Chapter One

The History of Philosophical Archaeology from Kant to Agamben

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Chapter 3 of Giorgio Agamben's book *The Signature of All Things: On Method* is titled "Philosophical Archaeology" and outlines an overarching research methodology that essentially embodies one's relation to history and historiographic research.

Philosophical archaeology, as Agamben acknowledges, has developed based on a series of philosophical ruins in which "Jottings for the Progress of Metaphysics,"[1] 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 archaeology

[*als philosophische Archäologie*]."[2] Thus for Kant the idea of philosophical archaeology entails coming to 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 archaeology 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) archaeology runs the risk of lacking a beginning and putting forth, as Kant writes, "a history of the thing that has not happened."[3] Thus we can derive, Agamben deduces, that as an a priori history (which is, after all, a historical practice), philosophical archaeology's origin, the *arché* 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 *arché* 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 archaeology 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 as partial objects or ruins, given only as *Urbilder* or archetypes that can never be attained and serve merely as guidelines.[4]

GLOSS II—FIRST BEGINNING AND THE BEFORE OF THE BOOK

It should be noted that between writing the first *Critique* (1781) and the *Progress of Metaphysics* (1793), Kant wrote another relatively short text where the logic of "ruinology" is further articulated mainly in relation to the concept of the *arché* of historiography. There, he argues 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."[5] Attempts to outline the *first beginning* of a certain (natural) historical phenomenon may legitimately include the insertion of conjectures regarding the phenomenon's *arché*, insofar as *nature* makes it. In this case, we assume it "was not better or worse than what we encounter now," thus the beginning need not be fictionalized. 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."[6]

As a genre-based semantic hinge, Kant's incidental comment about the novel (including its annexed footnote) enables us to reflect upon the (somewhat suggested) Kantian conception of temporality at the core of his framework of historicity or philosophical archaeology, as we have seen thus far. This also assists us in thinking about the influence Kant's conception of temporality has had on the manner in which Agamben articulates a conception of (messianic) time, which includes his understanding of the *arché* of philosophical archaeology. For example, 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"[7]—a limbo, pre- or sub-world of fantasies, sketches, notes, copybooks, drafts, and blotters.[8] 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 to provide it with a sufficient visual vocabulary. 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.[9]

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 in a fragmented form.[10] 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, toward both past and future, whose interruption at a certain historical point is purely contingent.[11] 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. Thus, for Agamben, a draft (of a certain work of art) is not an ex nihilo act of creation but an ongoing process of fulfillment and transformation. The so-called "completed work," he writes, "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 (Augustine's *Retractationes* [of 427] and Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* [of 1888] are just two of the most famous examples). 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.[12]

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 onward, 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."[13] 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 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.[14]

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The archetypal and unreachable characteristics of the (Agambenian/Kantian) *arché*, as herein conceived, imply that every authentic historical inquiry contains an "essential dishomogeneity," a constitutive gap between the *arché* it investigates (made of ruins or archetypes, not given in its totality within chronology) and the phenomenon's factual origin.[15]

GLOSS III—DISHOMOGENEITY

The idea of "essential dishomogeneity" mirrors the old philosophical problem of discontinuity. In the context of the following discussion, that is, a Foucauldian epistemological context, the problem of discontinuity establishes the background against which Foucault's archaeology (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 archaeology (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."[16] 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."[17]

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The idea of "essential dishomogeneity," 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. 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."[18] 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"?

GLOSS IV—GENEALOGY

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."[19] 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").

The genealogist who examines the descent (with its "subtle, sub-individual marks") constructs, as Foucault quotes Nietzsche's term from *The Gay Science* (1882), "cyclopean monuments," 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,"[20] but by revealing "the myriad events through which they were formed," and 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."[21] The search for the descent does not wish to secure foundations but conversely to destabilize what was previously considered founded to fragment what was thought

unified; and if the genealogist "listens to history," he or she 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"[22] 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*"), 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,"[23] 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 and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled"—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."[24]

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 where a battle was won against certain concrete conditions—emergence is thus the entry of forces. 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)"[25]; thus knowledge creation is a phenomenon that must be described in terms of power. Archaeological and genealogical studies are not mutually exclusive in Foucault's view; rather their different emphases are mutually supportive ("Archaeology 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").[26] Foucault's Genealogy thus has both political and ethical dimensions.

Although the theoretical discontinuity between Foucault's conception of archaeology (as in the archaeology of knowledge) and genealogy (as in the genealogy of power) might seem quite abrupt, in fact a closer reading (and cross-referencing other "secondary" sources by Foucault) might reveal a more gradual shift between them. Once "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" is published, which is often seen as a marker for Foucault's introduction of the term *genealogy* (and his explicit focus on power) from the early 1970s onward, it seems that Foucault attempts to use the term in order to elaborate a certain perspective that archaeology alone could not capture, not as a complete replacement for the latter. Thus, crude periodization of Foucault's work, in this sense, is rather hard to maintain.[27]

Stephen Howard reflects upon the relation between archaeology 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*).[28]

Howard's argument is as follows: although Agamben claims to develop Foucault's archaeological and genealogical methodology at large (mainly in Foucault's works on governmentality, power, and biopolitics), the fact is that Agamben's methodology deviates significantly from Foucault's. How can that be?

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 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 contributes to a historical knowledge of struggles and the utilization of that knowledge in contemporary tactics. The aim of Foucault's genealogy is to de-subjugate historical knowledges, to reactivate local knowledges against scientific hierarchization of knowledge, and to free subjugated knowledge from its marginalized position and reactivate it for political ends. Foucault succinctly summarizes the relation between archaeology and genealogy: "Archaeology is the method specific to the analysis of local discursivi-

ties, 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."[29] Genealogy demands relentless erudition because it first requires archaeology'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 "play of dominations," thus norms have history and arise in particular contexts. The insurrection of subjugated knowledge made possible by the genealogical combination of archaeological erudition and a politically motivated reactivation of marginalized knowledge.[30]

Throughout his entire oeuvre and specifically in *The Signature of All Things*, Agamben conflates archaeology 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 archaeological 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 archaeologist. 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'?"[31] 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 archaeology and genealogy (and thus showing that he is not merely an archaeologist in Foucault's sense).

Agamben's work in *The Highest Poverty* demonstrates that he does not subsume genealogy under archaeology 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 archaeological 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 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); in other words, 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 chapter in this book) entails that archaeology (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, archaeological erudition with the reactivation of marginalized knowledge). Howard writes: "In Agamben's conflation of Foucault's archaeology and genealogy, subjugated knowledges are reactivated not through genealogies of modern institutions and forms of knowledge; but through the archaeological analysis itself."[32] 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 *arché* (as origin) itself, which is neither chronological nor empirical per se, and which relates to Benjamin's idea of "messianic-time" and the eruption of the past into the present in an object's "now of knowability." Agamben's archaeology and genealogy is thus an interpretation of Foucault's methodology conditioned by the influence of Benjamin. Agamben's (Benjaminian) interpretations of the methodologies of archaeology and genealogy conflate what in Foucault are two distinct approaches. Foucault's genealogy aims for a more direct political intervention than his archaeology by "saving" oppressed knowledge, while Agamben's detailed readings manifest an archaeological method that intends to be in itself political without the need for a further genealogical step (as it already includes a [Benjaminian] temporal, historical, and thus political, element). Although Agamben considers Foucault and Overbeck (as we will now turn to) 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. 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 genealogy.

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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 heterogenous stratum within the life of a historical phenomenon, "is not placed in the position of a chronological origin but is qualitatively other."[33] 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 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."[34]

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.[35]

Archaeology is thus a historical inquiry that has to do with the moment of a phenomenon's arising and that must not only engage anew with the sources and tradition but also must confront the various mechanisms through which tradition regulates and conditions what it transmits. The emergence of a historical phenomenon (its moment of arising, its *arché* as we have outlined it thus far) that archaeology 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."[36]

Before continuing to elaborate on our investigation of archaeology as a historical inquiry, we need to further articulate the concept of the *arché* and to touch upon a few of its important elements to our discussion: (1) the tension between its chronological and morphological characteristics and the consequence this tension presents to the concept of temporality and history; (2) the philological history of the word *arché* in the philosophical discourse; and (3) the particular manner in which the structure of the *arché* is reflected within the cultural (operative) mechanism of the West.

GLOSS V—*ARCHÉ*

(1) In *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (originally published in French as *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* in 1947), 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.[37] 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.

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 *arché* (or the origin) in his essay "Walter Benjamin and the Demonic: Happiness and Historical Redemption,"[38] 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."[39] These attitudes are not in opposition but 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, according to Agamben, every intent to overthrow both is destined to fail. 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.[40]

The idea of origin here is akin to Goethe's concept of *Urphänomen*:[41] 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 "onceness" 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).[42]

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.[43]

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 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 nonlinear way.

Agamben revisits the Benjaminian concept of the origin-as-vortex in "Vortexes,"[44] 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.[45]

Origin, for Benjamin, does not precede a phenomenon's becoming
nor is separated from its chronology; origin autonomously dwells in a
phenomenon but also derives its matter from it. Origin accompanies
historical becoming, and like a vortex, is still present in it. The whirling
origin that archaeological investigation tries to reach, writes Agamben,
is an *arché*, 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."[46] For Agamben, the "correct" relation to
the past[47]—this dialectic in the origin—echoes the *arché* in archaeology,
which is not simply a historical fact that exhausts itself (as it is situated
in a chronology) nor a meta-historical archetype but something imma-
nent within history, internal to it, which cannot coincide with a precise
chronological moment nor is simply a historical fact given in chronology.

(2) This conception is evident in the *arché*'s double meaning (in
Greek),[48] which has its origin in the theological idea according to which
God created the world but also continuously governs it. The word *arché*
entered philosophical language around the time of 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, according to Reiner Schürmann, "a
technical term for designating the constitutive, abstract, and irreducible
element in being, becoming, and knowing,"[49] 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,"[50] but the *arché* itself is not an entity (nor supreme being) that creates and governs change, but only the common trait of the different types of causes.

In the second half of the twentieth century, three important attempts were made to theoretically wedge this dual meaning of the *arché*. The first was that of 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 *arché*, to reach an *arché* 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; however, 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 favoring 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 (e.g., the Indo-European language as an historical a priori: it is a priori because it makes understandable concrete historical phenomena, and it is historical not because we have written evidence of its existence but because we have to presuppose that it had existed).

The earlier remark that the word *arché* 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 *arché* (and its relation to the *apeiron*, the infinity, and the current sociopolitical order in the West), Stathis Gourgouris maintains that the word *arché* first appears as a philosophical principle in the well-known Anaximander fragment,[51] 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."[52] He thus establishes two essential elements: The first is that the *arché* 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."[53] 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." 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." 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 readmittance 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."[54] The condition 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."[55] Worldly things unsettle the "cosmic balance" that the relation between infinity and time attempts to maintain (i.e., 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."[56] This archaic Ionian imaginary, writes Gourgouris, for which finitude itself constitutes an injustice,[57] 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."[58] 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 Aristotle[59] 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."[60] 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 (recall Benjamin's elucidation [via Goethe] of the radial morphological structure of the concept of temporality and history); the geometrics of *meson*, of mediation and middle, thus "irrevocably alters an understanding of *archē* as the fixed point of origin and primary rule."[61] Not only is the *archē* not constituted as a primordial whole, but simultaneously it is cleft and permeated, and this condition renders it 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.'"[62]

(3) In *The Use of Bodies*, Agamben advances the claim that the structure of the *arché*, 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 *arché*. According to this idea, the originary structure of Western culture consists in an *ex-ceptio*, in an inclusive exclusion of human life.[63] 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."[64] The mechanism[65] 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 *arché* 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."[66] If the structure of the *arché* of our culture is such, claims Agamben, then philosophical archaeology is not a matter of thinking new articulations of the two elements (playing them against each other), nor a matter of an archaeological regression to a more originary beginning but one that may result from the deactivation of the machine. In this sense, following Agamben, first philosophy is always final philosophy.[67]

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 re-creating in every place the museum apparatus and the powers that it pretended to depose, which nowadays become even more oppressive insofar as they are deprived of all legitimacy. If it is true, as Agamben maintains, 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 at the point where we grasp and render destitute the anarchy of power."[68]

[3]

The term "archaeology," which nowadays (as stated previously) 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).

GLOSS VI—ARCHAEOLOGY

The word "archaeology" belongs, at least philosophically, to Michel Foucault but no less also to Maurice Merleau-Ponty (and others, as we will see), who had already characterized his own thinking using the same terminology in the 1950s—one can thus speak of the prehistory of archaeology before it came to be prominently associated with Foucault.[69] Merleau-Ponty's proximity to Foucault lies in a concern for the profound spatiality of "archaeology" 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.[70] Despite this distance (and their emphasis on spatiality at large), both Foucault and Merleau-Ponty refer to the past in their archaeological projects, a past that is somewhat still effective, still present, and one that "has always already been present": it is also a past that was never present and a past free for the future.

But as in most cases where we can identify someone who preceded the person previously thought to have conceptualized a certain matter, the case of the kind of past we are interested in here is no different. This past echoes, more or less, what Kant (1724–1804) called "a priori," what Husserl (1859–1938) called "transcendental subjectivity" or "Phenomenological Archaeology" (including Eugen Fink's writings on Husserl), and what Freud (1856–1939) called "the unconscious." These three thinkers thus also constitute the prehistory of the concept of "archaeology." Therefore, a concise summation of their ideas of archaeology 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 archaeology [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."][71]

According to Lawlor, by means of investigating the past, archaeology concerns itself in the transformation of the present. This concern comes from psychoanalysis (which is concerned, among other things, with curing the hysteric and not for investigating the past for its own sake), thus paradoxically archaeology is, in fact, interested in the future. This means another two characteristics of archaeology: on the one hand, as Freud says, the past that one returns to is always incomplete (and so