by the cutting of the present (a representation he names “time-image”) is inadequate, according to Guillaume, since it presents time as if it were always constructed, but does not show time in the act of being constructed in thought. One needs to represent something not only in its achieved state but also in its various phases through which thought had to pass constructing it, thus: “Guillaume defines ‘operational time’ as the time the mind takes to realize a time-image.”²⁶³ As per Guillaume, language (which he investigates from the point of view of the Aristotelian distinction between potential and act) can organize the constructed image by referring it back to the operational time in which it was constructed; and in regard to the chronological representation of time, the process of forming the time-

261 Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 64.

262 Quoted in Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 65.

263 Ibid, 65–66.

image can be cast back onto the time-image itself (adding a projection to this process). The result is a chronogenetic time, “a time which includes its own genesis,”²⁶⁴ a new representation of time that is no longer linear but three-dimensional (pure state of potentiality, process of formation, and the state of final construction).

In his introduction to Guillaume’s book, Canadian linguistic Walter Hirtle maintains that in his attempt to reach a deeper level of language, Guillaume determines an insight that provided the cornerstone for all of his later theorizing, that is, “that something is potential *before* it is actual.”²⁶⁵ This led Guillaume to theorize about how we think the possible and the real, realizing that in order to represent an event (in subjunctive mood) one needs to give it precedence, must think it prior to thinking it as real (in indicative mood). The only time this becomes possible is the “‘thinking time’ required by the mental process of representing a verb.”²⁶⁶ Thus, the system of mood, as Guillaume names it, means that is it essentially a single, subconscious operation of thought, determined by the underlying principle of analysis: *operative time*. The grammatical system is a mechanism in the mind that produces successive morphemes (i.e., the smallest grammatical unit that carries meaning, in a certain language) at different moments in the operation of thought, “as a potential meaning determined by its relative position in the operation involved.”²⁶⁷ Each morpheme is defined according to its position in the micro-stretch of time required for a mental process to unroll. The operative time of the system determines the “notional chronology” of the morphemes involved and their respective potential meaning as the consequences of their position within the system. The processes of language, for Guillaume, thus determines everything that can be understood regarding it. Language resides in the depth of the mind as an organized set of possible processes. The potential and the actual in language thus link in a subconscious morphogenetic process in order to produce a word, showing that a word (once described as a “miniature of art”) must be assembled by the speaker before being used in a sentence. Guillaume’s perspective of operative time enabled him a holistic view of language in which the potential and the actual

264 Agamben, “The Time that Is Left,” 5.

265 Quoted in Guillaume, *Foundations for a Science of Language*, xiii.

266 Ibid.

267 Ibid.

are parts of a single phenomenon. Exploring further the passage from the potential to the actual, from system to sentence, Guillaume analyses the grammatical systems within the word, specifically those concerned with representing time within verbs (which he termed *chronogenesis*). His studies indicated that “all the individual grammatical systems of a language can be seen as particular cases of one general system of representation.”²⁶⁸ He thus looked for the most general system that provides the underlying structural mechanism of the word, and finally found it in the most transparent of all words—the article. The mental operation underlying the system of the article consists of double movement: the first, from the universal to the particular; the second, following on the first in operative “thinking,” from the particular to the universal. To each movement corresponds a sign: for the first (contractive movement), the indefinite article (*un, a*); for the second (expansive movement), the definite article (*le, the*). This form of the movements or this mechanism, for Guillaume, “could provide a representation of any variable relationship based on quantity ... and he evoked it to depict the relation within the verb between time as an infinite stretch and time as a finite stretch (the present).”²⁶⁹ This all-embracing language mechanism reflects one of the basic capabilities of human thought: the ability to generalize and to particularize.

Guillaume further writes: “Science is founded on the insight that the world of appearances tells of hidden things, things which appearances reflect but do not resemble. One such insight is that what *seems* to be disorder in language hides an underlying order — a *wonderful* order.”²⁷⁰ Guillaume speaks in terms of spatiality both in regard to things and order, thus it comes as no surprise to encounter his claim that “already to be found in *Temps et verbe* is the idea that time is constructed in terms of space on *n* dimensions.”²⁷¹ The monograph exemplifies, according to Guillaume, the construction of time on the model of space, according to the principle that time is not representable by itself but requires to base its representations on spatial characteristics. The representation of time, the *chronogenesis*, is a spatialization of time. When the human mind does not carry out the

268 Ibid, xiv.

269 Ibid, xvi.

270 Guillaume, *Foundations for a Science of Language*, 3.

271 Ibid, 6. Guillaume will continue developing the concept of the spatialization of time in his work *L'architectonique du temps dans les langues classiques*.

representation of time according to these measures, time has no representation; it does not mean that it does not exist but rather that it exists in thought only as our experience does: “The human mind ... has the experience of time, but has no representation of it (it must, therefore, invent this representation, which will be a spatialization, representability being a property of space, and of space alone).”²⁷²

Once applied to the problem of messianic time, the paradigm of operational time implies another time that is not entirely consumed by the “previous” representation of time,²⁷³ as if man produces, in regard to chronological time, an additional time that prevents him from perfectly coinciding with the time out of which he is able to make images and representations. The idea of operational time demonstrates our inability to coincide with our image of time since it effects a gap between our experience and conception of the present moment. This is not a time added from the outside of chronological time nor a time-supplement; it is a time within time, an interior time that measures the disconnection (and being out of synch, being non-coincidental) from our representation of time,²⁷⁴ “but precisely because of this, allows for the possibility of my achieving and taking hold of it.”²⁷⁵ The space that the messianic time opens between ourselves and our representations of time permits us access to this transformative force at every instant, and thus we take hold of chronological time in a manner determined by the messianic event.

Agamben proceeds and offers a first definition of messianic time: “[M]essianic time is *the time that time takes to come to an end*, or, more precisely, the time we take to bring to an end, to achieve our representation of time.”²⁷⁶ It is an operational time pressing from within chronological time, working and transforming it internally, “the time we need to

272 Ibid.

273 Messianic time, being the time it takes for a temporal representation to be accomplished, opposes secular time, which is a homogenous time comprised of completed “time-images” or representations. Secular time contains within itself a second time that is required for the completion of the construction of representation, yet remains unaccounted for.

274 The disjointedness of messianic time indicates presence by marking our non-coincidence with it. Moreover, the gap that operational time measures further marks the non-coincidence also of thought with language, that is, the impossibility of an absolute sustained self-presence. Thus, messianic time is the measure of the disconnection of both oneself from one’s image of time and subjective language. (Doussan, “Time and Presence in Agamben’s Critique of Deconstruction,” 198.)

275 Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 67.

276 Ibid.

make time end: *the time that is left us [il tempo che ci resta]*.²⁷⁷ Operational time, the time that remains, is what's left of time (as a remnant) once it has exhausted itself in the actual. Whereas our representation of chronological time separates us from ourselves as impotent spectators, messianic time, an operational time in which we take hold of ourselves, is the time that we ourselves have, "the only real time, the only time we have."²⁷⁸

Agamben reaches a point in the analysis where he can now better articulate the structure of messianic time in Paul. The messianic event is decomposed into two times: resurrection and parousia (the second coming of Jesus, and the full presence of the Messiah, both occur at the end of time). This decomposition implies the paradoxical tension between an *already* and a *not yet* that defines the Pauline conception of salvation, meaning that the messianic event has already happened (salvation has already been achieved), but in order to truly be fulfilled requires an additional time (thus not yet). This unusual scission introduces a constitutive delay or deferment into the messianic.²⁷⁹ The Pauline decomposition of presence thus finds its true meaning from the perspective of operational time: as operational time, as the amount of time needed to end representations of time, the messianic *ho nyn kairos* ("the time of the now") can never fully coincide with a chronological moment internal to its representation (the end of time as a time-image represented by a final point on a continuous line of chronology). But as an image devoid of time, it can never be grasped and thus tends to infinitely defer itself. The fallacious and inadequate representation of the end lies in changing operational time into a supplementary time added onto chronological time in order to infinitely postpone the end. Parousia does

277 Ibid, 68. Elsewhere appears a slightly different translation of the Italian: "*the time which is left to us.*" (Agamben, "The Time that Is Left," 5.)

278 Ibid. Paul twice uses the expression *ton kairon exagorazomenoi*, "buying up time," to convey the temporal condition of messianic time.

279 Agamben mentions Gershom Scholem's interpretation of messianic time according to which the messianic antinomy is defined as "a life lived in deferment" in which nothing can be achieved, that is, as if the messianic event is a transitional time that belongs to both eras and thus tends to be prolonged into infinity and renders unreachable the end that it supposedly produces. (Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 70.) Scholem's thesis (appearing in his essay "Towards an Understanding of the Messianic Idea of Judaism" of 1959) is also referred to by Agamben in "The Messiah and the Sovereign: Problem of Law in Walter Benjamin," where Agamben cites the following: "[M]essianism is animated by two opposed tensions: the first is restorative tendency aiming at *restitutio in integrum* [total reinstatement] of the origin; the second is a utopian impulse turned instead toward the future and renewal." (Agamben, *Potentialities*, 166.) These opposed forces explain the antinomies of messianism and its essential character ("a life lived in deferral and delay") in which nothing can be brought to fulfillment and nothing accomplished once and for all; thus messianism possesses a tension that never finds true release.

not mean the “second coming” of Jesus (a second messianic event that follows and subsumes the first one), it does not signal a supplement added to something in order to complete it nor a supplement that follows that can never reach fulfillment. Parousia for Paul highlights the innermost structure of the messianic event, inasmuch as it is comprised of two heterogenous times (kairos and chronos, operational time and represented time)²⁸⁰ that are coextensive but that cannot be added together. Agamben writes:

Messianic presence lies besides itself, since, without ever coinciding with a chronological instant, and without ever adding itself onto it, it seizes hold of this instant and brings it forth to fulfillment. ... The Messiah has already arrived, the messianic event has already happened, but its presence contains within itself another time, which stretches its *parousia*, not in order to defer it, but, on the contrary, to make it graspable. For this reason, each instant may be, to use Benjamin’s words, the ‘small door through which the Messiah enters.’ The Messiah always already had his time, meaning he simultaneously makes time his and brings it to fulfillment.²⁸¹

Moreover, Paul expresses messianic time via two complementary notions: *Typos* and *Recapitulation*. *Typos* means figure,²⁸² prefiguration or foreshadowing, and is used by Paul to establish a typological relation between every event from past time and *ho nyn kairos*, messianic time. The important thing, however, is not this symmetry but the transformation of time implied by this typological relation. The problem here is mainly concerned with a tension that clasps together and transforms past and future in an inseparable constellation. The messianic is not just one of two terms in this typological relation, *it is the relation itself*. The two ends of the *olam hazzeh* and the *olam habba* are contracted into each other without ever coinciding—this contraction is messianic time.²⁸³ For Paul, the messianic is not a third era situated between two times but rather a caesura

280 *Kairos* and *chronos* are opposed to each other as they are qualitatively heterogeneous. The relation between them is characterized in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*: “[C]hronos is that in which there is *kairos*, and *kairos* is that in which there is little *chronos*.” (Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 68–69.) *Kairos* (banally translated as “occasion”) does not have another time at its disposal; when we seize *kairos* we do not have another time, but a contracted and abridged *chronos*.

281 Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 70–71.

282 Of the concept of “figure” in relation to language, see Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 59.

283 Paul speaks about “for us, for whom the extremities of the times have met, are face to face” (quoted in Agamben, “The Time that Is Left,” 9), that is, the two extremities of the *olam hazzeh* and the *olam habba* contact one another, “their face-to-face is messianic time.” (Agamben, “The Time that Is Left,” 9.)

that divides the division between times and introduces a remnant, a zone of undecidability, in which the past is dislocated into the present and the present is extended into the past. Messianic time, according to Agamben, is neither the complete nor the incomplete, neither the past nor the future, but the inversion of both.²⁸⁴ This inverse movement is perfectly rendered in the Pauline typological relation as an area of tension in which two times enter into a constellation that the apostle called *ho nyn kairos*. The past (the complete) rediscovers actuality and becomes unfulfilled, and the present (the incomplete) acquires a kind of fulfillment.

A recapitulation of all things, from creation to the messianic “now,” is what messianic time does. This recapitulation of the past produces a *plērōma*, a saturation and fulfillment of *kairoi* (messianic *kairoi* are full of *chronos*, but abbreviated, summary *chronos*) that anticipates eschatological *plērōma* when God “will be all in all.” Messianic *plērōma* is therefore an abridgement and anticipation of eschatological fulfillment. The *plērōma* of *kairoi* is understood as the relation of each instant to the Messiah (each *kairoi* is immediate to God and not just the final result of a process, as in the case, writes Agamben, with the model Marxism inherited from Hegel). Each time is the messianic now, whereas the messianic is not the chronological end of time “but the present as the exigency of fulfillment, what gives itself ‘as an end’.”²⁸⁵

The widespread view of messianic time as oriented solely toward the future is fallacious. For Paul, the moment of salvation is not solely about the future, but on the contrary, recapitulation means that *ho nyn kairos* is a contraction of past and present, that the entire past is summarily contained in the present, that we will have to “settle our debts, at the decisive moment, first and foremost with the past.”²⁸⁶ The Pauline gesture has a double movement as it produces a tension (toward what lies ahead) on and out of what lies behind. This is why Paul, caught in this double tension, can neither seize hold of himself

284 Agamben’s idea of “inversion” is based upon Gershom Scholem’s text (dedicated to Benjamin) where Scholem maintains that messianic time is the time of inverse *waw* (*waw* is a Hebrew letter that, when added to a verb, “inverts” it from future to past time and vice versa.) See Scholem, “95 Thesen über Judentum und Zionismus.”

285 Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 76.

286 Ibid, 78.

nor be fulfilled.²⁸⁷

In the “Epistle to the Ephesians” (Eph 1:10), Paul writes: “[F]or the economy of the plenitude of time, all things, both in heaven and on earth, recapitulate themselves in the messiah.”²⁸⁸ Messianic time thus recapitulates all times, summates the whole history, now appears in the messianic now. The whole past is summarized and unfolds itself as a “figure,” not in the sense of simple foreshadowing but as “a constellation and a contraction of the two times, so that the whole past, the whole of history is, so to say, summarily contained in the present, and the claim of a remnant to posit itself as a whole finds here its foundation.”²⁸⁹ The summarized past of the messianic pertains to a special kind of memory where at its core one finds “the economy of salvation,” that is, a past that is exclusively individual past, thus a past that potentially opens up for man a new (past) possibility that enables him to “take leave from this past.”

The last two days of the seminar (fifth and sixth) unfold the phrase ending *eis euaggelion Theou* (“for the gospel of God”). In Paul, the Greek punctuation *eis*, which signals a general movement toward something, can take on a terminological quality. *Euaggelion* (like the Hebrew *bsora*) means the “announcement” and “joyful message” announced by the *euaggelos*, the messenger of joy. The term signifies both the announcement and its content.

As we saw earlier, the temporal structure implied by the apostle’s euaggelion differs from that of the prophet—the announcement refers not to a future event but to a present fact. Thus, there is an underlying connection between the trio announcement-faith-presence (euaggelion-pistis-parousia), exemplified by Origen’s writing: “*Euaggelion* is either a discourse [*logos*] which contains the presence [*parousia*] of a good for the believer, or a

287 Elsewhere, Agamben writes that messianic time, the being-contemporary with the Messiah, is the example par excellence for the term we encountered earlier, that is, “contemporariness,” exemplified by the one who manages to use the fracture of time as a meeting place for times and generations: “Not only is this time [i.e., “the time of the now”] chronologically indeterminate (the parousia, the return of Christ that signals the end is certain and near, though not a calculable point), but it also has the singular capacity of putting every instant of the past in direct relationship with itself, of making every moment or episode of biblical history a prophecy or a prefiguration (Paul prefers the term typos, figure) of the present (thus Adam, through whom humanity received death and sin, is a ‘type’ or figure of the Messiah, who brings about redemption and life to human being).” (Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, 53.)

288 Quoted in Agamben, “The Time that Is Left,” 9.

289 Agamben, “The Time that Is Left,” 10.

discourse which announces that an awaited good is present [*pareinai*].”²⁹⁰ What is a *logos* that can enact a presence for whomever hears it and believes in it?

Paul’s letter, according to Agamben, which contains the term *euaggelion* (and appears in the incipit and at the same time coincides with the content of the message announced) is thus the impossibility of distinguishing between the announcement and the content. At every point, the text of the letter is indistinguishable from the announcement and the announcement from the good announced.

This zone of indistinction is called *pistis*, faith, by Paul. “Paul defines,” writes Agamben, “the essential relation between *euaggelion* and *pistis* in the following terms: ‘the announcement is power [*dynamis*] for the salvation of he who believes [*panti to pisteuonti*]’”²⁹¹—this definition implies that inasmuch as the announcement entails *dynamis*, potentiality (*dynamis* signifies power as much as it does possibility), it needs the complement of faith for it to be effectual. Being aware of the Greek opposition of potentiality (*dynamis*) and act (*energeia*), Paul often couples faith with *energeia*, being in act, so that faith (in relation to potentiality) is *energumen*, the principle of actuality and operativity. This principle is not external to the announcement, but the thing within it that makes potentiality active; at the same time, it may be presented as the very content of what is announced. Faith is the announcement’s being in act, its *energeia*.

Euaggelion is not merely a discourse—*logos* disconnected from what is announced and the subject that announces it. It is given as a *Plērophoria* (*pleros*, “full, fulfilled” + *phoreō*, “carrying,” “be transported”), something that is brought into fullness without any gap left over. It is not an announcement empty in itself, but nevertheless could be believed and verified. It is born in the faith of the one who utters it and who hears and lives in it exclusively. Agamben writes: “Faith consists in being fully persuaded of the necessary unity of promise and realization: ‘[Abraham] being fully persuaded that he who promised is equally capable of doing.’ The announcement is the form the promise assumes in the contraction of messianic time.”²⁹²

Paul uses the verb *Katargeō*, a compound of *argeō* (that derives from the adjective

290 Quoted in Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 89.

291 Ibid, 90.

292 Ibid, 91.

argos) meaning “inoperative, not-at-work (*a-ergos*), inactive.” The compound thus means “I make inoperative, I deactivate, I suspend the efficacy.” Before Paul, it was in use as the form *argeō* in the Septuagint as a translation of the Hebrew word that signifies rest on Saturday or the sabbatical suspension of work. In Greek, the positive equivalent of *katargeō* is *energeō* (“I put to work, I activate”). The etymological opposition with *energeō* demonstrates that *katargeō* signals a taking out of *energeia*, a taking out of the act. In the opposition (that Paul uses) between *dynamis/energeia*, potentiality/act, the messianic enacts an inversion, that is, a moment when potentiality passes over into actuality and meets up with its *telos*. It does not happen in the form of force or *ergon*, but in the form of *astheneia*, weakness. Paul formulates this principle of messianic inversion in the potential/act relation: “‘Power [or potentiality] realizes itself in weakness’ [*dynamis en astheneia teleitai*] (2 Cor 12:9); and “‘when I am weak, then am I powerful.’”²⁹³

In accordance with the Greek principle according to which privation (*sterēsis*) and im-potentiality (*adynamia*) maintain a kind of potentiality, Paul likewise believed that messianic power does not wear itself out in the *ergon*, but remains powerful in it in the form of weakness. Messianic *dynamis* is constitutively “weak” but precisely for this reason it enacts its effects. This is the messianic inversion of the potential/act relation. The messianic power is realized and acts in the form of weakness, not by annihilation or destruction, but by deactivation, by rendering inoperative, thus giving potentiality back (to whatever was worked on) in the form of inoperativity and ineffectiveness, and restoring it (the thing worked on) to the state of potentiality (in order, at the later stage, to fulfill it): “That which is deactivated, taken out of *energeia*, is not annulled, but conserved and held onto for its fulfillment. ... [*K*]atargēsis is not the destruction of being (*aphanisis tes ousia*), but the progression toward a better state.”²⁹⁴

Luther, writes Agamben, translates the Pauline verb *katargein* as *Aufheben*—the word that harbours the double meaning of abolishing and conserving found at the centre of Hegel dialectics. Thus, a genuinely messianic term becomes a key term for dialectics, and in this sense Hegel’s dialectic is nothing more than a secularization of Christian theology

293 Quoted in Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 97.

294 Ibid, 98.

(i.e., Hegel used a messianic weapon against theology furnished by theology itself). If this genealogy of *Aufhebung* is correct, then not only does Hegelian thought involve hermeneutic struggle with the messianic (in the sense of it being a conscious interpretation and secularization of messianic theme), but so does modernity (as the epoch that is situated under the sign of the dialectical *Aufhebung*). Based on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which, through its discussion of *Aufhebung* exposes the structure of linguistic signification by showing that language is always already caught up in a history and a time, the connection and difference between the problem of *aufhebung* and messianic time is shown: while messianic time (as operational time) also introduces a disconnection and delay into represented time, it cannot be attached onto time as a supplement or as infinite deferment. The messianic, the ungraspable quality of the "now," is the opening through which we seize hold of time, achieving our representation of time, making it end. The messianic exigency reemerges in Hegel in the problem of the *plērōma* of times and the end of history—he thinks the *plērōma* not as each instant's relation to the Messiah (as Paul does, via the Torah), but as the final result of a global process.

Both important interpreters of Hegel, Alexandre Koyré and Alexandre Kojève (who think the possibility of the Hegelian system in terms of the end of history), end up flattening out the messianic into the eschatological, mixing the problem of messianic time with the problem of post-history (Kojève's concept of *déœuvrement*, a good translation of Pauline *katargein*, "inoperativity," appears in his definition of the post-historical condition of man).²⁹⁵

295 Analogous conclusions could be drawn, according to Agamben, regarding the central concepts of twentieth-century (linguistic) thought: privative opposition, degree zero, the surplus of the signifier, as well as the trace and the originary supplement. Nikolai Trubetzkoy's idea of privative opposition shows that, once the opposition is neutralized, the marked term loses its value whereas the unmarked term remains as the only relevant term, taking the role of archiphoneme (or zero-degree signification) and representing all distinctive characteristics common to both terms [for Trubetzkoy "neutralization" is *Aufhebung* since it implies the unity of opposites; in the *Aufhebung* the opposition is both lifted and preserved as the zero degree of difference which works by opposing itself to the mere absence of phoneme (the philosophical ground for this concept is found in Aristotelian ontology of privation). Lévi-Strauss will later on develop these concepts in his theory of the signifier's constitutive surplus in its relation to the signified, a surplus that translates into free signifiers void of meaning in themselves, signs in the state of *déœuvrement* and *Aufhebung* that mark the necessity of a supplementary symbolic content].

1.2.2

The Time that Remains ends with a “threshold” (or *Tornada* as Agamben titles it). In this final passage, we come full circle (in our attempt to analyze messianic time, to formulate a concept of time that will condition a concept of history) back to Agamben’s positioning of the messianic concept in modern thought, particularly that of Benjamin.

Benjamin’s image of the hunchback dwarf, taken from the “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” assists him in portraying “the very text of the philosophy of history as a chessboard upon which a crucial theoretical battle unfolds, and which, we are to assume, is even lent a hand by a hidden theologian concealed between the lines of the text.”²⁹⁶ Who is this hunchback theologian?

In order to answer this question, according to Agamben, we have to better understand the role of citation in Benjamin’s work. Citation serves a strategic function; it is the mediator that enables secret meetings between past and present generations, as well as between past and present writings, thus citation is required to perform in secrecy. *Sperren*, in German, is translated as “spacing”—it refers to the method in typography of substituting italics with a script that places a space between each letter if that word is to be

Derrida critiques the primacy of presence in the metaphysical tradition by showing how metaphysics always already presupposes non-presence and signification. His idea of “originary supplement” is not something that is added externally to something else, but comes to supplement a lack and non-originary presence, both always already caught up in a signifying. The concept of the “trace” names the impossibility of a sign to be extinguished in the fullness of presence. The trace must be conceived as “before being,” the thing itself, always already as sign, the signified always already in the position of signifier. There is no nostalgia for origin since there is no origin; the origin is produced as a retroactive effect of non-origin and a trace. Although these concepts call into question the primacy of presence and signification, they do not question signification in general; they presuppose the impossibility of an extinguishing of the sign, they presuppose that there is still signification beyond presence and absence, that non-presence still signifies something, it posits itself as an “arch-trace,” a sort of archiphoneme between presence and absence. The arche-trace shows its link and difference from the Hegelian *Aufhebung* with its messianic theme. The movement of *Aufhebung*, which achieves signification, becomes a principle of infinite deferment. A signification that only signifies itself can never seize hold of itself, rather it is displaced and deferred in one and the same gesture, thus the trace is a suspended *Aufhebung* that will never come to know its full *plērōma*. Deconstruction thus is a suspension of the messianic.

A metaphysical concept which takes as its prime focus a moment of foundation and origin coexists with a messianic concept which focuses on a moment of fulfillment. Messianic and *historic* is the idea that fulfillment is possible by retrieving and revoking foundation. If we drop the messianic theme and focus only on the moment of foundation and origin (or their absence), we are left with empty, zero-degree signification with history as its infinite deferment.

296 Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 138.

highlighted. Benjamin himself uses this method, which, from a palaeographic standpoint, represents the opposite of how authors use abbreviations (in order to be read in full or because some words should not be read at all). As Agamben writes: “These spaced words are, in a certain way, hyperread: they are read twice, and, as Benjamin suggests, this double reading may be the palimpsest of citation.”²⁹⁷ In the second thesis, Benjamin writes: “Like every generation that precedes us, we have been endowed with a *w e a k* messianic power.”²⁹⁸ He refers, so it seems, back to Paul and his conception of the weakness of messianic power. Thus, the hidden Pauline text within the *theses* makes Benjamin’s use of words and typography a form of citation without quotation marks, “and it is precisely this hyperlegibility, this secret presence of the Pauline text in Benjamin’s *Theses*, that is signaled discretely by this spacing.”²⁹⁹

Now we can better identify the hunchback theologian who secretly guides the puppet of historical materialism in Benjamin’s text. Benjamin’s concept of the “image” (wherein the past and present are united in a constellation, and wherein the present recognizes the meaning of the past and the past finds its meaning and fulfilment) relates to Paul’s “typological relation,” where the past and the future enter a similar constellation, where a moment from the past must be recognized as the typos (figure) of the messianic now.³⁰⁰ The fact that Paul writes, “[H]e who is an image of the one who was to come,” causes Benjamin to speak of an image and not a figure; additionally, Benjamin’s own words “the true image of the past *f l e e s* by,” propels Agamben to claim that Benjamin took from Paul the idea that the image of the past runs the risk of disappearing completely

297 Ibid, 139.

298 Quoted in Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 139. The word is spaced in Benjamin’s original (*Handexemplar*) manuscript in German, and merely italicized in the English translation (See Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 254.)

299 Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 140.

300 *Typology* will become, in the Middle Ages, an interpretive system in Christian thought wherein people, events, and passages of the Old Testament are seen as prefigurations of New Testament (in order to prove that the New is a fulfillment of the Old).

if the present fails to recognize itself in it.³⁰¹

Benjamin's concept of "the now of legibility" (or knowability) defines a genuinely hermeneutic principle (in opposition to the idea that any work may become the object of infinite interpretations at any given time) according to which every text contains a historical index indicating both its belonging to a determinate epoch, as well as its only coming forth to full legibility at a determinate historical moment. In *The Arcades Project*, writes Agamben, Benjamin included the following note (N3, 1) that confided his "most extreme messianic formulation," a note that also serves Agamben as his final conclusion to the

301 Elsewhere in reference to Paul, Agamben mentions Benjamin, who writes (as we recall) that "[e]very day, every instant, is the small gate through which the messiah enters." (Quoted in Agamben, *The Church and the Kingdom*, 5.) The accurate quote, taken from Benjamin's addendum to the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," reads as follows: "For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter." (Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 264.) Benjamin's conception of messianic time is an emphasis of the redemptive potentiality of the non-chronological present that, in the context of the Pauline epistles, bears a relation not only to Judaism but also to the Church. [On the Jewish indebtedness to Benjamin, see, among others: Stéphane Mosès, *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem* (trans. Barbara Harshar), Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009; Eric Jacobson, *Metaphysics of the Profane: The Political Theology of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003; and Susan A. Handelman, *Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas*, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1991.] As Agamben shows in *The Church and the Kingdom*, since messianic time does not mean chronology but a qualitative change in how time is experienced, in the original positioning of the Church it makes no sense to speak in terms of chronology—there is no time for delay. Thus Paul, when addressing the Thessalonians, speaks about the "Day of the Lord" in present tense; or in the Gospels, when referring to the Messiah, he is called *ho erchomenos*, "he who comes," he who never ceases to come. Messianic time (the term Agamben was using in *The Time that Remains* to replace the term "kaiology" in *Infancy and History*) is set in opposition to the historical dialectic of progress and its logic of deferral, for example, the future coming of the Messiah who will redeem mankind and bring history to an end. Instead, both Agamben and Benjamin conceive of the messianic event as a potentiality of the present situation, or, as Benjamin once described his surrealist alarm clock, a clock that rings "sixty seconds every minute."

The Greek term *Paroikousa* means the manner in which foreigners (and those in exile) dwell, as opposed to the Greek verb, *katoikein*, which designates how a citizen of the city dwells. *Paroikein* designates how a Christian ought to live in this world as well as his experience of time or messianic time. The experience of time proper to the Church is defined by the ecclesiastical tradition as "*ho chronos tē paroikias*" (Agamben, *The Church and the Kingdom*, 2), that is, parochial time (in the sense of sojourning like a foreigner). Sojourning here does not mean a fixed period of time nor is it to be understood in the sense of chronological time, but in the sense that the Church sojourns on earth for a prolonged period of time without altering its messianic experience of time. This position preceded, according to Agamben, the Church's later position that took place on the background of the "delay of the parousia" (Ibid, 4): "*Paroika* and *parousia*, the sojourn of the foreigner and the presence of the messiah, have the same structure, expressed in Greek through the preposition *pará*: a presence that distends time, an *already* that is also a *not yet*, a delay that does not put off until later but, instead, a disconnection within the present moment that allows us to grasp time." (Ibid, 26.) The initial Christian community expected the imminent arrival of the messiah (and thus the end of time) but was confronted with an inexplicable delay and thus had to reorganize its institutional and juridical organization, a repositioning resulting in the Christian community ceasing to *paroikein* (to sojourn as foreigners) so as to begin to *katoikein* (to live like a citizen), and as a result, lost its messianic experience of time.

seminar:

Each now is the now of a particular knowability (*Jedes Jetzt das Jetzt einer bestimmten Erkennbarkeit*). In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time. (This point of explosion, and nothing else, is the death of the *intentio*, which thus coincides with the birth of authentic historical time, the time of truth.) It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, an image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: an image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what has been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but imagistic [*bildlich*]. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical—that is, not archaic—images. The image that is read—which is to say, the image in the now of its recognisability—bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded.³⁰²

1.2.3

We will now attempt to show the connection and interrelatedness between Benjamin's conception of the messianic (and the philosophy of history, at large) and a few ideas [such as montage, image, (semantic) void, melancholy, and angels] that characterize his writings on aesthetics and art. Illuminating the connection between these domains will assist us (among others) in progressing to section II.

A note (N1, 10) in *The Arcades Project* states the following: “This work has to develop to the highest degree the art of citing without quotation marks. Its theory is intimately related to that of montage.”³⁰³ What is a montage-based method of “citation without quotation marks”? How does it relate to history?

Benjamin, as it is well known, wrote increasingly on aesthetics and particularly on (imagery-core) photography. Thus, it comes as little or no surprise that the idea of “citation without quotation marks” is also referred to in these terms, that is, as the idea (or method) of “dialectical image.”³⁰⁴ Benjamin uses “image” in a broader sense than we are often accustomed to, using it as more than a visual image, and thus escapes what seems to be a paradoxical term (i.e., “dialectical image,” an image at once frozen and dialectical). His

302 Quoted in Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 145; Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 463.

303 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 458.

304 De La Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction*, 243–246.

method (further formulated as “dialectics at a standstill”) brings together two parties in dialogue and into dynamic contact—that is, dialectical images represent the conjuncture of past and present and are considered by Benjamin as the only genuine images. A dialectical image is charged with an energy that is capable of “blowing elements out of the historical continuum” once they achieve a special legibility that Benjamin calls the “now of knowability.” Agamben notes that “Walter Benjamin writes that the historical index contained in the images of the past indicates that these images may achieve legibility only in a determined moment of their history,”³⁰⁵ as well as characterizing Benjamin’s idea of the dialectical image as “the fulcrum of [Benjamin’s] theory of historical consciousness.”³⁰⁶

Agamben refers to the artistic method of montage and its relation to history also in his essay on the poetic characteristic of Guy Debord’s cinema. The specific function of the image that Agamben identifies in Debord’s work (though not exclusively) is what ties cinema and history together—its operation no longer as an immobile entity. The image is not an archetype, nor is outside history, rather (similarly to Benjamin’s “dialectical image” as Agamben writes) “it is a cut which itself is mobile, an image-movement, charged as such with a dynamic tension.”³⁰⁷ The mobility of the image pertains also to painting, according to Agamben, who conceive of it as a still charged with movement, a still from a film that is missing. The kind of history that Agamben thinks about, in this regard, is not our accustomed chronology, but messianic history, which he defines by two major characteristics: a history of salvation (“something must be saved”) and an eschatological history (“something must be completed, judged”)—messianic history where something happens right here, but in another time, and outside chronology, but without entering some other world. This characterization renders the messianic incalculable, but simultaneously makes every moment (and image) “the door through which the Messiah enters,”³⁰⁸ (paraphrasing Benjamin) right here, right now. This messianic historical situation equates,

305 Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, 53–54.

306 De La Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction*, 244; Agamben, “Nymphae,” 58.

307 Agamben, “Difference and Repetition,” 328.

308 Ibid, 329.

for Agamben, to Debord's cinematic situation. Debord's compositional technique in the field of cinema is, in fact, montage. The conditions of possibility ("transcendentals" in the philosophical jargon) for Debord's montage, Agamben explains, are double: *repetition* and *stoppage*. There is no need to shoot the film anymore, he writes, "just to repeat and stop," thus montage is shown as such. Debord's montage is understood by Agamben as an epoch-making innovation in cinema; it ushers in the time in which "cinema will now be made on the basis of images from cinema."³⁰⁹ Repetition for Agamben, building upon the works of previous thinkers, is not the return of the identical as one would imagine, but "the return of the possibility of what was"—it restores past possibility, and renders it possible anew. Repetition here relates to memory as the latter does not repeat the past as such, but "restores possibility to the past."³¹⁰ This is, according to Agamben, the theological dimension that Benjamin's ascribes to memory when he writes that "memory makes the unfulfilled into the fulfilled, and the fulfilled into the unfulfilled."³¹¹ Images thus charged with a historical and messianic importance because they are able to deliver potential possibilities to that which is impossible by definition, "toward the past." The centrality of the act of repetition in Debord's montage comes from the opening it produces between the possible and the real as a "zone of undecidability" into which what might become possible again happily enters.

The second transcendental is stoppage—the power to interrupt, "the 'revolutionary interruption' of which Benjamin spoke,"³¹² which brings cinema closer to poetry than to prose, since both cinema and poetry, writes Agamben, exclusively share the concept of the caesura and the enjambment: "This is also why Hölderlin could say that by stopping the rhythmic unfolding of words and representations, the caesura causes the word and the representation to appear as such. To bring the word to a stop is to pull it out of the flux of meaning, to exhibit it as such."³¹³ This is exactly how stoppage works in Debord's practice, as constitutive of a transcendental condition of montage. The cinematic power of stoppage works on the image itself, causes it to become separated from continuous narration and to be shown as such. Both repetition and stoppage form a single system of montage in Debord;

309 Ibid, 330.

310 Ibid.

311 Quoted in Agamben, "Difference and Repetition," 330.

312 Ibid, 331.

313 Ibid, 332.

as per Agamben, together they “carry out the messianic act of cinema.”³¹⁴

We return now to Benjamin. “For Benjamin,” writes Agamben in *The Signature of All Things*, “history is the proper sphere of signatures. Here they appear under the names of ‘indices’ (‘secrets,’ ‘historical,’ ‘temporal’) or of ‘images’ (*Bilder*), often characterized as ‘dialectical’.”³¹⁵ The precarious, dialectical and fleeting characteristics of the image “become clearer when restored to their proper context, namely, the theory of historical signatures,”³¹⁶ thus, since an image is always accompanied by an index or signature, it is constituted temporally and becomes legible precisely by that index or signature. For this reason, the success of a historiographic research (which necessarily has to do with signatures) is determined, for Agamben, by the researcher’s ability to read ephemeral signatures and follow their “subtle and obscure thread.”³¹⁷

However, the success of a historiographic research is determined not only by an effective reading of signatures, but also by recognizing them as a means of understanding. How do signatures generate understanding? What form of epistemology do they contain, which enables understanding? What do signatures (or Benjamin’s “dialectical images”) offer to Agamben, in terms of generating knowledge, that language cannot?

Earlier we mentioned that the signature, as the exposition of intelligibility, is akin to the paradigm and contains a few elements that refer back to the logic of the paradigm. Identifying signatures (that are crystallized historically) with a means of understanding, as well as the signatures’ structure and tensive functionality (that relate to a new event of meaning), indeed echoes the epistemological dimension of paradigms. This identification, in the context of Agamben’s epistemology, will help us to answer the above mentioned

314 Ibid.

315 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 72.

316 Ibid, 73.

317 Ibid.

questions.³¹⁸

A similarity exists between Benjamin's *dialectical images* and Agamben's signatures. Both terms represent a constellation of moments beyond mere elements in a historical archive, and functions as "a potentially dynamic means of understanding—and changing—the present situation, one that acquires its potentiality only at specific, and fortuitous, points."³¹⁹ These points are crystallizations of historical experience in a moment of unprecedented relevance. This functionality of the dialectical image, as well as that of the signature, determines its possibility to appear at a certain moment, which is also related to language and meaning.

In *Nymphs*, Agamben addresses the linguistic perspective of the functionality of the "dialectical image": "Where meaning is suspended," he writes, "dialectical images appear. The dialectical image is, in other words, an unresolved oscillation between estrangement and a new event of meaning. ... [T]he dialectical image holds its object suspended in a semiotic void."³²⁰ The life of the image can thus be characterized by a pause highly charged with tension between the two poles. Not only dialectic is inseparable from the objects it negates, "but also that the objects lose their identity and transform into the two poles of a single dialectical tension that reaches its highest manifestations in a state of immobility."³²¹

We see that the functionality of the dialectical image (and signature) results in a state of

318 However, Agamben's epistemological discussion should be taken with a grain of salt. In his lecture "What Is a Paradigm?" Agamben says: "The title of my presentation is 'What Is a Paradigm?' This title seems to suggest that my presentation will focus on epistemological and methodological questions. I do not feel at all at ease with these kind of questions, I do not like these kinds of problems, I always have the impression, like once Heidegger put it, that 'here we have people busy in sharpening knives when there is nothing left to cut'." ("What is a Paradigm?," YouTube video, 9:36, "European Graduate School," March 26, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9Wxn1L9Er0>.)

Agamben mentions this metaphor in relation to criticism and its epistemological character, already in his early work *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*: "What is now more and more frequently concealed by the endless sharpening of knives on behalf of a methodology with nothing left to cut—namely, the realization that the object to have been grasped has finally evaded knowledge—is instead reasserted by criticism as its own specific character." (Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, xvi.)

319 De La Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction*, 245.

320 Agamben, *Nymphs*, 29–30.

321 *Ibid*, 31.

immobility and the suspension of meaning, which also causes the image to gain its fullness and legibility, to be unprecedentedly known. But how exactly does this epistemological process come about?

In chapter 1 of *The Signature of All Things*, Agamben examines dichotomy-based (particular-general) epistemological processes and the dialectics between them; that is, the processes of acquiring knowledge that is based on binary logic. By contrast, the epistemological model of the paradigm is based on analogy and advances from singularity to singularity. The epistemological mechanism of the paradigm (as well as that of the dialectical image) is not logical (as in Hegel) but analogical and paradigmatic (as in Plato)—its formula, for whose explication Agamben credits Enzo Melandri, is “neither A nor B,” and the opposition it implies is not dichotomous and substantial but bipolar and tensive. The two terms are neither removed nor recomposed in a unity, but kept in an immobile coexistence charged with tension.³²² Each paradigmatic example becomes an exemplary case of a general law that could not have been stated a priori. Thus, the hermeneutic circle (which was previously discussed) is in fact a paradigmatic circle; there is no circularity between pre-understanding and interpretation, meaning does not precede the phenomenon but stands, so to speak, beside it—the phenomenon shows the general, which is the paradigm.

This non-dichotomous model or multi-polar field of forces entails a methodological principle that prevails when dealing with dichotomies. That is, how exactly does one need to understand a dichotomy? How does a dichotomy form? What kind of relation keeps a dichotomy intact? And perhaps more importantly, is it possible to understand both elements not as relating, but connecting, touching one another? For when we think about two factions, elements or concepts, we create a relation between them, we create a representation of one in the other. We then tend to think that richer representation amounts to a stronger connection between them as a result of a greater degree of affinity, and the stronger the affinity, the closer they get. But contrary to common opinion, they will ultimately be articulated or joined together, they will be in real contact, only as a result of

322 Melandri, *La Linea e Il Circolo: Studio Logico-Filosofico Sull'Analogia*, 798.

a complete *absence of representation*.³²³ This is an opposite definition of infinite proximity to the one we usually give. As long as there is a degree of representation between both elements, as long as we do find a relation of one in the other, they are related but not yet unified. By absolutely unravelling all their connections, both factions disappear in and of themselves, making space for a third thing to emerge for the first time as a figure of their unification. This is the meaning of the verb “to coincide,” from medieval Latin *coincidere*, meaning literally “to fall-upon-together.”

Moreover, recall Agamben’s critique of deconstruction—although he acknowledges its questioning of the primary precedence of origin and presence, he at the same time maintains that deconstruction fails to question signification itself. Thus it never really escapes from the realm of representation, and “does not yet find a way beyond the implicit hold of representation.”³²⁴ In the context of the present discussion, [that is, the understanding of how knowledge is generated through movement on the basis of the analogical model as opposed to the dichotomous particular/universal model (“littered with exceptions”) that characterizes the realm of (deconstructionist) representation], Agamben puts forth the example “as a contrast figure, found stated in the model of the paradigm.”³²⁵ An epistemological difference in thought models exists between the rule-based norm of representation or, in other words, the rule-based movement from the universal (norm) to the particular (application), and the paradigmatic example (through which others construct their own unique, always singular, identities), since the paradigm presents (not *re*-presents) neither the “original” nor the “copy,” but its own point of origin. As Agamben writes: “A paradigm implies the total abandonment of the particular-general couple as the model of logical inference.”³²⁶

As mentioned earlier, Agamben reminds us, on various occasions throughout his oeuvre, of the primacy of the cognitive paradigm in present Western culture, as well as of the fact that philosophy has become, after Kant, a doctrine of knowledge rather than one of

323 For a further explication of this idea, see Colli, *Filosofia dell’espressione*.

324 Dickinson, “Canon as an Act of Creation,” 142.

325 Ibid, 150.

326 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 21.

anthropogenesis (that is, the becoming human of man). This claim challenges the epistemological threshold of the human sciences, and in this sense, by adopting the Benjaminian art of citing without quotation marks and the epistemology of the dialectical image/signature, Agamben is able to call into question “the automatic support of a tradition turned into a ‘fortress of knowledge’ and vindicates an anti-authoritarian experience of language which measures its truth value only against its own merits.”³²⁷

We can strengthen these claims by momentarily turning back to an earlier period in history (the Renaissance), where the connection between art and theory enables epistemology beyond discursive language. We will find, here as well, the relevance of the analogy-based model and its special epistemic functionality.

In *The Unspeakable Girl*, Agamben refers to Odo Casel’s *Liturgy as Mystery Celebration* (1921), a manifesto for what will become the Liturgical Movement, which had an immense influence within the Catholic Church. Casel claimed that liturgy is not a doctrine but a mystery (thus having a generic relationship to the pagan mystery cults). Originally, mystery simply meant “gestures, acts and words through which divine action was effectively realized in time and in the world for the salvation of mankind.”³²⁸ Similarly, in Christian liturgy, the redemptive work of Christ is rendered present in and through the Church—what is rendered present in this mystery is not Christ as a historical individual but his “saving act,” communicated through the sacrament. According to Casel, the force of liturgy lies in its “fullness of actuality of the saving action of Christ.”³²⁹

The “fullness of actuality” is what the theological tradition attached to the doctrine of the efficacy *ex opere operato* of the liturgical act, that is, to the idea that the saving power of the sacrament was unaffected in the case it was administered in an “impure” manner (because the effective power of the sacrament is not depend upon the celebrant but on Christ, the “mystical presence” who guarantees its efficacy through God). This “irreducible liturgical operatively”³³⁰ is, however, quite remote from what we find in the

327 Kotsko and Salzani, “Introduction: Agamben as a Reader,” 8.

328 Agamben, “The Unspeakable Girl: The Myth and Mystery of Kore,” 31. See also Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*, 9–12.

329 Quoted in Agamben, “The Unspeakable Girl: The Myth and Mystery of Kore,” 31.

330 Agamben, “The Unspeakable Girl: The Myth and Mystery of Kore,” 32.

pagan mysteries, where salvation is described as “precarious” rather than as something of certainty.

The mystical experience is expressed through the verb “to see” (*opopen*), and “vision” (*epopteia*) is the term given to the supreme stage of initiation. *Epopetes* means both “initiate” and “spectator,” and the mysteries they were contemplating “were ‘living paintings’ composed of gestures, words and the presentation of objects.”³³¹ This constitutes, according to Agamben, the connection between the mystery cults and painting that was so active in Renaissance art. The philosophical tradition links supreme knowledge to mystery visions, knowledge that is experienced through seeing, touching, and naming, thus painting offered to this knowledge the most apt expression. Agamben builds upon the work of Edgar Wind (in particular *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*), according to which even though Renaissance culture (including the act of painting) regarded obscurity and mystery as necessary, the scholar (iconographer) must strive for clarity against the intention of the artist since any unresolved residue of meaning is an obstacle to the enjoyment of art. But, contrary to this, Renaissance allegories (like Eleusinian mysteries) are not “mysterious” because of some concealed content but because in them form and content have become indistinguishable. The third element, neutralizing both form and content, is mysterious because “in it there is no longer anything to conceal.”³³² Thus because there is nothing left to say on the discursive level, “thought and vision coincide.” Form and content coincide not because the content is now exposed, but because they “fall together” (as previously stated), reduced and reconciled, and what we are then given to contemplate is pure appearance. For this reason, one cannot discursively present the knowledge depicted in such paintings but merely title them.

If the Renaissance allegories offer a richer expression of thought than contemporary philosophical treaties, then not only painting is returned to its true theoretical foundations but “the very nature of thought is illuminated.” According to Wind, writes Agamben, the pagan mystical tradition exercised a decisive influence on German Idealism, particularly on how Hegel and Schelling conceived of the dialectical movement of thought (after the

331 Ibid, 35.

332 Ibid, 37.

model of *coincidentia oppositorum*). The “profoundest mysteries of art,” claimed Schelling, consist in conceiving at once the extreme discrepancy of opposed elements and their point of coincidence: “The third element, in which opposites meet, cannot be of the same nature as them and requires a different form of exposition, one in which the opposing elements are at once maintained and neutralized. It is the content but nothing contains it; it is form but it no longer forms anything—exposing, thereby, itself.”³³³

Thus, Benjamin’s idea of “image philosophy,” that is, the “image of thought” or *Denkbild* (which will be discussed at a later stage), should not be taken as a metaphor but understood literally—like Renaissance allegory, writes Agamben, it is “a mystery wherein that which cannot be discursively presented shines for a moment out of the ruins of language.”³³⁴ § [Messianic Language]

Agamben’s essay “The Melancholy Angel”³³⁵ further elaborates Benjamin’s concept of citation without quotation marks. Quotations, according to Agamben, draw their power not from their ability to retrieve the past and enable the reader to relive it, but from their capacity to expel from context while destroying the past in the course of happening.

Agamben points to Hannah Arendt’s notes on this idea. According to Arendt, the transmission of the past relates to tradition and authority; “[T]he break in tradition and the loss of authority”³³⁶ that Benjamin identified in his own time, writes Arendt, were irreparable and thus required new ways of dealing with the past. Benjamin’s solution, so to speak, was to replace the notion of the past’s transmissibility with its citability (or that there is a modern function of quotation), a solution that was born out of “despair of the present and the desire to destroy it,”³³⁷ albeit with the hope “that something from this period [would] survive.”³³⁸

Decontextualizing a fragment from the past makes it lose its character of authentic testimony while granting it an aggressive force, much like, according to Agamben, the

333 Ibid, 38.

334 Ibid, 39.

335 Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 104–115.

336 Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 193.

337 Ibid.

338 Ibid.

artistic action of the readymade in which an object loses its meaning (guaranteed by the authority of its daily use) and is charged “with an uncanny power to traumatize.”³³⁹ The radical break of this fragment from its past is linked to its hazardous state of alienation but also to the possibility of self-healing: “The past can only be fixed in the image that appears once and for all in the instant of its alienation, just as a memory appears suddenly, as in a flash, in a moment of danger.”³⁴⁰ The particular way of entering into a relation with the past resembles for Benjamin, according to Agamben, the figure of the collector who “quotes” objects outside of their context and destroys the order given to them by the internal order of their original disposition, or of the figure of the revolutionary for whom the new can appear only through the destruction of the old.

As tirelessly repeated, the image of a man who has lost the link with his past and can no longer find himself in history is identified and described (in Benjamin’s “Theses on

339 Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 128 (note #3).

340 Ibid, 104–105.

the Philosophy of History”) as the angel of history (*Angelus Novus*).^{341 342 343} If Paul Klee’s angel that Benjamin refers to is the angel of history, writes Agamben, then Albrecht Dürer’s famous engraving depicting a melancholic angel is its analogy, the angel of art. Dürer’s angel, however, “appears immersed in an atemporal dimension, as though something, interrupting the continuum of history, had frozen the surrounding reality in a

341 Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 257–58.

342 In “Walter Benjamin and the Demonic: Happiness and Historical Redemption” (Agamben, *Potentialities*, 138–59), Agamben attempts to show that Benjamin’s reflection on the philosophy of history is shaded with a melancholic light as a result of Gershom Scholem’s interpretation (Scholem, “Walter Benjamin and His Angel,” 198–237) to Benjamin’s angel as it is portrayed in Benjamin’s prose titled “Agesilaus Santander.” (Scholem, “Walter Benjamin and His Angel,” 208.) The angel (which has a redemptive role in Benjamin’s conception of history), claims Scholem, hides the dark, demonic traits of “Angelus Satanas.”

Agamben’s essay aims to open Benjamin’s text to another possible interpretation and to trace Benjamin’s lines of ethics. “Ethics” is referred to here in the sense of the use the Greeks had made of the word as “doctrine of happiness” as they linked the demonic to happiness. Benjamin’s text also ties the figure of the angel to the idea of happiness.

Since in the second thesis from the “Theses on the Philosophy of History” we find that happiness and redemption are inseparable, the presentation of Benjamin’s theory of happiness, according to Agamben, must proceed only by clarification of his ideas on the philosophy of history, which have at their centre the concept of redemption.

Scholem’s reading of Benjamin’s text is based on a hypothesis that the name “Agesilaus Santander” is in fact an anagram, a “secret name,” for *der Angelus Satanas*. However, Scholem’s formulation is preceded by a “disquieting shadow on the image of the angel” (Agamben, *Potentialities*, 139), which makes it hard to verify whether the hypothesis is necessary, whether it economically explains the text without leaving unresolved the most problematic aspects.

Scholem thus anticipates the Luciferian reading of “Agesilaus Santander” without having demonstrated its validity, immersing Benjamin’s text in a demonic light.

Scholem’s interpretation is also based on iconographical elements of the Satan, claiming that only Satan possesses claws and talons; however, this is not accurate, since in the European iconographic tradition, “there is only one figure that brings together purely angelic characteristics and the demonic traits of claws” (Ibid, 141)—this is not Satan but Eros, Love. A descriptive model, found for the first time in Plutarch, represents Eros as a winged (and often feminine) angelic figure with claws.

Thus, Benjamin’s figure of the angel with claws and wings leads to the domain of Eros, that is, not to a demon in the Judeo-Christian sense but a *daimōn* in the Greek sense (“in Plato, Eros appears as the demon par excellence”). Additionally, Benjamin was aware of this specific iconographic type as he mentions it in his essay “The Origin of the German Tragic Drama” (which makes Agamben’s claim more probable) as well as in his essay “Karl Kraus,” where the angel is in no sense to be considered a Satanic figure. Benjamin’s portrayal of the claws of *Angelus Novus* does not have a Satanic meaning, but instead characterizes the “destructive—and simultaneously liberating—power of the angel.”

Thus, there is a correspondence between the clawed angel of “Agesilaus Santander” and the liberating angel who (at the end of the essay on Kraus) celebrates his victory over the demon “at the point where origin and destruction meet.” This (Agamben’s) reading nullifies Scholem’s reading as the textual element that supports Scholem’s reading (of the Luciferian nature of the angel) disappears. This does not mean that Scholem’s reading is erroneous but, as Agamben writes, “that there is all the more reason to measure its validity only on the basis of its capacity to explain economically the most problematic aspects of Benjamin’s text.” (Ibid, 142.)

kind of messianic arrest.”³⁴⁴ The past that becomes incomprehensible for the angel of history “reconstitutes its form in front of the angel of art; but this form is the alienated image in which the past finds its truth again only on condition of negating it, and knowledge of the new is possible only in the nontruth of the old.”³⁴⁵ Agamben thus grants aesthetics the role of the redeemer as it performs the same task that tradition performed before its interruption, resolving the conflict between old and new, and “opening for man a space

343 The Angelus also appears, however only in passing, in Benjamin’s essay “Karl Kraus.” Here the Angelus is mentioned in the context of the messenger in old engravings who announces anticipated disaster. Kraus, as per Benjamin, is described as someone who “stands on the threshold of the Last Judgment” (Benjamin, “Karl Kraus,” 443) and thus resembles those saints in Baroque paintings who face, so to speak, an angelic flood. “Just as, in the most opulent examples of Baroque altar painting, saints hard-pressed against the frame extend defensive hands toward the breathtakingly foreshortened extremities of the angels, the blessed, and the damned floating before them, so the whole of world history presses in on Kraus in the extremities of a single item of local news, a single phrase, a single advertisement.” (Ibid.) Benjamin refers here to the concept of citation, Kraus’s basic polemical methodology, that further on becomes Benjamin’s most adequate methodology reflecting (as we have just analyzed) the structure of his philosophy of history—the presentation of the whole through a cited part, or in other words, the attempt to capture most accurately the historical image through the revelation of its most trivial elements, its remainders or leftovers. The excavated fragment contains within itself the figure of the whole (Benjamin, as previously noted, was influenced in this regard by Goethe’s *Urphänomen*).

344 Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 109–110.

345 Ibid.

between past and future in which he can find his action and his knowledge.”^{346 347}

The Man Without Content reserves a particular temporal status for the communicative,

346 Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 110. Man’s inability to recover his space in the tension between past and future history is exemplified most accurately, according to Agamben, in an image depicted by Kafka where train travellers entering into a tunnel are met with an accident causing the train to halt and the travellers to lose a sense of spatiality, not knowing whether they are at the end or the beginning of the tunnel. Kafka, writes Agamben, “thus replaces the idea of a history infinitely unfolding along an empty, linear time with the paradoxical image of a *state of history* in which the fundamental event of the human condition is perpetually taking place; the continuum of linear time is interrupted, but does not create an opening beyond itself.” (Ibid, 113.) Thus, Kafka’s image of a *state of history* is positioned side by side with Benjamin’s idea of “now-time” understood as a halt in happening. The creation of an opening beyond itself is likewise the theological horizon that the messianic opens up, working from within “given representations to de-stabilize them, as an eschatological horizon against which all particular identifications are rendered null and void.” (Dickinson, “Canon as an Act of Creation,” 158.)

347 It may be the case that epistemological questions or discourses of knowledge have merely moderate significance for a research process intertwining theoretical and practical artistic tendencies, since the act of research alone (physical rummaging, working with materials, archive searching, etc.) creates a comprehensive diapason of acquaintances, comprised of diverse degrees of relation of, by, and with its object; and this familiarity at least equally pertains to ontology and certainly no less to ethics. For the inquirer, one of the fundamental difficulties, whether in the conceptual or studio-based research phase, is that of communicating the insights thus accumulated to an interlocutor, most adequately and to the best of one’s abilities. Also, the interpreter’s act (as well as that of the reader or the listener), in and of itself, always remains partial and limited in its means to appropriate the knowledge generated, and presented as if objectively, by and with the (art)work. A historical and epistemological dishomogeneity is constitutive of any attempt in art. Furthermore, even under the assumption that the process of sending and receiving knowledge is completed as fully as possible (after all, this is just an assumption, as well as a tentative process that might not necessarily include other possibilities of acquiring knowledge), knowledge formation is subjected to social conditions and restraints; in other words, as tirelessly repeated, knowledge is conditioned by the *episteme* and the operational power struggle that derives from it. Knowledge that is accepted as a norm, as a crystallized discourse, is forever liable to individuals’ exchange of words, forever understood as “to the best of our knowledge,” thus endangered in becoming outdated and nonstandard.

Somewhat ironically, in this sense, it was none other than Michel Foucault who marked that knowledge, as a field of historicity, as free of any constitutive activity, liberated from referring backwards to an origin or forwards to a historical or transcendental teleology. Knowledge, according to this definition, is a “series of denials,” it is not constitutive of anything, and thus is “epistemologically natural—not value-free, but saturated with *all* values ... knowledge is ... the possibility of everything we know.” (Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, 313.)

By means of contemplative concepts, philosophy—so it seems—does not constitute “substantive” knowledge but, as the word’s etymology indicates, simply (not so simply) the love or passion for knowledge and wisdom (Socrates, we recall, never really defines the subject matter he interrogates but joyfully hovers over it; Aristotelian rhetoric uses enthymemes; etc.).

Art is likewise a manner of reflection, but also simultaneously a (graduated) material attempt to actually intensify epistemological precariousness while standing in contrast to two reductive and opposite attempts for acquiring knowledge of a thing: what it is made of and/or what it does. What is then the consequence of art epistemology?

Artistic research is a meadow for creating ideas. The research is not made in order to find facts and/or to present certain ideas, but in order to generate them. Knowledge that was supposedly generated by artistic research cannot, in principle, be ultimately defined since any (artistic) knowledge always already carries with it the whole of Being, with its multiple and diverse knowledges thus accumulated prior to research.

aesthetic gesture of the artist. If, in fact, the problem of art is to redeem the ever-possible conflict between past-present-future, it is obvious that the work of the artist, the *poiesis* (being a lead to the presence, an unveiling independently of the will), must have access to “a more original temporal dimension.”³⁴⁸ All this is configured as a sort of messianic arrest of time, as a caesura that projects art into an “atemporal dimension” that is given, however, only in the transience (or lapse) of the work.^{349 350}

Agamben continues:

The work of art ... allows man to attain his original status in history and time in his encounter with it. This is why Aristotle can say in the fifth book of the *Metaphysics*³⁵¹: ‘arts are also called “beginning,” and of these especially the architectonic arts.’ That art is architectonic means, etymologically: art, *poiesis*, is pro-duction of origin, art is the gift of the original space of man, *architectonics* par excellence. ... [I]n the work of art the *continuum* of linear time is broken, and man recovers, between past and future, his present space.³⁵²

The relationship between aesthetics and epistemology (and the relevancy of this relation to the fractured structure of Western culture at large) is analyzed by Agamben in his relatively short but dense book *Taste*.

According to Agamben, the Western cultural tradition understands taste, in contrast to sight and hearing (the “theoretical” senses Hegel calls them in *Aesthetics*), as unrelated to the faculty of knowledge, and thus to ethics (mostly exemplified by Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*). On the other hand, one finds a complete vocabulary in Greek and Latin languages that etymologically and semantically connects taste with the act of knowledge (Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies*, Nietzsche’s *Pre-Platonic Philosophers* are the main references for Agamben).

348 Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 101.

349 Agamben, “Un Libro senza Patria,” 43–46.

350 One recalls that in *The Time that Remains*, Agamben retakes the problem of time, and more accurately, the problem of the caesura of messianic time. Messianic time seems to be an underground alley, dug under the internal history of the West, in order to access salvation through the suspension or deactivation of chronological time and the works that are contained in it. I return to Agamben’s idea of the caesura, as art’s atemporal dimension, at the end of part I (of section II).

351 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V, 1013a.

352 Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, 101–102.

Seventeenth- and eighteenth- century aesthetics, which centres around the judgment and enjoyment of the beautiful, indicates taste as “this special form of knowledge that enjoys the beautiful object and the special form of pleasure that judges beauty.”³⁵³ Kant describes taste as the “enigma” that intertwines knowledge and pleasure (*The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 1790).

The problem of taste presents itself as that of “another knowledge” (knowledge that cannot account for its judgments but rather enjoys them) and “another pleasure” (a pleasure that knows and judges).

Modern aesthetics, beginning with Baumgarten, attempts to investigate this other knowledge and to establish its autonomy alongside intellectual cognition (“intuition” alongside “concept or *logica*”). Aesthetics describes this relation as “one between two autonomous forms within the same gnoseological process,”³⁵⁴ though failed to investigate the fundamental problem: why is knowledge originally divided, and likewise originally, why does it maintain a relation to the doctrine of pleasure, that is, to ethics? Can one reconcile the fracture between knowledge and the beautiful (between knowing the truth and enjoyment)?—“that science knows the truth but cannot enjoy it, and that taste enjoys the beauty, without being able to explain it?”³⁵⁵

These fractures (the division of the epistemic object into truth and beauty, and the division of human ethical *telos*³⁵⁶ into knowledge and pleasure), that characterize Western metaphysics, can be illuminated by the discussion of taste.

In Plato’s account (in *Phaedrus*) of the relationship between beauty and wisdom, Agamben writes, one finds “the original metaphysical problem of the fracture between visible and the invisible, or appearance and being.”³⁵⁷ The lack of an image of wisdom, and the particular visibility of beauty as per Plato’s definition, means a paradox of the visibility of the invisible or the sensible appearance of the Idea. In the *Symposium*, Plato defines Eros’

353 Agamben, *Taste*, 5.

354 Ibid, 7.

355 Ibid, 8.

356 “(which in the Aristotelian ethics still appeared undivided in the notion of a *theoria* that is also *teleia eudaimonia*, ‘perfect happiness’)”—(Ibid.)

357 Ibid, 10.

(love) status in the epistemic realm as a medium between wisdom and ignorance, “knowledge that judges correctly and grasps the truth without, however, being able to justify itself,”³⁵⁸ or in other words, “right opinion” (*orthē doxa*). Plato assigns to the theory of love a paradoxical task of guaranteeing the relation between beauty and truth. One of Plato’s most profound intensions is to exclude the visible from the domain of science (see book 7 of the *Republic*—the truth [of astronomy] cannot be grasped from the standpoint of appearance and visible beauty). “The *episteme*, by itself, cannot ‘save appearances’ in mathematical relationships without presuming to have exhausted the visible phenomena in its beauty”³⁵⁹—this intertwining of double impossibility (that beauty cannot be known and truth cannot be seen) is at the core of Plato’s theory of Idea and Eros’s “other knowledge.” The significance of the term “Idea” is contained in the play between truth and beauty. “Only because the supreme act of knowledge is split in this manner into truth and beauty, ... wisdom must be constituted as ‘love of knowledge’ ... [Wisdom] must present itself as philosophy.... as a medium between science and ignorance—between a having and a not-having.”³⁶⁰

“The formation of the concept of taste, ... betrays its metaphysical origin through the secret solidarity it presupposes between science and pleasure. Taste appears from the beginning as a ‘knowledge that does not know, but enjoys’ and as a ‘pleasure that knows’.”³⁶¹

“In its most radical formulation, eighteenth-century reflection on the beautiful and taste culminates in the return to *knowledge* that one cannot explain since it is grounded on a pure signifier; ... and to a *pleasure* that allows one to judge since it is sustained not on a substantial reality but, rather, on that which in the object is pure signification.”³⁶²

The concept of taste, which Western culture established as an ideal of knowledge (“one that could suture the metaphysical scission between the sensible and the intelligible”),³⁶³

358 Ibid, 12.
 359 Ibid, 17.
 360 Ibid, 18–19.
 361 Ibid, 22.
 362 Ibid, 39–40.
 363 Ibid, 51.

appears as an impossibility for the subject since it cannot be explained. Taste is an empty or excessive sense, situated at the very limit of knowledge and pleasure. The object of this knowledge is designated as beauty: according to Plato's conception, it is given to sight, but a sight of which there can be no science, only love. Thus, this impossibility of grasping the object of vision as such drove Plato to account for it not as "wisdom," but as the desire for wisdom. Beauty means that "there is a subject of desire (a *philosophos*) but not a subject of wisdom (a *sophos*),"³⁶⁴ therefore Plato's theory of Eros aims at bridging these two divided subjects.

In the last part of the book, Agamben discusses the expression "excessive signifier" that derives from the work of Levi-Strauss, in particular his theory of signification that he developed through the concept of *mana* in his *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (1950). Levi-Strauss presumes "a fundamental inadequate relation between signification and knowledge that translates to an irreducible excess of the signifier over the signified."³⁶⁵ According to Levi-Strauss, the process of meaning-granting was a gradual transformation (and which had no counterpart in the field of knowledge), thus an opposition exists (in the history of the human mind)

between symbolism which is characteristically discontinuous, and knowledge, characterized by continuity.... The categories of the signifier and the signified constituted simultaneously and interdependently, as complementary units; whereas knowledge ... got started very slowly.... The universe signified long before people began to know what it signified; ... but... from the beginning, the universe signified the totality of what humankind can expect to know about it.³⁶⁶

The surplus of signification, which maintains the relationship of complementarity, "is the very condition of the exercise of symbolic thinking."³⁶⁷ For Levi-Strauss, the notion of *mana* means "that *floating signifier* which is the disability of all finite thought."³⁶⁸

Extending Levi-Strauss's conception, we can conclude that, since Plato was unable

364 Ibid, 52.
365 Ibid, 55.
366 Ibid, 56–57.
367 Ibid, 60.
368 Ibid.

to exhaust the visible phenomena as such (through its explanation) and thus had to seek the invisible, “ancient science left free in the phenomena what was pure appearance in them (that is, pure signifier), opening beside itself a space that divinatory science could occupy without contradiction.”³⁶⁹ Thus astrology, which picks up the pure signifier that astronomy could not fully explain, treats that signifier as “a supplement of signification to distribute at its whim.”³⁷⁰

This structure can be extended to incorporate the entire epistemological status of Western culture, claims Agamben. Thus, in the ancient world there are two types of knowledge: one that is known (that is founded in the adequation of signifier and signified), and one that is not known (divinatory science, founded on the excessive signifier). Emile Benveniste’s distinction between the *semiotic* and the *semantic* as the “double signification” inherent in human language means, in this sense, that the first is semantic knowledge (which has a subject and can be explained) and the second is semiotic knowledge (which does not have a subject and can only be recognized). Philosophy is placed by Plato between these two forms of knowledge, but since it perceives the phenomena as beauty it is not limited merely to the distribution of the excessive signifier, but “thanks to the mediation of Eros, is able instead to save the phenomena in the Idea.”³⁷¹

Since the eighteenth century, divinatory science was excluded from knowledge, and science negated the possibility of any knowledge without subject. But this form of knowledge did not disappear completely since “hard” science was unable to fill or reduce the excessive signifier. Modern aesthetics (and other forms of knowledge such as philology) substitutes divinatory science as the knowledge of the excessive signifier (of the beautiful). In political economy, too, we see a connection to aesthetics in this sense—Georg Simmel, according to Agamben, defines money as a “pure relation without content,” thus the “value-form, like Levi-Strauss’ *mana*, is a zero symbolic value or pure signifier that simply indicates the necessity of a supplementary symbolic content.”³⁷² At the end of the nineteenth century, another science replaced the vacancy left by divinatory science based

369 Ibid, 61–62.

370 Ibid, 62.

371 Ibid, 63.

372 Ibid, 67.

on the assumption that there is a knowledge that is not known but that is revealed in symbols and signifiers: psychoanalysis. In a way, the more modern culture and science attempt to “save appearance,”

the greater becomes the residue of the excessive signifier (the quantity of knowledge that is not known) that must be explained by the divinatory sciences. Semiotic science and semantic science, divination and science strictly appear together linked through a relation of complementarity, in which the one guarantees the possibility and the function of the other.... The fracture between signification and knowledge—the semiotic and the semantic—is not in fact something produced once and for all outside of the human, but instead is a fracture of this very same subject of knowledge: man as *Homo sapiens*. Since, as a speaking and thinking being, the human is held between signification and knowledge, its cognition is necessarily split and the problem of who knows knowledge (the problem of the subject of knowledge) remains the fundamental question of every epistemology.³⁷³

Philosophy and modern science, since Descartes, tried to guarantee the unity of cognition through the fiction of an *ego cogito*, the *I* as a pure self-consciousness and the only subject of knowledge. Yet this subject of knowledge is called into question in recent developments of human science—psychoanalysis’ *id* as the subject of a knowledge that is not known; structuralism’s structure as an unconscious categorical knowledge without a reference to a thinking subject; or linguistics’ identification in the phoneme of a knowledge independent of the speaking subject. All of these are examples of an Other as the subject of knowledge.

Thus, a problem arises—that is, the passage between knowledge that is known and knowledge that is not known (knowledge of the Other and knowledge of the subject). Yet, this gap cannot be bridged, similarly to the way Benveniste showed the impossibility of bridging the gap between the semiotic and the semantic. Thus, semiology cannot constitute itself as a general science of the sign (as a knowledge founded upon the unity of the signifier and the signified), since, in order to do so, it would have to reduce the signifier’s excess and suture the scission between semiotic knowledge (knowledge that is known) and semantic knowledge (knowledge that is not known), a scission that is inscribed into the very notion of the sign—a conclusion that brings Agamben’s discussion of taste to an end,

373 Ibid, 70–71.

and section I of this thesis nearly to its end.

Before we end, it is necessary to conclude this section with a minor reservation, put forward by Agamben in *Creation and Anarchy: The Work of Art and the Religion of Capitalism* (his book most recently translated to English), regarding art's (and artists') capacity to act in and upon the world. If it appears, somewhat justifiably, as if Agamben ascribes art (or the aesthetic gesture of the artist) with unrealistic, grandiose power and potentiality, let us consider his suggestion that we “abandon the artistic machine to its fate.”³⁷⁴ What is the artistic machine?

In “Archeology of the Work of Art” (the book's opening essay), Agamben raises the following question: what is the place of art in the present?³⁷⁵ The essay tries to archeologically analyze the problematic (as per Agamben) position of the syntagma “the work of art,” to determine “whether the decisive element is the work or the art, or a mixture of them that is no better defined, and whether the two elements proceed in harmonious agreement or are instead in a conflictual relationship.”³⁷⁶ The decisive crisis in the notion of “work,” as we experience it today according to Agamben, causes the work's disappearance from the sphere of artistic production—today art is more and more realized as an activity without a “work,” because “the being-work of the work of art had remained unthought.”³⁷⁷ Agamben thus calls for a genealogy (in this short essay, though, he merely focuses on three key moments) of this fundamental ontological concept, by means of language analysis (since “philosophical problems are in the last analysis questions about the meaning of words”), in order to resolve our contemporary problematic relationship with the “work of art.”

In classical Greek, writes Agamben, artists are conceived as “technicians” who do not possess their own *telos*, their own end, because they produce a product that is exterior to them. Artists are constitutively incomplete beings (unlike the ones who contemplate or the visionaries, for example, who are philosophically superior to artists and hold within

374 Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*, 13.

375 Ibid, 2. Agamben mentions Giovanni Urbani, the late Italian art critic, as the first one perhaps to pose this question in a coherent way, and to whom Agamben's book *The Man Without Content* is dedicated.

376 Ibid.

377 Ibid, 3.

them their *energeia*, the being-in-act or being-at-work) since “in unproductive activities, as thought (*theōria*) precisely is, the subject perfectly possesses his end.”³⁷⁸ Praxis, the action that has its end in itself, is superior to *poiēsis*, the activity whose end is in the work. Beginning from the Renaissance, Agamben writes, art becomes an action that no longer has its *energeia* in the exterior object, but is slowly transformed into one of those activities (like knowing or praxis) that have their being-at-work in themselves. Art no longer resides in the work, but in the mind of the artists, in their ideas, while they produce the work. This concept has its model (as we previously saw in the gloss “The Before of the Book”) in the theological idea of divine creation, according to which God created the world with a pre-existing model in His “mind”; likewise, the artist already acquires the idea of the work of art before its realization. This is the theological vocabulary of creation in today’s art writing as per Agamben. This process results in the modern status of the art object itself, as an unnecessary remainder with respect to the artist and its creative act. Thus, “*ergon* and *energeia*, work and creative operation, are complementary yet incommunicable notions, which form, with the artist as their middle term, what I propose to call the ‘artistic machine’ of modernity. And it is not possible, ... either to separate them or to make them coincide or, even less, to play one of against the other.”³⁷⁹

Further into the essay, Agamben attempts to juxtapose, in regard to the present, the practice of the avant-garde and liturgy, based on the (also previously mentioned) writing of Odo Casel (the manifesto of the Liturgical Movement of the 1920s). Based on the idea that liturgy is not a “representation” or “commemoration” of the salvific event, but is itself the event, and thus is carried out *ex opere operato* (“in that moment and in that place”), Agamben hypothesises that a strong analogy exists between sacred action of the liturgy and the praxis of the artistic avant-garde and of the art called contemporary. These arts abandon, writes Agamben:

[T]he mimetic-representative paradigm in the name of a genuinely pragmatic claim. The artist’s action is emancipated from its traditional productive or reproductive end and becomes an absolute ‘performance,’ a pure ‘liturgy’ that coincides with its own celebration and is effective *ex*

378 Ibid, 6.

379 Ibid, 8–9.

opere operato and not through the intellectual or moral qualities of the artist.
... [L]iturgy and ‘performance’ insinuate a hybrid third, in which the action
itself claims to present itself as a work.³⁸⁰

With the “invention” of the ready-made, Duchamp, according to Agamben’s third and last genealogical moment, attempted to free art from what was blocking it, namely the “artistic machine.” Duchamp attempted to deactivate this machine by forming a new place for the ready-made—“neither in the work nor in the artist, neither in the *ergon* nor in the *energeia*, but only in the museum, which at this point acquires a decisive rank and value.”³⁸¹ Thus, in contemporary art there appears a historical conflict between art and work, *energeia* and *ergon*.

In conclusion, not only does Agamben suggest that we abandon the “artistic machine,” but with it the idea that there is something like a supreme human activity that, “by means of a subject, realizes itself in a work or in an *energeia* that draws from it its incomparable value.”³⁸²

[Continue Reading]

380 Ibid, 11.
381 Ibid, 12.
382 Ibid, 13.

§ [Messianic Language]

Benjamin's philosophy of history is analyzed by Agamben not exclusively from the messianic perspective offered thus far (Benjamin's concept of history and the idea of messianic time as a paradigm of historical time that are at the core of the essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History"), but also (and perhaps always, as these perspectives are complementary and interwoven) from a perspective based in language.

A comprehensive discussion of Benjamin's philosophy of language, its connection with the problem of history and its messianic intention, is found in Agamben's early essay "Lingua e storia. Categorie linguistiche e categorie storiche nel pensiero di Benjamin."³⁸³ The essay commences with a fragmented quote from Benjamin's preparatory notes to "Theses on the Philosophy of History":

The Messianic world is the world of a total and integral actuality. The first instance of universal history occurs there. Today this term can only denote a type of esperanto which cannot be realized until the confusion of Babel is cleared up. It presupposes a language into which every text can be wholly translated. ... Or rather, it is itself this language; not in written form, but as it is joyously acted out.³⁸⁴

Benjamin's argument, writes Agamben, messianically conflates language and history,

383 The essay originally appeared in Italian, in the edited volume *Walter Benjamin: Tempo storia linguaggio* (1983). English translations appeared as "Language and History in Benjamin" in the journal *Differenzia* (1988); and a later version, albeit lacking a few final paragraphs, also appeared as "Language and History: Linguistic and Historical Categories in Benjamin's Thought" in the collection *Potentialities* (1999). A further treatment of this theme appears, in *Potentialities*, also in "Walter Benjamin and the Demonic: Happiness and Historical Redemption," 138–159.

Additionally, Agamben also develops this theme in *Infancy and History*, in an attempt to develop a new experience of time and history that will be grounded, accordingly, in a new experience of language. There he picks up on Benjamin's essay "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" (Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, 100–110) of 1918 where Benjamin calls for a reinvention of experience beyond the constraints of the Kantian model, a reinvention that by relating to the Kantian system would likewise be turned into knowledge. This would be a transformation of the concept of knowledge that begins to manifest itself in the acquisition of a new concept of experience, and at the centre of this reinvention we find the question of language. Benjamin writes: "The great transformation and correction which must be performed upon the concept of experience, originated to one-sidedly along mathematical-mechanical lines, can be attained only by relating knowledge to language;" (Ibid, 107–108) and, moreover, "a concept of knowledge gained from reflection on the linguistic nature of knowledge will create a corresponding concept of experience which will also encompass realms that Kant failed to truly systemize." (Ibid, 108.)

384 Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1239. Quoted in Agamben, "Language and History in Benjamin," 169.

maintaining that the history of redeemed humanity is the only universal history that amounts to its language (that is, universal post-Babylonian language), and that this language comes in the form of joyous celebration rather than writing.

The conflation of historical and linguistic categories, according to Agamben, should not come as a surprise—in fact, it can be grasped already in the Middle Ages (in the seventh century) when, for example, Isidore of Seville claims (in the *Etymologies*) that “[h]istory pertains to grammar,”³⁸⁵ or in an even remoter reference, Augustine’s *De ordine*, where one finds the claim: “Whenever something memorable was to be written down, it necessarily pertained to grammar. Grammar was thus linked to history, ... a discipline ... not so much for historians but for grammarians.”³⁸⁶ Every historical process of handing down refers to the domain of the “letter,” since the Augustinian conflation is based on a broader definition of grammar, one that also includes (beyond the obvious lingual structural analysis) “the infinite dimension of historical transmittal.”³⁸⁷ The letter, for Augustine, is essentially “an historical element.” This conception is a sequel to the long tradition of the ancient world that reflects on language in terms of being a two-fold system that incorporates names (as pure denomination) and discourse (in Marcus Terentius Varro’s words, “a river from a spring”³⁸⁸). Man’s use of words is a result of his historical participation in this river. That is, history mediates and conditions the foundation of language for man, who receives names (that proceed him) only through a process of them being handed down to him, them hierarchically *descending* to him within a historical process. Whether descending from a divine or profane source, the crucial thing here is that “the origin of names escapes the speaker. ... As long as man has no access to the foundation of language, there will be a handing down of names; and as long as there is a handing down, there will be history and destiny.”³⁸⁹

Benjamin’s conflation of language and history thus means, writes Agamben, that

385 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, I, XLI. Quoted in Agamben, “Language and History in Benjamin,” 170.

386 Augustine, *De Ordine*, 2, 12, 37. Quoted in Agamben, “Language and History in Benjamin,” 170.

387 Agamben, “Language and History in Benjamin,” 170.

388 Varro, *De Lingua Latina*, VIII, 5, 6. Quoted in Agamben, “Language and History in Benjamin,” 171.

389 Agamben, “Language and History in Benjamin,” 171–172. On the concept of “handing down” and/or “handing over” in the context of Christian Theology, see Agamben, *Pilate and Jesus*, 26–29.

“[m]an’s historical condition is inseparable from his condition as a speaker, and is inscribed in the very modality of his access to language, originally signaled by a split.”³⁹⁰ The original field of language, as articulated by Benjamin in his essay “On Language in General and the Language of Men” (1916), is that of names exemplified (according to the story of Genesis) in the Adamic language. This “pure language” is not our customary (and bourgeois, as per Benjamin) idea of language according to which a signifying word transmits meaning from one subject to another, but a language where the name communicates itself absolutely—in the name, “the spiritual essence which communicates itself is language.”³⁹¹ Nothing is communicated in the Adamic language beyond the name itself; in other words, spiritual essence and linguistic essence coincide, and in such a “pure language” the problem of the unsayable, which characterizes human language, does not exist, thus it corresponds with the religious concept of revelation, “which does not know any unsayable.”³⁹²

The original sin of man means, in this sense, language’s fall from its perfect status of non-signifying names to the signifying word as a means of exterior communication and, moreover, man’s making of language a means and a sign, a process that ended up in a Babylonian mayhem. This fallen condition of language is later on thought from the perspective of messianic redemption via Benjamin’s essay “The Work of the Translator” (1921). In this essay, Benjamin attempts to explicate the relation between the original, paradisiacal language and the multiple of languages that comprise it in terms of part and whole, claiming that a thing can only be understood not by an individual language but by the “totality of their meanings which become fused together as pure language.”³⁹³ In other words, a meaning conveyed and explained by supposedly only one language is impossible as it exists merely as a potential waiting to be harmonized with all other languages, in what Benjamin terms the “messianic end of their history.”³⁹⁴ Both history and linguistics move forward towards their messianic fulfillment; once this point arrives, language will be a “‘word without expression,’ which is liberated from the weight and the alienation of

390 Agamben, “Language and History in Benjamin,” 172.

391 Ibid, 173.

392 Ibid.

393 Quoted in Agamben, “Language and History in Benjamin,” 173.

394 Ibid, 174.

sense.”³⁹⁵ At the same time, however, once this state is reached, all communication and sense will extinguish themselves.

What is a word, asks Agamben, that no longer means, that is no longer destined for the historical handing down of a signified? How can person speak purely, how can they understand the word, without the mediation of the signified? For Agamben, that which remains unsayable and unsaid in every language is precisely that thing it wants to say but cannot, “the pure language, the inexpressive word”; the field of names is that meaning which it tries to convey but cannot bring “as such into speech.”³⁹⁶ Languages signify and have sense because they mean, but what they mean—that is, pure language—remains unsaid. The unsaid of meaning sustains, in each language, the tension between a language and its historical evolution; and it is what destined the language for its historical development. The biblical myth of the fall of Edenic language, according to Agamben, should be understood exactly in this way.³⁹⁷

The relationship between the various historical languages and their one common feature remains dialectical—on the one hand, they need to cease their meaning to say it, but on the other hand, this is exactly what they cannot do without (at the same time) abolish

395 Ibid.

396 Ibid,175.

397 Agamben will develop this theme in his later book *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, where he deals with human linguistic infancy or how humans are expelled from language as such into a linguistic and metaphysical scission. Infancy refers to the interim state between our pure state of grace in language, echoing that of the animal, and our acquisition of voice. Having language and the privation of voice are fundamental conditions of human being. “Animals are not in fact denied language ... they are already inside it. Man, instead, by having an infancy ... splits this single language and, in order to speak, has to constitute himself as the subject of language—he has to say *I*. ... man’s nature is split at its source, for infancy brings its discontinuity and the difference between language and discourse. The historicity of the human being has its basis in this difference and discontinuity.” (Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 52.) One can thus conclude that: (1) humans have no voice of their own; (2) as humans acquire their voice, a division is developed between speech and language; (3) this division and our awareness of it define *human* beings, as well as the way in which we come to have language (not the mere fact that we have one); and (4) we have language first as bifurcation (language-speech), then as subordination (speech over language), and then as negation (speech denies the experience of the nature of language as such). Yet because we have infancy we also have history, and because we have history we are human.

Moreover, infancy first names our coming away from being animal, then it indicates our ability to conceive of pure thinking not in terms of what cannot be said, but what can, and finally, it names the problem of human experience. The human experience of language, for Agamben, is always taken within language, but not entirely within language as if the division between language and speech never occurred. To undergo an experience within language is to undergo a new form of experience as testing (“experience” is related etymologically to “experiment” in Latin) or thinking, one that accepts the presence of language as such. Infancy is to be found in the human at all stages as both remnant of the animal and potential for the post-human. (Watkin, *The Literary Agamben: Adventures in Logopoiesis*, 6–9.)

themselves, since this capacity is only accessible to the totality of their messianic end: “Inasmuch as the pure language is the only one which does not mean, but says, it is also the only one in which that ‘crystalline elimination of the unsayable in language,’ can be realized.”³⁹⁸

Benjamin suggested, according to Agamben, that universal language (or history) should not be understood in terms of being an “Ideal” or an infinite duty that crosses all historical evolution; nor that the inexpressive word should be understood in terms of an infinite task (that could never be fulfilled) towards which the historical experience of speaking man is moving. Agamben justifies this claim by interpreting Benjamin as a thinker who “grouped together the social democratic transformation of a Marxist ideal of a classless society into a never-ending task, with an analogous transformation ... of the Kantian idea into an ideal;”³⁹⁹ and just as classless society is never actually realized, so the ideal language never reaches the level of the word. A classless society (which was, for Benjamin, genuinely messianic) is not the end of historical progress, but its interruption, “so often missed and finally fulfilled.”⁴⁰⁰ According to Agamben’s interpretation of Benjamin, contemporary hermeneutics (which looks for the unsaid and the infinity of meaning) tries, in fact, to fulfill the unsaid and the infinity of meaning rather than to conserve them, which is the exact opposite of true textual hermeneutics. Accordingly, for Benjamin, “if the letters ... commit human language to an historical handing down and an infinite interpretation, we can suppose ... that the universal language represents rather the definite cancelation and resolution of human language.”⁴⁰¹

398 Agamben, “Language and History in Benjamin,” 175.

399 Ibid, 177.

400 Ibid. It was Benjamin’s break with a Marxist teleological reading of history that propelled his conception of a “weak messianic force” working through history in order to redeem those who were forgotten by history. Benjamin uses the notion of the messianic as a disruptive force working within the canonical representation of history; and just as the messianic is envisioned by Benjamin to be the redemptive figure of political liberation for the Jewish people, so he found a way to generate alternative meaning to history, through a messianic cessation, and against violently narrated ideological ends. (Dickinson, “Canon as an Act of Creation,” 137.)

401 Agamben, “Language and History in Benjamin,” 178–179.

“Like the origin,”⁴⁰² writes Agamben, for Benjamin “the language of names is not, then, an initial chronological point, just as the messianic end of languages, the universal language of redeemed humanity, is not a simple chronological cessation. Together they constitute the two faces of a single ‘idea of language’.”⁴⁰³ The universal language can only be, for Benjamin, the idea of language, “not an ideal (in the neo-Kantian sense) but the very *Platonic idea* of language which saves and contains in itself all languages.”⁴⁰⁴ This “idea of language” no longer presupposes any other language, it has nothing more to say, but, simply, speaks. At this radical point of transparency, there is no distinction in the language between “field of names” and signifying words or between the intended and the said, and the language reaches its messianic end. Accordingly universal history “knows no past to transmit, but it is the world of an ‘integral actuality’ . Language here disappears as an autonomous category. ... [M]en no longer write their language, but they act it out like a celebration.”⁴⁰⁵ Language (that is, universal language) had become so close to man (and his history) that they seem, like never before, to perfectly coincide, in the same way as lovers who have no more room for any image, letter, or grammar to reside between them.

[Continue Reading]

402 The origin, with respect to language and names in particular, is elsewhere illustrated by Agamben via the metaphor of the vortex: “Names—and each name is a proper or a divine name—are the vortexes of the historical becoming of language, whirlpools in which the semantic and communicative tension of language clogs up into itself and becomes equal to zero. In a name, we no longer say—or do not yet say—anything; we only call. It is perhaps for this reason that, in the naive representation of the origin of language, we imagine that names come first, discrete and isolated as in a dictionary, and that we then combine them to form a discourse. Once again, this puerile imagination becomes perspicuous if we understand that the name is actually a vortex that perforates and interrupts the semantic flow of language, not simply in order to abolish it. In the vortex of nomination, the linguistic sign, by turning and sinking into itself, is intensified and exacerbated in the extreme; it then makes itself be sucked in at the point of infinite pressure, in which it disappears as a sign and re-emerges on the other side as a pure name.” (Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale*, 61–62.)

403 Agamben, “Language and History in Benjamin,” 180.

404 Ibid.

405 Ibid, 182. Benjamin’s conception of language seems to exceed a realization in a mere theoretical form. As if bodily experienced, it is grounded on actuality, closely tied to the *experience* of language, to the realization that *there is* language, and in the same manner as any other ontological substance, it is given in time and (from itself) involves a reflection on history.

Section II—*Philosophical Archeology Space 2009–2019*

Introduction

This section is an integral component of my thesis exhibition titled *Philosophical Archeology Space 2009–2019*. The first part of section II is meant to contextualize the archeological orientation in contemporary art, as well as to generally draw how some artists have recently worked with archives or collections in their practice. A connection is thus made between art's conception of the historical and the archeological, between document and monument, in order to delineate a material conception of temporality. Consequently, the messianic conception of time (and its possible temporal realizations) is described in its relation to artistic, archeological production.

The discussion does not intend to punctiliously demonstrate how philosophical archeology works regarding our engagement with art, but to picture, in general terms, how key elements of the methodology (that were presented thus far) are conceived within the discourse of contemporary art.

The second part of section II (titled “The Archive and the Index”) is meant to offer a further entry to my artistic practice and thesis installation/exhibition. It does so by explicating the installation's two-part structure and the material *a priori* (as a historiographic methodology) of my artistic practice; and additionally, by offering terrains of thought regarding the various art works (or, in the jargon of philosophical archeology, “paradigms”) that are contained within the archive part of the installation.

I aim to write about these works rather indirectly, without over-explicating them, in order to leave enough room for the readers (and viewers) to generate their own self-directed archeological interpretation. Moreover, these terrains of thought somewhat shy away from a discussion mostly based on contemporary art theories or heavily infused with examples of artworks from the history of contemporary art.⁴⁰⁶ I use philosophical archeology, in writing, to comment upon ideas that lay at the core of (my) artworks and

406 However, I offer (in footnotes) references where one can turn in order to find further relevant information.

artistic practice (as an *arche* or “historical *a priori*”), and that has the power to do exactly that. The important thing for me, given the logic of philosophical archeology, is to unfold a non-authoritative reading of the concepts (or, in the jargon of philosophical archeology, “signatures”) that condition and govern my ongoing artistic projects/practice.

Part I—The Archeological Orientation in Contemporary Art

2.1.1

A key essay in the vigilant articulation of the archeological orientation in contemporary art was published by curator Dieter Roelstraete in 2009, under the title “The Way of the Shovel: On the Archeological Imaginary in Art.”⁴⁰⁷ The essay’s central argument concerns the identification of a “historiographic turn” in the art of the early twenty-first century, that is, a preoccupation with “looking back” among the generation of artists active at that time in the international art scene. Moreover, the essay questions whether this historiographic mode of artistic production and thinking might overemphasize the romantic notion that truth lies buried in history, and thus distracts from more pressing issues of the present and the future.

Roelstraete’s series of subsequent essays and curated exhibitions that he continued to develop on the subject matter culminated with the publication of *The Way of the Shovel*—a catalogue that accompanied an exhibition he curated at the MCA in Chicago under the same title (November 2013–March 2014). The catalogue contains, among others, Roelstraete’s essay “Field Notes,” which commences with a quote from an “archeological” thinker who is perhaps the most appropriate to sound out a culture marked by fragments, shards and traces—that is, Walter Benjamin: “He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging.”⁴⁰⁸ The metaphor of digging, writes Roelstraete, seems to be an identifying (though ironic) feature of contemporary art: “that the one sector of culture most commonly associated with looking *forward* should appear

407 For the reverse orientation, in other words, for the recent influence of the visual arts on the discipline of archeology, see Renfrew, Gosden, and DeMarrais, eds. *Substance, Memory, Display: Archeology and Art*. For their mutual influence, in general, see Renfrew, *Figuring It Out*. One of the important claims in these texts is that both art and archeology involve making subtle modifications in the landscape, explore natural materials and processes of change, as well as ask profound questions about the nature of the human condition. The difference between them relates to the fact that archeologists explore their field in the form of objective knowledge, attempt to formulate statements about their findings that “go beyond one’s own personal experiences and subjective beliefs.” (Renfrew, Gosden, and DeMarrais, eds. *Substance, Memory, Display: Archeology and Art*, 166.) Artists, on the other hand, have no such constraints and are expected to indulge in self-expression. The need to figure out what one is looking at when facing a monument in the field or an artwork in the gallery is common to both disciplines, but the difference between them is that this need is an obligation for the archeologist whereas for the artist is rather a meadow for further explorations.

408 Benjamin, “Excavation and Memory,” 576; Roelstraete, “Field Notes,” 14.

so consumed by a passion for looking not just the proverbial other way but in the opposite direction—*backwards*.”⁴⁰⁹ Nonetheless, historical consciousness in the art world “appears to have reached a critical level, to have become something qualitatively *new*.”⁴¹⁰

A few of the exhibited works in *The Way of the Shovel* clearly illustrate the archeological orientation in contemporary art that Roelstraete points to. One of them is *Plot* (2007) by Canadian artist Derek Brunen. It is a performance/video work that, in the course of 6 hours and 12 minutes, shows the artist literally digging his own grave, “recording the laborious action in real time, solitarily performed in a cemetery in the artist’s former hometown, Vancouver.”⁴¹¹ This is a philosophically charged work that does not shy away from the big questions—life, death, fate, infinity—as it seeks answers to them, answers that inevitably remain somewhat unanswered. This is the way of the shovel at its most literal sense, as earthly soil is dug out with a shovel in order to prepare for the artist’s ultimate exiting. “[I]n its appropriation of the endgame motif,” Roelstraete writes, the artist proves “how the frustrated spectacle of the search for meaning can still engender an experience of the new.”^{412 413}

Another exhibited work which lucidly speaks to the manner in which contemporary artists construct their relation to history is *Message from Andrée* (2005) by Danish artist Joachim Koester. Drawing on both documentary and fiction, Joachim Koester’s work reexamines and reactivates certain forms and traces from the past, with the intention of finding and translating “the buried stories such marks might contain.”⁴¹⁴ While two prominent recurring concerns in his work are “how ideas and narratives take on a physical form” and “how stories and history materialize,”⁴¹⁵ equally important is the “dematerialized” question of the “tension between the apparent narrative, which the viewer

409 Roelstraete, “Field Notes,” 15–16.

410 Ibid, 19.

411 *The Way of the Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art*, 65.

412 Ibid.

413 For another film that shows an artist digging his own grave, see *The Hole* (1972–74). The film was a part of a two-year project, culminating in the film itself. Shot under the influence of LSD and bathed in eerie, hazy light, this short film shows the artist, Jacques Katmor, staging his own burial while drawing Cabalistic and Jewish symbols on the ground and with the movements of the camera.

414 *The Way of the Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art*, 140.

415 Koester, *Message from the Unseen*, 40.

immediately sees, and what remains invisible or illegible.”⁴¹⁶

Message from Andrée (usually presented as an installation of a 3:39 minute, 16mm film and two ink-jet prints) was inspired by a hot-air balloon expedition led by Swedish researcher Salomon August Andrée, who left Norway to journey across the North Pole in 1897. Thirty-three years later, the explorers’ remains were found with a box of negatives that told the story of a crash and an ill-fated three-month trek across the ice. Koester photographed the negatives, which were covered in black stains, scratches, and streaks of light, and produced a film that just shows black dots of different sizes flicker over a field of white—those effects of film often ignored by historians. Koester writes: “Most historians studying the expedition ignored this layer of ‘visual noise’. I, on the other hand, have made it my focus. If language defines our world, the black dots and light streaks on the photographs can be seen as bordering on the visible, or marking the edge of the unknown, pointing to the twilight zone of what can be told and what cannot be told, narratives and non-narratives, document and mistake.”⁴¹⁷ While the viewer sees only inscrutable traces of something fluttering across the screen, the film evokes memories of the tragically optimistic explorers, the forces of time and severe weather conditions physically acting on the film, and the power of photography to reveal otherwise lost moments.

Message from Andrée, corresponding to a turning point for Koester, is his first work to include a film with a flicker effect and whose documentary dimension is a pretext for a perceptual experiment. From there, the artist concentrated more and more on a quest for “spirits.” Koester’s “ghost-hunting,” which attempts to bring back forgotten people or places, often involves occultism or rituals that experiment with different types of perception. Spirits, for Koester, are all those things never fully realized in history. As Foster writes on Koester’s work:

Even as modernization obliterates history, it can also produce ‘points of suspensions’ that expose its uneven development—or, perhaps better, its uneven devolution into so many ruins. Such are the ‘blind spots’ that intrigue Koester. An oxymoron of sorts, the term suggests sites that,

416 Ibid.

417 Caron, *Joachim Koester: Of Spirits and Empty Spaces*, 178.

normally overlooked, might still provide insights; and, as Koester captures them, they are unsettled, an unusual mix of the banal and the uncanny, evocative of an everyday kind of historical unconscious.⁴¹⁸

Foster's "points of suspension" is borrowed from Koester's (and Buckingham's) treatment and analysis of empty or indeterminate spaces and their relation to meaning embedded in material forms. They draw on the example of the Free City of Christiania, a 1,200 person anarchistic squat located in Copenhagen, which since 1971 "exists as a police-free social experiment, self-governed under a direct-democratic process where all major decisions are made by unanimous vote. A sign posted at Christiania's main entrance declares: You are now leaving the European Union."⁴¹⁹ The representative flag is comprised of three yellow dots on a red background, a design that seemingly acts in opposition to "usual" symbols (that attempt to fix meaning against the flow of time) in the sense that it marks transience and fragmentation. "The three dots resemble an ellipsis, or 'points of suspension', the typographical mark that indicates an omission, faltering speech, or an incomplete thought in a printed text."⁴²⁰ The ellipsis marks the indeterminate but can also act as a connector of any two (or more) sentences, "forming an endless chain of possible thoughts."⁴²¹ The three dots also form a broken horizon line, a limit that at the same time allows the mind spaces beyond the limit: "Empty spaces urging us onwards, reminding us that the vanishing point of history is always the present moment."⁴²²

A last example from *The Way of the Shovel* belongs to the artist that, as Roelstraete writes, "[N]o survey of the archeological impulse in contemporary art would be complete without"⁴²³—Mark Dion. Dion's practice has become almost synonymous with the art of the archeological dig, both as a metaphor and as a literal, physical act. In the exhibition, Dion presents a series of illustrations of mixed-media installations that he produced throughout his vast artistic activity, as well as two, crude and well-used shovels that have accompanied Dion on numerous digs. The emphasis of Dion's work, and in relation to the

418 Foster, "Blind Spots: Hal Foster on the Art of Joachim Koester," 216.

419 Koester and Buckingham, *Points of Suspension*, 56.

420 Ibid, 60.

421 Ibid, 62.

422 Ibid.

423 *The Way of the Shovel: On the Archaeological Imaginary in Art*, 100.

archeological orientation in contemporary art, resides in its epistemological inquiry: “Dion’s sprawling installations,” writes Roelstraete, “regularly borrow from the aesthetic Lingua franca of nineteenth-century Victorian museum culture, consistently reversing the means and ends of scientific research and its ‘objective’ results or findings, to turn both the investigation and the locale—a desk, a lab coat, a tool kit—into a work of art.”⁴²⁴

The new height of historical consciousness among contemporary artists, according to Roelstraete, is partly the result of the current knowledge economy that artists (as well as art critics, curators, and almost all art-world agents) are subject to; in other words, artists are part of a larger process of epistemological reorientation underway in society, a clearly identifiable process that (in the art world) is practiced through research done in the archive and library rather than in the studio, where such work (traditionally) used to take place.⁴²⁵ In this quest for knowledge, artists aspire to recover long-forgotten artifacts, but also (sometimes due to the impossibility of the mission of recovery) attempt to enhance our memory, to reconstruct, reenact, repeat; to engage not only in practices of storytelling but of history-telling: “Indeed, if the past truly *is* a foreign country ... it is certainly one many artists feel called upon to rediscover from afar—the only terra incognita left to map, perhaps, in a world of total transparency in which everything is always immediately ‘known’.”⁴²⁶

Moreover, in his attempt to answer the question “Why now?” of the historiographic turn, Roelstraete addresses the current crisis of history both as an intellectual discipline and as a fundament of contemporary culture more generally. Today’s general state of post-ideological fatigue as well as the political evacuation of academia are signaled as the crisis’s symptoms: “If ‘progress,’” he writes, “in contemporary culture is predicated in part on accelerated oblivion, it is typically art’s role to go against the grain of such dominant, homogenizing trends and slow down the spiral of forgetfulness, and even to occasionally

424 Ibid.

425 In order to support this claim, Roelstraete mentions two previous important texts written on the phenomenon: Godfrey’s “The Artist as Historian” (2007) and Foster’s “An Archival Impulse” (2004).

426 Roelstraete, “Field Notes,” 25. This artistic inclination towards researching and presenting alternative histories, according to Roelstraete, is also a result of current technological and political burdens.

turn back the clock.”⁴²⁷

Another part of Roelstraete’s answer to the question, “Why now?”, relates more directly to “the straightforward matter of chronology.” The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 [being parts of a series of various political upheavals in (mostly) eastern Europe at the end of the twentieth-century] mark the first clear milestones in this process as per Roelstraete; and the current generation of artists who grew up around that time are the ones who today attempt to, in some ways, preserve in memory the way of life on the “other” side (of the wall, the border, etc.) or to preserve what is no longer there. The other key event in this proposed chronology is the September 11, 2001, terror attack in New York, an event that signaled the end of “the age of neoliberal complacency ushered in by the publication, in 1989, of Francis Fukuyama’s landmark essay ‘The End of History?’,”⁴²⁸ an event that announced the dramatic *return* to History (with a capital H) and renewed calls upon art to take part in this process (as the present political worldwide climate is overly miserable to handle): “The historiographic turn in contemporary art, then, was also a turning away from a present that art, as a whole, felt utterly powerless to change—or ... uninterested in being a part of.”⁴²⁹ 430

Furthermore, the reason for art’s recent attraction to the archeological paradigm, according to Roelstraete, is related also to the discipline’s truth claims—that is, “the

427 Ibid, 33.

428 Ibid, 37.

429 Ibid, 39.

430 The one tragic flaw of the “historiographic turn” in art, writes Roelstraete, is “its inability to grasp or even look at the present, much less to *excavate* the future.” (Roelstraete, “The Way of the Shovel: On the Archeological Imaginary in Art,” 6.) In a follow-up essay, Roelstraete offers a fix to this flaw, maintaining the need to view the art world as a historical whole, “to finally be able again to capture art in a handful of isms.” (Roelstraete, “After the Historiographic Turn: Current Findings,” 7.) Specifically, after the financial crisis (in the art market) of 2008, a true historical thinking on the grand scale of “isms” is required (as we often expect or witness after a “natural” breed of realisms crises). We hardly have any realism in art and culture now, according to Roelstraete, because there “have not been real crises,” and “there simply has not been terribly much engagement with something akin to a ‘real’ world in recent times.” (Ibid, 9.)

rhetorical assumption that depth delivers truth, that the ground cannot lie.”⁴³¹ ⁴³² The archeological, material-based quest or (re)search is an elaborated allegory of the artist’s quest for the unknown and unknowable. In this quest, earthly soil plays a crucial role.⁴³³

2.1.2

If we accept the assumption that the ground cannot lie, and at the same time, recognize that archeology is practiced (as a form of art) through engaging with its philosophical dimension, we can perhaps argue that philosophical archeology in artistic practice confines this term to its proper meaning, that is, as potential truth.

In what he terms as “anteroom thought,” Siegfried Kracauer advocates against the radical character of philosophical truths, due to their “generality and concomitant abstractness” as well as their favouring of “either-or decisions” and tendency for “freezing into dogma.”⁴³⁴ Resisting attempts at mediation, philosophical doctrines tend to leave no

431 Roelstraete, “Field Notes,” 43.

432 However, even if one believes the assumptions that “depth deliver[s] truth, that the ground cannot lie,” this belief does not necessarily entail its grasping. Isaiah Berlin writes, with regard to the division between “surface” and “depths,” the following: “There is a vision, or at least a glimpse, a moment of revelation which in some sense explains and reconciles, a theodicy, a justification of what exists and happens, as well as its elucidation. What does it consist in? ... [W]e are here plainly intended to see that these 'heroes' of the novel—the 'good' people—have now, after the storms and agonies of ten years and more, achieved a kind of peace, based on some degree of understanding: understanding of what? Of the need to submit: to what? ... To the permanent relationship of things, and the universal texture of human life, wherein alone truth and justice are to be found by a kind of 'natural'—somewhat Aristotelian—knowledge. ... How can this be known? ... By an awareness, not necessarily explicit or conscious, of certain general characteristics of human life and experience. And the most important and the most pervasive of these is the crucial line that divides the 'surface' from the 'depth'—on the one hand the world of perceptible, describable, analyzable data ... [a]nd, on the other hand, the order which, as it were, 'contains' and determines the structure of experience ... [W]e are in art living in a world the constituents of which we can discover ... [B]ut in part, we are immersed and submerged in a medium that, precisely to the degree to which we inevitably take it for granted as part of ourselves, we do not and cannot observe as if from the outside ... cannot even be wholly aware of, inasmuch as it enters too intimately into all our experience, is itself too closely interwoven with all that we are and do to be lifted out of the flow (it is the flow) and observed with scientific detachment, as an object. It—the medium in which we are—determines our most permanent categories ... [It is] the ultimate framework, the basic presuppositions wherewith we function. ... Yet some human beings are better aware—although they cannot describe it—of the texture ... [I]t is ... a special sensitiveness to the contours of the circumstances in which we happen to be placed ... [T]his inexpressible sense of cosmic orientation is the 'sense of reality', the 'knowledge' of how to live.” (Berlin, “The Hedgehog and the Fox,” 487–89.)

433 In this sense, Roelstraete mentions Georges Bataille’s idea of “Base Materialism” according to which both art and archeology are forms of work that involve our bodily engagement “*in the world*,” diminishing the distance from the material and the work itself, forcing us to touch and scratch it, “intensifying out bodily bondage.”

434 Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, 214.

room for something to exist in the interstices between these truths. This threatens to overshadow potential truths that are not conceived as belonging to the “ultimate range of the general.”⁴³⁵ Anteroom thought, on the contrary, requires the acknowledgment of philosophical truths and their claim to objective validity *alongside* the awareness of their limitations in terms of absoluteness and controlling power—“[a]mbiguity is of the essence in this intermediary area.”^{436 437}

2.1.3

Art’s current coupling of historical perspective and archeological digging brings to mind a previous, similar coupling—between the document and the monument—described perhaps most elliptically by Foucault in this celebrated passage from *The Archeology of Knowledge*:

435 Ibid.

436 Ibid.

437 Siegfried Kracauer’s “anteroom thought” can perhaps be realized in the context of poststructuralism, and especially its relation to language. In *Experiencing the Past*, Michael Shanks clearly explains this multilayered connection. Metaphysical judgments, he writes, are judgments about what really exists, that is, ontology. The object of study is the origin. The past, present in its traces, is the beginning and end of archeology. The word itself—archeology—contains all that exists in its project: (arche) meaning origin and beginning, power and sovereignty; (logos) meaning account, reason, explanation, expression, discourse. Whether these elements have presence and meaning in themselves is to be questioned in a poststructuralist account, especially ideas of identity, origin, and meaning.

It is argued that the past has no determinate meaning, but it constantly slips from our conceptual hold. The reason for this is because it depends on foregrounding language and its structure. Language is argued as central to human experience, and language is primarily signification—communication in and through signs. Saussure’s structural linguistics established a fundamental *split* within the sign: between the (differential, sensible) *signifier*, that is, a sound or image that acts as a vehicle; and the (formal, intelligible) *signified*, that is, a concept referred to. Signifiers have no necessary meaning in themselves, but hold potential. This potential comes from signifiers being located in a structure of signifiers that differ from each other. A word on its own means nothing; rather, its meaning comes from its difference from other words—this structure of difference enables the signifier to be tied to the signified (both components of the sign, differs from the actual object in reality, which is called the referent).

We relate the word and its associations with others. The result is a texture; each word is formed on the basis of traces within it of other words. Nothing is ever simply present or absent, and there is no end to this differing. We are always delayed in reaching meaning. Meaning is constantly deferred, divided from itself. There are only webs of signifiers. This entails meaning always being absent, in a way—it is not present in the sign. Thus, if our “hold” on reality is primarily through language, then identity and meaning are elusive.

When one holds an object in one’s hands, various attributes (decorations, markings, colours, styles, etc.) are associated with the object that seem to give it its identity. These attributes are not present *within* the object but are constantly shifting; the object is becoming and not being. It does not have identity and being so much as difference and becoming. The meaning of the object is here and elsewhere. The signifier is subverted; the (object’s) past is not the origin of meaning.

In conclusion, Shanks claims that poststructuralist argument does not question truth to replace it with a free play of signifiers, but the truth of the past is material and institutional, social and personal; and archeologists write in the space between past and present.

“In our time, history is that which transforms *document* into *monument*.”⁴³⁸ Foucault’s critique, being a continuation of a historical tradition that started in France by the intellectuals of the *Annales* journal of the 1930s, emphasized a redefinition of the methodology involved in historical research. This critique of the document and history’s fundamental relation to it, as well as the manner in which visual and textual materials were being used in historical research, highlight a more reflective use of the document that was exercised in academic circles, but also (and perhaps more lucidly than in others fields) in artistic practices of the 1960s onwards—using the document no longer as a site for interpretation, but as a site for construction. “The document,” as Foucault writes, “is no longer for history an inert material,”⁴³⁹ it actively manifests its potentiality in different ways if one just learns how to question it properly.⁴⁴⁰ As opposed to the classic work of the historian, who investigates the document in order to uncover its supposed concealed truths, the artist is able to produce a document that is no longer part of a group of hidden evidence, but is part of constructed scenes of knowledge manufacture.⁴⁴¹

The idea that, in the hands of artists, the document is no longer an inert material (and that it has become a site for knowledge production) is reflected by multiple examples in recent contemporary art. Artists have continuously used archives and collections as a form of storytelling or history telling, in order to construct a desired narrative or to rewrite the

438 Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, 7.

439 Ibid.

440 Foucault builds upon the work of the French historian Marc Bloch, who writes: “For even those texts or archeological documents which seem the clearest and the most accommodating will speak only when they are properly questioned. ... [E]very historical research supposes that the inquiry has a direction at the very first step. In the beginning, there must be the guiding spirit.” (Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, 64–65.) If we adhere to the idea that any document is fraught with ideological overtones, we should also approach any monument in the same way. The historian Jacques LeGoff, a follower of Marc Bloch, adds that a document is made a monument through historical societies’ efforts to impose—voluntarily or involuntarily—a certain image of themselves into the future. He writes: “There is no truthful document. Every document is a lie. It is the task of the historian to deconstruct, to demolish this montage, to re-structure this construction, and to analyze the conditions of production of these documents—monuments.” (Le Goff, “Documento/Monumento,” 455.)

The other assumption, according to Bloch, that permits the historian its research is the conception of time as “a multiple operator ... as the source of the heterogeneous multiplicity and polysemy of reality.” In characterizing time as both continuous and changing, Bloch conceives of time as causing “history to be experienced in a multiplicity of ways and within a multiplicity of meanings. ... Time becomes a locus of distribution of multiple meanings.” (Calcagno, “Abolishing Time and History,” 21.)

441 For a discussion of art epistemology, see Govrin, “Art Epistemology (Project for a Review).”

historiography of a certain subject matter. To demonstrate that, and to further support the claim for the historiographic tendency in contemporary art, we can review a few prominent examples to the way artists have worked with and constituted archives or collections in the past, while shedding light on important socio–political consequences of it.

Mining the Museum (1992) was an exhibition curated and installed by artist Fred Wilson. Wilson was invited by The Contemporary (Baltimore) to create the exhibition using the archives and resources of the Maryland Historical Society. The society’s collection is known for holding many objects from the “antebellum period.” These items, along with their indexation, made the collection itself known for promoting agenda of white supremacy. When Wilson culled objects from the permanent collection, he juxtaposed the products of slavery with fine–art statuary, furniture, and silverware. It constituted an act of criticism directed at the institution itself, showing the gap between the society’s own blind spots toward its past and the repressed history of the black population in the U.S. today. For example, in one room titled “Cabinetmaking,” he placed a set of antique armchairs in front of a whipping post (that was in use until 1938), as if to allow the audience to watch the white elite entertained by the abuse and humiliation of the black population. In this room, as well as others, Wilson mimicked the usual methods of curatorial museum display (i.e., specially painted rooms, silkscreened wall texts, labels, audiovisual material, etc.) and through that mimicry radicalized a subgenre of conceptualism—the institutional critique.

Institutional critique became more entrenched in contemporary art from the time that artists were invited by the institutions themselves to act as critics within their own walls. An example from two years earlier was Joseph Kosuth’s *The Play of the Unmentionable* (1990), which was exhibited in the Brooklyn Museum. Kosuth’s project was part of a site–specific series of installations in the grand lobby of the museum, where artists were asked to “shed further light on the debate with an eye to history,”⁴⁴² as stated by Robert T. Buck, the director of the Brooklyn Museum. For this installation, Kosuth created a dialogue about what art is in its social and political context, and for that he chose approximately one hundred works from the museum’s permanent collection “that were

442 *Brooklyn Museum*, “The Brooklyn Museum Collection: The Play of the Unmentionable (Joseph Kosuth).”

once considered acceptable in the cultures in which they were created, but now might be viewed by some as otherwise,”⁴⁴³ as noted further in the museum press release.

Howard Halle notes in his essay “Mining the Museum” (1993), that most of the artists criticizing the institution of art represent minority groups, such as women (like Louise Lawler, Judith Barry, Silvia Kolbowski and Andrea Fraser) or artists of colour, like Wilson, as part of a struggle to redefine art history by erasing the demarcations of gender, race, and class. Claire Bishop (in her essay “Rescuing Collective Desires: Benjamin, History and Contemporary Art”)⁴⁴⁴ agrees with Halle’s comments on Wilson’s project, but notes that most exhibitions curated by artists are not trying to confront any element of art history, but rather use the art collection as the extension of their own practice, in what should be considered “archival installation,” as defined by Hal Foster. In “Archival Impulse” (2004), Foster argues that through the archival-like installation, artists collect and rearrange objects as part of an associative dialogue, jumping from one idea to the other, so that the installation acts only as a module of their taste. *Raid the Icebox 1 with Andy Warhol* (1969) is a good example of this. In early 1969 Andy Warhol was invited to select works for a travelling exhibition that intended to provide a fresh and less academic interpretation of the collections in the storerooms of the RISD Museum. This landmark exhibition was not only noteworthy for Warhol’s idiosyncratic choice of objects—including shoes, parasols, chairs, hat boxes, Native American pottery and blankets, wallpaper, bundles of auction catalogues, even a ginkgo tree growing in the museum’s courtyard—but for the radical way he chose to display the works: along with their storage cabinets, racks, and shelves, as they were stacked and grouped in storage when *he* first saw them.

The origins for both approaches to working with a collection, as Bishop notes, resides in two unfinished projects from the beginning of the twentieth century: Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924–29) and Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* (1927–40). In the *Atlas*, Warburg used pictorial reproductions pinned on wooden panels to show the continuity of visual elements from the early pagan era to the renaissance of Christianity. By contrast,

443 *Brooklyn Museum*, “The Brooklyn Museum Collection: The Play of the Unmentionable (Joseph Kosuth).”

444 *Walter Benjamin: Exilic Archive*, 77–86.

Benjamin's *Arcades Project* illuminates a process that locates the decisive shift to the modern age. Through a montage of quotations from, and reflections on, hundreds of published sources, arranged in thirty-six categories, Benjamin tells the history of nineteenth-century capitalism and what he calls the "commodification of things." From this research, he coined (as previously mentioned) the term "Dialectical Image," where past and present interact with one another as a method and subject of critical analysis. In other words, the juxtaposition of collected archival materials, as organized by Benjamin, can show how experience from the past can tell us something about present times, and perhaps even of the future. Artists working with collections in this way could create new readings of materials, retelling their stories and narratives, leading to new knowledge of the institution, its collection, and more generally of art history and beyond. But the detailed, repetitious, laborious act of uncovering buried "treasures," revealing the process of time's passage, etc.—approximate a "scientific" type of art—is needed before any new knowledge can be founded. In other words, this "new" knowledge has come to be dependent more and more on the archeology of the past, and therefore, the archeological optic is one of the founding principles of modern museum culture (which in itself became a site to be explored) as well as the way contemporary artists work with and through archives or collections.

Artists are not historians and they should not attempt to be. They may create works that masquerade as documents and in doing so emphasize the extent to which documents are the products of conventions of knowledge production rather than vehicles for evidence. Their interest, in this case, lies less in uncovering than in unsettling historical truths and narratives. A great example is Walid Raad's Atlas Group (established in 1999), which researches and documents the contemporary history of Lebanon, in particular the years of the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90/91). Through the collection of the continuing effects of all the individual and collective experiences that constitutes history in the first place, the archive grows through not only found, but also intentionally invented photographic, audiovisual, and written "documents" of everyday life in Lebanon. Raad aligns experience and memories of the past with "actual" photographs and documents from the time of the civil war; and by doing so, he asks an important question about the authenticity of documents: why is a memory of the past less valid than a documentation of it? This

important question is very much related to the world we live in today, where every experience seems to be photographed and uploaded immediately to humanity's largest archive—the Internet.⁴⁴⁵

In her account of Walid Raad's work, Eva Respini emphasizes that "the Atlas Group presented itself as an organization founded to research and document the contemporary history of Lebanon, specifically the Lebanese Civil War, and as such as maintaining an archive of documents, films, notebooks, photographs, and objects."⁴⁴⁶ Investigating how photographs, moving images, documents, and first-person narratives confer authenticity on official histories, be they histories of war or art, Raad's work weaves elements of the past, the present, and the future to build narratives that question how history, memory, and geopolitical relationships are constructed. Each Atlas Group document was attributed to a source, including the colourful historian Dr. Fadl Fakhouri who, however, was fictional as was the Atlas Group organization itself. For Raad, it seems, the opposition between fiction and non-fiction does not apply. A fact in his work incorporates fantasy and imagination while a fiction is grounded in real events, dates, and statistics: "Perhaps it is more productive to think of Raad's work in terms of its *imaginary* dimensions rather than its *fictive* ones."⁴⁴⁷ In fact, it seems as if Raad's work's success hinges on our need to believe in official narratives. None of the "documents" produced by the Atlas Group is essentially faked: but when Raad re-photographs or scans them and mediates their presentation through story lines, literary titles, narrative wall texts, and engaging performances, they move into the imaginary realm. Raad's work turns to fiction in order to represent historical experience more adequately. He isn't concerned very much with "the fallaciousness of the material it presents,"⁴⁴⁸ but in suggesting that only through fiction can an adequate image of reality be created.

2.1.4

This methodological research and understanding of history nonetheless transgress the

445 For another recent project that addresses the intersections between photography and archeology, see *The Ar(t)chaeology Project: Intersections of Photography and Archaeology*.

446 Respini, Flood, and Raad, *Walid Raad*, 29.

447 Ibid.

448 Godfrey, "The Artist as Historian," 145.

proper discourse of art production. Media critic Knut Ebeling hypothesizes that in the twentieth century a new, archeological thinking of the past appears next to its historical twin. This form of thinking is constituted via a few major, modern intellectual endeavours he terms “Wild Archeologies,” that is, the dealing with archeological projects outside archeology proper. Such projects include, as he mentions, Freud’s “Archeology of the Soul”; Benjamin’s “Archeology of Modernity”; and Foucault’s “Archeology of Knowledge.” What all these projects share in common is that they are framed by Kant’s “Archeology of Philosophy” of 1793, as well as the fact that they “experimented with a material reflection on temporality.”⁴⁴⁹

Thus, a shift occurs from nineteenth century’s historical thinking to twentieth century’s archeological thinking; intellectual history becomes archeological, not historical. He writes that, nowadays, “[T]hinking temporality in the digital age requires a different line of thinking than historical discourse: not narrating, but counting; seeing rather than reading, not *historia* but *archaiologia*.”⁴⁵⁰ Ebeling’s idea corresponds and supports Roelstraete’s claim regarding artists’ current enthusiasm for narration and (story– and history) telling strategies, as well as their archeological, material conception of the past.

“Wild Archeologies” present a certain suspicion towards history, in terms of historical facts, documentations and records, and the “monopoly of scripture” that history once exclusively obtained. As opposed to history’s constructs, to the printed word and the textbook version of the world, one finds the archeological effort of uncovering that is systematically different—from simply “telling a story” to sounding out real debris, detritus and the world of things, that is, from textual to material reflection of the past. He writes: “Archeology does not represent the past; it materializes it. Archeologists work with the materiality of the past, whereas historians work with its written documents.”⁴⁵¹ Thus, the difference is the one we have already mentioned, that of *document* versus *monument*, textuality versus visibility. Both archeology and art secure remnants for visibility as opposed to history’s telling of them.

Additionally, the encountered objects might tell something different than the

449 Ebeling, “The Art of Searching,” 8.

450 Ibid, 7.

451 Ibid, 9.

wishful thinking of self-narration. This is the epistemic difference between *document* and *monument*. The archeologists do not have a causal knowledge of the event or phenomenon, their knowledge of the contemporary is strictly material, it needs to construct everything from a post-contemporary position, simultaneously, without sequencing semantics. This is the archeological image, or as Benjamin called it, the *dialectical image*.

The second major difference between history and the archeology is that of the language of inquiry—the historical account, whether written or oral, transforms everything into language, symbols and digits, whereas the archeological account first brings history and its object to light in order to consult the remnants themselves, not knowing in which language or logic to read and decipher them.

The third difference pivots around their conception of time as they sequence past contemporaneity⁴⁵² in different ways. Historical narration constructs time chronologically, linearly and continuously, jumping back and forth on an immaterial axis of time—one always starts to narrate in the beginning. In contrast, material archeology starts from the most recent, present moment (from the “contemporary ground,” as Benjamin called it) and regresses backwards in time, calculating back “from the end, which is the present.”^{453 454}

Thus, history and archeology qualitatively differ in their temporalities, or as Agamben puts it (according to Ebeling), history explores the documented past that has already originated, whereas archeology searches for the originating, instead of the always already originated. The emergence of original temporalities is what interests the archeologist. He calls it an “event”: “the idea of an ‘operation’ whose effects are yet to come. ... [F]or the originating, effective past, or, more generally, for all effective operations—that lie in the past, but effect the present.”⁴⁵⁵

Agamben, claims Ebeling, is somewhat less wild than the other “Wild Archeologists” previously mentioned, since his methodology “holds no materiality, it

452 For a tangential discussion of this term, and in the context of art production, see Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, 3–58.

453 Ebeling, “The Art of Searching,” 9.

454 This also entails a spatial difference between history and archeology. Archeology shows spatially what once was, while history narrates something chronologically in time. History chooses from chronological time while archeology preserves it all for display in the archaic regime of visibility (from transcendental model of historical time to strata of time, in other words, material time, the deep time of the layer). Archeology renders time sensible.

455 Ebeling, “The Art of Searching,” 11.

swallows and ignores the conflict between paper and stone, reading and seeing, text and technique,” up to the point where it is “completely absorbed and assimilated by philosophy.”⁴⁵⁶ Is archeology without materiality, asks Ebeling, still archeology? To that, I want to suggest, Agamben might reply with his proposition for a “minimal definition of thought” (in accordance with Aristotle’s identification of the blank page as the pure potentiality of thought): “*To think means to recall the blank page while we write or read. To think—but also to read—means to recall matter.*”⁴⁵⁷ My suggestion emphasizes that even when the idea of “archeology without materiality” is pushed to its extreme (that is, becomes completely and merely “thinking”), the materiality of the blank page always lurks in the background—thoughts, in this sense, resemble readymades. Thus, my suggestion responds to Ebeling’s question with a “yes.”⁴⁵⁸

In his book on Agamben’s work, Kishik has an insight that can offer another pertinent angle in this regard. He writes:

This attitude [i.e. the idea that philosophical prose must be ‘poeticized’ or else it runs the risk of falling into banality] partly explains the mosaic-like nature of his work. The tesserae that make up his texts are fragments chiseled from larger stones, or texts, written by others. It is a kind of historical materialism, not in the sense of a historical analysis directed at material processes but in the sense of a philosophical process that uses history as its material, indeed, as its capital, and thus wins over history itself by going against its grain.... A preliminary name for this method might be *détournement*: the cutting, pasting, and altering of found materials in the process of creating a new work.^{459 460}

Materiality, according to Ebeling (as previously mentioned), is the common denominator of all “Wild Archeologies,” which try, in varying ways, to construct archeology outside archeology proper. Materiality operates as *other*, as the other of history and historical

456 Ibid, 14.

457 Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale*, 108.

458 This suggestion is based on a broader definition of “archeology,” conceiving it also as a metaphor or allegory.

459 Kishik, *The Power of Life*, 61.

460 The method of *détournement* might propel a reference to artists working with language in a similarly materialistic ways; one example, out of many, is Robert Smithson’s essay “Language to be looked at and/or things to be read” (1967) in relation to his drawing/work “A Heap of Language” (1966). See Smithson, *The Collected Writings*, 61.

knowledge.⁴⁶¹ “Wild Archeologies” of the modern period thus “transformed” the very idea of materiality—from immaterial idea to material understandings of it—which is, essentially, the base matter of archeology.

The formulation of a new archeological object (Metaphysics in Kant; Media in Kittler; Souls in Freud; Knowledge in Foucault, etc.), as per Ebeling, enables a culture to define and describe itself. The archeological action can be interpreted as the art of constructing the missing link to the self.

2.1.5

In recent history, the art world (operating as a site of cultural discourse) has attempted to encounter, document, and interpret the past in various ways: the antiquarian endeavors of the eighteenth century (with its display technologies); the alignment of the advent of modern photography with archeological pursuits of the nineteenth century; and the artistic responses to the formal aesthetics of archeological artifacts of the early twentieth century are perhaps the most prominent constructions. In the second part of the twentieth century, according to curator and writer Ian Alden Russell, one witnesses a shift “from purely formal responses to archeological aesthetics toward more reflective and critical treatments of the manifestations of traces of human agency in the world”⁴⁶²—a shift that was carried out by the works of a large and diverse group of artists (such as Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth, Richard Long, Keith Arnatt, Cornelia Parker, Mark Dion, and perhaps most notably Robert Smithson), all contributing to the development of archeological awareness as a mode of ecological sensitivity.

Moreover, Russell claims that in the latter half of the twentieth century, archeology extends its metaphor to become an allegory, a historical development that refocuses critical engagement “from rhetoric of layers, depth, and progress (as in the twentieth century) to affect, performance, and meaning-making,” so that the return to the past is not carried out primarily for the sake of inspiration, but “is a deployment of the past as a technique in itself—a search for liberation through the subaltern past as a means of resistance to and

461 On the relation between “Otherness” and material debris, see Bell, “Rag-Picking.”

462 Russell, “The Art of the Past: Before and After Archeology,” 308.

critique of the teleology of technological progress.”⁴⁶³ Thus, the first decade of the twenty-first century witnesses a strengthened relationship between archeological and artistic practices and an ongoing effort towards a renewed conception of the past, so much so that “we may be witnessing a revival of an avant-gardist past that is not confined by disciplinary structures or epistemic conventions, where the past is not the destination but the way.”⁴⁶⁴

2.1.6

An avant-gardist, renewed conception of the past might be a different rehabilitation that Roelstraete seeks for the “tragic flaw of the historiographic turn in art,” although not necessarily in the form of another “ism.” Rethinking the past, or more generally, rethinking time as the medium in which the objects of historical research in art are taking part, is perhaps not an “ism” as such, but is at least a radical shift that has equal value in our thinking and making, and which has the potential to open up renewed possibilities outside linear chronologies and against the blockage of the cultural imagination that art seemed to have reached.

In a feature for *Frieze* in late 2012 (“This Is So Contemporary!”), writer Amelia Groom surveys how a number of recent exhibitions have been integrating the past with the present, seeking to do away with correct chronological sequence and the confines of cultural context, in order to suggest that the time and place in which a thing was made should not shut it off from other times and places.

Groom offers heterogeneous examples: *The Russian Linesman* (2009) at London’s Hayward Gallery, curated by Mark Wallinger, suggested surprising correspondences between vastly different objects spanning two millennia; *History of History* (toured between 2003–9), organized by Japanese contemporary artist and collector Hiroshi Sugimoto, established intricate dialogues between new works and material culture from distant pasts; *Intolerance* (2010) by the Dutch artist Willem de Rooij, organized at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, presented a series of animal portraits from the Golden Age of Dutch painting alongside feathered ceremonial headdresses from eighteenth-century

463 Ibid, 311–12. Russell further brings various recently curated international exhibitions (organized around 2010) and scholarly publications as examples to the growing allegorical appropriation of archeology.

464 Ibid, 313.

Hawaii, referred to the display as part of his ongoing work with “spatial collage”; *Never the Same River (Possible Futures, Probable Pasts)*, curated by Simon Starling at London’s Camden Arts Centre in 2010–11, slipped between different histories in the present as the artist restaged works from Camden shows of the last half-century; *Shaped by Time* (2012) at the National Museum of Denmark, organized by artist Julie Sass and curator Milena Hoegsberg, positioned (in relation to the museum’s prehistoric collection) fragmented pasts in dialogue with the present in order to consider the construct of history and reveal its fluidity; or when the 54th Venice Biennale (2011), curated by Bice Curiger, included paintings by Tintoretto amongst its line-up of new art.

These lines of thought, writes Groom, can be dated back to the art of the early 1960s (framed today as Minimalism, Conceptualism, and Land Art), which involve practices that were theoretically influenced by the Mesoamerican art historian George Kubler, and his book *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (1962). Dismissing the rhetoric of progress in favour of more chaotic models of time, Kubler outlined how artistic innovation, replication, and mutation never unfold in a single unbroken direction. History’s movements are turbulent, and art will always refuse to tell a fixed, unified story. *The Shape of Time* emphasized that the segmentation of the past is purely arbitrary and conventional, and that an imposition of linear order on something that is infinitely more fluid and complex is problematic. Kubler further claimed that historic time is always at once progressive and regressive, in the same way that art modifies our conception of what went before it and what comes after it (for instance, one’s knowledge of Auguste Rodin forever changes one’s understanding of Michelangelo, according to Kubler).

Groom concludes:

When we are presented with old art and new art together on equal terms, divisions become slippery and the past is made available for communicative interaction with the present. We form new associations, and possibly face up to contradictions we’d rather not acknowledge. The inclusion of things in displays of contemporary art that are neither strictly ‘contemporary’ nor ‘art’ is not, as some have suggested, a mere fleeting curatorial trend. It’s part of a broader growing awareness of the anachronism inherent in all time. After the failed productive-progressivism of modernity, we’re dealing with the fact that then and now and later aren’t proceeding along a flat line;

they're synchronized and woven through each other.⁴⁶⁵

2.1.7

What entails a cultural condition that denies linear chronology and advancement along a flat line but nonetheless is considered and executed at the present time? What kind of (temporal) present does it present and represent?

In his meditation on the (cultural) contemporary, theorist Boris Groys addresses the present and its position within and in relation to chronology. He writes: “The present has ceased to be a point of transition from the past to the future, becoming instead a site of the permanent rewriting of both past and future.”⁴⁶⁶ The artistic medium that best reflects this contemporary condition is, for Groys (and not without a touch of irony), time-based media:

[B]ecause it thematizes the non-productive, wasted, excessive time—a suspended time ... it captures and demonstrates activities that take place in time, but do not lead to the creation of any definite product. ... But it is precisely because such a wasted, suspended, non-historical time cannot be accumulated and absorbed by its product that it can be repeated—impersonally and potentially infinitely. ... Hence, practicing literal repetition can be seen as initiating a rupture in the continuity of life by creating a non-historical excess of time through art. And this is the point at which art can indeed become truly contemporary.⁴⁶⁷

Time-based art (as opposed to traditional artworks) is thus not based on a solid foundation of time, but rather documents time “that is in danger of being lost as a result of its unproductive character.”⁴⁶⁸ This change in the relationship between art and time also changes the temporality of art itself—it ceases to be present, ceases to be “in the present” or “in time,” and begins to document a repetitive present that can be prolonged into the indefinite future. The temporality of contemporary art, according to Groys, is thus “with time”—being contemporary, as the essay’s title suggests, means being a “comrade of time.”

465 Groom, “This Is So Contemporary!”

466 Groys, “Comrades of Time,” 4.

467 Ibid, 6.

468 Ibid, 7. For the suggestion that, from the perspective of production, time-based media promotes an understanding of the plasticity of time, see Birnbaum, *Chronology*.

For the most part nowadays, the actual conditions of spectatorship in time-based art (as it is often exhibited in art spaces) seem to support Groys' analysis. In modernity, the attitude of passive contemplation was discredited by celebrations of the potent movements of material forces. He writes: "While the *vita contemplativa* was for a very long time perceived as an ideal form of human existence, it came to be despised and rejected throughout the period of modernity as a manifestation of the weakness of life, a lack of energy."⁴⁶⁹ Contemporary spectators, on the other hand, can no longer rely on having infinite time resources or perspectives ("the expectation that was constitutive for Platonic, Christian, or Buddhist traditions of contemplation"); contemporary *vita contemplativa* coincides with permanent active circulation. It is a repetitive gesture that leads to no result, to no "well-founded aesthetic judgment."^{470 471}

The growing disbelief that characterizes the contemporary—the disbelief that cultural projects can realize their (past and future) promises in a way that reflects the disbelief of socio-political structures—causes Groys to speculate on a particular, acute need of the contemporary: "The contemporary is actually constituted by doubt, hesitation, uncertainty, indecision—by the need for prolonged reflection, for a delay. ... [A] prolonged, even potentially infinite period of delay."⁴⁷²

2.1.8

Paul, as we recall from section I, used the expression *ton kairon exagorazomenoi*, "buying up time," to convey the temporal condition of messianic time against the representation of chronological time that separates us from ourselves as impotent spectators.

Ceal Floyer's video work "Drop" (2013)⁴⁷³ is a clear example which seems to

469 Ibid, 8.

470 Ibid, 10.

471 This claim corresponds with Peter Osborne's argument according to which "the mode of attention appropriate to the conditions of contemporary art is best conceived in terms of a *historical dialectic of boredom and distraction*, rather than the strictly transcendental timelessness of the model of 'contemplative immersion' historically associated with the exhibition-value of modern art." (Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 176.)

472 Groys, "Comrades of Time," 3.

473 HD Video, Silent. 11:18 min, Loop. Video Documentation: <https://www.303gallery.com/artists/ceal-floyer/video-slideshow/undefined?view=slider#2> (and a Hi-Res version at: <http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2016/04/ceal-floyer-at-aargauer-kunsthau/>).

fulfill the contemporary's need (as per Groys) for potentially infinite deferment that will allow for the messianic to "seep in." The sublime emptiness of the present moment is manifested in her portrayal of the passing of time (and the present moment) in a material form—water drops accumulating very slowly until a breaking point occurs and gravity pulls it down, causing the drop to fall and shatter. The agonizing time of the viewer, who waits for the drop to disconnect, stretches out endlessly and becomes pure duration. The piece is not only a time-based work, but also takes place *in* time—that is, it criticizes the metaphysics of presence in the sense that it shows the before and after of presence, of the present moment by stretching the past and the future to its extreme.⁴⁷⁴ The actual moment of falling happens almost too quickly for the human eye to catch, the present withdraws and appears as if never took place. One is never contemporary with the present, as there is no now; the now is always deferred.

2.1.9

What seems to undergo a profound change is not the water drop itself, as an essence or material entity in and of itself, but something in our understanding of it, in our appreciation of the drop perhaps like never before. The messianic world, in a return to Agamben, introduces a small displacement that does not affect the identity of the Absolute and our concrete world, does not concern the state of things, but "their sense and their limits," as it takes place "in the space of ease between everything and itself."⁴⁷⁵ In his *questio* about halos, Saint Thomas, writes Agamben, addresses this displacement by characterizing it as a "halo"—a surplus that makes the essential more brilliant, a supplement added to perfection, a "vibration of that which is perfect, the glow at its edges."⁴⁷⁶ "This imperceptible trembling of the finite," writes Agamben, "that makes its limits indeterminate and allows it to blend, ... is the tiny displacement that everything must accomplish in the messianic world. Its beatitude is that of a potentiality that comes only

As far as my research was able to reveal, this work was shown for the first time at *Museion* (Bolzano, Italy) in 2014 and later on at *Aargauer Kunsthaus* (Aarau, Switzerland) in 2016, and at *Kindl* (Berlin, Germany) in 2016/17.

474 Ebeling, "Debris Field: An Archeology of Contemporaneity."

475 Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 53.

476 *Ibid*, 54.

after the act, of matter that does not remain beneath the form, but surrounds it with a halo.”⁴⁷⁷

In a short essay on Cy Twombly’s sculpture *Untitled* (dated Gaeta, 1984),⁴⁷⁸ Agamben refers to beatitude (or beauty) and its conditioning by the concept of “caesura.” The theory of the caesura is developed, writes Agamben, by Hölderlin’s annotations on his translation to Sophocles according to which (as per Hölderlin) “in the textured cut in the line made by the caesura,” what appears is “representation itself, the ‘pure word’.” Likewise, writes Agamben, Twombly’s sculpture, as a material artistic manifestation of this caesura, “has succeeded in giving form to a caesura, in displaying its sculptural equivalent.”

According to Agamben, the image of beauty (in every genuine creative journey) that was thus far pursued as a continual ascent, suddenly inverts and starts falling directly downwards. Twombly’s sculpture is not a representation of caesura but is “the caesura itself, in its movement, ... the caesura that exposes the inactive core of every work, the point at which the will of art supporting it seems almost blinded and suspended.” The movement of falling beauty, for Agamben, has no weight; it is a sort of inverse flight that Twombly’s sculpture makes apparent, “in which every ascent is reversed and suspended, almost a threshold or caesura between an action and a non-action: Falling beauty.”

This point is a point of de-creation on the part of the artist, understood by Agamben in theological terms, or more precisely, as a messianic moment “which has no possible title and in which art miraculously stands still, almost thunderstruck, fallen and risen at every moment.”⁴⁷⁹

477 Ibid, 55.

478 Agamben, “Falling Beauty,” 13–15.

479 Ibid.

Part II—The Archive and the Index

As inquired of in section I, one of the fundamental questions in regard to philosophical archeology is the following: What is an origin? Origin (or *arche*), as we recall, means both beginning and commandment; that which gives birth to something and that which governs its development in time. Within the framework of this part, I am interested in my personal origin: What gave birth to, and still commands, my personal identity and meaning of self? And more specifically: What conditions my various artistic engagements in the world, and how? In other words: What is the material *a priori* of my practice? How does it manifest itself in *Philosophical Archeology Space 2009–2019*?

2.2.1

The archive and the index constitute the installation's two-part structure. The first part, the archive, delimited in roughly one-third of the exhibition space, is not fully accessible. A perforated metal door blocks the physical entry to the archive, so that one can merely view and listen to (remotely behind the door) what's inside. The archive contains previous works of mine from the past decade: some of them are boxed, some are fully exhibited, and some in between. The second part, the index, situated in the main part of the gallery space, is a series of photo-litho prints (Japanese Washi paper sheets, 30 x 55 in. each) infused with collage work, sounds, and ephemera, forming a constellation rendered and conceived by archeological art-making.

Based on what he defines as “the *culmination* of twentieth-century linguistics,”⁴⁸⁰ Benveniste's well-known scholarly study *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society* (1969), Agamben points out the philological finding that the word “*index*” derives from the Latin verb *dico* which originally means “to show”—to show by words, therefore,

480 Agamben, Foreword, ix.

to say. The lexical family of *dico*, as observed by linguists and philologists, is joined by an essential bond to the sphere of law, thus *index* “is ‘the one who shows or indicates by means of the word,’ just as *iudex*⁴⁸¹ is ‘the one who says the law.’”⁴⁸² The term “*vindex*” (“which denotes the one who in a trial takes the place of the accused and declares himself ready to suffer the consequences of the proceedings”),⁴⁸³ Agamben indicates, belongs to the same group and is derived etymologically from *vim dicere* (“to say or to show force”).⁴⁸⁴ The force in the action of *vindex* is thus the force “of the efficacious formula, as the originary force of the law. That is to say, the sphere of the law is that of an efficacious word ... [and] if this is true, the law is the sphere of signatures par excellence, where the efficacy of the word is in excess of its meaning (or realizes it).”⁴⁸⁵

It follows, then, that the *index* is not simply a neutrally configured locus designed to indicatively and expressively function as a means for communication and orientation, but is inherently a locus that incorporates dimensions of authority, constraint, and even coercion as it literally forms itself in the figure of a bidding locus of *signatures*. In this sense, one could find in the presented index an illuminating relation, if not an equivalent (albeit in an artistic form), to the *arche* that has been conceived thus far. The exhibited archive and index function (under the framework of my artistic *modus operandi*) in parallel to Agamben’s paradigms and signatures (under his method of philosophical archeology)—the various works in the archive participate in, and are conceived under, *signatures* gathered together by the index.⁴⁸⁶

The index is comprised of three complementary and interwoven *signatures* (that I titled as

481 In English, judge.

482 Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, 74.

483 Ibid, 74–75.

484 Ibid, 75.

485 Ibid.

486 This indexical, material “historical *a priori*” is encapsulated within its paradoxical title: in spite of the historical dimension in which it dwells, at the same time, it harbours the ahistorical. Its metaphor is that of the crystal, the poet’s refractory tool, which reflects the very structure of living. “Reading” the crystal enables the poet to escape history altogether, since living and history are in opposition. The crystal “appears as the index of a certain aesthetic occurrence” (Whyte, “Studio as History,” 1) that represents reality in an ahistorical manner, as something primordial that happens before judgment or language.

However, the index is materially produced, it sprouts from the depths of the ground, and in this sense the studio is for the artist what historiography is for the historian: “it is what says what can be said, how, and for whom.” (Ibid, 2.)

follows):

- (1) Impassability—Impassibility—Impossibility;
- (2) Anchorite—Anchorage—Bridging; and
- (3) Remnants—Relics—Fragments.

The first signature (Impassability—Impassibility—Impossibility) refers to the discussion of dishomogeneity, to the gap that can be identified within the evolution of historical phenomena or the gap within the creative process that prevails between preliminary thought and executed action. Here, a fracturing of unity marks both the need for artificial construction of meaning and the point where artistic historiography begins. In terms of a cultural critic's vocabulary, this signature alludes to the discussion of the crisis in representation and its reference to the ontological problem. This signature thus also touches upon ideas of reconnection and relations formation. The first signature is a reminder and a call for unification.

The second signature (Anchorite—Anchorage—Bridging) aims somewhat to offer a response to this call, and in this sense can be seen as a complementary part to the previous signature, but at the same time, it stands independently. This signature incorporates various elements of bridging—fulcrums to be based upon. Several theoretical and material elements are presented as tools to process and generate meaning, interpretation and understanding—such as techniques of ekphrasis, acts of translation, mental maps, hermeneutic strategies, etc.—tools that the works use, although differently in each occurrence.

But beyond these tools that are primarily based on spoken, written, or visual language, the works themselves are also forms of bridging—they attempt to convey to a certain viewer, through their materiality, the subjective experience of the artist. Discussing his own practice, the British sculptor Antony Gormley articulates this very point while emphasizing the potential of materiality in addressing this issue. When asked about the problem of bridging intense, subjective experiences, he replied:

That for me is the real challenge of sculpture. How do you make something

out there, material, separate from you, an object amongst other objects, somehow carry the feeling of being—for the viewer to somehow make a connection with it.... That idea that in some way there are things that cannot be articulated, that are unavailable for discourse, which can be conveyed in a material way, but can never be given a precise word equivalent for.⁴⁸⁷

The various fulcrums of this signature are attributed to a subject that, historically developed, has a special function that pertains to the signature's theme. As Alain de Libera's archeological analysis (on the basis of Foucauldian concepts) portrays, the concept of a subject was conceived mutely and non-linearly prior to Descartes, throughout the history of (Western) philosophy. He writes: "Descartes did not bring about a comprehensive concept unifying subjecthood, personality, identity, egoity, agency, and causality under the single word *subject*. Before being decentered 'the' subject had to be centered. It had to become a 'centre' of perception, a 'centre' of acting and suffering. Such a concept had been delineated in the Middle Ages."⁴⁸⁸ Thus, the modern subject emerged through the combination, in late scholasticism, of two conflicting "models of subjectivity" inherited from late antiquity—the Aristotelian philosophical conception and the Augustinian theological conception—"enabling us to grasp the 'modern subject' as a 'bridging', transdisciplinary entity."⁴⁸⁹

In this sense, artistic practice (and this installation-based thesis exhibition that takes into account the historical discussion in terms of the medium of presentation, and the certain historical charge of presenting art "archeologically") involves a subject as a focal point of perception that also has an active, participatory role in the construction of the body of work. Allying itself with poststructuralist theory at large, and in contrary to a perspective rooted in the Renaissance, art-historian Claire Bishop advocates for installation art's potential, however tentative, to propel in the viewer/subject (after recognizing its fragmented and decentered subjectivity) a form of emancipation, because the *activation* of the subject is analogous to the subject's engagement in the world. A tension prevails

487 Hutchinson et al., *Antony Gormley*, 12.

488 De Libera, "Subject (Re-/decentered)," 22. See also de Libera, "When Did the Modern Subject Emerge?" 185; 194–95; 202–203.

489 De Libera, "Subject (Re-/decentered)," 22. See also de Libera, "When Did the Modern Subject Emerge?" 216.

between the fragmented *model subject* of poststructuralist theory and a self-reflexive *viewing subject* capable of recognizing its own fragmentation, since installation art “insists upon the viewer’s physical presence *precisely in order to subject it to an experience of decentering*.”⁴⁹⁰ What installation art offers, then, “is an experience of centering *and decentering*: work that insists on our centered presence in order then to subject us to an experience of decentering.”⁴⁹¹

The third signature (Remnants—Relics—Fragments) emphasizes the material aspect that is at work in the index, speaks to the archeological momentum the index manifests, and the various acts of digging and unearthing that were employed at hand.

Additionally, this signature echoes the recurring, interpretive theme of the hermeneutic circle (as it is comprised by pairs such as general–particular, object–subject, text–interpreter, and classic–romantic), albeit in a material fashion, by the use of scattered pieces of various kinds in relation to a (supposedly or imaginary) complete material entity. It underlies a material practice that continuously negotiates parts and whole within the artwork.

This material negotiation entails an epistemic dimension, in accordance perhaps with Foucault’s crossing of dispersed remnants and the existence of knowledge: “[T]he *epistemic* is not a *grand unifying theory*, it is a space of *dispersion*, it is an *open field of relationships and no doubt indefinitely describable.... [T]he epistemic is not a slice of history* common to all the sciences: it is a *simultaneous play of specific remanences.... The Epistemic is not a general stage of reason; it is a complex relationship of successive displacement in time*.”⁴⁹²

The fragmentary, material-based characteristic of this signature establishes a relation to the dishomogeneity characteristic of the first signature. In the same manner that (as previously mentioned) Jabès’ writing is a succession of textual fragments that (due to printed spaces that separate them from one another, as well as its mixing together of different times, places, and levels of language) constitutes a structure of dishomogeneity

490 Bishop, *Installation Art*, 133.

491 Ibid, 130.

492 Foucault and Lotringer, *Foucault Live*, 35.

and openness to further elaboration; so the fragmentary signature allows the artwork to stay open to unforeseen possibilities, whether on the interpretive dimension or the creative one. New uses become possible only through a perforated structure, between its cracks.

The other material aspect of the index reveals itself in the form of sound (although sound, beyond its materiality, appears in other ways within the installation at large). In his essay on listening, Roland Barthes speaks about a first type of listening he terms “*alert*,” in which living beings orient their listening to certain *indices*, similarly to animals. Thus, he writes, “[T]he raw material of listening is the index, because it either reveals danger or promises the satisfaction of need.”⁴⁹³ By the human “invention” of intentional reproduction of a rhythm or rhythmic representations, “listening ceases to be a purely supervisory activity and becomes creation,” and due to rhythm language becomes possible since “the sign is based on an oscillation, that of the *marked* and the *non-marked*, which we call paradigm.”⁴⁹⁴ Barthes raises the example of a child who listens to noises indicating his mother’s desired return—the child performs *alert* listening, that of indices. But once the child stops supervising the appearance of the index, and begins miming its regular return, the child turns the awaited index into a sign—thus entering the second type of listening, which is that of meaning. This type of listening is a mode of deciphering in which what the ear tries to intercept are certain *signs*. The child no longer listens to the *possible*, but to the *secret* (recall Benjamin’s idea of “secret indices”): “that which, concealed in reality, can reach human consciousness only through a code, which serves simultaneously to encipher and to decipher that reality.”⁴⁹⁵ ⁴⁹⁶

2.2.2

The (visual, textual, and sonic) juxtaposed elements in each signature are not intended to

493 Barthes, “Listening,” 247.

494 Ibid, 249.

495 Ibid.

496 The contemporary discussion around sound art is vast. See, for example, the following anthologies: Kelly, ed., *Sound*; Sterne, ed., *The Sound Studies Reader*; Cox and Warner, eds., *Audio Culture: Reading in Modern Music*; Altman, ed., *Sound Theory Sound Practice*; LaBelle and Roden, eds., *Site of Sound: Of Architecture and the Ear*; and Cobussen, Meelberg, and Truax, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Sounding Art*.

be read in direct opposition, nor do they suggest simple forced equivalencies. Rather, they are deeply entangled notions of coexistence. They refute (as was previously discussed in relation to the mode of knowledge of the paradigm) dichotomous logic in favour of a bipolar analogical model, a model that archeologically proceeds by means of reading signs and their analogies. This reading does not necessarily intend the conception of the signature as a unity-in-plurality, in accordance with the traditional, aesthetic demand from art, which was raised by Plato.⁴⁹⁷ The knowledge the signature generates propagates in time, as it appears in one place only to manifest differently somewhere else, at another time. The signature, as said, is a mode of distribution that operates through time and discourses.

Are the written sentences, concepts, images, and sounds imprinted on the paper actually a call to decipher hieroglyphics as in ancient Egypt, or are they abandoned signs, which serve only the image? And what does it mean, in this context, to have an aesthetic experience, that is, to experience beauty?

The three *signatures* of the index crystallize and unify, transport and disseminate the different artworks (referred to here as “paradigms”) that are contained within the signed archive, forming a practice-based historiographic methodology, an archeological *modus operandi*. Thus, the index, in its presented materiality and conceptual structure, corresponds and refers to similar artistic-hermeneutic techniques of historiography. One of them (previously discussed), for example, in the context deployed thus far, is Benjamin’s *Denkbild* in which its further explication will assist in highlighting the index as an artistic, archeological and historiographic (cross-disciplinary) apparatus.

As of 1923, Benjamin began to publish short narrative prose pieces, so-called *Denkbilder*, which bears a relation to the Baroque emblematic technique.⁴⁹⁸ The Baroque emblem contains visual and verbal material in a tripartite form: *pictura* (icon or pictorial aspect), *inscriptio* (*motto*, written above and describes, somewhat enigmatically, the image), and

497 Plato’s demand finds its connection here with the idea of *kairos*: “The idea of *kairos* as right timing is reimagined by Plato as aesthetic and ethical propriety, or the power of proportion to harmonize elements into a proper balance.” (Chan, “A Time Apart,” 53.)

498 The following discussion of Benjamin’s *Denkbilder* is based on Kirst, “Walter Benjamin’s ‘Denkbild’: Emblematic Historiography of the Recent Past.”

subscriptio (epigram, written below the *pictura* as an explanatory poem or prose). The emblem aims to reveal a hidden meaning and significance (*res significans*) and additionally, follows the two-fold intention of *Darstellen* (representation) and *Deuten* (interpretation).

Benjamin's *Denkbilder* work similarly. They generally have a three-part form consisting of a title, a narrated image, and a related thought, and present an image as an integral albeit not immediately recognizable part of the thought. Neither is clear without the other, and their relation is subject to critical reflection of their interdependence. This interdependence of parts is characteristic of the Baroque emblem, and likewise in Benjamin's *Denkbilder* these parts are supposed to provide information about the hidden signatures of reality. The objects of the *Denkbilder* become signs for hidden, fabricated *human* meaning about the world (as opposed to *divine* meaning in the Baroque emblem). Because the emblematic structure is intimately bound to the concept of *res significans*, the author must believe in the possibility and necessity of uncovering a secret meaning in the world, whether religious (as for the Baroque writer) or materialist as for the modern artist. The reader is not presented with a clear meaning, but is compelled to find the description of their own reflective process, to be led into a careful contemplation of the world. Thus, the *Denkbilder* relate to the hieroglyph—in the tension between image and thought, it conveys polysemy. It is this polysemy that, once reflected upon prudently, may reveal the world's hidden meaning. This significance, however, may never be grasped fully, according to Benjamin. But nevertheless, his *Denkbilder* are intended to illustrate that reality may be constructed in multiple ways.

The *Denkbilder* urge the reader to turn backwards upon history, to recognize in itself “the past” as philosophical material which has yet to be re-presented “visually,” wishing for the reader to discover it as a paradigm of (Benjamin's) experience of reality. Consider, for example, the following Benjaminian *Denkbild* titled “*Heidelberg Castle*”: “Ruins jutting into the sky can appear doubly beautiful on clear days when, in their windows or above their contours, the gaze meets passing clouds. Through the transient spectacle it opens in the sky, destruction reaffirms the eternity of these fallen stones.”⁴⁹⁹

499 Benjamin, *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, 81.

The view through the castle ruin reveals the dependence of eternity on its contrast to transience—the ruins serve as an allegory for the lost past when it is identified by the observer as a permanent loss, also a loss that could be one’s own. Simultaneously, the *Denkbild* of the castle ruin illustrates the multidirectional temporality of history, when the past is revealed (for a fleeting present moment) in its future, revolutionary potentiality. The observer’s perception of the ruins is revealed as the rubble of historical hegemony. The aesthetic appreciation that was produced by the tension between eternity and transience turns into the understanding that the once-ruling historical protagonists have been overthrown and are permanently destroyed. Benjamin’s *Denkbild* provides an insight into the tragically self-inflicted catastrophe of human history, a catastrophe stemming from a lack of understanding of the discontinuous relation of the present and the past. Benjamin, writing within the discourse of historical materialism, refers to this revelation as “profane illumination,” which can occur only if the historian will recognize the reappearance of the past in the present; only then will past events gain their true significance. In this sense, as per Benjamin, history can be pictured as a kaleidoscope—infinite, ever-changing constellations of past and present moments (accordingly, for example, the calendar reveals itself as a document of historical time). From this perspective, the past does not progress linearly toward the present, but (as the *Denkbild* demonstrates) rather endures in the present. As such, time is charged with a redemptive quality. Thus, the *Denkbild* gains importance as a historiographic narrative form. In 1928, Benjamin seems to further develop his thinking of the functionality of the *Denkbilder*—he writes: “[T]he function of artistic form is ... to make historical content ... into a philosophical truth.”⁵⁰⁰

2.2.3

This part thus introduces comments on my own work—comments (or terrains of thought) that refer to issues of materiality in my works, to questions I asked myself as an artist while making the works, to questions (however pressing) I was unable to formulate. For example: What is a historical *a priori* inquiry in art? What is an artistic *a priori* inquiry into history or historical phenomena? How does one perform philosophical archeology in art? What is

500 Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 182.

a material-based philosophical archeology that addresses the past via objects containing their own epistemologies?

These questions are addressed primarily by and through the exhibition, but also in my writing that supports the exhibited installation. How should one address, in writing, material art objects? According to Pedro Erber,⁵⁰¹ the critique of art objects tries out different approaches for sounding out an object, not in order to impose a specific, “correct” theory on it, but rather as a process of negotiation through which its infinite potentiality of possible meanings is gradually revealed. The unsayable in an art object cannot be straightforwardly explained nor translated into a conceptual discourse or a form of narration. Nonetheless, the repeated attempt to do so is a fundamental task in art writing, which should be guided by the object and its potentiality to speak aesthetically. This working-through resembles an idea by cultural theorist Mieke Bal, according to which an image is a dialogical partner rather than a case study subjected to the scholar’s scalpel. Such a “speaking image” speaks back at its spectator, transforms the way the latter looks at art, and is termed by Bal (following French art historian Hubert Damisch) as a “theoretical object.”⁵⁰² Theoretical objects, writes Bal, are “not conceptual as opposed to material, but conceptual in their very materiality.”⁵⁰³ This claim conceives of materiality as no longer dependent on visibility but, at the same time, as not in opposition to it either—thus, a theoretical object proposes a transformation of visibility into a participatory act, seducing the spectator into a relationship beyond contemplation. Art writing itself is a mode of “spectator participation,” performed as a response to the object’s seduction (yet resistance to translation). Conversely, the making of an art object can be seen as a material translation of something that resists conceptual expressivity. Translation, in this sense, is no longer understood on the basis of correspondence between clearly defined and separate realms of significance; what’s missing is correspondence itself as well as its conditions of possibility, that is, a clear division between the artistic and the theoretical, the material and

501 See Erber, “Theory Materialized.”

502 Erber, “Theory Materialized,” 4; Bal, *Louise Bourgeois’ Spider: The Architecture of Art–Writing*, 5.

503 Erber, “Theory Materialized,” 9; Bal, *Louise Bourgeois’ Spider: The Architecture of Art–Writing*, 84.

the conceptual. Instead of corresponding, the kind of translation at stake here is more accurately conceived as *responding* to what demands (yet resists) translation. This translation, which adapts itself to its object, refers back to an “origin,” in itself never completely exhausted in translation.

I knew, but didn't believe it and because I didn't believe, I didn't know (2017)

[Plate 1]

In this mixed-media installation, an analogue TV screen is positioned on the floor in a defined space. The physical entry to the space is blocked, but the viewer can see through, and hear through, a perforated metal door. The TV shows a close-up video segment of a man (Jan Karski) speaking indirectly to the camera. The video has no sound—sound, however, is played back from within the space through concealed audio speakers. The sound includes abstract sounds and field recordings of a forested surrounding. Outside the

space, next to the door, a text⁵⁰⁴ is hung—a transcription of the talking head, depicting his desperate attempts to convey his firsthand report on the unprecedented events of the Shoah.

In 2010, Claude Lanzmann's film *The Karski Report* was released. It is comprised entirely of an interview with Jan Karski, an official in the Polish resistance during World War II whose testimony in *Shoah* (Lanzmann's seminal film from 1985) remains unforgettable. *The Karski Report* outlines Karski's desperate attempts to convey the unimaginable events to the West from occupied Poland. Did he succeed? What will entail an unheard-of, horrific story to someone who is unprepared to receive it because it concerns a crime that is without precedent in the history of humanity? To Lanzmann's question regarding the early (yet unfounded) rumours of the fatal events, Karski replied: "I knew, but didn't believe it and because I didn't believe it, I didn't know."

504 The text reads: "A few days later the ambassador tells me: "Johnny, now you're going to see Justice Frankfurter. He will come here." Again, he gave me his briefing. "Now, Johnny, again be careful." He always would brief me. "Now, all knowledgeable people consider this man the most brilliant man in the administration." As a justice of the supreme court, the institution is very important. But next, "For years he is a confidant of the president. All America knows about it." Now he says: "Johnny," now "he is a Jew, so be sure he will be interested in your report." All right, so I wait again carefully. On the appointed hour – as a matter of fact I even remember it was between breakfast and lunch, before lunch in the morning hours, on time – I was sitting in the living room, salon... ambassador comes from the first floor with Justice Frankfurter. Justice Frankfurter, a little man. He did emanate some brilliance, very alive, his eyes... unimpressive physically, a little man, Jewish looking. Very friendly, friendly, smiles, towards me all the time friendly, several times he called me "young man" during our conversation. Well, I introduced myself, we sat down. He in front of me, Chehanowski on my left. Justice Frankfurter starts: "Mr. Karski, I had been invited by my very good friend, your ambassador, to come here to see you. I was also advised that I should see you. Apparently, you have some information that I should know. What do you have to say?" My answer: "Sir, I don't know what you're interested in. Could you ask me some questions? It will be easier on me." Frankfurter: "Young man, do you know that I am a Jew?" "Yes, sir, Mr. Ambassador told me about this." "Well, tell me about the Jews. We have here many reports, what happens to the Jews in your country?" Now I become a machine again, I give my stack. The man sits. I remember he looked like... smaller and smaller, somehow... like... looking at the floor, but listens, he doesn't interrupt me. I report, as you know from this film, usually it lasted 15 to 20 minutes. I tell him, Jewish leaders, Ghetto, Belzec. 15 to 20 minutes passed and I stopped. Now, Justice Frankfurter, he sits, looks at me still at this moment, and tells me the following: "Young man, as I mentioned, I had been informed about your activities. I was told that you came out of hell, and I was told that you're going back to hell. My admiration for people like you." And then now: "Young man, I'm no longer young, I'm judge of man. Man like me, with a man like you, must be totally honest. And I'm telling you I don't believe you!" Chehanowski breaks in: "Felix! What are you talking about? Well, you know about him, he saw the president, he was checked and rechecked ten times, in England, here, Felix! What... he is not lying!" Frankfurter: "Mr. Ambassador," formally, "I didn't say that he is lying, I said that I don't believe him... these are different things. My mind, my heart, they are made in such a way that I cannot except it... No! No! No!" I mumbled something; that is a shock for me."

Thus, in this installation I attempt to address the problem of representation, to point to the presence/absence split relation and to a possible attempt to close its gap. I try to conceive of the index as a mediator.⁵⁰⁵

According to Lanzmann, the catastrophe of the Shoah is non-representable. He thus employs, in both films, a “non-representability” cinematic principle according to which any kind of archival images or documents associated with the Nazi killing machine are avoided, and the common historical archive as well as fact-based fictions are likewise rejected. Instead, Lanzmann relies exclusively on spoken testimony⁵⁰⁶ in order to examine, beyond the memory of the slaughter of Jews during World War II, the discourses of historical representation and truth.⁵⁰⁷

I. Historical Representation

505 The relation between an index and the object it represents is a natural relation (as opposed to agreement-based characteristics of relation or other signification functions such as the symbol or the icon). The index forms a direct relation between the signifier and the signified; it points to its object. Accordingly, the pointing finger seems to “penetrate” the object and thus indicates its existence. The indexical signification diminishes the gap between the signifier and the signified and creates contiguity. The penetration point marks the conceptual point of incredulity, which therefore subsides but simultaneously generates pain.

Various passages throughout the holy scriptures depict God as experiencing emotions (See, for example, Jeremiah 14:17 and Isaiah 63:9 in Oei, “The Impassible God Who ‘Cried,’” 238), textual depictions that afterward had certainly propelled controversies with regard to the Christian doctrine of divine impassibility (somewhat influenced by Hellenistic philosophy) according to which God is not subject to emotion—on the one hand, an impassible God is too distant and thus inferior and incapable of redemption; on the other hand, an emotional God entails His dependency upon creation and the contingency of the world, clearly an impossible theological situation that diminishes God and enables His vulnerability. The doctrine of God’s impassibility (by nature), the idea that God is indifferent to human life, poses a serious theological problem—if God cannot weep, it is claimed, He cannot love either. To modern Christian theologians, who witness (like all others) the terrible suffering of modern times, this problem becomes perhaps more acute than ever: if man can enter into a relationship with a caring God, they say, God must be capable of entering into man’s pain; sheltered under God’s compassion and empathy, man can overcome its pain. Hence, their search for what is called “a God after Auschwitz.”

506 German anthropologist Johannes Fabian terms the temporality of the ethnographical fieldwork as “coevalness”: the sharing of time between subject and object, “the temporality of dialogical interaction.” (Erber, “Contemporaneity and Its Discontents,” 30.) It indicates an attempt to correct the betrayal of the anthropologists who distinguish themselves from the time of their subject of knowledge, often constructing the Other in terms of distance, spatial and temporal. This distance means a denial of contemporaneity, and is established in the transition from oral, dialogical knowledge to the written medium. Fabian terms this fallacious situation as “allochronism,” which is grounded in a primacy of seeing and observing, transforming the other into an object of contemplation—it amounts to “a sort of aestheticization of the other” (Ibid) instead of an inquiry into the other based on linguistic communication. Thus, one finds a different mode of temporality that originates by the “oral-to-written” displacement.

507 On reenactments of the Shoah in art and imaginative literature, see Van Alphen, *Caught by History*.

Lanzmann's categorical choice in favour of spoken testimony emphasizes a fundamental absence—a missing and impossible image—that is indicative of the irreducible totality of the catastrophe. But can verbal testimony be considered as a withdrawal from representation? Can we even indicate clearly when the threshold of representation has been crossed and a phenomenon has reached the area of non-representability? Certainly, we cannot be satisfied with the lack of visual material only, as spoken testimony is a crucial part of the film's archival material. Perhaps the threshold is crossed if we are left with abstract tones only, sounds supposedly devoid of meaning, as a testimony only to the land that involuntarily hosted the monstrous events.

Thus, I decided to extract the full soundtrack of *Shoah*, which runs for roughly eleven hours. I then deleted all the sound scenes and sonic materials that could be associated with even the minor conveying of meaning (dialogues, field recordings of folk songs, train sounds, etc.). Eventually, I ended up with about fifteen minutes of sound. This ratio came to me somewhat as a surprise, since I'd expected it to be much higher. My surprise was a result of a direct encounter with the film and the overall impression of it as a slowly progressing, meditative, lamenting, and silent cinematic work—an impression that was in clear contradiction with the minor degree of semantic, verbal, and sonic material. How could one reconcile this supposed paradox? Perhaps it means that an audible space, its sense of volume and density, is not necessarily and solely a result of sonic information. As my editing action over *Shoah*'s soundtrack showed, a large degree of meaning-conveying sounds of various forms and textures can still constitute a sense of contemplative, silent space (mental space as well as cinematic space).

Exemplified by the lack of visual imagery, the impossibility to represent the Shoah as a historical event is further emphasized, in addition, by the abstention from using meaning-conveying sounds. This makes evident the radical lack of context and the meaninglessness itself, unrelated to a certain historical event—a crossed threshold. The threshold (from meaning to meaninglessness) is crossed backwards. In an attempt to inversely cross back over it, meaning does not constitute positively but as a subtraction of information, knowledge, history and time from a place (or space) beyond us, beyond our bodies. The soundtrack is an archive that lacks the use of language as a means of representation—what meaning does it thus generate? I was wondering whether, because it

lacks the language of representation, a certain context is required to form the entry to the work without, at the same time, diminishing its interpretive dimension that is subject-dependent.

We can even imagine an archive, apparently devoid of context, presented without the perspective of whomever constructed it. In such a scenario, it seems, the archive is understood and constituted differently each time according to the viewer's ideologies that have been embedded through many years of education and social involvement. Is this an archive that, instead of supplying more knowledge, intensifies disinformation and speculations just as a drama is spun in a child's mind? What role does the imagination play in this sense? Experiencing such an archive does not guarantee the reception of meaning, but its mystery generates an imaginary dimension aroused by the physicality of the archival material and the wish to make sense of it. It seems as if the act of searching and sorting the archive, randomly digging its depths with one's hands (or ears), has an importance of its own because it slows the viewer's experience and thus discharges the excess of imagination.

II. Truth

One of my intentions in this work, following Lanzmann, was to think about the truth-fiction relation. I was wondering whether information becomes knowledge when completed with faith. Faith, for its part, is dependent in the sense of the truthfulness and verity one grants this information with—this appears to be the relation between information and knowledge, as well as between truth and fiction. One believes in the story one tells oneself, as the story is based on the long-lasting actions of narrative plotting and sketching. I suppose that a work of art does not necessarily tell a captivating story in and of itself, but constitutes a rich, symbolic meadow for the viewer and the entry into the work in terms of an adequacy with one's branched psycho-ideological array at the core of consciousness. This array is perhaps the condition for giving faith in the feasibility of a certain event. One can know something informatively but deny its possibility or existence due to a mental block. Thus, the story we tell ourselves conditions what we believe to be real.

In "On Fiction" (1966), Vilém Flusser maintains that reality is not given or discoverable, it is invented. Reality is fictitious. There is no comparative reference (or

external world), fiction is the only reality. Each type of fiction is a reality in its respective discourse. No specific perspective is more “real” than another. All points of view are relative and equivalent. Eliminating perspectives leaves nothing. A thing is the sum of its perspectives, Flusser claims, and the reality of a thing is the sum of the fictions that form it. If all perspectives are fictions, then the human beings who project these perspectives form reality—but aren’t we exactly what we project? We, ourselves, without things to project on, are nothing. Without things, we are mere fictions, mere virtuality. Reality is thus not in objects and also not in subjects (since they are both fictions). Perhaps reality is the relationship between subject and object—but what if there are many relations as points of view? Does it mean they are all reality, ontologically equivalent? Then, according to Flusser, reality is fiction and fiction is reality, and only faith can provide reality.

Silent Maps (2016)

[Plates 2–7]

This body of work is presented as a mixed-media installation in variable dimensions. It includes maps made out of various materials (paper, wood, stone, resin, wax, and rusted metal) and formations (photolithography prints, collage, text-based works, sound works, and a display cabinet). My work on it began with a reflection on what I perceived as a peculiar intersection of two things: a material I often use in my works—damar resin—and a story I was once told.

From preliminary research towards the exhibition, I observed that inclusions trapped in amber are often found in the Baltic Sea region of Northern Europe. Fossilized from tree resin and formed through a long period of petrification, these inclusions don’t easily share their mysteries. Early amber hunters of the region used to measure the amber’s value according to the inclusions found within it. Their assessment was based not only on the object caught within the resin, but also on the narrative they could generate from the particular inclusion. Vernacular Baltic legends about how a certain insect or plant ended

up trapped within this once viscous material highly affected their overall evaluation. By contrast, an inclusion found and presented as an orphan fragment caused great confusion. Mysteries entangled and exchange rates followed promptly. Extensive landscape descriptions, maps, and drawings were made by the hunters for future reference. Their outlines had to be reliable; however, if mistakes occurred, one could always revisit the landscape to decipher the problem.

Can we apply this methodology to a textual landscape? Can we follow the same path, back and forth, between a text (as a system of representation or as an abstract map) and the world supposedly outside the text? Can we revisit the world in order to decipher an error or a problem in comprehension that occurs within a textual landscape? Will it still be the same world?

My grandfather once told me about a story he was planning to write. It was about a journey he had taken from his hometown of Vilnius to the Curonian Spit, which separates the Curonian lagoon from the Baltic Sea's southeastern coast. He departed on that journey, as a somewhat modern Baltic hunter, in search for the earliest catechism written in Old Prussian, around AD 1400, and said to be buried within the dunes of the spit. The catechism also included, so he was told, a mysterious "footnote" written in Hebrew and serving as an important key to the text, without which the text could not be fully deciphered. Being fluent in both languages, he was hired by a local archbishop eager to find the original text and its footnote (though he already held a printed copy in his hands from the 16th century). He equipped my grandfather with a crumbled map that indicated the catechism's exact location. Because it seemed completely hopeless, my grandfather was astounded to find the catechism, including its footnote, in the exact place indicated by the map. But he could not immediately recognize nor read the footnote, because it was written densely, by an encumbered hand. Back in Vilnius, feeding the archbishop's discontent, all he managed to ascertain was its subject matter.

I then asked myself: what if I'll retrace my grandfather's journey?

In Eastern philosophy one finds the idea of *subtle realms*—experiential inter-worlds and

realms of unconscious associations that form intuitive perceptions of physical reality.⁵⁰⁸ The territory of *subtle realms* is a territory that runs parallel to physical reality but interacts with it, so that a person is effectively living in two worlds at once, subtle and physical. When one searches for the *subtle realms*, one develops an intuitive awareness through the use of the imagination. As a faculty yoking the sensible and the intelligible, the imagination operates in the experience of the beyond and in the construction of imaginable worlds.

With this work, I ask myself (as an artist) the following questions: How can one draw the territory of the *subtle realms*? What does it mean to enter its landscape? How does one form its map as a mode of external symbolic storage?⁵⁰⁹ What is the relationship between the concept of “landscape” and environment or world. In the history of art, landscape painting is a genre; in Geography, it is part of nature, etc. What does it mean to see a landscape? Is it something exterior? Is it something psychological or internal? The concept, I assume, can be understood in various ways.

When anthropologists and historians treat the concept of landscape, they often claim it is a modern invention and refer to a letter by Petrarch who describes his climbs up Mont Ventoux in Provence to gaze at the landscape.⁵¹⁰ This is considered, in the West, as the first description of man looking at landscape (similarly, art historians claim that “landscape painting” begins with fifteenth-century Flemish painters), a false consideration since even Petrarch himself mentions the ancients climbing the mountain to contemplate and look down at the landscape, or even Roman frescoes with beautiful landscapes, and so on.

For a philosophical perspective on landscape, one can possibly turn to a seminar Heidegger gave in Freiburg in 1929/30 titled “Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World,

508 “Such is the case with the *Kehai* of *Kami* as well, where *Kami* come and go into the interstices of being but leave their faint signs, and where sensitive humans, by emptying themselves into the midst of now (*naka ima*) may directly experience the time/space gods embodied—however fleetingly—in the signs, sounds, and sights of the world. It is an ‘experiential, mysterious place’ created as a third place between all other places and as an accumulation of experienced *ch’i* beyond all distinctions, boundaries, orders, and descriptive constructs.” (Pilgrim, “Intervals (‘Ma’) in Space and Time: Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Paradigm in Japan,” 271.)

509 For a thorough discussion of mental maps, see Gould and White, *Mental Maps*.

510 Cassirer et al., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, 36–46.

Finitude, Solitude.” In this, perhaps his most important seminar, Heidegger tries to define the fundamental structure of *Dasein* (of human beings) as a passage from the poverty of the animal world to the building of a world that defines humanity. In order to do this, he must define the essence of the environment of the animal, thus to understand the difference between animal environment (a poor world, in his terms) and human one. The animal’s environment is defined, as per Heidegger, by the idea that each animal selects (in the natural world) one crucial element that defines its environment and is absorbed in it without being conscious about it. On the contrary, what defines the building of human world is the fact that man is never unconsciously absorbed but perceives being as such. Deep boredom, according to Heidegger, is a good example: when we are bored we suspend any relation to the world (cannot do anything or are not interesting in anything). Thus, in the suspension of animality one becomes human.

Looking at a landscape we see everything, all elements at once, and perceive it in another dimension, suspending all animal relation as well as human relation (being as such); we are absorbed in the landscape as if we lose our subjectivity while observing it, becoming an integral part of it. In Heideggerian terms, the human world is the making inoperative of the animal relation to its environment, while landscape is the making inoperative of the human world itself—this is a third stage after animality (environment) and human (world).⁵¹¹

Vaalbara (2014)

[Plates 8–13]

This body of artwork is constituted of several overlapping narratives, manifest in varied artistic mediums, that unfold by means of a series of artistic revelations in dialogue with a fragmented, poetic manuscript of my late grandfather. Since he passed away when I was

511 See Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*, 45–50.

nearly fourteen years old, I have been left with a strong sense of loss. His diverse manuscript and artistic work, although insignificant for me at that time, has become increasingly important to me. By telling a story and reimagining its narratives, I interpret in and through this personal archive. This work tries to recreate the possibility of a shared biography through an artistic dialogue.

The first narrative displays the manuscript, which is placed inside a covered cabinet. A sound that resembles that of a Morse code emerges from within and fades in and out. It was necessary to divide the voluminous manuscript into several piles due to presentation constraints, but also due to issues such as fragmentation, meaning construction, and the relation between parts and whole. How should I divide the manuscript? Which pages should I explicitly show, at the expense of others?

The second narrative is made out of many sheets of paper, stitched together and bathed in a mixture of resin and beeswax (as an encaustic medium)—materials I use in several of my works. The papers are thus grouped together to form two main strata that correspond to the left and right audio channels. Sound comes from beneath the thick layers, portraying abstract, unpleasant (even appalling) murmurs, perhaps that of a little child at a pre-verbal stage who tries, but fails, to communicate.

The third narrative combines two rusted metal plates and sound. The plates are leaned against the wall, connected to one another by a hidden sound device that works both as a speaker and a tactile transducer—it simultaneously plays the distant sound of faint, slow piano playing and, by rumbling, causes the plates to sound out low metallic noises.

The last, fourth narrative is a diptych made out of Japanese washi paper and a few texts from the original manuscript. The papers are treated with diluted resin, which causes them to rearrange in layered forms as they become transparent in various degrees. The original texts combine together to become a partly deciphered unity.

These narratives seem to suggest the signified yet obscure and unreachable nature of a literary work sealed shut. I was thinking about them as trying to traverse a gap, to bridge a physical presence that will cause them to materially seep into the archive. I felt that the textual depth of this archive is suspended to present the gravity of the work as a physical

mass; as if the manuscript is rendered as an object. Deleuze writes: “Time becomes a subject because it is the folding of the outside and, as such, forces every present into forgetting, but preserves the whole of the past within memory: forgetting is the impossibility of return, and memory is the necessity of renewal.”⁵¹² The outside entity, the manuscript, is folded in, and as such, is preserved in memory. My intention was for the overlapping narratives to be the renewal—not interventions but parallel responses, like light rays aligned in parallel, communicating as collimated spirits in non-linear time. It was written that they indicate wormholes where the dialogue becomes possible, taking place, and by avoiding semantic translation and representation, the aura of the literary manuscript is maintained.⁵¹³

To Return to a Place, Is, Like Dying (2016)

[Plates 14–15]

This is a multidisciplinary body of work in sound, installation, printmaking, and text. The geographical and spiritual remoteness from home constitutes the exhibition’s core, as a fundamental contemplation on distancing, exile, retreat, and nomadism. However, more personal questions guided me in this work: how much of my cultural, biographical, and subjective background comes into the writing and the making of exhibitions at present? And even: what is the tension between the (Israeli) foreign and the (Canadian) local perspectives in this process? The exhibition space, coloured in shades of yellow and brown, brings to mind an ancient appearance, an old photograph or a cave revealed in an archaeological dig.

I. Re(moteness); Re(treat); Re(turn)

512 Deleuze, “Folding, or the Inside of Thought (Subjectivation),” 327.

513 See Abraham, “Collimation,” 10–12.

The late Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai wrote: “To return to a place, / is, like dying. / It is, to fulfill prophecies / or empty them.”⁵¹⁴

In the previously mentioned interview between Jabès and Ettinger Lichtenberg, we find the following dialogue:

Ettinger Lichtenberg: At the moment when it’s impossible to fixate something, it’s impossible to separate one thing from another.

Jabès: Here you touch at the heart of the nomadic writing. You’re at the heart of nomadic writing.

Ettinger Lichtenberg: Which is the inability to fixate, to strike roots?

Jabès: This is the desert, nothing strikes roots here.⁵¹⁵

And finally, Shapira summarizes:

514 Quoted from his poem “Ein-Gedi”; my translation.

“To return to a place,
is, like dying.
It is, to fulfill prophecies
or empty them.”

“
,
,
.”

The aforementioned quotation is at the same time formal and semantic; inasmuch as the quoting action itself by which the quotation’s content is concerned with—its meaning—is happening (again) “in-itself,” we perceive as a drawing. Because it is also semantic, in its simple textual sense, it seems to achieve, without an insignificant extent, an almost automatic precedence. The double move is in fact a second order abstraction; a reverberation of a reverberation, a quote of a quote—a return to something alienated and familiar.

How should this be understood? Perhaps, by a pre-understanding (what is pre-understanding?) that it is of great significance to correctly position a question, any question, in order to fulfill, even temporarily, our basic curiosity drive. But this temporality points more than anything else, to the significance that a properly given answer will leave the question open yet stable. The punctuation marks condition the thought, and being conditioned by repetition and sense fixing—it is impossible for the thought to reveal itself in its pureness; however clear methodological forms, through their interrelations, can determine between various senses that “seep into” the thought from the outside. The mark requires repetition and sense, iteration and sense... until the question’s deep foundations will (again) collapse into themselves.

The double operator of the punctuation marks—multiple roles become possible—as an organizing element, structures, balances, calms, permits a relation a relationship to be established and again soothes, or rather, emerges, reveals, breaks, bubbles, floats from above, in trauma? The assumption is that the experience of art requires from us a certain disregarding, even if against our natural and humane will.

515 *Routes of Wandering: Nomadism, Journeys and Transition in Contemporary Israeli Art*, 248.

The archeologist conducts a journey to discover relics of an extinct culture. The fragments that he exposes do not exist, in effect, without his gaze, and their chronicle is formulated by him by means of the language of his discipline. But this discipline (even when it is conscious of its reflective activity) represents the historical processes that it contextures as events that happened in the past (before the language of archeology which constitutes them). Hence, archeology conditions itself upon a prior time that it itself signifies—a time signified as an artificial product, and not as an origin or an authentic basis.⁵¹⁶

The voice of the past is combined with that of the present.

II. (Re)—Time

The prefix (Re-) inevitably includes a certain conception of time. What is the time of return? Different philosophical approaches view the present as the most important time; it is the atemporal time, the time which all other times refer to. The more it becomes possible to connect the past to the present experience, the richer and deeper the present consciousness gets. The larger the liaison with past events, the more the contemporary, present consciousness gains through sprawl and burgeoning horizon. According to the philosopher Edmund Husserl, the experience of the present works to bring into focus its strength as well as the contents of all times of the past and of the future. For this he coined the term “standing-streaming”—a formalistic expression that measures the consciousness’ static dimension of the present against its dynamic flow of experiences.⁵¹⁷

In Jewish sacred and literary sources, a certain time is mentioned that is “not day, and not night.” It is a time described as uniting all times, a time that designates a conscious space of abstruseness: a conscious space of numerous intellectual contradictions into which coherent, logical reasoning tools collapse.⁵¹⁸

This conception of time brings to mind (as previous mentioned) Agamben’s conception of messianic time, and the form of time at the basis of Benjamin’s dialectical

516 Ibid, 209–10.

517 *To return to a place, is, like dying*, ii–vi.

518 Ibid.

image.⁵¹⁹

Galut (Diaspora) (2011)

[Plate 16]

This is an eight-channel sound installation (in the form of a radio drama) that is presented in a dark space alongside a painting. The installation is inspired by the artistic work of my grandfather—this time, by a painting he made of his late parents who were exiled to an unknown concentration camp during WWII (the ultimate diaspora). The content of the installation is made out of fragments of my grandfather's literary works, which were removed from their original context and rejoined to tell a story.

Some of the questions I asked myself in the making of this work were as follows: how is it possible to reuse old decontextualized fragments in order to produce a new literary meaning? What role does sound take in conveying and representing meaning? Is this role unique to sound? Can I return from this metaphorical (even physical) exile? What is the relationship between the three figures of the radio drama, which are actually one and the same? Where do our histories converge?

It seems as if an unavoidable gap exists between the work and its interpreter, between the work and the text written about it; as if, enforced by various techniques of defamiliarization, the interpreter becomes an exile who faces itself. If these alienations will not be resolved, one is left in suspension as an exile in one's own land.

In the radio drama, a man is transformed into a number. 56698 is his new, alienated and estranged name. He dwells in a place without a place, where there are no openings. In the eternal night that prevails this place, no face is revealed in the mirror. The sole traces

519 On the application of current theoretical examinations of time to the field of contemporary art, see Ross, *The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art*.

of a meaningful world are barred shadows upon a missing floor, merely projections.

When listening to the installation, the sonic garden of forking paths seems to resist a linear melodic motif; it rather forms a multidimensional, atemporal space. It is an exilic space in the deepest sense, detached and forever irrelevant. A fabric of distancing.

Between Things (2010)

[Plate 17]

This installation is based upon a few (poetic, philosophical, scientific) texts that attempt to articulate time. The texts are hung in the air, while various leftovers of paper, ink, accompanying materials, and sound are piled up on the floor beneath them. In this installation, time is contemplated and expressed as a plastic thought, as image and sound. This is a work about a concept (time) that prevails perhaps in any work of art, but is here conceived within an ongoing series of works that attempt to formulate a specific form of time—a form of time that evolves into the conception of time as messianic time, and that lies at the basis of this thesis exhibition. What kind of trace does time generate in this installation?⁵²⁰

A leftover is a testimony to an act that took place at the interval between things. This act occurs in relation to time—it is carried out in light of an expected final result, and therefore desperately clings to the speed of change and its purpose, or alternatively, through an involuntary and temporary act of conspicuousness (as a deviation from somewhat predicted and routine path). This act is temporally carried out, in the world, even as pure abstraction. Time is expressed through numerous descriptions (in parallel with the characteristics of the act itself) that complement each other in different modes, and their nature is often remains

⁵²⁰ For a survey of contemporary art and theory that proposes alternative to outdated linear models of time, see Groom, *Time*.

unclear to us. Each action matches a different relation and it seems as if we cannot comprehensively generalize the exact nature of this relation. Moreover, perhaps other, infinite relations exist and therefore infinite types of time exist as well; these time essences will always refer to various actions in themselves and in relation to other actions.

Leftovers are piled on the floor. The space divides and separates them as it divides and has been divided by time. Therefore, a series of questions arise in the making of this work: what exists between successive events that come to be in time? Does time exist within time? Can we at all speak about a “between things” mode of existence? Or whether this is a different type of time that requires a different comprehension?

Personally, in making this installation, the most interesting aspect of time occurs between things. An action occurred, a body appeared, an object was installed, a cat crossed the street, stopped and sat down on the sidewalk. What happened at the point of transition, a moment before it started and a slight moment after it ended? Could we at all split or bound the action and consequently the time it took for it to happen? Does this mean that time stands still? Or alternatively, that infinite essences of time correspond to infinite types of events whose theoretical summation is “the” time that we talk about or intuitively relate to? How, if at all, does time exist between things?

Time indicates life, whether intensive or almost static, short or long, fulfilled with actions or reduced to the smallest measure needed to keep life going. Time means living souls, it cycles, from morning to the next, it always exists within things but also (and especially) between things, where it exists perhaps in the strangest way. The breath indicates life, life within the body, alive, which continuously helps time to be formed. Every breath feels differently. So is time.

The archive includes other, undiscussed previous works or only minute fragments of these works. The scale, both physical and symbolic, of the leftover or fragment is occasionally the reason for not discussing the work or for not offering any terrain of thought in regard to it. However, sometimes the reason is of a different register, as in the case of the following

works (that are nonetheless included in the archive) which present a challenge for thinking. This challenge, so it seems, sometimes overpowers an attempt for critical analysis; at other times, the work is utterly intuitive, and does not easily lend itself to words.

These works are (in chronological order):

Not Quite the Highest Point (2017) [Plates 18–23];

Teca (everything you tell me I keep in my body) (2015) [Plate 24];

The Revisit II (2014) [Plate 25];

Had We but World Enough and Time (2014) [Plate 26];

From the River Archive (2014) [Plate 27];

Quiet Whispers in the Hallway (2013) [Plates 28–29];

A Revisit (2012) [Plate 30];

The Revisit (2011) [Plate 31];

Attentiveness Foldings (2010) [Plate 32];

If the Walls Could Speak (2010) [Plate 33];

Moraine (2010) [Plate 34]; and

15 Maps for Becoming a Concept (2009) [Plate 35].

Conclusion

“There will be no conclusion. I think, in fact, that in philosophy as in art, we cannot ‘conclude’ a work: we can only abandon it, as Giacometti said of his canvases.”⁵²¹

This research revealed philosophical archeology to be multifaceted—it is a research methodology (a historiographic framework) in the humanities at large, which essentially embodies one’s relation to history and historiographic research (as extensively exemplified in section I, part I); a metaphor (allegory);⁵²² (art) content or subject matter as well as a material-based historiography or method of historical inquiry in art;⁵²³ a critical force that conceives of its (past) objects as (future) prototypes or blueprints; and, lastly, philosophical archeology embodies a certain (messianic) conception of time that conditions a conception of history.⁵²⁴ The originality of philosophical archeology, as a critical methodology, does not necessarily stem from the nature of its tools, but from the integration of threads drawn from various disciplines and broad fields of knowledge.

As a historiographic methodology in use throughout research across the humanities at large, philosophical archeology aims at researching the “historical *a priori*” dimension of a certain historical phenomenon, a dimension (“point of emergence”; “moment of arising”) that cannot be identified as the phenomenon’s diachronic origin, but as an active tendency within it that conditions its development in time. The “historical *a priori*” designates a

521 Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*, 76.

522 See p.55 where Freud speaks about archeology as a metaphor for the mind; p.58 where, for Foucault, archeology is a metaphor for “knowledge as a substratum that ‘lies beneath the surface’”; p.45–46 and p.131 where Agamben uses the idea of vortex as a metaphor for the origin or *arche* (and vice versa); p.149 where I suggest that “archeology”, in its extreme sense, can be understood as a metaphor rather than as a material discipline in practice; and p.150 where Russell claims that in the twentieth-century archeology extends from being a metaphor to being an allegory (that is, it now employs narrative, not just a single word, in order to deploy the past “as a technique in itself”).

523 See section II in its entirety, and p.134 where Roelstraete refers to archeology as an “identifying feature of contemporary art”; p.137 where the archeological dig equates with Mark Dion’s artistic practice; and p.140 where the artistic archeological search represents “the artist’s quest for the unknown”.

524 See mainly the discussion of messianic time-history-aesthetics in section I (part II), and for example p.158 where the “historical *a priori*” is conceived as a crystal that embodies non-linear time, or p.165 where ruins symbolize “the lost past” that nonetheless can redirect its advancement.

sequential past, yet not simply as an older prehistoric unified phase nor as an a-historical structure; as a past that still commands in the present, it is an operative force within the historic phenomenon that guarantees its intelligibility and consistency. Philosophical archeology is thus “a ‘science of signs’, an inquiry into the signatures left by the origin on the living body of history.”⁵²⁵

The “historical *a priori*” dimension is synchronic, contemporaneous with the present and the real, and therefore the archeologist withdraws, so to speak, towards the present. Once the archeologist reaches this phase or dimension, the past that was never really experienced (and thus remained a present) becomes a real or true present, thus it has the temporal structure of *future anterior*, a past that will become a past in the future once the archeological work is complete.

The “historical *a priori*” dimension is qualitatively different from the historical dimension. Like the child in psychoanalysis (which is a continuous active force within the life of the adult) or the “big bang” (which we assume took place and the effects of which we can feel, though we cannot locate chronologically), the “historical *a priori*” is not an event or substance that precedes the phenomenon diachronically or which can be dated or chronologically situated. Neither is it a metahistorical construct that narrates the phenomenon from the outside, as in the common sense of an origin. Lacking a concrete time and space, it is a heterogeneous fracture existing between history and prehistory, a field of bipolar historical tensions that spreads between the phenomenon’s *arche* and its becoming, between arch-past and present.

From an epistemological perspective, the “historical *a priori*” dimension, through various processes of canonization, conditions the potential to constitute knowledge of and by the phenomenon while at the same time being conditioned itself as it is embedded within historical constellations. Fulfilling the paradox of an *a priori* condition embedded within history, it is thus paradigmatic and transcendent. Once the archeologist, through a critique of origins, reaches this dimension that is covered and concealed by the long-lasting effect of tradition, the past that was never really experienced becomes accessible for the first time, and with it, its buried epistemologies. Hence the “historical *a priori*” (the *arche*) elucidates

525 Cerella, “The Sacred and the Political: Exploration on Mimesis, Violence, and Religion,” 225.

the phenomenon from within.

In this doctoral research I attempted to show that philosophical archeology is constituted as an interdependence between three inseparable pillars: history, archeology, and philology—any historical investigation requires not only archeological vigilance, but must also give an account of language. The articulation between language and world is disclosed as “history” by the continuous process of anthropogenesis—that is, the continuous event experienced by *Homo sapiens* of becoming human and remaining inhuman. This articulation is humankind’s (and philosophy’s) historical *a priori*. Philosophical archeology is immanent and constitutive to philosophy; it means going back archaeologically to the continuous event of anthropogenesis in an attempt to bring to light the various historical *a priori* that condition the history of humanity. Thus, philosophical archeology entails coming to know the means and ways by which a thing articulates itself and its historical development, based on the *a priori* principles that it possesses.

Moreover, philosophical archeology’s tripartite structure (as indicated above) always involves a messianic moment of thinking. This moment (as elucidated mainly in Paul, Benjamin, and Agamben), although originally theological, is prevalent throughout the length and breadth of secular time. Secular time incorporates another time, messianic time, that (illustrated via Guillaume’s idea of *operational time*) operates in it from within—messianic time enables chronology by the construction of “time images” (or “time representations”) that, only at that point, are still charged with potentiality (“*the time which is left to us*”). Messianic time is in opposition to historical dialectics of progress, since the messianic is the pure potentiality of the present moment. This messianic conception of time, this concept of temporality and history, shows a structure with bipolar tensions: linear chronology (which supposedly ends in an origin), and a radial form whose manifestations all revolve around an *Urphänomen* in a non-linear manner. Based on a dialectic of “oneness” and repetition, the origin is (at the same time) inside and outside chronology, it is (at the same time) independent and inseparable from chronology. Like the *arche*, the origin is a historical *a priori* that remains immanent within history, within the phenomenon.

The origin is not a factual event nor a mythical archetype, but a vortex in the stream of becoming; it is that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance while it swallows the material involved in the process. As materiality, worldly things disrupt (in this process) the balance between the infinite and time—the infinite (the *apeiron*, as per Anaximander), although an *arche*, is crossed by time and cannot overrule it. Material things thus defy the infinite due to (their movement in) time, but also defy time due to their inevitable return to the infinite. As we saw, for Aristotle, the infinite is not a force of the cosmos but the intermediary between its elements; a mediatory field or space that is named “the middle (*meson*).” The infinite (and, it could be argued in regard to the exhibited installation, the Washi paper) is a central space from which all elements are equally distanced due to the balance they are forced to maintain. Thus, as an *arche*, the infinite is not understood as a fixed point of origin and primary rule. The *arche* is not a whole, but a perforated concept—a characteristic that enables it to be a mediator; similarly, time is formed as a porous structure.

In section I, part II, we encountered another mediator—Benjamin’s (and Debord’s) montage or the concept of “citation without quotation marks.” Related to Benjamin’s idea of the “dialectical image” (or “dialectic at a standstill”—the image at once frozen and dialectical), this mediator enables secret meetings of times, images, and texts and, similarly to Paul’s “typos,” can disappear (as past occurrence) if the present moment does not recognize itself in it. An image or text carries an index within itself which will cause it to burst only at a specific moment in the present when the past and present form a constellation—Benjamin’s concept of messianic time (as opposed to historical progress) thus emphasizes the redemptive potentiality of the non-chronological present. Understood as a conjuncture of past and present, and containing a historical index (or signature, which is a mode of distribution as it is characterized by a signatory displacement, a pure historical element due to its connectivity characteristic and its working outside chronology), an image is constituted temporally to achieve legibility in the future—it is thus, more than a visual image pure and simple, the fulcrum of Benjamin’s theory of historical consciousness. A dialectical image appears when both of the objects it negates freeze and become immobile, thus suspending meaning. The image becomes full, legible and produces knowledge by

adhering to the analogy-based epistemological model/process that consists of a bipolar, tensive opposition between its elements. The elements do not unite, but remain in an immobile coexistence charged with tension. This form of knowledge, formulated and developed also by Benjamin's *Denkbild*, seems to offer Agamben what discursive language epistemologically cannot—the *Denkbild* (which “shines for a moment out of the ruins of language”), and perhaps art at large, is the pre-conceptual knowledge of the world.

The concept of “citation without quotation marks” expels from context, and thus destroys, the past. The problem of transmitting the past is thus replaced by the aspiration to cite it. This action resembles the way artists work with ready-mades—an artistic action, and a relation to the past, that brings to mind (art) collectors or revolutionaries in terms of destroying the common, bourgeois order. This action, however, carries within it a potential for renewal and healing. Benjamin's methodology of citation (like Kraus's) becomes his main tool for reflecting on the kaleidoscopic structure of the philosophy of history—the whole is presented through the part or fragment; the cited leftover contains the image of the whole within it. Similarly, it could be argued, in his writing style, Agamben works like a curator, as per the previously described method of “brachylogy.”

In the footsteps of Benjamin, Agamben thus grants aesthetics (or aesthetic operations) the role, however modest or limited, of the redeemer—aesthetics opens for us a space between past and future as a messianic arrest of time. Messianic time is a gap between our conception of the present and our experience of it, a gap that exhibits our inadequacy of being fully present “in-time” but also our ability to aesthetically work it out. This opening is the theological (and epistemological) horizon reflected in the messianic. The artist (or aesthetics), as a redeemer, must have access to an original temporal dimension. This is the messianic dimension that deactivates chronological time, as a caesura that transports a work of art into an atemporal existence. Messianic time resembles an underground alley—dug beneath history and enables its redemption. Thus art, *poiesis*, is a beginning, the pro-duction of origin, as it breaks the continuum of chronological time, and can conceive of history as a blueprint for science fiction.

In section II, part I, the historiographic turn in contemporary art, characterized by the metaphor of the archeological dig and the need to look backwards, is depicted as

contributing to artists' historical consciousness and in particular with regard to the societal knowledge economy. The constant artistic search for the unknown is exemplified, as an expanded metaphor, by the soil and buried past, that is now understood as the only terrain left for further explorations. History's traditional inert materials (documents, archives, etc.) are charged by artists with active forces, and are archeologically transformed into sites of knowledge construction. Various cultural, archeological projects reformulate a conception of time by materializing the past—examining and interpreting the material object, beyond the constraints of language, these archeological projects constitute a porous, multidirectional conception of time, and thus propel an epistemological difference between history and archeology in regard to the object. In the hands of (some) contemporary artists, so it seems, the avant-gardist return to the past becomes a cultural production technique, capable of opening up new possibilities rather than being a merely romantic, inspirational caprice. This return is thus transformed into a deferred present where past and future are constantly rewritten, where (against the dematerialization of the ephemeral art object) the present moment is the only possible thing left to document. The artistic present requires a constant deferred reflection—messianic time. The messianic time of contemporary art, its beatitude, as Agamben defines it is conditioned by a caesura that shows the pure representation and the silent core that are constitutive to an authentic work of art. This is an image of beauty that is weightless and postponed, existing in a standstill between passivity and activity—a messianic moment of de-creation. This beatitude is made possible due to the unforeseen, non-linear flow of time—like Benjamin's kaleidoscopic conception of history, time is an ever-changing temporal constellation charged with a redemptive, messianic force.

The final part of this thesis unfolds from my artistic work, where I ask: What is an origin? As we recall, origin (*arche*, in Greek), etymologically speaking, means, in the Western tradition, both beginning and commandment; that which gives birth to something (the principle where things begin, the *arche*) and that which commands its history, governs its development in time (the principle where order is given, the *archon*). I inquired into the concept of the origin as such, but also into my personal origin: what gave birth to, and still commands, my personal identity and meaning as self; what conditions my artistic

engagement in the world, and how?

In this inquiry, I practiced philosophical archeology—a research methodology that is nowadays associated mostly with the theoretical work of Agamben; however, in this research, I applied this methodology both theoretically and artistically as two different but complementary means of generating knowledge. This bifurcated research was befitting of the substantial purposes of philosophical archeology: that is, to transform the present through a unique approach to the past (or to historiography); to liberate oppressed epistemologies; and (more broadly) to render inoperative the binary logic of Western Metaphysics, to deactivate the conceptual machine, since the understanding of its working in history frees us from its tyranny and presents the past as “a work of fiction.”

Moreover, philosophical archeology attempts to examine the structure of the *investigation* and the *subject*, to research the dimension in which an artistic practice is deactivated and contemplated as such—thus, by a “poetic of inoperativity,” this research revealed a series of three artistic signatures that constitutes the material *a priori* of my practice. Acknowledging this material *a priori* dimension is perhaps the most important outcome of researching my artistic practice, that no other force, element or theory can compare itself to—since, with this acknowledgement, the potentiality to transform my artistic practice from within, and open it up for a new possible use, gains new meaning.

As Agamben writes:

What is poetry if not an operation in language that deactivates and renders inoperative its communicative and informative functions in order to open them to a new possible use? ... [W]hat poetry accomplishes for the potentiality to say, politics and philosophy must accomplish for the potentiality to act. Rendering inoperative economic and social operations, they show what the human body is capable of; they open it to a new possible use.⁵²⁶

526 Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale*, 55; Agamben, *Creation and Anarchy*, 27–28.

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Plates

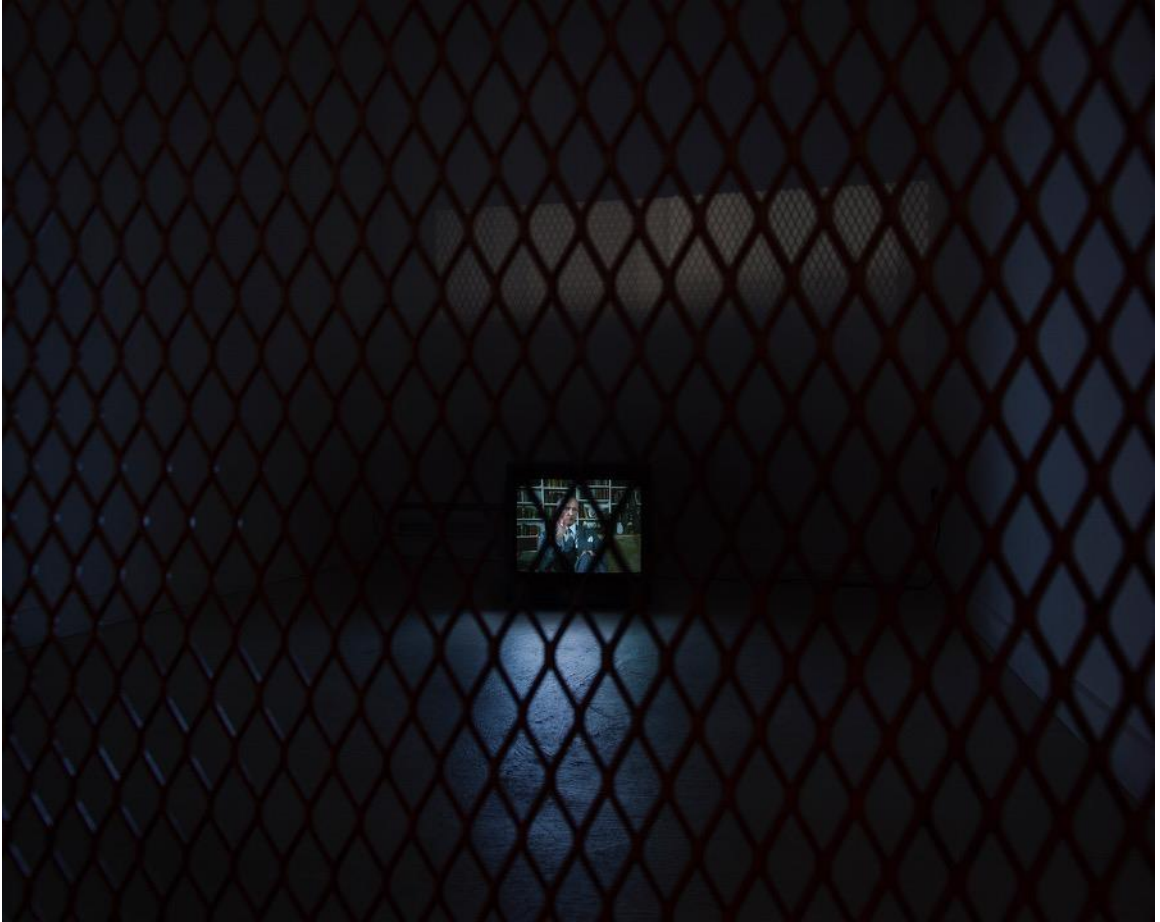


Plate 1: *I knew, but didn't believe it and because I didn't believe it, I didn't know* (2017)

Installation view. Katzman Contemporary, Toronto, 2017.



Plate 2: *Silent Maps* (2016)

Exhibition view. Red Head Gallery, Toronto, 2016.



Plate 3: *Silent Maps* (2016)

Exhibition view. Red Head Gallery, Toronto, 2016.



Plate 4: *Silent Maps* (2016)

Exhibition view. Red Head Gallery, Toronto, 2016.



Plate 5: *Silent Maps* (2016)

Untitled, 150 X 140 cm. Red Head Gallery, Toronto, 2016.



Plate 6: *Silent Maps* (2016)

Untitled, 48 X 39 cm. Red Head Gallery, Toronto, 2016.



Plate 7: *Silent Maps* (2016)

Untitled, 53 X 73 cm. Red Head Gallery, Toronto, 2016.



Plate 8: *Vaalbara* (2014)

Exhibition view. Art Museum, Toronto, 2014.

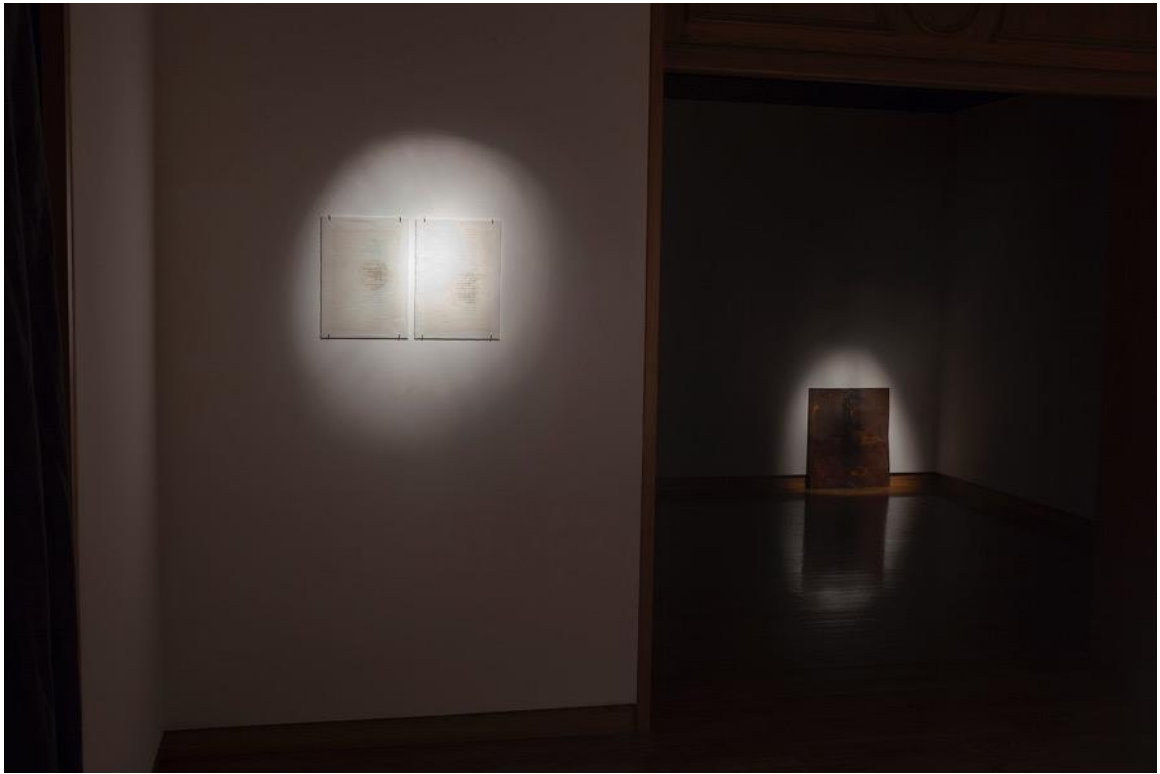


Plate 9: *Vaalbara* (2014)

Exhibition view. Art Museum, Toronto, 2014.



Plate 10: *Vaalbara* (2014)

Untitled, 100 X 100 X 30 cm. Art Museum, Toronto, 2014.



Plate 11: *Vaalbara* (2014)

Untitled, Variable dimensions. Art Museum, Toronto, 2014.



Plate 12: *Vaalbara* (2014)

Untitled, 90 X 30 cm. Art Museum, Toronto, 2014.



Plate 13: *Vaalbara* (2014)

Untitled, 40 X 30 cm. (each). Art Museum, Toronto, 2014.



Plate 14: *To Return to a Place, Is, Like Dying* (2016)

Exhibition view. Hansen House, Jerusalem, 2016.



Plate 15: *To Return to a Place, Is, Like Dying* (2016)

Exhibition view. Hansen House, Jerusalem, 2016.

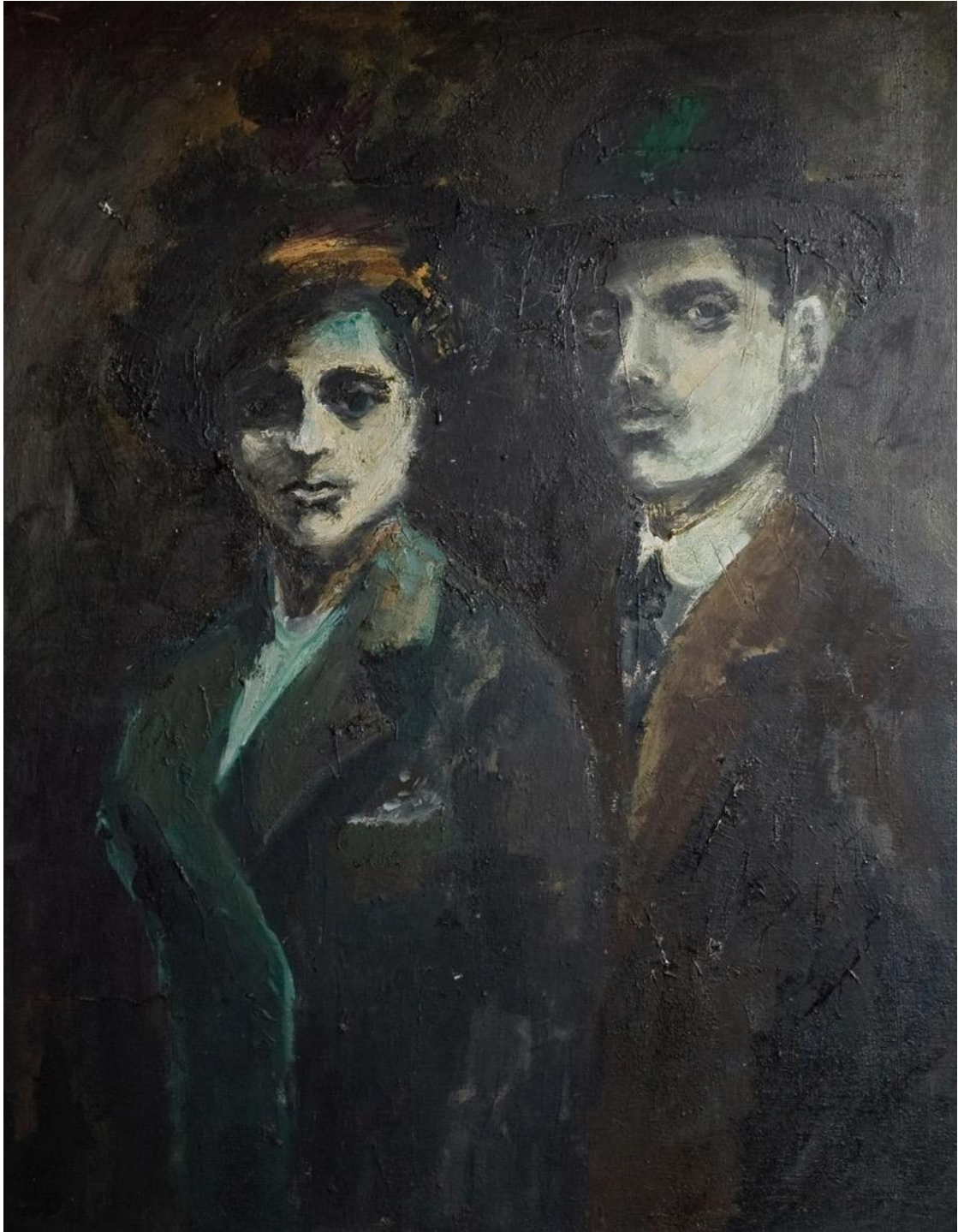


Plate 16: *Galut (Diaspora)* (2011)

Installation detail, Painting by Kopel Gurwin

Audio Documentation—[www.idogovrin.net/galut\(diaspora\).mp3](http://www.idogovrin.net/galut(diaspora).mp3)



Plate 17: *Between Things* (2010)

Installation detail. P8 Gallery, Tel-Aviv, 2010.



Plate 18: *Not Quite the Highest Point* (2017)

Exhibition view. ArtLab, London (ON), 2017.

Not Quite the Highest Point consists of multiple sets of objects, ephemera, sounds, leftovers, miniatures, books and perishable instances which form various paradigmatic historical constellations or thought-spaces, rendered and conceived by archeological art-making.



Plate 19: *Not Quite the Highest Point* (2017)

Exhibition view. ArtLab, London (ON), 2017.



Plate 20: *Not Quite the Highest Point* (2017)

Exhibition view. ArtLab, London (ON), 2017.



Plate 21: *Not Quite the Highest Point* (2017)

Exhibition view. ArtLab, London (ON), 2017.



Plate 22: *Not Quite the Highest Point* (2017)

Installation detail. ArtLab, London (ON), 2017.



Plate 23: *Not Quite the Highest Point* (2017)

Installation detail. ArtLab, London (ON), 2017.



Plate 24: *Teca* (everything you tell me I keep in my body) (2015)

Mixed media—Sound, Wood, Cotton. 51 X 31 X 20 cm.



Plate 25: *The Revisit II* (2014)

Mixed media—Bees Wax, Resin, Paper, Ink. 39 X 29 cm.



Plate 26: *Had We but World Enough and Time* (2014)

Mixed media—Bees Wax, Resin, Paper, Ink, Bamboo. 23 X 15 cm.



Plate 27: *From the River Archive* (2014)

Mixed media—Audio speaker, Bees Wax, Resin, Paper, Bamboo. 23 X 15 X 7 cm.



Plate 28: *Quite Whispers in the Hallway* (2013)

Video Installation.

Projected text reads:

The sound of a tongue in a dried mouth, quiet whispers in the hallway, and the door closes. I could hear the morning newspaper's pages turning; again, and again, and again... squashing. His heavy breathings. The sound of a cellophane wrap being constantly folded. Salty almonds crushing, grinding, crumbling, and then he growled: "Are you coming?"

The sound of vigorous footsteps, and fatigued ones, slowly going in and out of phase. A burst of an engine, and sounds of asphalt grains tightly pressed against each other; again, and again, and again... Slowly halting. I could hear a thin stream of air being forcibly released, silently he mumbled: "Are you going?"



Plate 29: *Quiet Whispers in the Hallway* (2013)

Installation detail



Plate 30: *A Revisit* (2012)

Mixed media—Print, Paper, Ink, Tape. 53 X 48 cm.



Plate 31: *The Revisit* (2011)

CD

The album's title, *the revisit*, indicates its metaphysical foundation. Comprising of five pieces, the album exhibits several revisits to contemporary classical music which in the end reveal nothing of the original sonic material, yet dwell in the pieces' worldliness.

No sampling was taken; everything was recorded live and was later on digitally processed and edited.

The revisits became possible, on the one hand, due to the pieces' initial character of openness and, on the other hand, due to my interest in artworks that leave the horizon relatively open, in this case, for further composition.

What occurs at the liminal moment in time of the revisit?

Audio Documentation—www.idogovrin.net/therevisit.mp3



Plate 32: *Attentiveness Foldings* (2010)

Installation view. CCA, Tel-Aviv, 2011.

Mixed media—Seashells, Sound, Paper. Variable dimensions.



Plate 33: *If the Walls Could Speak* (2010)

Site-specific sound installation. Variable dimensions. Yafo 23 Gallery, Jerusalem, 2010.

The structure, literally, is a material that exists as limited information, defined in a closed and finite reality. Sound is contained in the structure as part of the happening within the structure, and around it; but even when the happening had past, the sound remains intact, floating, burned into dense layers as simultaneously existing derivatives, as a known testimony to the thing itself, and as an unknown testimony to the thing which was lost. This installation attempts to carve the layers of sound, to unfold time, and to decipher the local history that existed, and still exists.

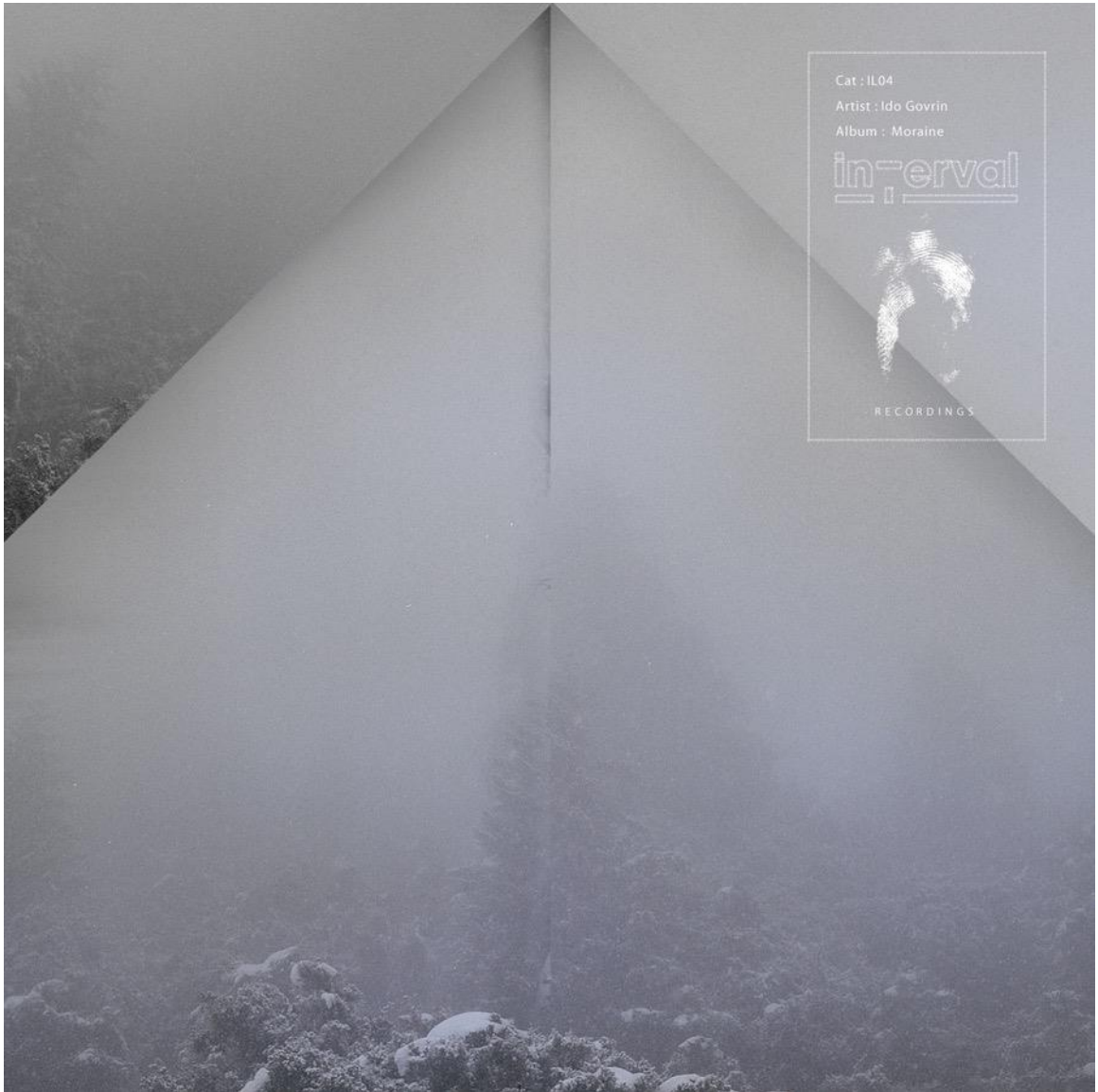


Plate 34: *Moraine* (2010)

CD

Audio Documentation—www.idogovrin.net/moraine.mp3

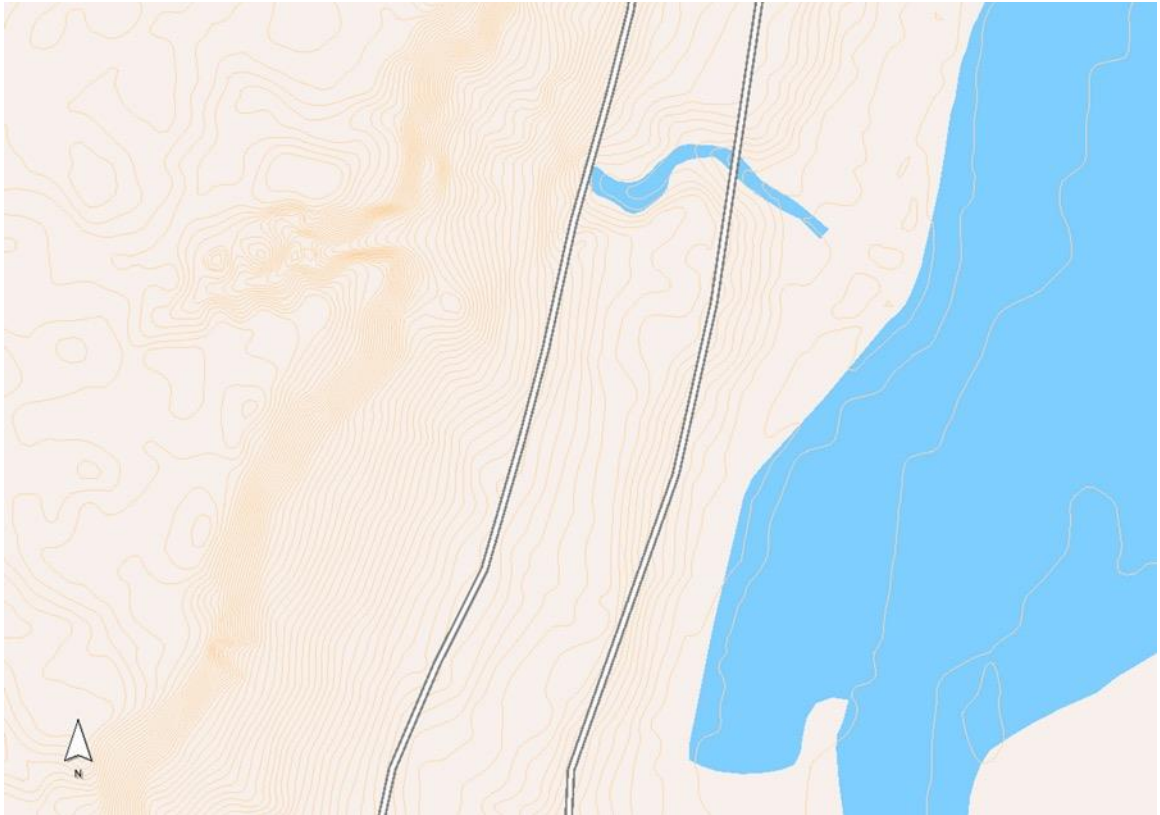


Plate 35: *15 Maps for Becoming a Concept* (2009)

Graphic score (detail).

Audio Documentation— www.idogovrin.net/15maps.mp3

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Ido Govrin

**Post-secondary
Education and Degrees:** Diploma in Sonology
Koninklijk Conservatory (Den-Haag, The Netherlands)
2003–2004

B.A. Philosophy
Tel-Aviv University (Tel-Aviv, Israel)
2006–2012

Master of Visual Studies
University of Toronto (Toronto, ON, Canada)
2012–2014

PhD Art and Visual Culture
Western University (London, ON, Canada)
2015–2019

**Thesis-related
Honours and Awards**

Western University Graduate Fellowship, 2015

Ontario Art Council, Exhibition Assistance Grant, 2015

Western University (Faculty of Arts and Humanities),
Alumni Graduate Award, 2016

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
(SSHRC), Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate
Scholarship (CGS) Doctoral Award, 2016–2019

**Thesis-related
Art Exhibitions**

Philosophical Archeology Space 2009–2019
McIntosh Gallery (London, Canada)
27 June–26 July 2019

Not Quite the Highest Point
ArtLab (London, Canada)
26 October–14 November 2017

*I Knew, but didn't believe it and because I didn't believe it, I
didn't know*
Katzman Contemporary (Toronto, Canada)
18 February–25 March 2017

Silent Maps
Red Head Gallery (Toronto, Canada)
2 March–26 March 2016

To Return to a Place, is, Like Dying
Hansen House (Jerusalem, Israel)
7 January–20 February 2016

**Related Work
Experience**

Teaching Assistant
Department of Visual Arts (Western University)
2015–2018

Publications

Books

Govrin, Ido. *To Return to a Place, is, Like Dying*. Jerusalem: Hansen House—Centre for Design, Media and Technology, 2016.

Edited Books

Govrin, Ido, ed., *Laptopia #5*. Bat-Yam: Bat-Yam Museum for Contemporary Art and Interval Publishing, 2009.

Peer-Reviewed Journals

Govrin, Ido. “Art Epistemology (Project for a Review).” *JAR*, (18 January, 2019).
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Govrin, Ido. “Tears, Fears and Flashes.” *Seismograf*, Special Issue: Sound Art Matters (November 2017).
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Articles and Essays

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Govrin, Ido. “Laptopia.” *Tav+: Music, Arts, Society*, no.4, (September 2004): 110–111.

Works in Progress

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Epistemological Constellation)." *Journal for Italian
Philosophy*, no.2, (anticipated Fall 2019)

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