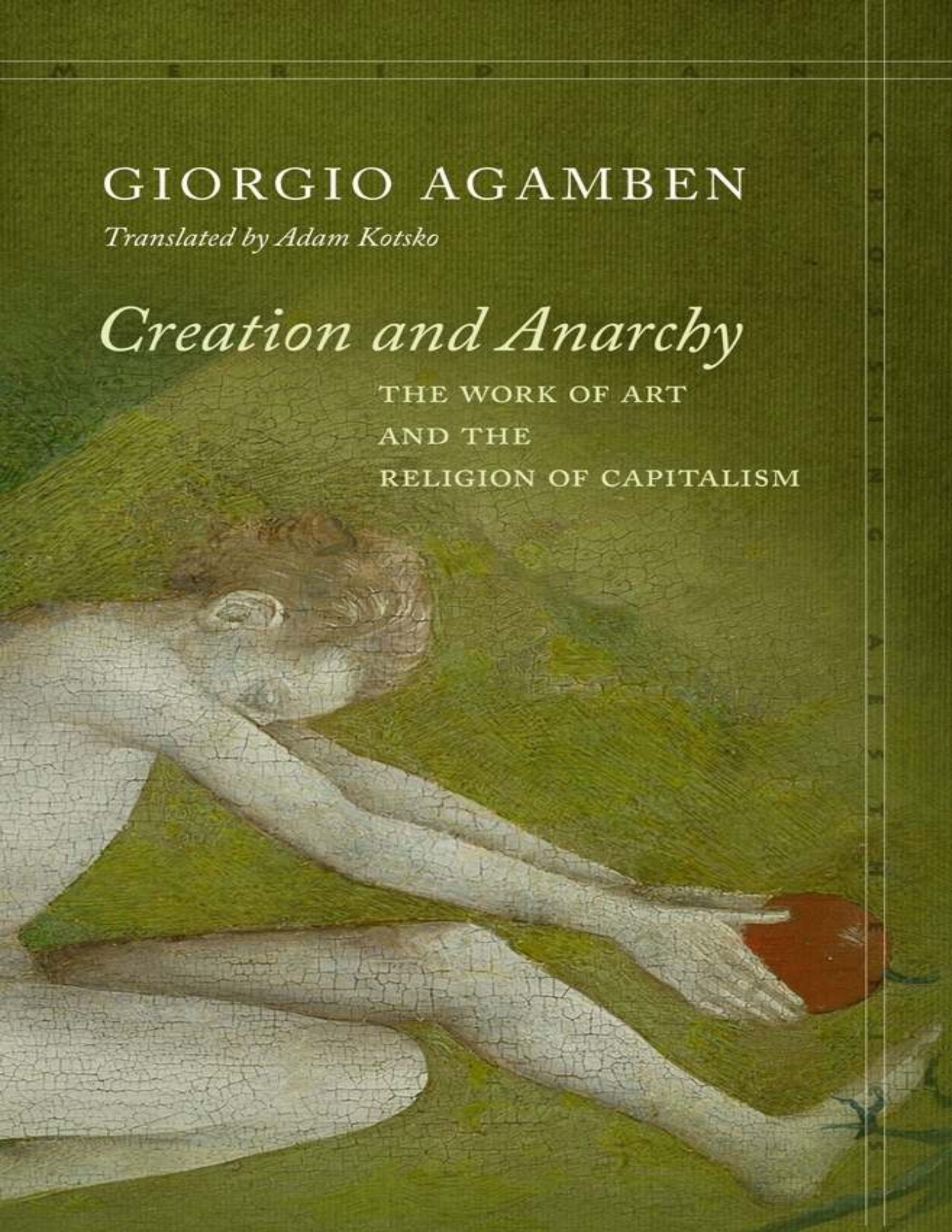
MERIDIAN CROSSING ASTHETICS

GIORGIO AGAMBEN

Translated by Adam Kotsko

Creation and Anarchy

THE WORK OF ART AND THE RELIGION OF CAPITALISM



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The Work of Art and the Religion of Capitalism

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Translator's Note

I have followed the convention of distinguishing between *potenza* and *potere*, translating them respectively as "potential" (with accompanying adjective forms) and "power." *Opera* is translated as "work" throughout, but the connection with "operation," "inoperativity," and related forms should not be forgotten. I have rendered the phrase *essere-in-opera* as "being-at-work" rather than the more artificial "being-in-work"; hopefully "at" can be read with the same locative implications as "in." For *dovere esse*, I have followed my practice from *Opus Dei* and rendered it as "having to be" (rather than "must be") for the sake of readability and parallelism, but in other formulations involving *dovere* I have at times opted for "must" or "ought." Relatedly, I have translated *volere* as "to will" in Agamben's discussion of modal verbs.

In a brief prefatory note, Agamben clarifies that "the texts published here reproduce, with some variation, those of five lectures held at the Mendrisio Academy of Architecture between October 2012 and April 2013." One of those texts, "What Is an Act of Creation?," is reprinted with some variations from *The Fire and the Tale*, which Lorenzo Chiesa translated for Stanford University Press; I have lightly edited his translation for conformity with the present volume. Portions of Chapter 3, "The Inappropriable," are drawn from the chapter of the same name from *The Use of Bodies*, and I have reproduced my own translation wherever the Italian text is identical; a few short passages closely follow the text of the essay "Expropriated Matter" from *The End of the Poem*, and to the extent possible, I have drawn on Daniel Heller-Roazen's translation for those portions of the text.

I would like to thank Giorgio Agamben and Carlo Salzani for their comments on the manuscript and to express my gratitude, as always, to Emily-Jane Cohen and the staff at Stanford University Press.

1
Archaeology of the Work of Art

The idea that guides my reflections on the concept of the work of art is that archaeology is the sole means of access to the present. It is in this sense that the title "Archaeology of the Work of Art" is to be understood. As Michel Foucault has suggested, the investigation of the past is nothing but the shadow cast by an interrogation directed at the present. It is in seeking to comprehend the present that human beings—at least we Europeans—find ourselves compelled to interrogate the past. I have specified "we Europeans" because it seems to me that, supposing that the word "Europe" has a sense, it cannot, as is obvious today, be either political or religious and even less economic. Rather, it consists perhaps in this: that Europeans—unlike, for example, Asians and Americans, for whom history and the past have a completely different significance—can gain access to their truth only by means of a confrontation with the past, only by settling accounts with their history. Many years ago, a philosopher who was also a high functionary of the emergent Europe, Alexandre Kojève, maintained that *Homo sapiens* had arrived at the end of its history and at this point had before it only two possibilities: access to a post-historical animality (incarnated by the "American Way of Life") or snobbism (incarnated by the Japanese, who continued to celebrate their tea ceremonies, devoid though they were of any historical meaning). Between a completely reanimalized America and a Japan that remained human solely on condition of renouncing any historical content, Europe could offer the alternative of a culture that remains human and vital even after the end of history, because it is capable of confronting itself with its own history in its totality and of drawing from this confrontation a new life.

For this reason, the crisis that Europe is going through—as should be evident in the dismantling of its university institutions and in the growing museification of culture—is not an economic problem ("economy" today is a shibboleth and not a concept) but a crisis of the relationship with the past. Since obviously the only place in which the past can live is the present, if the present is no longer aware of its past as living, then universities and museums become problematic places. And if art has today become for us an eminent figure—perhaps *the* eminent figure—of this past, then the question that we must never stop posing is: what is the place of art in the present? (And I would here like to pay homage to

Giovanni Urbani, who was perhaps the first to have posed the question in a coherent way.)

The expression “archaeology of the work of art” therefore presupposes that our relationship with the work of art today has itself become a problem. And because I am convinced, as Wittgenstein suggested, that philosophical problems are in the last analysis questions about the meaning of words, this indicates that today the syntagm “work of art” is opaque, if not unintelligible, and that its obscurity concerns not only the term “art,” which two centuries of aesthetic reflection have accustomed us to consider problematic, but also and above all the apparently simpler term “work.” Even from a grammatical point of view the syntagm “work of art,” which we use with such casualness, is not easy to understand, because it is far from clear whether we are dealing with a subjective genitive (the work is made by art and belongs to it) or an objective one (art depends on the work and receives its sense from it)—in other words, 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.

We know, after all, that today the work seems to be going through a decisive crisis, which has led it to disappear from the sphere of artistic production, in which “performance” and the creative or conceptual activity of the artist tend more and more to take the place of what we were accustomed to consider as a “work.”

Already in 1967, a young and exceptional scholar, Robert Klein, had published a brief study with the eloquent title “The Eclipse of the Work of Art.” Klein suggested that the attacks of the artistic avant-garde of the twentieth century were not directed at art, but exclusively against its incarnation in a work, as though art, in a curious self-destructive impulse, were devouring what had always defined its basis: its own work.

That things are precisely so emerges clearly from the way in which Guy Debord—who before founding the Situationist International had taken part in the last fringes of the twentieth-century avant-garde—summarizes his position on the problem of art in his time: “Surrealism wanted to realize art without abolishing it; Dadaism wanted to abolish it without realizing it; we want at the same time to abolish it and realize it.” Obviously what must be abolished is the work, but equally obvious is that the work of art must be abolished in the name of something that, in art itself, goes beyond the work and demands to be realized not in a work but in life (the Situationists accordingly intended to produce not works but situations).

If today art presents itself as an activity without a work—even if, in a self-

interested contradiction, artists and dealers continue to demand a price for it—this could happen precisely because the being-work of the work of art had remained unthought. I believe that only a genealogy of this fundamental ontological concept (although it is not registered as such in philosophy textbooks) will be able to render comprehensible that process that—following the well-known psychoanalytic paradigm of the return of the repressed in pathological forms—brought artistic practice to assume those characteristics that so-called contemporary art has exasperated in unwittingly parodic forms. (Contemporary art as a return in pathological forms of the repressed "work.")

This is certainly not the place to attempt such a genealogy. Instead I limit myself to presenting some reflections on three moments that seem to me to be particularly significant.

It will be necessary, for the first, for you to transpose yourself into classical Greece, more or less at the time of Aristotle, that is, in the fourth century before Christ. What is the situation of the work of art—and more generally of the work and of the artist—at this moment? Very different from what we are accustomed to. The artist, like every other artisan, is classified among the *technitai*, that is, among those who produce things by practicing a technique. His activity, however, is never taken into account as such, but is always and only considered from the point of view of the work produced. This is clearly testified in the fact, which is surprising for historians of law, that the contract that he enters into with the purchaser never mentions the quantity of labor necessary, but only the work that he must furnish. For this reason, modern historians have been in the habit of repeating that our concept of labor or productive activity was completely unknown to the Greeks, who lacked even a term for it. I believe that one should say, more precisely, that they did not distinguish labor and productive activity from the work, because in their eyes, the productive activity resides in the work and not in the artist who has produced it.

There is a passage in Aristotle in which all this is clearly expressed. The passage is found in Book Theta of the *Metaphysics*, which is devoted to the problem of potential (*dynamis*) and act (*energeia*). The term *energeia* is an invention of Aristotle's—philosophers, like poets, have a need to create words, and terminology, it has been rightly said, is the poetic element of thought—but for a Greek eye, it is immediately intelligible. For "work, activity," one says *ergon* in Greek, and the adjective *energos* means "active, working": *energeia* therefore means that something is "at work, in action," in the sense that it has reached its proper end, the operation to which it is destined. Curiously, to define the opposition between potential and act, *dynamis* and *energeia*, Aristotle makes

use of an example drawn precisely from the sphere that we would define as artistic: Hermes, he says, is in potential in the wood that is not yet sculpted, but he is at work in the sculpted statue. The work of art belongs, that is to say, constitutively to the sphere of *energeia*, which, on the other hand, refers in its very name to a being-at-work.

And here begins the passage (1050a, 21–35) that I am interested in reading together with you. The end, the *telos*—he writes—is the *ergon*, the work, and the work is *energeia*, operation and being-at-work: in fact the term *energeia* derives from *ergon* and therefore tends toward completion, *entelecheia* (another term forged by Aristotle: possessing itself in its own end). Yet there are cases in which the final end is exhausted in use, as in eyesight (*opsis*, the faculty of seeing) and vision (the act of seeing, *horasis*), in which nothing else is produced beyond vision; while there are other cases in which something else is produced, as, for example, from the art of building (*oikodomikē*) the house is also produced, beyond the operation of building (*oikodomēsis*). In these cases, the act of building, the *oikodomēsis*, resides in the thing built (*en tō oikodomoumenō*); it comes into being (*gignetai*, "is generated") and is contemporaneous with the house. In all cases, then, in which something is produced beyond the use, the *energeia* resides in the thing made (*en tō poioumenō*), just as the act of building is in the house built and the act of weaving is in what is woven. When, by contrast, there is not another *ergon*, another work beyond the *energeia*, then the *energeia*, the being-at-work, will reside in the subject himself, as, for example, vision in the one seeing and contemplation (*theōria*, that is, the highest knowing) in the one contemplating and life in the soul.

Let us linger a moment on this extraordinary passage. We now understand better why the Greeks would privilege the work with respect to the artist (or the artisan). In activities that produce something, the *energeia*, the true and proper productive activity, does not reside, however much this may surprise us, in the artist, but in the work: the operation of building in the house and the act of weaving in the thing woven. And we also understand why the Greeks could not hold the artist in high esteem. While contemplation, the act of knowing, is in the one contemplating, the artist is a being who has his end, his *telos*, outside himself, in the work. That is to say, he is a constitutively incomplete being who never possesses his *telos*, who lacks *entelecheia*. For this reason the Greeks considered the *technitēs* as a *banausos*, a term that indicates a person who is unimportant, not entirely respectable. This does not mean, obviously, that they were not in a position to see the difference between a shoemaker and Phidias. But to their eyes, both had their end outside themselves, the first in the shoe and the second in the statues of the Parthenon. In any case, their *energeia* did not

belong to them. The problem, then, was not aesthetic but metaphysical.

Alongside activities that produce works, there are others without a work—which Aristotle exemplifies in vision and knowing—in which the *energeia* is instead in the subject himself. It goes without saying that these latter are, for a Greek, superior to the others, once again not because they were not in a position to appreciate the importance of artworks with respect to knowledge and thought, but because in unproductive activities, as thought (*theōria*) precisely is, the subject perfectly possesses his end. The work, the *ergon*, is by contrast in some way an obstacle that dispossesses the agent of his *energeia*, which resides not in him, but in the work. Praxis, the action that has its end in itself, is for this reason, as Aristotle never stops repeating, in some way superior to *poiēsis*, to productive activity whose end is in the work. The perfect *energeia* or operation is without a work and has its place in the agent. (The ancients accordingly distinguished the *artes in effectu*, like painting and sculpture, which produce a thing, from the *artes actuosae*, like dance and mime, which are exhausted in their execution.)

It seems to me that this conception of human action contains in itself the seed of an aporia, which concerns the proper place of human *energeia*, which in one case—in *poiēsis*—resides in the work and in the other in the agent. That we are dealing with a problem that is not negligible, or that Aristotle did not consider to be such, is evidenced by a passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which the philosopher asks if there exists something like an *ergon*, a work that defines the human as such, in the sense in which the work of the shoemaker is to make shoes, the work of the flute player to play the flute, and that of the architect to build a house. Or, asks Aristotle, must we say that while the shoemaker, the flute player, and the architect each have their work, the human being as such is, by contrast, born without a work? Aristotle suddenly leaves this hypothesis, which to me seems very interesting, aside and responds that the work of the human being is the *energeia* of the soul according to *logos*, that is to say, once again an activity without a work, or in which the work coincides with the exercise itself, because it is always already at-work. But, we may ask, then what about the shoemaker, the flute player, in short, the human being as *technitēs* and constructor of objects? Will he not be a being that is condemned to a split, because there will be in him two different works, one that belongs to him as human being and another, exterior one that belongs to him as producer?

If we compare this conception of the work of art with ours, we can say that what separates us from the Greeks is that, at a certain point, by means of a slow process whose beginnings we can identify with the Renaissance, art has withdrawn from the sphere of activities that have their *energeia* outside themselves, in a work, and has been transposed into the circle of those activities

that, like knowing or praxis, have their *energeia*, their being-at-work, in themselves. The artist is no longer a *banausos*, constrained to pursue his completion outside himself in the work, but like the contemplative, he now lays claim to the mastery and titularity of his creative activity.

Perhaps the critical moment in which this transformation finds its condition of possibility occurs when, beginning with the end of the classical world and then more and more often in medieval theology, there emerged the conception (to which Erwin Panofsky has devoted an exemplary study) according to which art resides not in the work, but in the mind of the artist, and more precisely in the idea he is looking at while he realizes his work. The strength of this conception is that it had its model in the divine creation. Just as the house preexists in the form of an idea in the mind of the architect, Aquinas writes, so has God created the world according to the model or idea that existed in his mind. It is from this paradigm that there derives the disastrous transposition of the theological vocabulary of creation onto the activity of the artist, which until then no one had dreamed of defining as creative. And it is significant that it is precisely the praxis of the architect that developed a decisive role in the elaboration of this paradigm (which means, perhaps, that those who practice architecture should be particularly cautious when reflecting on their practice; the centrality and at the same time the problematicity of the notion of a "project" should be considered from this perspective).

But what the artist gained on the one hand—independence with respect to the work—is, so to speak, lacking to him on the other. If he possesses his *energeia* in himself and can thus affirm his superiority over the work, this latter becomes in a certain sense accidental to him, is transformed into a remainder, in some way unnecessary, of his creative activity. While in Greece the artist is a sort of awkward remainder or a presupposition of the work, in modernity the work is in some way an awkward remainder of the creative activity and the genius of the artist.

The place of the work of art has fallen to pieces. *Ergon* and *energeia* are dissociated and art—an ever more enigmatic concept, which aesthetics will later transform into a true and proper mystery—no longer resides in the work, but also and above all in the mind of the artist.

The hypothesis that I would suggest at this point is that *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, even if it is always attempted, either to separate them or to make them coincide or, even less, to play one off against the other. We are dealing, then, with something like a Borromean

knot, which binds together the work, the artist, and the operation; and as in every Borromean knot, it is not possible to release one of the three elements that compose it without irrevocably breaking the entire knot.

I want to invite you now to transpose yourself into Germany, in the early twenties of the twentieth century, yet not into the disorders and tumults that in those years mark the life of the great German cities, but rather into the silence and concentration of the Benedictine abbey of Maria Laach in Rhineland. Here in 1923 (the same year in which Duchamp finishes *The Large Glass*, or rather, abandons it in a state of "definitive incompleteness"), an obscure monk, Odo Casel, publishes "Die Liturgie als Misterien-feier" (Liturgy as Mystical Feast), a sort of manifesto for what would later be defined as the Liturgical Movement.

The first thirty years of the twentieth century have been rightly baptized "the age of movements." Not only do parties, on both the right and the left of the political spectrum, cede their place to movements (both Fascism and the workers movement defined themselves in this way), but also in art, in the sciences (when, in 1914, Freud attempted to define psychoanalysis, he found nothing better than a "psychoanalytic movement"), and in every aspect of culture, movements are substituted for schools and institutions. It is in this context that "the renewal of the Church from the spirit of liturgy" undertaken at Maria Laach ended up being defined as the *Liturgische Bewegung*, just as many avant-gardes of those years described themselves as artistic or literary "movements."

The juxtaposition between the practice of the avant-garde and the liturgy, between artistic movements and liturgical movements is not preposterous. At the basis of Casel's doctrine in fact stands the idea that the liturgy (it is well known that the Greek term *leitourgia* means "public work or performance," from *laos*, "people," and *ergon*) is essentially a "mystery." Yet mystery does not in any way signify, according to Casel, an unknown teaching or secret doctrine. Originally, as in the Eleusinian mysteries that were celebrated in classical Greece, mystery signified a practice, a sort of theatrical action, made up of gestures and words that are carried out in time and in the world, for the salvation of human beings. Christianity is not therefore a "religion" or a "confession" in the modern sense of the term, an ensemble of truths and dogmas that it is a question of recognizing and professing: it is rather a "mystery," that is, a liturgical *actio*, a "performance," whose actors are Christ and his mystical body, namely, the Church. And this action is, of course, a specific praxis, but at the same time, it defines the most universal and truest human activity, in which what is at stake is the salvation of those who carry it out and of those who participate in it. Liturgy ceases, from this perspective, to appear as the celebration of an

exterior rite, which has its truth elsewhere (in faith and in dogma): on the contrary, only in the carrying out *hic et nunc* of this absolutely performative action, which always realizes what it signifies, can believers find their truth and their salvation.

According to Casel, in fact, liturgy (for example, the celebration of the eucharistic sacrifice of the mass) is not a "representation" or a "commemoration" of the salvific event: it is itself the event. That is to say, we are not dealing with a representation in a mimetic sense, but with a (re)presentation in which the salvific action (the *Heilstat*) of Christ is rendered effectively present by means of the symbols and images that signify it. For this reason, liturgical action acts, as one says, *ex opere operato*, that is, through the very fact of being carried out in that moment and in that place, independently of the moral qualities of the celebrant (even if they were criminal—if, for example, he were to baptize a woman with the intention of doing her violence—the liturgical act would not for this reason lose its validity).

It is starting from this "mysterical" conception of religion that I would like to propose to you the hypothesis that between the sacred action of the liturgy and the praxis of the artistic avantgardes and of the art called contemporary there is something more than a simple analogy. A special attention to liturgy on the part of artists had already appeared in the later decades of the nineteenth century, in particular in those artistic and literary movements that are generally defined with such vague terms as "symbolism," "aestheticism," "decadentism." In keeping with the process that, with the first apparition of the culture industry, drove the disciples of a pure art toward the margins of social production, artists and poets (it suffices, for the latter, to note the name of Mallarmé) begin to regard their practice as the celebration of a liturgy—liturgy in the proper sense of the term, insofar as it implies both a soteriological dimension, in which there seems to be in question the spiritual salvation of the artist, and a performative dimension, in which creative activity assumes the form of a true and proper ritual, released from every social signification and effective through the simple fact of being celebrated.

In any case it is also and precisely this second aspect, which is decisively taken up by the twentieth-century avant-gardes, that constitutes a radical extremicization of these movements and, at the same time, a parody. I do not believe I am announcing anything extravagant by suggesting the hypothesis that the avant-gardes and their contemporary derivatives deserve to be read as the clear and almost conscious taking up of an essentially liturgical paradigm.

Just as, according to Casel, the liturgical celebration is not an imitation or a representation of the salvific event but is itself the event, in the same way what

defines the praxis of the twentieth-century avant-gardes and their contemporary derivatives is the decisive abandonment of the 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 opere operato* and not through the intellectual or moral qualities of the artist.

In a famous passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle had distinguished making (*poiēsis*), which aims at an external end (the production of a work), from acting (*praxis*), which has its own end in itself (in acting well). Between these two models, liturgy and "performance" insinuate a hybrid third, in which the action itself claims to present itself as a work.

At this point, for the third moment of this summary archaeology of mine, we must displace ourselves to New York around 1916. Here a gentleman whom I do not know how to define—perhaps a monk like Casel, in some way an ascetic, certainly not an artist—by the name of Marcel Duchamp invents the "ready-made." As Giovanni Urbani understood, in putting forward those existential acts (and not works of art) that are the "ready-mades," Duchamp knew perfectly well that he was not working as an artist. He also knew that the path to art was blocked by an insurmountable obstacle, which was art itself, by this point constituted by aesthetics as an autonomous reality. In the terms of this archaeology, I would argue that Duchamp understood that what was blocking art was precisely what I have defined as the artistic machine, which in the liturgy of the avant-gardes had reached its critical mass.

What does Duchamp do to blow up or at least deactivate the work-artist-operation machine? He takes any ordinary object of use, even a urinal, and by introducing it into a museum, he forces it to present itself as a work of art. Naturally—except for the brief instant that the effect of estrangement and surprise lasts—in reality nothing here comes to presence: not the work, because we are dealing with some industrially produced object of use, nor the artistic operation, because in no way is there *poiēsis* or production, and least of all the artist, because the one who signs the urinal with an ironic false name does not act as artist, but at most as philosopher or critic or, as Duchamp loved to say, as "one who breathes," a simple living being. The "ready-made" no longer has a place, 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.

What happened later is that a gang, unfortunately still active, of skilled speculators and fools have transformed the "readymade" into a work of art. Not

that they have succeeded in truly putting the artistic machine back in motion—it is by now running on idle—but the semblance of movement manages to feed, I believe not for very much longer, those temples of absurdity that are the museums of contemporary art.

I do not intend to say that contemporary art—or, if you wish, post-Duchamp art—has no interest. On the contrary, what comes to light in it is perhaps the most interesting event that one can imagine: the appearing of the historical conflict, decisive in every sense, between art and work, *energeia* and *ergon*. My critique, if one can speak of a critique, is directed at the perfect irresponsibility with which artists and curators too often elude the confrontation with this event and pretend that everything continues as before.

I now want to conclude my brief archaeology of the work of art by suggesting that we abandon the artistic machine to its fate. And with it, that we also abandon 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. This implies drawing from scratch the map of the space in which modernity has situated the subject and its faculties.

An artist or poet is not someone who has the potential or faculty to create, which one fine day, through an act or will or by obeying a divine injunction (the will is, in Western culture, the apparatus that permits us to attribute actions and techniques in possession to a subject), he or she decides, like the God of the theologians, to put to work, who knows how or why. And just like the poet and the painter, so also the carpenter, the shoemaker, the flute player, and finally every human being are not the transcendent title-holders of a capacity to act or produce works: they are rather living beings who, in the use and only in the use of their members and of the world that surrounds them, gain experience of themselves and constitute themselves as forms of life.

Art is only the way in which the anonymous ones we call artists, by maintaining themselves constantly in relation with a practice, seek to constitute their life as a form of life: the life of the painter, of the carpenter, of the architect, of the contrabassist, in which, as in every form-of-life, what is in question is nothing less than their happiness.

2
What Is the Act of Creation?

The title “What Is the Act of Creation?” evokes that of a lecture given by Gilles Deleuze in Paris in March 1987. Deleuze defined the act of creation as an “act of resistance.” Resistance to death, first of all, but also resistance to the paradigm of information, through which power is exercised in what he calls “control societies,” to distinguish them from the disciplinary societies analyzed by Foucault. Each act of creation resists something—for example, Deleuze says, Bach’s music is an act of resistance against the separation of the sacred from the profane.

Deleuze does not define what “to resist” means and appears to give this term the current meaning of opposing a force or an external threat. In the conversation on the word *resistance* in the *Abécédaire*, he adds, with reference to the work of art, that to resist always means to free a potential of life that was imprisoned or offended; however, even here a real definition of the act of creation as an act of resistance is missing.

After many years spent reading, writing, and studying, it happens at times that we understand what is our special way—if there is one—of proceeding in thought and research. In my case, it is a matter of perceiving what Feuerbach called the “capacity for development” contained in the work of the authors I love. The genuinely philosophical element contained in a work—be it an artistic, scientific, or theoretical work—is its capacity to be developed, something that has remained—or has willingly been left—unspoken and that needs to be found and seized. Why does the search for the element susceptible to being 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 to originality fade away, fills me with joy.

I will therefore try to question what has remained unsaid in the Deleuzian idea of the act of creation as an act of resistance, and in this way, I will endeavor to continue and carry on, obviously under my full responsibility, the thought of an author I love.

I have to begin by saying that I am rather uneasy about the use of the term "creation" with respect to artistic practices, which is unfortunately very common today. While I was investigating the genealogy of this use, I discovered to my surprise that architects are partly responsible for it. When medieval theologians had to explain the creation of the world, they drew on an example that had already been given by the Stoics. Thomas Aquinas writes that just as a house preexists in the mind of the architect, so too did God create the world while looking at the model he had in his mind. Naturally, Aquinas still distinguished between *creare ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing), which defines divine creation, and *facere de materia* (making from material), which defines human making. At any rate, the comparison between the act of the architect and that of God already contains the seed of the transposition of the paradigm of creation onto the activity of the artist.

For this reason, I prefer to speak instead of the poetic act, and although I will continue to avail myself of the term "creation" for convenience, I would like it to be understood without any emphasis, in the simple sense of *poiein*, "to produce."

Understanding resistance only as an opposition to an external force does not seem to me to be sufficient for a comprehension of the act of creation. In a planned preface to *Philosophische Bemerkungen* (*Philosophical Investigations*), Wittgenstein observed how having to resist the pressure and friction that an age that is lacking in culture—which his age was for him and certainly ours is for us—opposes to creation ends up dispersing and fragmenting the forces of an individual. This is true to such a degree that, in the *Abécédaire*, Deleuze felt obliged to specify that the act of creation constitutively has to do with the liberation of a potential.

I think, however, that the potential liberated by the act of creation must be a potential that is internal to the act itself, just like the act of resistance must be internal to it. Only in this way does the relation between resistance and creation and that between creation and potential become comprehensible.

In Western philosophy the concept of potential has a long history, which we can date back to Aristotle. Aristotle opposes—and at the same time links—potential (*dynamis*) to act (*energeia*), and this opposition, which marks both his metaphysics and his physics, was bequeathed first to philosophy and then to medieval and modern science. It is through this opposition that Aristotle explains what we call acts of creation, which for him coincided more soberly with the exercise of the *technai* (the arts in the most general sense of the term). The examples he gives to illustrate the passage from potential to act are in this sense significant: the architect (*oikodomos*), the cithara player, the sculptor, but also

the grammarian and, in general, anyone who has a knowledge or a technique. That is to say, the potential of which Aristotle speaks in Book 9 of the *Metaphysics* and in Book 2 of the *De Anima* is not a generic potential, according to which we say that a child can become an architect or a sculptor, but that which belongs to those who have already acquired the corresponding art or knowledge. Aristotle calls this potential *hexis*, from *echō*, "to have": habit, that is, the possession of a capacity or ability.

The one who possesses—or has the habit of—a potential can both put it into action and not put it into action. Aristotle's brilliant, even if apparently obvious, thesis is that potential is essentially defined by the possibility of its non-exercise. The architect is potent insofar as he is capable of not building; potential is the suspension of the act. (This is well known in politics, where there is even a figure, the so-called provocateur, who has precisely the task of obliging those who have power to exercise it, to put it into action.) It is in this way that, in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle responds to the theses of the Megarians, who claimed, not without good reason, that potential exists only in the act (*energēi monon dynastai, hotan dē mē energēi ou dynastai*; *Metaphysics* 1046b, 29–30). Aristotle objects that, if this were the case, we could not consider an architect to be an architect when he is not building or call "doctor" a doctor who is not exercising his art. What is at stake is, then, the mode of being of potential, which exists in the form of *hexis*, of mastery over a privation. There is a form or presence of what is not in action, and this privative presence is potential. As Aristotle states without reservation in an extraordinary passage of his *Physics*: "*sterēsis*, privation, is in a way form" (*eidos ti*; 193b, 19–20).

Following his characteristic gesture, Aristotle pushes this thesis to the extreme, to the point at which it seems to almost turn into an aporia. From the fact that potential is defined by the possibility of its non-exercise, he infers that there is a consitutive co-belonging of potential and impotential. "Impotential [*adynamia*]," he writes, "is a privation contrary to potential [*dynamis*]. Every potential is the impotential of the same and with respect to the same thing (of which it is the potential) [*tou autou kai kata to auto pasa dynamis adynamia*]" (*Metaphysics* 1046a, 29–32). *Adynamia*, "impotential," does not mean here the absence of any potential, but the potential-not-to (pass to the act), *dynamis mē energein*. That is to say, this thesis defines the specific ambivalence of every human potential, which in its original structure always maintains a relationship with its own privation and is always—and with reference to the same thing—the potential to be and not to be, to do and not to do. For Aristotle it is this relation that constitutes the essence of potential. The living being, who exists in the mode

of potential, is capable of his own impotential, and only in this way does he possess his own potential. He can be and do because he preserves a relation with his own not being and not doing. In potential, sensation is constitutively anesthesia; thought is non-thought, work is inoperativity.

If we recall that the examples of potential-not-to are almost always derived from the fields of human techniques and knowledge (grammar, music, architecture, medicine), we can then say that the human is the living being that exists eminently in the dimension of potential, of being-able-to and being-able-not-to. Every human potential is co-originarily impotential; every being-able-to-be or -do is, for the human being, constitutively in relationship with its own privation.

If we go back to our question about the act of creation, this means that the latter cannot at all be understood, according to the current representation, as a simple transit from potential to act. The artist is not the one who possesses a potential to create that, at a certain point, he decides, who knows how and why, to realize and put into action. If every potential is constitutively impotential, potential-not-to, how can the passage to the act take place? The act of the potential to play the piano is certainly, for pianists, the performance of a piano piece; but what happens to the potential not to play when they start to play? How is a potential not to play realized?

We can now understand in a new way the relation between creation and resistance Deleuze spoke about. In each act of creation there is something that resists and opposes expression. “To resist,” which comes from the Latin *sisto*, etymologically means “to stop, to hold down” or “to stop oneself.” This power that withholds or stops potential in its movement toward the act is impotential, the potential-not-to. That is, potential is an ambiguous being that not only is capable both of something and of its opposite, but contains in itself an intimate and irreducible resistance.

If this is the case, we then need to look at the act of creation as a field of forces stretched between potential and impotential, being-able-to and being-able-not-to, acting and resisting. Human beings are capable of having mastery of their potential and having access to it only through their impotential; but precisely for this reason, there is in the end no mastery over potential, and being a poet means being at the mercy of one’s own impotential.

Only a potential that is capable of both potential and impotential, then, is the supreme potential. If every potential is both potential to be and potential not to be, the passage to the act can take place only by transferring one’s own

potential-not-to into action. This means that if the potential to play and the potential not to play necessarily belong to every pianist, Glenn Gould is, however, the one who is capable of *not* not playing and, by directing his potential not only to the act but also to its impotential, he plays, as it were, with his potential not to play. As opposed to ability, which simply negates and abandons its potential not to play, and talent, which can only play, mastery preserves and exercises in action not its potential to play but its potential not to play.

Let us now analyze more concretely the action of resistance in the act of creation. Like the inexpressive in Benjamin, which shatters in the work the claim of appearance to put itself forward as totality, resistance acts as a critical instance that slows down the blind and immediate thrust of potential toward the act and, in this way, prevents potential from being resolved and fully exhausted in the act. If creation were only potential-to-, which cannot but blindly cross into the act, art would lapse into execution, which proceeds with false confidence toward a complete form, since it has removed the resistance of the potential-not-to. Contrary to a common equivocation, mastery is not formal perfection but quite the opposite: it is the preservation of potential in the act, the salvation of the imperfection in the perfect form. In the painting of a master or on a page from a great writer, the resistance of the potential-not-to is marked in the work as the intimate mannerism present in every masterpiece.

And it is precisely on this being-able-not-to that every properly critical instance is ultimately founded: what an error of taste makes evident is always a lack not so much on the level of potential-to but on that of being-able-not-to. Those who lack taste cannot refrain from anything; tastelessness is always a not being able not to do something.

What stamps a seal of necessity on the work is thus precisely what might not have been or might have been otherwise: its contingency. Here it is not a question of the painter's changing his mind, as shown by a radiograph under the layers of color, nor of the first drafts or variants attested in the manuscript: what is at stake is, rather, that "light, imperceptible trembling" in the very immobility of the form, which, according to Focillon, is the insignia of classical style.

Dante has summarized this amphibious character of poetic creation in a verse: *l'artista / ch'a l'abito de l'arte ha man che trema* ("the artist who has the habit of art has a hand that trembles," *Paradiso* 13.77–78; according to another reading, which seems to me *facilior*: *ch' ha l'abito de l'arte e man che trema* "who has the habit of art and a hand that trembles"). From the perspective we are

interested in, the apparent contradiction between habit and hand is not a defect, but perfectly expresses the twofold structure of every authentic creative process, intimately suspended between two contradictory urges: thrust and resistance, inspiration and critique. And this contradiction pervades the entirety of the poetic act, given that habit already somehow contradicts inspiration, which comes from elsewhere and by definition cannot be mastered in a habit. In this sense, the resistance of the potential-not-to, by deactivating the habit, remains faithful to inspiration and almost prevents it from reifying itself in the work: the inspired artist is without work. Yet the potential-not-to cannot be mastered in its turn and transformed into an autonomous principle that would end up impeding any work. What is decisive is that the work always results from a dialectic between these two intimately connected principles.

In an important work, Simondon wrote that the human being is, as it were, a two-stage being, which results from the relation between a non-individuated and impersonal part and an individual and personal part. The pre-individual is not a chronological past that, at a certain point, is realized and resolved into the individual: it coexists with it and remains irreducible to it.

From this perspective, it is possible to think the act of creation as a complicated dialectic between an impersonal element that precedes and oversteps the individual subject and a personal element that obstinately resists it. The impersonal is the potential-to, the genius that drives toward work and expression; the potential-not-to is the reticence that the individual opposes to the impersonal, the characteristic that tenaciously resists expression and imprints it with its mark. The style of a work depends not only on the impersonal element, that is, the creative potential, but also on what resists and almost enters into conflict with it.

However, the potential-not-to does not negate potential and form, but, through its resistance, somehow exhibits them, just as manner is not simply opposed to style, but can at times highlight it.

Dante’s line is, in this sense, a prophecy that announces Titian’s late painting, as evidenced, for example, in the *Annunciation*, housed in the church of San Salvador, Venice. When we observe this extraordinary canvas, we cannot but be struck by the way in which, not only in the clouds that stand above the two figures but also on the wings of the angel, color clogs up and, at the same time, is hollowed out in what has for good reason been defined as a crackling magma, where “flesh trembles” and “lights fight the shadows.” It is not surprising that Titian signed this work with an unusual formula, *Titianus fecit fecit*, “made it

and remade it," that is, almost unmade it. The fact that radiographs revealed under this writing the usual formula *faciebat* does not necessarily mean that we are dealing with a later addition. On the contrary, it is possible that Titian deleted it precisely in order to stress the peculiarity of his work, which, as Ridolfi suggested—possibly referring to an oral tradition that dated back to Titian—those who commissioned it deemed to be "not reduced to perfection."

From this perspective it is possible that the writing that one reads on the bottom below the flower pot, *ignis ardens non comburens*—which refers to the episode of the burning bush from the Bible and, according to theologians, symbolizes the virginity of Mary—might have been inserted by Titian precisely to stress the specific character of the act of creation, which burned on the surface of the canvas without, however, being consumed—a perfect metaphor for a potential that is in flames without exhausting itself.

For this reason his hand trembles, but this trembling is supreme mastery. What trembles and almost dances in the form is potential: *ignis ardens non comburens*.

Hence the pertinence of those figures of creation that are found so frequently in Kafka, where the great artist is defined precisely by an absolute incapacity with respect to his art. On the one hand, this is the confession of the great swimmer: "It is true that I have set a world record, but if you were to ask me how I achieved it, I would be unable to answer you to your satisfaction. You see, I actually cannot swim at all. I have always wanted to learn, but I have never found the opportunity" (Kafka, "Item 61").

On the other hand, we have the extraordinary singer of the mouse people, Josephine, who not only does not know how to sing but can barely whistle like her fellows do; nonetheless, precisely in this way, "she achieves effects that a virtuoso among us would strive in vain to achieve, effects she owes only and alone to her inadequate abilities" (Kafka, "Josephine," p. 101).

Perhaps nowhere as in these figures has the current idea of art as a knowledge or a habit been put more radically into question: Josephine sings with her impotential to sing, just as the great swimmer swims with his inability to swim.

The potential-not-to is not another potential juxtaposed to the potential-to: it is its inoperativity, what results from the deactivation of the scheme potential/act. In other words, there is an essential link between the potential-not-to and inoperativity. Just as Josephine, by means of her inability to sing, only exposes the whistle that all mice know how to make but that, in this way, is "freed from the bonds of everyday life" (p. 103) and shown in its "authentic nature" (p. 96), so does the potential-not-to, by suspending the passage to the act, render potential inoperative and expose it as such. Being able not to sing is, first and

foremost, a suspension and an exhibition of the potential to sing, which is not simply transferred to the act, but turns in on itself. That is to say, there is no potential not to sing that precedes the potential to sing and that must therefore be annulled for potential to be realized in singing: the potential-not-to is a resistance internal to potential, which prevents the latter from being simply exhausted in the act and pushes it to turn in on itself, to become *potentia potentiae*, that is, to be capable of its own impotential.

The works—for example, *Las Meninas*—that result from this suspension of potential do not represent only their object: along with it they present the potential—the art—with which it has been painted. In the same way, great poetry does not simply say what it says, but also the fact that it is saying it, the potential and the impotential to say it. And painting is a suspension and exposition of the potential of the gaze, just as poetry is a suspension and exposition of language.

The way in which our tradition has thought inoperativity is as self-reference, the turning in on itself of potential. In a famous passage from Book Lambda of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states that "thought [*noēsis*, the act of thinking] is the thought of thought [*noēseōs noēsis*]" (1074b, 15–35). The Aristotelian formula does not mean that thought takes itself as its object (if this were the case, we would have—to paraphrase the terminology of logic—a meta-thought, on the one hand, and an object-thought, a thought that is thought and not thinking, on the other).

As Aristotle suggests, the aporia concerns the very nature of *nous*, which, in the *De Anima*, is defined as a being of potential ("it has no other nature but being a potential" and "no being is in act before thinking"; 429a, 21–24) and, in the passage from the *Metaphysics*, is rather defined as a pure act, a pure *noēsis*: "If it thinks, but thinks something else that dominates it, its essence will not be the act of thinking [*noēsis*, thinking thought], but potential, and it cannot then be the best thing. . . . If it is not thinking thought, but potential, then the continuation of the act of thinking would be wearisome to it" (1074b, 15–35).

The aporia is resolved if we recall that, in the *De Anima*, the philosopher had written that *nous*, when each of the intelligibles is actualized, "remains in a sense potential . . . and is then capable of thinking itself" (429b, 9–10). While in the *Metaphysics* thought thinks itself (i.e., there is a pure act), in the *De Anima*, we instead have a potential that, insofar as it is capable of not passing into the act, remains free, inoperative, and is thus capable of thinking itself. This is something like pure potential.

It is this inoperative remainder of potential that makes possible the thought of thought, the painting of painting, the poetry of poetry.

That is to say, if self-reference implies a constitutive excess of potential over any realization in the act, it is then always necessary not to forget that thinking self-reference correctly implies, first and foremost, the deactivation and the abandonment of the apparatus subject/object. In Velázquez or Titian's canvases, painting (the *pictura picta*, the painting that is painted) is not the object of the subject that paints (of the *pictura pingens*, the painting doing the painting), just as, in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, thought is not the object of the thinking subject, which would be absurd. On the contrary, the painting of painting means simply that painting (the potential of painting, the *pictura pingens*) is exposed and suspended in the act of painting, just like the poetry of poetry means that language is exposed and suspended in the poem.

I realize that the term "inoperativity" comes up time and time again in these reflections on the act of creation. At this stage it is perhaps appropriate for me to try to delineate at least some elements of what I would like to define as a "poetics—or a politics—of inoperativity." I have added the term "politics" because the attempt to think *poiēsis*, human making, in a different way cannot but also put in question the way in which we conceive of politics.

In a passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1097b, 22ff.), Aristotle raises the question of the work of the human being and incidentally suggests the hypothesis that human beings lack a proper work, that they are essentially inoperative beings: "For just as for a flute-player or sculptor or any artist [*technitē*], and, in general, for all those who have a work [*ergon*] or activity [*praxis*], the good [*tagathon*] and the 'well' [*to eu*] seem to reside in the work, so would it seem to be for human beings, if they have a work [*ti ergon*]. Or [shall we say that] the carpenter and the tanner have a work and activity, and human beings [as such] by contrast have none? Are they born without a work [*argos*, 'inoperative']?"

In this context, *ergon* does not simply mean "work," but what defines the *energeia*, the activity or being-in-act proper to human beings. In the same sense, Plato already wondered about what the *ergon*, the specific activity, was—for instance, that of the horse. The question about the work or absence of work of human beings therefore has a decisive strategic value, since what depends on it is not only the possibility of assigning a nature and proper essence to the human being, but also, from Aristotle's perspective, that of defining human happiness and hence politics.

Naturally, Aristotle soon leaves aside the hypothesis that human beings are essentially *argos*, inoperative animals, whom no work or vocation can define.

For my part I would like to encourage you to take this hypothesis seriously and consequently to think the human as the living being without work. This is by no means an uncommon hypothesis, given that, to the outrage of theologians, political scientists, and fundamentalists of every tendency and party, it has never stopped reappearing in the history of our culture. I would like to refer to just two of these reappearances in the twentieth century. The first comes from the field of the sciences, and that is the extraordinary booklet written by Louis Bolk, professor of anatomy at the University of Amsterdam, entitled *Das Problem der Menschwerdung* (*The Problem of Anthropogenesis*, 1926). According to Bolk, the human being does not derive from an adult primate but from a primate fetus that has acquired the ability to reproduce. In other words, the human is a monkey cub that has constituted itself into an autonomous species. This accounts for the fact that, with respect to other living beings, humans are and remain beings of potential, able to adapt to all environments, all food, and all activities, yet none of these can ever exhaust or define them.

The second example, this time from the field of art, is Kazimir Malevich's peculiar pamphlet *Inoperativity as the Real Truth of Humankind*, in which, against the tradition that sees in labor the realization of the human being, inoperativity is defined as the "highest form of humanity," of which white—the ultimate level reached by Suprematism in painting—becomes the most appropriate symbol. Like all attempts at thinking inoperativity, this text too—similarly to its direct precedent, Lafargue's *The Right to Be Lazy*—remains trapped in a negative determination of its own object, since it defines inoperativity only *e contrario* with respect to labor. While for the ancients it was labor—*negotium*—that was defined negatively with respect to the contemplative life—*otium*—moderns seem unable to conceive of contemplation, inoperativity, and feast otherwise than as rest or the negation of labor.

Since we are instead trying to define inoperativity in relation to potential and the act of creation, it goes without saying that we cannot think it as idleness or inertia, but as a praxis or a potential of a special kind, which constitutively maintains itself in relationship with its own inoperativity.

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza uses a concept that seems to me to be helpful to understand what we are discussing. He calls *acquiescentia in se ipso* "a joy born of the fact that a human being contemplates himself and his potential to act" (IV, Proposition 52, Demonstration). What does it mean to "contemplate one's own potential to act"? What is an inoperativity that consists of contemplating one's own potentiality to act?

I believe it is a matter of, so to speak, an inoperativity internal to the operation

itself, a sui generis praxis that, in the work, exposes and contemplates potential first and foremost, a potential that does not precede the work, but accompanies it, makes it live, and opens it to possibilities. The life that contemplates its own potential to act and not to act renders itself inoperative in all its operations, lives only its livability.

We therefore understand the essential function that the tradition of Western philosophy has ascribed to the contemplative life and inoperativity: the properly human praxis is that which, by rendering inoperative the specific works and functions of the living being, makes them, so to speak, run on idle and in this way opens them to possibilities. Contemplation and inoperativity are, in this sense, the metaphysical operators of anthropogenesis, which, by freeing the human creature from every biological or social destiny and from any predetermined task, make him available for that particular absence of work we are accustomed to call "politics" and "art." Politics and art are neither tasks nor simply "works": they name, rather, the dimension in which linguistic and bodily, material and immaterial, biological and social operations are deactivated and contemplated as such.

I hope that at this point what I mean by a "poetics of inoperativity" is somehow clearer. And perhaps the model par excellence of this operation that consists in rendering all human works inoperative is poetry itself. 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? Or, in Spinoza's terms, the point at which language, having deactivated its utilitarian functions, rests in itself and contemplates its potential to say. In this sense, Dante's *Commedia*, Leopardi's *Canti*, and Caproni's *Il seme del piangere* are the contemplation of the Italian language; Arnaut's *sestina* is the contemplation of the Provençal language; *Trilce* and the posthumous poems of Vallejo are the contemplation of the Spanish language; Rimbaud's *Illuminations* are the contemplation of the French language; Hölderlin's hymns and Trakl's poetry are the contemplation of the German language.

And what poetry accomplishes for the potential to say, politics and philosophy must accomplish for the potential to act. By rendering economic and social operations inoperative, they show what the human body can do; they open it to a new possible use.

Spinoza defined the essence of each thing as the desire, the *conatus* to persevere in one's being. If it is possible to express a minor reservation with regard to a great thinker, I would say that it now seems to me that we need to

insinuate a small resistance, as we have seen with the act of creation, into this Spinozian idea as well. Certainly, every thing desires and strives to persevere in its being; but at the same time, it resists this desire; at least for an instant it renders it inoperative and contemplates it. Once again, this is a resistance internal to desire, an inoperativity internal to the operation. But it alone confers on *conatus* its justice and its truth. In a word—and this is, at least in art, the decisive element—its grace.

3
The Inappropriable

I would like to speak to you about a concept that is, for obvious reasons, extremely timely and, at the same time, absolutely untimely. To tell the truth, this coincidence of opposites in one single term should not be surprising: it occurred to me a few years ago, while reflecting on the problem of what the contemporary is, that I had to conclude that the contemporary is the untimely, that something is that much more urgent and close to us the more it seems to be excluded from the sphere of what, with a term that by this point has a rightly derogatory connotation, one calls "timeliness." This highly timely and at the same time untimely concept is "poverty": highly timely because it is everywhere; untimely because, insofar as it coincides with absolute disvalue, it seems that our time can think only its opposite: wealth and money.

I was concerned with the problem of poverty while I was studying the spiritual movements of the eleventh and twelfth centuries that culminated in Franciscanism. As we know, not only is poverty claimed by the Franciscans as the highest good ("the highest poverty"), but it coincided perfectly with the form of life that they professed as their own and that Francis had expressed by means of the formulas *vivere sine proprio* (to live without property) and *vivere secundum formam sancti evangeli* (to live according to the form of the Holy Gospels). It was a question of a pure and simple renunciation of any form of ownership whatsoever. From a juridical point of view, this posed a series of problems that were not negligible. The great jurist Bartolus of Saxoferrato wrote of the Franciscans that "so great was their *novitas vitae* (novelty of life) that the *corpus iuris* (code of law) could not find application to them" (p. 191). As Bartolus's acumen intuited, refusing ownership in reality meant claiming the possibility of a human existence completely outside the law. Franciscan theorists took this step unreservedly: in Hugh of Digne's willfully paradoxical formulation, they claimed "one sole right, that of not having any rights" (p. 161). This amounts to posing the problem of poverty with a radicality of which our culture shaped by law has lost all trace. The *abdicatio iuris*, the idea of a community that lives beyond the law, is the Franciscan legacy that modernity is unable even to think. (We moderns are such prisoners of law that we think everything can be legislated without limit.) Hence the inevitable collision with

the curia: what could be tolerated in a small group of wandering monks (because that is what the Franciscans were at the beginning) was more difficult to accept for a powerful and numerous religious order, as the Franciscans became within a few decades.

The paradigm by means of which the Franciscan theorists develop their idea of a refusal of ownership and seek to secure legitimacy for a life beyond the law is use. One can use something without having not only ownership of it, but even the right of use or usufruct. Just as the horse eats oats without having any right to them, so too do Franciscans use the things they need. From the juridical point of view, the idea that the Franciscans maintain is the separability of use—for this reason called *usus facti* (de facto use; literally, use of fact)—from ownership. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio formulates these theses in both theological and juridical terms, and Pope Nicholas III admits them in the 1279 bull *Exiit qui seminat*.

We must not forget that the doctrine of use was elaborated within a defensive strategy against attacks, first from the secular masters and then from the Avignon curia, who called into question the very possibility of the Franciscan refusal of every form of ownership. The concept of *usus facti* and the idea of a separability of use from ownership undoubtedly represented an effective tool that allowed them to give juridical coherence to the rule's generic *vivere sine proprio*, even securing, at least at first, with the bull *Exiit qui seminat*, a perhaps unexpected victory against the secular masters. Yet, as will often happen, this doctrine, precisely insofar as it essentially meant to define poverty with respect to the law, showed itself to be a two-edged sword, which opened the way to the decisive attack brought forth by John XXII precisely in the name of the law (the 1322 bull *Ad conditorem canonum*). Once the status of poverty was defined by purely negative arguments with respect to the law and according to a modality that presupposed the collaboration of the curia, which had reserved to itself the ownership of the goods of which the Franciscans had the use, it was clear that for the Friars Minor the doctrine of *usus facti* represented a very fragile shield against the heavy artillery of the curial jurists. In fact, it is possible that, when repeating Bonaventure's doctrine on the separability of use from ownership, Nicholas III was aware of the utility of somehow defining in juridical terms, even if only negative ones, a form of life that presented itself as otherwise inassimilable for the ecclesiastical order.

One can say that, from this point of view, Francis had more foresight than his successors, in refusing to articulate his *vivere sine proprio* in a juridical conceptuality and leaving it completely indeterminate. Except in one point (chapter 9 of the *Regula non bullata*, on the topic of the state of necessity, in

which he cites the properly juridical maxim according to which *necessitas non habet legem*, "necessity has no law"), Francis gives no juridical determination of poverty and in fact seems to intend *vivere sine proprio* in a very broad sense, which calls into question the possibility even of something like a proper will (cf. *Admonitiones*, chapter 2: *is qui suam voluntatem appropriat*, he who appropriates his will, eats from the Tree of Knowledge).

Exclusive concentration on the attacks first of the seculars and then of the curia, by imprisoning the doctrine of use and poverty within a defensive strategy, kept the Franciscan theorists from putting it into relation with the form of life of the Friars Minor in all its aspects.

For that reason I would like to attempt to continue in a philosophical key the analysis and definition of the concept of poverty, beyond the historical context of Franciscanism. Thinking poverty from a philosophical perspective means thinking it as an ontological category. Thus, again, thinking it not only in relation to having, but also and above all in relation to being. To this end, I will make use of two brief philosophical texts. The first is a 1945 lecture from Martin Heidegger, published in *Heidegger Studies* in 1994, and the second a fragment from Walter Benjamin, probably composed in 1916 and published only in 1992 in the *Adorno Blätter* (vol. 4).

Heidegger's lecture was held on June 27, 1945, in the Castle of Wildenstein, not far from Messkirch, where, after the Allied bombardment of Freiburg, the faculty of philosophy had been transferred. The Russians were about to enter Berlin, while the French troops, having just entered Freiburg, had decreed the suspension of courses, and thus that day the closure of the semester was celebrated. Heidegger's lecture was the concluding event of this ceremony of forced closure. It is in relation to this certainly unhappy context that one should perhaps consider the title chosen by Heidegger: "Die Armut," poverty. An autograph annotation on the first page of the manuscript in fact reads: "Why, in the present moment of world history, I have chosen to interpret these words, will become clear through the interpretation itself."

The words that the lecture proposes to interpret come from a fragment of Hölderlin's, which reads: "For us everything is concentrated upon the spiritual, we have become poor in order to become rich" (p. 3). These last words contain an obvious reference to 2 Corinthians 8:9: "Jesus, though he was rich, made himself poor, so that you may become rich from his poverty," which Heidegger could not fail to recognize, even if in his commentary he does not say a word about it.

This is not the place for a detailed analysis of the text of the lecture. I will

limit myself to citing the definition that Heidegger there gives of poverty: “What does ‘poor’ mean? In what does the essence of poverty consist? What does ‘rich’ mean if only in and through poverty we are to become rich? According to the ordinary meaning, ‘poor’ and ‘rich’ pertain to possession, to having wealth. Poverty is a not-having [*Nicht-Haben*] and specifically a lacking of the necessary [*Entbehren des Nötigen*; *entbehren* means ‘to feel the lack of something,’ but also ‘to do without’]. Wealth is a non-lacking of the necessary, a having beyond the necessary. The essence of poverty, however, lies in a being [*Seyn*]. To be truly poor means to be in such a way that one is lacking nothing except the non-necessary [*das Unnötige*, ‘the superfluous’]. To be truly lacking means not being able to be without what is non-necessary and thus immediately and exclusively belonging to the non-necessary” (p. 8/6).

A few lines later, the necessary is defined as that which comes from need (*Not*), which is to say from constriction (*Zwang*). The non-necessary is, in contrast, that which does not come from need, but from the free (*Freien*).

Before attempting to comment on this definition, I would like to trace a brief genealogy of the term *Armut* in Heidegger’s thought. It appears, in fact, in the very important course of 1929–30 on the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, where it defines the condition of the animal, namely, its “poverty in world” (*Weltarmut*). The stone is worldless, the animal is poor in world (*weltarm*), and human beings are world-forming.

Immediately before describing the relationship of the animal with its environment, Heidegger makes some consideration on the concept of poverty in general, which must be understood in a qualitative and not quantitative sense. It is to this end that he introduces, to define poverty, the verb *entbehren*, which we have already encountered: “Being poor does not simply mean possessing nothing, or little, or less than another. Rather being poor means to lack, to feel lack [*entbehren*]. Such feeling lack is in turn possible in different ways depending on how whatever is poor is lacking and comports itself in its lack, how it responds to the lack, how it takes this lack. In short: with regard to what such a being is lacking and above all to the way in which it feels itself lacking” (p. 287/195).

Heidegger does not cite Francis by name, but it is difficult not to perceive in his considerations an echo of the Franciscan discussions on poverty and use, on how one should understand the use that the poor make of what they use, in particular in the conflict between the Spirituals, who defined use in an objective mode as *usus pauper* (poor use), and the Conventuals, for whom what was decisive, in contrast, was the interior modality of use (*uti re ut non sua*, to use things as not one’s own) and not its exterior object.

In the 1929–30 course, however, poverty defines not the human being, who is capable of opening a world and entering into relation with the open, but the animal, which is not worldless, like the stone, but in some way experiences its lack. Here Heidegger cites a passage from the Letter to the Romans (8:19) on the *apokaradokia tēs ktiseōs*, nature's agonizing wait for its liberation from the slavery of corruption. The animal's not having a world must be understood, Heidegger writes, as a lacking (*entbehren*) and the animal's mode of being as a being poor. Poverty is thus defined essentially in terms of a lack.

In the 1941–42 course on Hölderlin's hymn "Andenken," Heidegger returns to the concept of poverty to think a more positive determination of it. Poverty, he suggests, must not be defined solely as renunciation of riches. "Only he can be rich and use wealth freely . . . who can be poor, in the sense of poverty which is no mere renunciation. For renunciation remains constantly in a not-having, for which, as soon as there is something that it does not have, it would also like to have everything, though without being appropriated to this possession. This renunciation does not spring from the courage (*Mut*) of poverty (*Armut*). This renunciation, which wants to have, is mere indigence which continues to depend on wealth, without being in a position to know its genuine essence and the conditions of its appropriation and without wanting to submit itself to them. The essential and originary poverty is courage for simple and originary things, courage which has no need to depend on anything. This poverty discerns the essence of wealth and in this way knows the law and the manner in which it is offered" (p. 174/154–155).

It is obvious that here Heidegger is seeking to think poverty not only in a negative mode, namely, as a renunciation of wealth, which still depends on wealth. In this sense, his critique of renunciation could also implicate the Franciscans' *abdicatio*, as a prisoner of one and the same merely negative determination of poverty. And the observation on the insufficiency of an indigence that continues to depend on wealth can recall John XXII's affirmation according to which "if the same solicitude (*sollicitudo*) persists after such divestment of ownership as existed before it, such divestment can contribute nothing to perfection" (§3). One can also say of Heidegger's thesis on poverty, however, that it continues to depend on its opposite, because the sole positive determination that he gives of it is that "this poverty discerns the essence of wealth and in this way knows the law and the manner in which it is offered" ("Andenken," p. 174/155).

If we return at this point to the 1945 lecture, we note that Heidegger there works out a decisive displacement with respect to both the 1929–30 course and that of 1941–42. The "lack" (*entbehren*) that in the first defined the animal's

condition as “poor in world,” and that was absent from the 1941–42 course, now defines the situation of that human being, who gains, like the animal, experience of a lack. That is to say, poverty here has an anthropogenetic value, from a perspective in which difference with respect to the animal seems curiously to fade away. What is lacking to human beings is not, however, the necessary, but the non-necessary, that is, precisely that “free” and “open” that, in the 1929–30 course, defined their essential possession. If through the experience of poverty human beings are thus, on the one hand, brought back together to the animal and to its poverty in world, on the other hand, this poverty now opens for them access to true wealth. To be poor, in other words to feel solely the lack of the non-necessary, means in fact “residing in a relationship to that which liberates” (“Die Armut,” p. 9/7) and therefore, with spiritual wealth. Heidegger returns here to the phrase from Hölderlin from which he started and gives it an interpretation that can be read in relation to the Pauline passage from which it originates: “We have become poor, in order to become rich. Becoming rich does not follow from being poor like an effect following a cause. Rather, genuinely being poor is in itself being rich. As we are not lacking in anything because of poverty, we own everything already: we are in the overflowing being, which overflows all needs that make us needy” (p. 9/8).

The strategic reconciliation toward the animal and its poverty in world aims, in the last analysis, at the dialectical reversal of poverty into wealth, of material necessity into spiritual abundance. And curiously, with an abrupt return to the historical situation of Germany and Europe, this reversal is presented as a prescription to confront communism: “What is ahead of us as world-historical destiny and is inappropriately called ‘communism’ does not make us poor. . . . In being poor, we do not avoid and bypass communism but supersede it in its essence. Only in this way will we be able truly to overcome it” (p. 11/8).

If I have lingered on these texts of Heidegger’s, it is to show their insufficiency. I have recalled analogies with respect to the Franciscan strategy: the approach toward the animal condition and the subjective and interior determination of poverty. Not only does Heidegger, like the Franciscans, not manage to reach a positive determination of poverty, which in the lecture remains in every case dependent on wealth, but this negative determination is arbitrarily reversed into a positive one, something that the Franciscans were very careful not to do.

Thus the Heideggerian concept of poverty could not help me. Another text instead furnished me with an essential suggestion: Benjamin’s “Notes toward a Work on the Category of Justice” (1916). It is a fragmentary and obscure text, in which the concept of poverty does not appear. But it interests me because justice

is there defined as “the condition of a good that cannot be a possession [*Besitz*].” Only this good, the text continues, “is the good through which goods become possessionless [*besitzlos*, but the adjective also means ‘poor’]” (p. 41/257).

Justice thus has nothing to do with the distribution of goods according to needs or with the good will of human beings. Benjamin writes that it “does not appear to refer to the good will of the subject, but, instead, constitutes a state of the world [*einen Zustand der Welt*].” As such, justice is opposed to virtue, because while virtue designates the ethical category of duty, “justice designates the ethical category of the existent.” For that reason, Benjamin continues with a formulation that forcefully takes its distance from Kantian ethics: “Virtue can be demanded; justice in the final analysis can only be [*nur sein*] as a state of the world or as a state of God” (p. 41/257).

What I find new and important in this Benjaminian fragment is precisely the fact that justice is removed from the sphere of duty and virtue—and in general, of subjectivity—to take on the ontological meaning of a state of the world, in which the latter appears as inappropriable and “poor.” This means that the character of inappropriability is not attributed to it by human beings, but comes from the good itself.

It is on this basis that it is necessary to rethink the problem of poverty. It is possible to free this concept from the negative dimension in which it is always imprisoned only if one thinks it starting from the relation with something that is in itself inappropriable.

I would therefore like to propose this definition of poverty: *poverty is the relation with an inappropriable; to be poor means: to maintain oneself in relation with an inappropriable good*. As the Franciscans said, poverty is *expropriative* not because it implies a renunciation of ownership, but because it risks itself in the relation with the inappropriable and remains in it. This is what Francis’s *vivere sine proprio* means: not so much or not only an act of renouncing juridical ownership, but a form of life that, insofar as it maintains itself in relation with an inappropriable, is always already constitutively outside the law and can never appropriate anything to itself.

From this perspective, the Franciscan concept of use also takes on a new and broader meaning. It no longer means only the negation of ownership but the relation that the poor person has with the world as inappropriable. To be poor means to use, and to use does not mean simply to utilize something, but to maintain oneself in relation with an inappropriable.

If, in Benjamin’s words, justice is the condition of a good that can never become a possession, then the proximity between poverty and justice also takes on a decisive meaning. If poverty and justice are understood in reference to the

condition of an inappropriable good, then they call into question the very order of law insofar as it is founded on the possibility of appropriation.

The testimony of experience, which daily offers us examples of inappropriable things with which we are nevertheless intimately in relation, testifies that a similar conception of use as relation to an inappropriable is not completely strange. Here I propose we examine three of these inappropriables: the body, language, and landscape.

A correct posing of the problem of the body was put durably off course by the phenomenological doctrine of the body proper. According to this doctrine—which finds its topical place in the polemic of Husserl and Edith Stein against Lipps's theory of empathy—the experience of the body would be, together with the I, what is most proper and originary. "The originary donation of the body," Husserl writes, "can only be the donation of my body and no one else's [*meines und keines andern Leibes*]. The apperception 'my body' is in any originally essential way [*urwesentlich*] the first and only one that can be fully originary. Only if I have constituted my body can I apperceive every other body as such, and this apperception principally has a mediated character" (vol. 14, p. 7). And yet precisely this apodictic pronouncement of the originary character as "mine" of the donation of a body never stops giving rise to aporias and difficulties.

The first is the perception of the body of the other. This latter is not actually perceived as an inert body (*Körper*) but as a living body (*Leib*), endowed like mine with sensibility and perception. In the notes and fragmentary drafts that make up volumes XIII and XIV of the *Husserliana*, pages and pages are dedicated to the problem of the perception of the hand of the other. How is it possible to perceive a hand as alive, that is, not simply as a thing, a marble, or painted hand but as a hand "of flesh and blood"—and yet not mine? If to the perception of the body there originarily belongs the character of being mine, what is the difference between the hand of another, which I see in this moment and which touches me, and mine? It cannot be a question of a logical inference or an analogy, because I "feel" the hand of the other, I identify with it, and its sensibility is given to me in a sort of immediate presentification (*Vergegenwärtigung*; Husserl, vol. 13, pp. 40–41). Then what keeps us from thinking that the hand of the other and mine are given co-originarily and that only in a second moment is the distinction produced?

The problem is particularly pressing because at the time when Husserl wrote his notes, the debate around the problem of empathy (*Einfühlung*) was still very much alive. In a book published some years before (*Leitfaden der Psychologie*, 1903), Theodor Lipps had excluded the idea that empathetic experiences, in

which the subject finds himself suddenly transferred into another's lived experience, could be explained by means of imitation, association, or analogy. When I observe with full participation the acrobats who are walking suspended in the void and cry out in terror when it looks like they will fall, I am in some way "with" them and feel their body as if it were my own and my own as if it were theirs. "It is therefore not the case," writes Husserl, "that I first solipsistically constitute my things and my world, and then empathetically grasp the other I, as solipsistically constituting his world for himself, and that only then is the one identified with the other; but rather my sensible unity, insofar as the external multiplicity is not separate from mine, is *eo ipso* empathetically perceived as the same as mine" (vol. 14, p. 10).

In this way, the axiom of the originarity of the body proper is seriously called into question. As Husserl could not fail to admit, empathetic experience introduces into the solipsistic constitution of the body proper a "transcendence," in which consciousness seems to go beyond itself and distinguishing one's own lived experience from another's becomes problematic (ibid., p. 8). This is especially the case since Max Scheler, who had sought to apply to ethics the methods of Husserlian phenomenology, had postulated unreservedly—with a thesis that Edith Stein had designated as "fascinating" even if erroneous—an originary, undifferentiated current of lived experience, in which the I and the body of the other are perceived in the same way as one's own.

None of the repeated attempts of Husserl and his student to restore the primacy and originarity of the body proper is finally convincing. As happens every time we persist in maintaining a certainty that experience has revealed to be fallacious, they come to a contradiction, which in this case takes the form of an oxymoron, of a "non-originary originarity." "Neither the external body nor external subjectivity," writes Husserl, "is given to me *originaliter*; and yet that human being is given to me originarily in my surrounding world" (vol. 14, p. 234). (And in an even more contradictory way, Edith Stein says: "While I am living in the other's joy, I do not feel originary joy. It does not issue live from my 'I.' Neither does it have the character of having-once-been-lived like remembered joy. . . . This other subject is originary although I do not live it as originary; the joy that arises in him is originary even though I do not live it as originary. In my non-originary lived experience I feel, as it were, accompanied by an originary lived experience not lived by me but still there, manifesting itself in my non-originary lived experience" [p. 11].)

In this "non-originarily living an originarity," the originarity of the body proper is maintained, so to speak, in bad faith, only on condition of dividing empathetic experience into two contradictory moments. Immediate participation

in external lived experience, which Lipps expressed as my being fully and distressingly transported "alongside" the acrobat who walks on the tightrope, is thus hastily set aside. In any case, what empathy—but, alongside it, it would be necessary to mention hypnosis, magnetism, and suggestion, which in those years seem to have obsessively captured the attention of psychologists and sociologists—shows is that however much one affirms the originary character of the "propriety" of the body and of lived experience, the intrusiveness of an "impropriety" shows itself to be all the more originary and strong in it, as if the body proper always cast a shadow, which can in no case be separated from it.

In the 1935 essay *De l' évasion* (*On Escape*), Emmanuel Levinas subjects to a merciless examination bodily experiences as familiar as they are disagreeable: shame, nausea, need. According to his characteristic gesture, Levinas exaggerates and drives to the extreme the analytic of Dasein of his teacher Heidegger so as to exhibit, so to speak, its dark side. If in *Being and Time* Dasein is irreparably thrown into a facticity that is improper to it and that it has not chosen, such that he always has to assume and grasp impropriety itself, this ontological structure now finds its parodic formulation in the analysis of bodily need, nausea, and shame. In fact, what defines these experiences is not a lack or defect of being, which we seek to fill up or from which we take our distance: on the contrary, they are founded on a double movement, in which the subject finds himself, on the one hand, irremissibly consigned to his body and, on the other, just as inexorably incapable of assuming it.

Let us imagine an exemplary case of shame: shame due to nudity. If in nudity we experience shame, it is because in it we find ourselves consigned to something that we cannot at any cost retract. "Shame arises each time we are unable to make others forget our basic nudity. It is related to everything we would like to hide and that we cannot bury or cover up. . . . What appears in shame is thus precisely the fact of being riveted to oneself, the radical impossibility of fleeing oneself to hide from oneself, the unalterably binding presence of the I to itself. Nakedness is shameful when it is the sheer visibility of our being, of its ultimate intimacy. . . . It is therefore our intimacy, that is, our presence to ourselves, that is shameful" (Levinas, pp. 86–87/64–67). This means that, at the instant in which what is most intimate and proper to us—our body—is irreparably laid bare, it appears to us as the most foreign thing, which we cannot in any way assume and which we want, for that reason, to hide.

This double, paradoxical movement is even more evident in nausea and bodily need. Indeed, nausea is "the revolting presence of ourselves to ourselves" that, in the instant in which it is lived, "appears insurmountable" (ibid., p. 89/66). The

more the nauseating state, with its vomiting, consigns me to my stomach, as to my sole and irrefutable reality, so much more does it seem to me to be foreign and inappropriable: I am nothing but nausea and vomiting, and yet I can neither accept it nor come out of it. “There is in nausea a refusal to remain there, an effort to get out. Yet this effort is always already characterized as desperate. . . . In nausea—which amounts to an impossibility of being what one is—we are at the same time riveted to ourselves, enclosed in a tight circle that smothers” (p. 90/66).

The contradictory nature of the relation to the body reaches its critical mass in need. At the moment that I experience an uncontestable urge to urinate, it is as if all my reality and all my presence are concentrated in the part of my body from which the need is coming. It is absolutely and implacably proper to me, and yet just for this reason, precisely because I am nailed down to it without escape, it becomes the most external and inappropriable thing. The instant of need, that is to say, lays bare the truth of the body proper: it is a field of polar tensions whose extremes are defined by a “being consigned to” and a “not being able to assume.” My body is given to me originarily as the most proper thing, only to the extent to which it reveals itself to be absolutely inappropriable.

There exists, from this perspective, a structural analogy between the body and language. Indeed, language also—in particular in the figure of the mother tongue—appears for each speaker as what is the most intimate and proper; and yet, speaking of an “ownership” and of an “intimacy” of language is certainly misleading, since language happens to the human being from the outside, through a process of transmission and learning that can be arduous and painful and is imposed on the infant rather than being willed by it. And while the body seems particular to each individual, language is by definition shared by others and as such an object of common use. Like the bodily constitution according to the Stoics, that is to say, language is something with which the living being must be familiarized in a more or less drawn-out *oikeiosis*, which seems natural and almost inborn; and yet—as *lapsus*, stuttering, unexpected forgetfulness, and aphasia testify—it has always remained to some degree external to the speaker.

This is all the more evident in those—the poets—whose trade is precisely that of mastering language and making it proper. They must for this reason first of all abandon conventions and common use and, so to speak, render foreign the language that they must dominate, inscribing it in a system of rules as arbitrary as they are inexorable—foreign to such a point that according to a firm tradition, it is not they who speak but another, divine principle (the muse) who utters the poem for which the poet is limited to providing the voice. The appropriation of

language that they pursue, that is to say, is to the same extent an expropriation, in such a way that the poetic act appears as a bipolar gesture, which each time renders external what it must unfailingly appropriate.

We can call the ways in which this double gesture is signed in language style and manner. Here it is necessary to abandon the customary hierarchical representations, for which manner would be a perversion and a decline of style, which for them remains superior by definition. Style and manner instead name the two irreducible poles of the poetic gesture: if style marks its most proper trait, manner registers an inverse demand for expropriation and non-belonging. Appropriation and disappropriation are to be taken literally here, as a process that invests and transforms language in all its aspects. The linguist Ernst Lewy, who was Walter Benjamin's professor at Berlin, published the study *On the Language of the Old Goethe: An Essay on the Language of the Individual* in 1913. Like many before him, Lewy had noted the obvious transformation of Goethe's language in his late works. But whereas critics and literary historians had accounted for this transformation in terms of intralinguistic stylistic devices and senile artifices, Lewy, who was a specialist in Ural-Altaic languages, observed that in the usage of the elderly poet German evolved from the characteristic morphology of Indo-European languages toward different forms similar to those of agglutinative languages, such as Turkish. Among these late changes, Lewy listed the tendency toward extremely unusual composed adjectives, the prevalence of the nominal sentence, and the progressive disappearance of the article. That is to say, language itself was deported beyond its frontiers toward ever more distant territories, as if the poet now wrote in a language that was so proper that it had become completely foreign.

Tensions of this kind, which are not uncommon in the late work of artists (it is enough, for painting, to think of the later Titian or Michelangelo), are usually classified by critics as mannerisms. The Alexandrian grammarians observed early on that Plato's style, which is so limpid in the youthful dialogues, becomes obscure and overly paratactic in the late dialogues. Similar remarks can be made concerning the writings of Hölderlin after the translations of Sophocles, which are so divided between the rough and broken technique of the hymns and the stereotypical sweetness of the poems signed with the heteronym Scardinelli. Analogously, in Melville's last novels, mannerisms and digressions proliferate to the point of breaking the very form of the novel, carrying away toward other, less legible genres, like the philosophical treatise or the erudite notebook.

In the circles where the concept of manner has been defined most rigorously (art history and psychology) it designates a bipolar process: it is at the same time an excessive adherence to a usage or a model (stereotype, repetition) and an

impossibility of truly identifying oneself with it (extravagance, uniqueness). Thus in art history, mannerism presupposes awareness of a style to which one wants to adhere at all costs and that one seeks, rather, more or less unconsciously to avoid through its exaggeration; in psychiatry, the pathology of the mannerist manifests itself through strange and inexplicable gestures and behaviors and, at the same time, in the will to earn thereby one's own terrain and identity.

Analogous considerations can be made for the relation of speakers to their inappropriable language: it defines a field of polar forces, held between idiosyncrasy and stereotype, the excessively proper and the most complete externality.

Only in this context does the opposition between style and manner acquire its true sense. They are the two poles in the tension of which the gesture of the poet lives: style is disappropriating appropriation (a sublime negligence, a forgetting oneself in the proper), manner an appropriating disappropriation (a presenting oneself or remembering oneself in the improper).

We can therefore call "use" the field of tension whose poles are style and manner, appropriation and expropriation. And not only in the poet but in every speaking human being with respect to their language and in every living thing with respect to its body there is always, in use, a manner that takes its distance from style and a style that is disappropriated in manner. In this sense, every use is a polar gesture: on the one hand, appropriation and habit; on the other, loss and expropriation. To use—hence the semantic breadth of the term, which indicates both use in the strict sense and habitual praxis—means to oscillate unceasingly between a homeland and an exile: to inhabit.

The third example of an inappropriable is something on which we should never stop reflecting today: landscape. An attempt to define landscape must begin from the exposition of its relationship with the environment and with the world. And this is not because the problem of landscape as it has been dealt with by art historians, anthropologists, and historians of culture is irrelevant. Rather, what is decisive is the observation of the aporias to which these disciplines remain prisoner whenever they seek to define landscape. Not only is it unclear whether it is a natural reality or a human phenomenon, a geographical place or a place in the soul; but in this second case, neither is it clear whether it should be considered as consubstantial to the human being or is instead a modern invention.

It has often been repeated that the first appearance of a sensibility to landscape is the letter of Petrarch that describes the ascension of Mount Ventoux as motivated *sola videndi insignem loci altitudinem cupiditate ductus* ("by nothing

but the desire to see its conspicuous height"; p. 36). In the same sense, it has been affirmed that landscape painting, unknown to antiquity, was the invention of the Dutch painters of the Quattrocento. Both affirmations are false. Not only are the place and the date of composition of the letter probably fictitious, but the citation of Augustine that Petrarch introduces there to stigmatize his *cupiditas videndi* implies that already in the fourth century human beings loved to contemplate landscape: *et eunt homines mirari alta montium et ingentes fluctus maris et latissimos lapsus fluminum* ("and men go to admire the high mountains, the vast floods of the sea, the circumference of the ocean"; *Confessions*, 10.8.15, qtd. in Petrarch, p. 44). Numerous passages testify, in fact, to a true and proper passion of the ancients for contemplation from the heights (*magnam capies voluptatem*, writes Pliny, *si hunc regionis situm ex monte prospexeris* ["You would be most agreeably entertained by taking a view of the face of this country from the mountains"]; Letter V, vi, 13), which ethology has unexpectedly found in the animal kingdom, where one sees goats, vicuñas, felines, and primates climbing up to an elevated place to then contemplate, for no apparent reason, the surrounding landscape (Fehling, pp. 44–48). As for painting, not only the Pompeian frescos but the sources as well show that the Greeks and Romans were familiar with landscape painting, which they called *topiographia* or "scenography" (*skenographia*), and they have preserved for us the names of landscape painters like Ludius, *qui primus instituit amoenissimam parietum picturam* ("who first introduced the attractive fashion of painting walls with pictures of country houses"; Pliny, *Natural History*, XXXV, 116–117), and Serapion, of whom we know that he could paint scenographies of landscapes but not human figures (*hic scaenas optime pinxit, sed hominem pingere non potuit*; ibid., XXXV, 113). And those who have observed the petrified, dreamy landscapes painted on the walls of Campanian villas, which Michail Rostovzev called idyllic-sacral (*sakral-idyllisch*), know that they find themselves before something extremely difficult to understand but that they recognize unequivocally as landscapes.

The landscape is therefore a phenomenon that concerns the human being—and perhaps the living being as such—in an essential way, and yet it seems to elude every definition. Only to a philosophical consideration will it perhaps be able to disclose its truth.

In the course on the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger seeks to define the fundamental structure of the human being as a passage from the "poverty in world" of the animal to the being-in-the-world that defines Dasein. On the basis of the work of Jakob von Uexküll and other zoologists, extremely perceptive pages are dedicated to the description and analysis of the relationship

of the animal with its environment (*Umwelt*). The animal is poor in world (*weltarm*), because it remains a prisoner of the immediate relationship with a series of elements (Heidegger calls "disinhibitors" what Uexküll defined as "bearers of significance") that their receptive organs have selected in the environment. The relationship with these disinhibitors is so strict and totalizing that the animal is literally "stunned" and "captured" in them. As a representative example of this stunning, Heidegger refers to the experiment in which a bee is placed in a laboratory in front of a glass full of honey. If, after it has begun to suck, one removes the bee's abdomen, it tranquilly continues to suck, while one sees honey flowing out where the abdomen has been cut off. The bee is so absorbed in its disinhibitor that it can never place itself before it to perceive it as something that exists objectively in and for itself. Certainly, with respect to the rock, which is absolutely deprived of world, the animal is in some way open to its disinhibitors, and yet can never see them as such. "The animal," writes Heidegger, "can never apprehend something as something" (p. 360/248). For this reason the animal remains enclosed in the circle of its environment and can never open itself into a world.

The philosophical problem of the course is that of the boundary—that is to say, of the extreme separation and vertiginous proximity—between the animal and the human. In what way is something like a world opened for the human being? The passage from the environment to the world is not, in reality, simply the passage from a closure to an opening. The animal in fact not only does not see the open, beings in their unveiled being, but nor does it perceive its own non-openness, its own being captured and stunned in its own disinhibitors. The skylark that soars in the air "does not see the open," but neither is it in a position to relate to its own closure. "The animal," writes Heidegger, "is excluded from the essential domain of the conflict between unconcealedness and concealedness" (pp. 237–238/159–160). The openness of the world begins in the human being precisely from the perception of a non-openness.

In the course, the metaphysical operator in which the passage from the animal's poverty in world to the human world is brought about is in fact "profound boredom" (*tiefe Langeweile*), in which precisely the closure of the animal environment is experienced as such. In stunning, the animal was in an immediate relation with its disinhibitor, exposed and unconscious in it in such a way that it could never be revealed as such. That of which the animal is incapable is precisely suspending and deactivating its relation with the circle of its specific disinhibitors. The experience of profound boredom, which Heidegger describes in detail, is a sort of parodic taking to extremes of the animal stunning. In boredom—just like the animal in its disinhibitor—we are "absorbed" and

“stunned” in things; but these latter, in contrast with what happens in the animal, refuse themselves to us to the same extent in which we are enclosed in them. “Dasein thus finds itself delivered over to beings’ telling refusal of themselves as a whole” (p. 210/139). In a state of profound boredom, the human being is consigned to something that refuses itself, exactly as the animal, in its stunning, is exposed in a non-revelation. But, differently from the animal, the human being, while remaining in boredom, suspends the immediate relationship with the environment: the human being is an animal that becomes bored and thus perceives for the first time as such—that is, as a being—the disinhibitor that refuses itself to it.

This means, therefore, that the world does not open up onto a new or ulterior space, fuller and more luminous, conquered beyond the limits of the animal environment and without relation with it. On the contrary, it has been opened only through a suspension and deactivation of the animal relationship with the disinhibitor. The open and the free space of being do not name something radically other with respect to the non-open of the animal: they are only a grasping of a dis-unveiling, the suspension and the capture of the skylark-not-seeing-the-open. The openness that is in question in the world is essentially the openness to a closure, and the one who looks into the open sees only a closing up, sees only a non-seeing.

For this reason—that is to say, insofar as the world has been opened only through the interruption and nullification of the relationship of the living being with its disinhibitor—being is from the very beginning traversed by the nothing, and the world is constitutively marked by negativity and disorientation.

One can comprehend what landscape is only if one understands that it represents, with respect to the animal environment and the human world, an ulterior stage. When we look at a landscape, we certainly see the open and contemplate the world, with all the elements that make it up (the ancient sources list among these the woods, the hills, the lakes, the villas, the headlands, springs, streams, canals, flocks and shepherds, people on foot or in a boat, those hunting or harvesting . . .); but these things, which are already no longer parts of an animal environment, are now, so to speak, deactivated one by one on the level of being and perceived as a whole in a new dimension. We see them as perfectly and clearly as ever, and yet we already do not see them, lost—happily, immemorially lost—in the landscape. Being, *en état de paysage*, is suspended and rendered inoperative, and the world, having become perfectly inappropriable, goes, so to speak, beyond being and nothing. No longer animal nor human, to the one who contemplates the landscape is only landscape. That person no longer seeks to comprehend, only looks. If the world is the

inoperativity of the animal environment, landscape is, so to speak, inoperativity of inoperativity, deactivated being. Neither animal disinhibitors nor beings, the elements that form the landscape are ontologically neutral. And negativity, which inhered in the world in the form of the nothing and non-openness—because it comes from the animal closure, of which it was only a suspension—is now dismissed.

Insofar as it has in this sense gone beyond being, landscape is the outstanding form of use. In it, use-of-oneself and use of the world correspond without remainder. Justice, as a state of the world as inappropriable, is here the decisive experience. Landscape is a dwelling in the inappropriable as form-of-life, as justice. For this reason, if in the world the human being was necessarily thrown and disoriented, in landscape he is finally at home. *Pays! paese!* ("country," from *pagus*, "village") is according to the etymologists originally the greeting that is exchanged by those who recognize each other as being from the same village. Landscape is the house of Being.

4
What Is a Command?

Today I will seek simply to present to you the status report for an inquiry in progress, which concerns the archaeology of the command. Rather than a doctrine to transmit, we will be dealing with concepts in their strategic relation to a problem or instruments in their relation to a possible use, which it will be up to you to practice, if you would like to.

At the outset of the inquiry, I immediately became aware that I would have to confront two unexpected preliminary difficulties. The first was that the very formulation of the inquiry—archaeology of the command—contained something like an aporia or contradiction. Archaeology is the inquiry into an *archē*, an origin, but the Greek term *archē* has two meanings: it means both "origin, principle" and "command, order." Thus the verb *archō* means "to begin, to be prior to something," but also means "to command, to be the leader." Not to mention that the *archōn* (literally "the one who begins") was the supreme magistrate in Athens.

This homonymy or, rather, this polysemy in our languages is a fact so common that we are not surprised to find linked under one single entry in our dictionaries meanings that are at least apparently very distant from each other, which the patient labor of linguists then seeks to stitch together into a common etymology. I believe that this twofold movement of semantic dissemination and reunification is consubstantial with our languages and that only by means of this contradictory gesture can a word realize its meaning. In any case, as concerns our term *archē*, it is certainly not incomprehensible that from the idea of an origin there would derive that of a command, that from the fact of being the first to do something would result the fact of being the leader. And vice versa: the one who commands is also the first, just as at the origin there is a command.

And it is precisely this that we read in the Bible. In the Greek translation made by the rabbis of Alexandria in the third century BC, the book of Genesis opens with the phrase "*en archē*, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"; but as we read immediately afterward, he created them by means of a command, which is to say an imperative: *genēthētō*, "And God said: let there be light." The same thing happens in the Gospel of John: "*en archē*, in the beginning was the *logos*, the word." But a word that is in the beginning, before

everything, can only be a command. Thus I believe that perhaps the most correct translation of this famous *incipit* should be not “in the beginning was the word” but “in command—that is, in the form of a command—was the word.” If this translation had prevailed, many things would be more clear, not only in theology, but also and above all in politics.

I would now like to draw your attention to this fact, which is certainly not fortuitous: in our culture, the *archē*, the origin, is always already the command; the beginning is always also the principle that governs and commands. It is perhaps through an ironic awareness of this coincidence that the Greek term *archos* means both “commander” and “anus”: the spirit of language, which loves to play, transforms into a play on words the theorem according to which the origin must also be “foundation” and principle of governance. The prestige of the origin in our culture derives from this structural homonymy: the origin is what commands and governs not only the birth, but also the growth, development, circulation, and transmission—in a word: the history—of that to which it has given origin. Whether we are dealing with a being, an idea, a knowledge, or a praxis, in every case the beginning is not a simple preamble, which then disappears into what follows. On the contrary, the origin never ceases to begin, that is, to command and govern what it has put into being.

This is true in theology, where God has not only created the world but governs it and never ceases to govern it in a continual creation, because if he did not do this, it would collapse. But it is also true in the philosophical tradition and the human sciences, in which there exists a constitutive connection between the origin of something and its history, between what founds and begins and what guides and governs.

In this sense, think of the decisive function that the concept of *Anfang*, “beginning,” has in Heidegger’s thought. Here the beginning can never become a past, it never ceases to be present, because it determines and commands the history of Being. With one of those etymological figures that are so dear to him, Heidegger relates the German term that means “history” (*Geschichte*) back to the verb *schicken*, which means “to transmit, to send,” and the term *Geschick*, which means “fate,” suggesting in some way that what we call a historical epoch is in reality something that has been sent and transmitted by an *archē*, by a beginning that remains hidden yet operative in what it has sent and commanded (“to command,” if we can also amuse ourselves with etymology, comes from *mandare*, which in Latin means both “to send” and “to give an order or a task”).

Archē in the sense of origin and *archē* in the sense of command here coincide perfectly, and this intimate connection of beginning and command in fact defines the Heideggerian conception of the history of Being.

Here I would only like to suggest that the problem of the connection between order and command has produced two interesting developments in post-Heideggerian thought. The first—which we could define as the anarchic interpretation of Heidegger—is Reiner Schürmann's beautiful book, *Le principe d'anarchie* (The Principle of Anarchy, 1982), which is an attempt to separate origin and command in order to reach something like a pure origin, a simple "coming to presence" severed from every command. The second—which it will not be illegitimate to define as the democratic interpretation of Heidegger—is the symmetrically opposed attempt of Jacques Derrida to neutralize the origin in order to reach a pure imperative, without any content but the injunction: interpret!

(Anarchy has always seemed more interesting to me than democracy, but it goes without saying that everyone here is free to think as they believe best.)

In any case, I believe that you can now understand without difficulty what I was referring to when I evoked the aporias that an archaeology of the command must confront. There is not an *archē* of the command, because the command itself is the *archē*; it is the origin, or, at least, it is in the place of the origin.

The second difficulty I had to confront was the almost complete absence in the philosophical tradition of a reflection on the command. There have been and there are still studies on obedience, on why human beings obey, like Étienne de La Boétie's very beautiful *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*; but we find (almost) none on the necessary presupposition of obedience, namely, on the command and on why human beings command. But I have developed the conviction that power cannot be defined only by its capacity to cause itself to be obeyed, but above all by its capacity to command. A power does not fall when it is no longer, or no longer fully, obeyed, but when it stops giving orders.

In one of the most beautiful novels of the twentieth century, Alexander Lernet-Holenia's *The Standard*, we see the multinational army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the point when it begins to disintegrate, toward the end of the First World War. A regiment of Hungarians all of a sudden refuses to obey an order to march given by an Austrian commanding officer. The commanding officer, astonished in the face of this unexpected disobedience, hesitates, consults other officials, does not know what to do, and is about to give up his command, when he finally finds a regiment of another nationality that still obeys his orders and fires on the insurgents. Every time a power is in decay, so long as someone gives orders, there will always also be found someone, even if only one, who will obey it: a power ceases to exist only when it leaves off giving orders. This is what happened in Germany at the time of the fall of the Wall and

in Italy after September 8, 1945: obedience had not ceased, but command was lacking.

Hence the urgency and necessity of an archaeology of the command, of a study that would interrogate not only the reasons for obedience, but also and above all those for the command.

Since philosophy nevertheless did not seem to provide me with any definition of the concept of command, I decided to begin first of all with an analysis of its linguistic form. What is a command from the point of view of language? What are its grammar and its logic?

On this subject the philosophical tradition furnished me with a decisive clue: the fundamental division of linguistic enunciations that Aristotle establishes in a passage from the *Peri hermēneias* (*On Interpretation*), which, by excluding a part of them from philosophical consideration, was revealed to be at the origin of the scant attention that Western logic has granted to the command. "Not every discourse," writes Aristotle, "is apophantic, but only that discourse in which it is possible to say the true and the false [*alētheuein ē pseudesthai*]. This does not happen in all discourses: for example, prayer is a discourse [*logos*], but it is neither true nor false. We can dismiss these other discourses, since consideration of them belongs rather to the study of rhetoric or poetry; the present investigation deals solely with apophantic discourse" (17a, 1–7).

Aristotle seems to have lied here, because if we open his treatise on *Poetics*, we will discover that the exclusion of prayer is curiously repeated and extended to a vast ensemble of non-apophantic discourses that also includes the command: "knowledge of the figures of discourse (*schēmata tēs lexeōs*) concerns the art of the author (*hypokritikēs*) and to the one who possesses it technically: such as to say what the command (*entolē*) is, what prayer is, what narration, threat, question, and response are, and other arguments of that kind. From the knowledge or ignorance of this nothing that is in any way worthy of consideration can come to poetics. What fault can one see in Homer's 'Sing of the wrath, Goddess'?—which Protagoras has criticized as being a command where a prayer was meant, since to bid one do or not do, he tells us, is a command. Let us pass over this, then, as belonging to another investigation and not to poetics" (*Poetics* 1456b, 9–25).

Let us consider this great caesura that, according to Aristotle, divides the field of language and at the same time excludes a part of it from the professional competence of the philosophers. There is a discourse, a *logos*, that Aristotle calls "apophantic" because it is capable of manifesting (this is the meaning of the verb *apophainō*) whether a thing exists or not, and it is for that reason necessarily true or false. There are moreover other discourses, other *logoi*—like prayers,

commands, threats, narrations, questions, and responses (and also, we can add, exclamations, greetings, advice, curses, blasphemy, etc.)—that are not apophantic, do not manifest the being or non-being of something, and are therefore indifferent to truth or falsehood. Aristotle's decision to exclude non-apophantic discourse from philosophy has marked the history of Western logic. For centuries, logic, that is, reflection on language, has been focused solely on the analysis of apophantic propositions, which can be true or false, and has left aside, as an inaccessible territory, that enormous portion of the language we nonetheless use every day, that non-apophantic discourse that can be neither true nor false and, as such, when it was not simply ignored, was abandoned to the competence of rhetoricians, moralists, and theologians.

As to the command, which was an essential part of this terra incognita, it was essentially explained, when it happened that one could not avoid mentioning it, as an act of will and, as such, confined within the sphere of jurisprudence and morality. Even a clearly unconventional author like Hobbes, in his *Elements of Law*, defines the command simply as "an expression of appetite and will" (p. 76).

Only in the twentieth century did logicians begin to be interested in what they called "prescriptive language," that is, discourse expressed in the imperative mood. If I do not linger on this chapter in the history of logic, which has by this point produced an extremely vast literature, it is because the problem here seems to be only that of avoiding the aporias implicit in the command by transforming a discourse in the imperative into a discourse in the indicative. My problem was instead precisely that of defining the imperative as such.

Let us now attempt to understand what happens when someone expresses a non-apophantic discourse in the form of an imperative, as for example: "Walk!" To understand the meaning of this injunction, it will be useful to compare it with the same verb in the third person of the indicative mode: "He walks" or "Carlo walks." This last proposition is apophantic in the Aristotelian sense, because it can be true (Carlo is actually walking) or false (Carlo is sitting down); but in any case it refers to something in the world; it manifests the being or non-being of something. In total contrast, while morphologically identical to the verbal expression of the indicative, the command "Walk!" does not manifest the being or non-being of something, it does not describe or deny a state of things, and without being for this reason false, it does not refer to anything existing in the world. It is necessary to avoid with all due caution the equivocation according to which the meaning of the imperative would consist in the act of its execution. The order given by the official to his soldiers is perfect from the sole fact of

being uttered: whether it is obeyed or disregarded does not in any way impugn its validity.

We must therefore admit unreservedly that nothing, in the world as it is, corresponds to the imperative. For this reason jurists and moralists are accustomed to repeat that the imperative does not imply a *being*, but a *having to be*, a distinction that the German language expresses clearly in the opposition between *Sein* and *Sollen*, which Kant put at the foundation of his ethics and Kelsen at the base of his pure theory of law. "If an individual," writes Hans Kelsen, "by his acts expresses a will directed at a certain behavior of another . . . then the meaning of his acts cannot be described by the statement that the individual *will* (future tense) behave in that way, but only that he *ought* to [*soll*] behave in that way" (p. 13/5).

But can we truly affirm that we have understood, thanks to this distinction between being and having to be, the meaning of the imperative "Walk!"? Is it possible to define the semantics of the imperative?

The science of language is of no help to us, because linguists confess that they enter into difficulties whenever it is a matter of describing the meaning of an imperative. I will mention, however, the cursory remarks of two of the greatest linguists of the twentieth century, Antoine Meillet and Émile Benveniste.

Meillet, who emphasizes the morphological identity between the verb form of the indicative and that of the imperative, observes that in Indo-European languages the imperative usually coincides with the stem of the verb and draws from this the consequence that the imperative could be something like the "essential form of the verb." It is not clear if "essential" also means "primitive" here, but the idea that the imperative could be the originary form of the verb does not seem far off. In an article in which he critiques Austin's conception of the command as a performative (we will have occasion to return to the problem of the performative), Benveniste writes that the imperative "is not denotative and does not have the communication of content as its aim; rather it is characterized as pragmatic and aims to act upon the hearer to indicate a behavior to him"; it is not properly a verbal tense but is rather "the simple semanteme used as a jussive form with a specific intonation" ("La philosophie analytique et la langage," p. 274/237). Let us seek to develop this laconic, almost enigmatic definition. The imperative is the "simple semanteme," that is, as such, something that expresses the pure ontological relation between language and the world. This simple semanteme is used, however, in a non-denotative mode: that is to say, it does not refer to a concrete segment of the world or to a state of things, but serves rather to intimate something to the one who receives it. What does the imperative intimate? It is obviously that what the imperative "Walk!" as "simple

semanteme" intimates is nothing but itself, it is nothing but the simple semanteme "to walk," employed not to communicate something or describe its relation with a state of things, but in the form of a command. Thus we are in the presence of meaningful but non-denotative language, which intimates itself, which is to say, the pure semantic connection between language and world. *The ontological relation between language and world here is not asserted, as in apophantic discourse, but commanded*. Yet we are still dealing with an ontology, except that it does not have the form of "is" but that of "be!"; it does not describe a relation between language and world but enjoins and commands it.

We can suggest, then, the following hypothesis, which is perhaps the essential result of my inquiry, at least in the phase it is presently in. There are, in Western culture, two ontologies, distinct but not unrelated: the first, the ontology of the apophantic assertion, is expressed essentially in the indicative; the second, the ontology of the command, is expressed essentially in the imperative. We can call the first "ontology of *esti*" (in Greek, the third-person indicative form of the verb "to be"), the second "ontology of *estō*" (the corresponding imperative form). In Parmenides's poem, which inaugurates Western metaphysics, the fundamental ontological proposition has the form *esti gar einai*, "there is actually being"; we must imagine, alongside this, another proposition, which inaugurates a different ontology: *estō gar einai*, "let there actually be being."

To this linguistic partition there corresponds the partition of the real into two correlated but distinct spheres: the first ontology in fact defines and governs the sphere of philosophy and science; the second, that of law, religion, and magic.

Law, religion, and magic—which originally it is not always easy to distinguish—constitute in fact a sphere in which language is always in the imperative. Indeed, I believe that a good definition of religion would be that which characterizes it as the attempt to construct an entire universe on the basis of a command. And not only does God express himself in the imperative, in the form of the command, but curiously, human beings also address God in the same way. Whether in the classical world or in Judaism and Christianity, prayers are always formulated in the imperative: "Give us this day our daily bread."

In the history of Western culture the two ontologies incessantly divide and intersect, fight without respite and just as stubbornly crossbreed and join together.

This means that Western ontology is in reality a twofold or bipolar machine, in which the pole of the command, left in the shadow of the apophantic ontology for centuries in the classical era, in the Christian era begins progressively to acquire an ever more decisive importance.

To understand the peculiar effectiveness that defines the ontology of the command, I invite you to return to the problem of the performative, which is central to John L. Austin's 1962 book *How to Do Things with Words*. In this book, the command is classified in the category of performatives or "speech acts," which is to say, among those enunciations that do not describe an external state of things but, by their simple utterance, produce what they signify as a fact. The one who pronounces an oath actualizes the fact of the oath by the simple fact of saying "I swear."

How does a performative work? What grants words the power to transform into facts? Linguists do not explain it, as if here they had truly hit upon a sort of magical power of language.

I believe that the problem is clarified if we return to our hypothesis on the twofold machine of Western ontology. The distinction between assertive and performative—or, as the linguists say, between locutionary act and illocutionary act—corresponds to the twofold structure of the machine: the performative represents the survival in language of an epoch when the relation between words and things was not apophantic, but instead had the form of a command. Or as one could also say, the performative represents a crossover between the two ontologies, in which the ontology of *estō* suspends and substitutes for the ontology of *esti*.

If we consider the increasing success of the category of the performative, not only among linguists but also among philosophers, jurists, and theorists of literature and art, it is permissible to suggest the hypothesis that the centrality of this concept actually corresponds to the fact that, in contemporary societies, the ontology of the command is progressively supplanting the ontology of the assertion.

This means that, in a type of what psychoanalysts call "return of the repressed," religion, magic, and law—and with these, the whole sphere of non-apophantic discourse, which have been driven into the shadows—in reality secretly govern the functioning of our societies that wish to be lay and secular.

Indeed, I believe that a good description of the so-called democratic societies in which we live consists in defining them as societies in which the ontology of the command has taken the place of the ontology of assertion, yet not in the clear form of an imperative but in the more underhanded form of advice, of invitation, of the warning given in the name of security, in such a way that obedience to a command takes the form of a cooperation and, often, of a command given to oneself. I am not thinking only of the sphere of advertising and that of the security prescriptions given in the form of an invitation, but also of the sphere of technological apparatuses. These apparatuses are defined by the fact that the

subjects who use them believe themselves to command them (and in fact push buttons defined as “commands”), but in truth do nothing but obey a command inscribed in the very structure of the apparatus. The free citizens of democratic-technological societies are beings who incessantly obey in the very gesture with which they impart a command.

I have said that I would give you a status report on my inquiry on the archaeology of the command. But this status report would not be complete if I did not mention another concept, which has constantly accompanied my investigation of the command as a sort of clandestine companion. I am speaking of will. In the philosophical tradition, the command, when it is mentioned, is constantly and hastily explained as an “act of will”; but—since no one has ever succeeded in defining what “will” means—this means claiming to explain, as one says, an *obscurum per obscurius*, something obscure with something even more obscure. For this reason, at a certain point in my inquiry, I decided to attempt to follow the suggestion of Nietzsche, who inverts the explanation and affirms that willing means nothing other than commanding.

One of the few questions on which historians of ancient philosophy seem to be in perfect agreement is the lack of a concept of will in classical Greek thought. This concept, at least in the fundamental sense that it has for us, begins to appear only with the Roman Stoics and finds its full development in Christian theology. But if one seeks to follow the process that leads to its formation, one observes that it seems to grow out of another concept, which in Greek philosophy performs a function just as important and to which will remains closely connected: the concept of potential, *dynamis*.

I believe, as a matter of fact, that it would not be wrong to say that, while Greek philosophy had potential and possibility at its center, Christian theology—and modern philosophy in its wake—placed will at its own center. If ancient man is a being of potential, a being who *can*, the modern human being is a being of will, a subject who *wills*. In this sense, the passage from the sphere of potential to that of will marks the threshold between the ancient and the modern. This could also be expressed by saying that, with the beginning of the modern age, the modal verb “will” takes the place of the modal verb “can.”

It is therefore worth reflecting on the fundamental function that modal verbs develop in our culture and in philosophy in particular.

We know that philosophy is defined as the science of being, but this is true only on the condition that we specify that being is always thought according to its modalities, that is, it is always already divided and articulated into “possibility, contingency, necessity,” and that in its givenness it is always

already marked by a being-able-to, a willing-to, a having-to. Nonetheless, the modal verbs have a curious peculiarity: as ancient grammarians said, they "are lacking the thing" (*elleiponta tō pragmati*), they are "void" (*kena*) in the sense that, to acquire their meaning, they must be followed by another verb in the infinitive that completes them (Ildefonse, p. 364). "I walk, I write, I eat" are not void; but "I can, I will, I must" can be used only if accompanied by an expressed or implied verb: "I can walk," "I will write," "I must eat."

It is striking that these void verbs are so important for philosophy that it seems to have taken up the comprehension of their meaning as a task. I believe in this respect that a good definition of philosophy would be that which characterizes it as the attempt to grasp the meaning of a void verb, as if, in this difficult attempt, something essential were at stake, precisely our rendering life possible or impossible for ourselves and our acting free or necessary. For this reason all philosophers have their particular ways of conjugating and separating these void verbs, of preferring one and abhorring the other or, by contrast, of tying them in a knot and even grafting them onto one another, as if they wanted, by reflecting one void into another, to delude themselves that they had filled it once and for all.

And this intertwining reaches its extreme form in Kant when, seeking the most appropriate formulation for his ethics in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he lets slip this entirely delirious phrase: *man muss wollen können*, "we must be able to will" (p. 424/75). It is perhaps precisely this knotting together of the three modal verbs that defines the space of modernity and, at the same time, the impossibility of articulating something like an ethics within it. When we hear the fatuous password "I can" repeated so often today, it is likely that, in the decomposition of every ethical experience that defines our time, what the delirious person actually means to say is rather: "I must will to be able," that is: "I command myself to obey."

To show what is at stake in the passage from potential to will, I have chosen an example in which the strategy that has guided the new declension of the modal verbs that defines modernity becomes particularly visible. It is a question, so to speak, of the limit case of potential, namely, the way in which theologians take on the problem of divine omnipotence.

You know that God's omnipotence received the status of a dogma: *Credimus in unum deum patrem omnipotentem* (We believe in one God the omnipotent Father), reads the beginning of the creed in which the Council of Nicea fixed the indisputable content of the Catholic faith. Yet precisely this apparently reassuring axiom contained unacceptable, indeed scandalous, consequences,

which threw theologians into bewilderment and embarrassment. Because if God can do everything, absolutely and unconditionally everything, it follows that he could do anything that did not imply a logical impossibility, for example, become incarnate not in Jesus but in a worm or, even more scandalously, in a woman, or even damn Peter and save Judas or lie and do evil or destroy his entire creation, or even—something that, I don't know why, seems to fill the theologians' minds with indignation and at the same time excite them beyond any measure—restore the virginity of a deflowered woman (Peter Damian's treatise *On Divine Omnipotence* is devoted almost entirely to this topic). Or again—and there is in this a sort of more or less unwitting theological humor—God could carry out ridiculous and gratuitous acts, for example, suddenly start running (or, we could add, make use of a bicycle to get from one place to another).

The list of scandalous consequences of divine omnipotence could continue to infinity. The divine potential has something like a shadow or a dark side, by virtue of which God becomes capable of the evil, the irrational, and even the ridiculous. In any case, between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries this shadow never stops preoccupying the theologians' minds, and the quantity of booklets, treatises, and *quaestiones* devoted to the argument is enough to discourage the patience of the researcher.

In what way did the theologians seek to check the scandal of divine omnipotence and remove the shadow that had become decidedly too cumbersome? Following a philosophical strategy of which Aristotle was the master but which scholastic theologians pushed to an extreme, it was a question of dividing the potential by articulating it into the couple *potentia absoluta–potentia ordinata*. Even if the way in which the relation between these two concepts is argued presents different nuances in each author, the global sense of the apparatus is as follows: *de potentia absoluta*, that is, as regards the potential considered in itself and, so to speak, in the abstract, God can do everything, however scandalous it may seem to us; but *de potentia ordinata*, that is, according to the order and the command that he has imposed on his potential with his will, God can do only what he has decided to do. And God has decided to become incarnate in Jesus and not in a woman, to save Peter and not Judas, not to destroy his creation, and above all not to start running for no reason.

The sense and strategic function of this apparatus are perfectly clear: it is a question of containing and curbing potential, of putting a limit to the chaos and immensity of the divine omnipotence, which would otherwise render an ordered governance of the world impossible. The instrument that realizes this limitation of potential, so to speak, from within is the will. Potential *can* will and, once it

has willed, it *must* act according to its will. And like God, human beings too can and must will, can and must subdue the obscure abyss of their potential.

Nietzsche's hypothesis, according to which willing actually means commanding, thus turns out to be correct, and that which will commands is nothing other than potential. I would like, therefore, to leave the last word to a character from Melville, who seems to dwell stubbornly at the intersection between will and potential, Bartleby the scrivener, who to the man of law who asks him: "Will you not?" never ceases to respond by turning the will against itself: "I would prefer not to."

5
Capitalism as Religion

There are signs of the times (Matthew 16:2–4) that human beings, who scrutinize the signs of the heavens, do not manage to perceive, even though they are evident. They crystallize in events that announce and define the epoch to come, events that can pass unobserved and not alter in almost any way the reality to which they are added and that nevertheless, precisely for this reason, serve as signs, as historical indexes, *sēmeia tōn kairōn*.

One of these events took place on August 15, 1971, when the American government, under the presidency of Richard Nixon, declared that the convertibility of the dollar into gold was suspended. Although this declaration de facto marked the end of a system that long bound the value of money to a gold base, the news, which arrived at the height of the summer holidays, received less discussion than it would have been legitimate to expect. Yet, beginning from that moment, the inscription that one read on many banknotes (for example on the pound sterling and the rupee but not on the euro), "I promise to pay the bearer the sum of . . . ," countersigned by the governor of the central bank, had definitively lost its meaning. This phrase now meant that, in exchange for this bill, the central bank would have furnished to the one who made this request of it (granted that anyone would have been so foolish as to ask) not a certain quantity of gold (for the dollar, a thirty-fifth of an ounce), but an exactly equal bill. Money was evacuated of any value that is not purely self-referential. Even more astonishing is the ease with which this gesture of the American sovereign, which amounted to annulling the gold wealth of the possessors of money, was accepted. And if, as has been suggested, the exercise of monetary sovereignty on the part of a state consists in its capacity to induce the actors on the market to use its debts as money, now even that debt had lost all real consistency, had become purely paper.

The process of money's dematerialization had begun many centuries earlier, when the demands of the market led to introducing letters of exchange, banknotes, *juros*, "Goldsmith's notes," and so forth, alongside metallic money, which was necessarily scarce and cumbersome. All these forms of paper money are actually titles of credit and for this reason are called fiduciary money. In contrast, metallic money was valued—or was supposed to be valued—for its

content of precious metal (which was moreover, as is well known, unstable: the limit case is that of the silver money coined by Frederick II, which when used revealed the red of copper). Nonetheless Joseph Schumpeter, who lived, it is true, in an epoch in which paper money had already overcome metallic money, could claim, not without reason, that in the last analysis all money is only credit. After August 15, 1971, one should add that money is a credit that is founded solely on itself and that does not correspond to anything but itself.

"Capitalism as Religion" is the title of one of Walter Benjamin's most penetrating posthumous fragments.

That socialism is something like a religion has been noted many times (among others, by Carl Schmitt: "Socialism claims to give life to a new religion that for the men of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has the same meaning as Christianity for the men of two millennia ago"; p. 95). According to Benjamin, capitalism does not represent only, as in Weber, a secularization of the Protestant faith, but is itself essentially a religious phenomenon, which developed in a parasitical way from Christianity. As such, as the religion of modernity, it is defined by three characteristics.

1. It is a cultic religion, perhaps the most extreme and absolute that has ever existed. Everything in it has meaning only with reference to the carrying out of the cult, not with respect to a dogma or an idea. 2. This cult is permanent, it is "the celebration of a cult *sans trêve et sans merci* [without truce or mercy]" (p. 100/288). In it, it is not possible to distinguish between feast days and working days, but rather there is a single, uninterrupted day of feast-labor, in which labor coincides with the celebration of the cult. 3. The capitalist cult is not directed at redemption or expiation of guilt, but at guilt itself. "Capitalism is probably the first instance of a cult that creates guilt, not atonement. . . . A vast sense of guilt that is unable to find relief seizes on the cult, not to atone for this guilt but to make it universal . . . to the point where God, too, finally takes on the entire burden of guilt. . . . [God] is not dead; he has been incorporated into the destiny of humanity" (pp. 100–101/288–289).

Precisely because it tends with all its might not toward redemption but toward guilt, not toward hope but toward desperation, capitalism as a religion does not aim at the transformation of the world but at its destruction. And its dominion is in our time so total that even the three great prophets of modernity (Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud) conspire with it, according to Benjamin, and are somehow in solidarity with the religion of desperation. "This passage of the planet 'human' through the house of despair in the absolute loneliness of his trajectory is the ethos that Nietzsche defined. This man is the superman, the first to recognize the

religion of capitalism and begin to bring it to fulfillment." But Freudian theory also belongs to the priesthood of the capitalist cult: "what has been repressed, the idea of sin, is capital itself, which pays interest on the hell of the unconscious." And in Marx, capitalism, "by means of the simple and compound interest that are functions of guilt . . . , transforms immediately into socialism" (p. 101/289).

Let us attempt to take Benjamin's hypothesis seriously and develop it. If capitalism is a religion, how can we define it in terms of faith? What does capitalism believe in? And what, with respect to this faith, does Nixon's decision imply?

David Flusser, a great scholar in the science of religions (there exists also a discipline with this strange name), was working on the word *pistis*, which is the Greek term that Jesus and the apostles used for "faith." One day he found himself by chance in a square in Athens and at a certain point, raising his eyes, he saw written in block letters in front of him *Trapeza tēs pisteōs*. Astonished by the coincidence, he looked more closely and after a few seconds realized that he was simply in front of a bank: *trapeza tēs pistēos* means "bank of credit" in Greek. Here was the meaning of the word *pistis*, which he had been trying to understand for months: *pistis*, "faith," is simply the credit we enjoy with God and the word of God enjoys with us, when we believe (or credit) him. For this reason Paul can say in a famous definition that "faith is the substance of things hoped for" (Hebrews 11:1): it is what gives reality and credit to what does not yet exist but in which we believe and have trust, in which we have put at stake our credit and our word. *Creditum* is the past participle of the Latin verb *credere*: it is that in which we believe, in which we put our faith, when we establish a fiduciary relationship with someone by taking them under our protection or lending them money, in entrusting ourselves to their protection or taking money as a loan. In Pauline *pistis* there revives, then, that very ancient Indo-European institution that Benveniste has reconstructed, "personal loyalty": "the one who holds the *fidēs* placed in him by a man has this man at his mercy. . . . In their primitive form these relations involved a certain reciprocity: placing one's *fidēs* in somebody secured in return his guarantee and his support" ("La fidelité personelle," pp. 118–119/97).

If this is true, then Benjamin's hypothesis of a close relationship between capitalism and Christianity receives a further confirmation: capitalism is a religion entirely founded on faith; it is a religion whose adherents live *sola fide*, by faith alone. And just as, according to Benjamin, capitalism is a religion in which the cult has been emancipated from every object and guilt from every sin, thus from every possible redemption, so too, from the point of view of faith, does capitalism have no object: it believes in the pure fact of believing, in pure

credit, which is to say, in money. Capitalism, then, is 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.

This means that the bank, which is nothing other than a machine to fabricate and administer credit, has taken the place of the church and, by governing credit, manipulates and administers the faith—the scarce, insecure trust—that our time still has in itself.

What did the decision to suspend convertibility into gold mean for this religion? Certainly something like a clarification of its own theological content comparable to Moses's destruction of the golden calf and the fixing of a conciliar dogma—in any case, the decisive step toward the purification and crystallization of its own faith. This latter, in the form of money and credit, now emancipates itself from every external referent, cancels its idolatrous connection with gold, and affirms itself in its absoluteness. Credit is a purely immaterial being, the most perfect parody of the *pistis* that is nothing but a "substance of things hoped for." Faith—so we read in the famous definition of the Letter to the Hebrews—is the substance (*ousia*, technical term par excellence of Greek ontology) of things hoped for. What Paul means is that those who have faith, who have put their *pistis* in Christ, take the word of Christ as if it were thing, being, substance. But it is precisely this "as if" that the capitalist religion's parody cancels. Money, the new *pistis*, is now substance immediately and without remainder. The destructive character of the capitalist religion, of which Benjamin spoke, here appears in full evidence. The "thing hoped for" is no more; it has been annihilated and has to be, because money is the very essence of the thing, its *ousia* in a technical sense. And in this way, the final obstacle to the creation of a money market, to the complete translation of money into a commodity, is taken out of the way.

A society whose religion is credit, which only believes in belief, is condemned to live on credit. Robert Kurz has illustrated the transformation of nineteenth-century capitalism, still founded on solvency and on distrust with respect to credit, into contemporary finance capitalism. "For nineteenth-century private capital, with its personal owners and with its related family clans, the principles of respectability and solvency still held, in light of which the ever greater recourse to credit appeared almost as obscene, as the beginning of the end. The serial literature of the epoch is full of stories in which great houses fall into ruin because of their dependence on credit: in some passages in *Buddenbrook*, Thomas Mann even made of it a theme worthy of a Nobel Prize. Capital productive of interest was naturally completely indispensable for the system that

had been forming, but it did not yet have a decisive part in general capitalist reproduction. The businesses of ‘fictitious’ capital were considered typical of an environment of swindlers and dishonest people, at the margin of true and proper capital. Even Henry Ford refused recourse to bank credit for a long time and wanted to finance his investments only with his own capital” (pp. 76–77).

Over the course of the twentieth century, this patriarchal conception was completely dissolved, and business capital today has recourse in increasing measure to monetary capital, taken on loan from the banking system. This means that businesses, to be able to continue to produce, must in essence mortgage in advance ever greater quantities of labor and future production. Capital productive of goods is fictitiously feeding on its own future. The capitalist religion, consistent with Benjamin’s thesis, lives in a continual indebtedness, which neither can nor should be paid off.

But not only are businesses to live, in this sense, *sola fide*, on credit (or on debit). Individuals and families too, who make recourse to it to a growing extent, are just as religiously obligated in this continual and generalized leap of faith on the future. And the Bank is the high priest who administers to the faithful the sole sacrament of the capitalist religion: credit-debt.

I ask myself at times how it is possible that people so tenaciously keep their faith in the capitalist religion. Because it is clear that if people ceased to have faith in credit and stopped living on credit, capitalism would immediately collapse. It seems to me, however, that I am catching a glimpse of some signs of an incipient atheism with respect to the credit God.

Four years before Nixon’s declaration, Guy Debord published *The Society of the Spectacle*. The book’s central thesis was that capitalism, in its final phase, presents itself as an immense accumulation of images, in which everything that was directly used and lived is estranged in a representation. At the point when commodification reaches its culmination, not only does every use value disappear, but the very nature of money is transformed. It is no longer simply “the general abstract equivalent of all commodities,” in themselves still endowed with some use value: “the spectacle is the money which *one can only look at*, because in the spectacle the totality of use has been exchanged for the totality of abstract representation” (§49). It is clear, even if Debord does not say it, that such a money is an absolute commodity, which cannot refer to a concrete quantity of metal, and that, in this sense, the society of the spectacle is a prophecy of what the decision of the American government had realized four years later.

To this there corresponds, according to Debord, a transformation of human

language, which no longer has anything to communicate and appears as "communication of the incommunicable" (§192). To money as pure commodity there corresponds a language in which the connection with the world has been broken. Language and culture, separated into "the media" and advertising, become "the star commodity of the spectacular society" (§193), which begins to secure for itself a growing part of the national product. It is the very linguistic and communicative nature of human beings that thus finds itself expropriated in the spectacle: what impedes communication is its being absolutized in a separate sphere, in which there is no longer anything to communicate except communication itself. In the spectacular society, human beings are separated by what should unite them.

That there is a similarity between language and money, that, according to Goethe's adage, *verba valent sicut nummi* (words are as valuable as money), is sheer common sense. But if we attempt to take seriously the relation implicit in the adage, it is revealed as something more than an analogy. Just as money refers to things by constituting them as commodities, by rendering them commercial, so too does language refer to things by rendering them sayable and communicable. Just as, for centuries, what permitted money to develop its function of universal equivalent of the value of all commodities was its relation with gold, so also what guarantees the communicative capacity of language is the intention to signify, its effective reference to the thing. The denotative connection with things, really present in the mind of every speaker, is what, in language, corresponds to the gold basis of money. This is the meaning of the medieval principle according to which it is not the thing that is subject to discourse but the discourse to the thing (*non sermoni res, sed rei est sermo subiectus*). And it is significant that a great canon lawyer of the thirteenth century, Geoffrey of Trani, expresses this connection in juridical terms, speaking of a *lingua rea*, to which one can then impute a relation with the thing: "only the effective connection of the mind with the thing renders language effectively imputable (that is, significant) [*ream linguam non facit nisi rea mens*]" (f. 247, n. 2, p. 37). If this signifying connection disappears, language literally says nothing (*nihil dicit*). Meaning—the reference to reality—guarantees the communicative function of language exactly as the reference to gold secures the capacity of money to be exchanged with all things. And logic watches over the connection between language and the world, exactly as the "gold exchange standard" watched over the connection of money with the gold basis.

It is against the nullification of this guarantee implied, on the one hand, in detaching money from gold and, on the other, in the rupture of the connection between language and world, that the critical analyses of finance capital and the

society of the spectacle are, with good reason, directed. The medium that renders exchange possible cannot be the very thing that is exchanged: money, which measures commodities, cannot itself become a commodity. In the same way, the language that renders things communicable cannot itself become a thing, an object at once of appropriation and of exchange: the means of communication cannot itself be communicated. Separated from things, language communicates nothing and in this way celebrates its ephemeral triumph over the world; detached from gold, money exhibits its own nothingness as absolute measure—and, at the same time, absolute commodity. Language is the supreme spectacular value, because it reveals the nothingness of all things; money is the supreme commodity, because in the last analysis it shows the nullity of all commodities.

But it is in every sphere of experience that capitalism attests its religious character and, at the same time, its parasitical relation with Christianity. Above all with respect to time and history. Capitalism has no *telos*; it is essentially infinite yet, precisely for this reason, incessantly in prey to a crisis, always in the act of ending. But in this too it attests its parasitical relationship with Christianity. Responding to David Cayley, who asked him if ours is a post-Christian world, Ivan Illich claimed that ours is not a post-Christian world, but the most explicitly Christian world that has ever existed, namely, an apocalyptic world. The Christian philosophy of history (but every philosophy of history is necessarily Christian) is in fact founded on the assumption that the history of humanity and of the world is essentially finite: it goes from the creation to the end of days, which coincides with the Day of Judgment, with salvation or damnation. But in this chronological historical time, the messianic event inscribes another kairological time, in which every instant holds itself in direct relation with the end, has experience of a "time of the end," that is, however, also a new beginning. If the Church seems to have closed its eschatological office, today it is above all the scientists, transformed into apocalyptic prophets, who announce the imminent end of life on earth. And in every sphere, in the economy as in politics, the capitalist religion declares a state of permanent crisis (*crisis* etymologically means "definitive judgment"), which is, at the same time, a state of exception that has become normal, whose only possible outcome presents itself, precisely as in the Apocalypse, as "a new earth." But the eschatology of the capitalist religion is a blank eschatology, without redemption or judgment.

Just as it cannot in fact have a true end and is for this reason always in the act of ending, capitalism also does not know a beginning; it is intimately an-archic yet, precisely for this reason, always in the act of beginning again. Hence the consubstantiality between capitalism and innovation, which Schumpeter placed

at the foundation of his definition of capitalism. The anarchy of capital coincides with its incessant need to innovate.

Nevertheless, once again capitalism here shows its intimate and parodic connection with Christian dogma: what, in fact, is the Trinity, if not the apparatus that allows for reconciling the absence of any *archē* in God with the birth, at once eternal and historical, of Christ, the divine anarchy with the governance of the world and the economy of salvation?

I would like to add something in connection with the relation between capitalism and anarchy. There is a phrase, pronounced by one of the four villains in Pasolini's *Salò*, which says: "The only true anarchy is the anarchy of power." In the same sense Benjamin had written many years before: "Nothing is so anarchic as the bourgeois order." I believe that their suggestion must be taken seriously. Benjamin and Pasolini here grasp an 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. But in this case as well the capitalist religion shows its parasitical dependence on Christian theology.

What functions here as the paradigm of capitalist anarchy is Christology. Between the fourth and sixth centuries, the Church was deeply divided by the controversy over Arianism, in which all of Eastern Christianity, together with the emperor, were violently involved. The problem concerned precisely the *archē* of the Son. Both Arius and his adversaries were actually in agreement in claiming that the Son was generated by the Father and that this generation had happened "before eternal times" (*pro chronōn aioniōn* in Arius; *pro pantōn tōn aionōn* in Eusebius of Caesarea). Arius indeed took care to specify that the Son was generated *achronōs*, atemporally. What is in question here is not so much a chronological precedence (time does not yet exist), nor only a problem of rank (that the Father is "greater" than the Son is an opinion shared by many of the anti-Arians); instead, it is a matter of deciding if the Son—that is, the word and praxis of God—is founded in the Father or is, like him, without beginning, *anarchos*, which is to say, unfounded.

A textual analysis of Arius's letters and of the writings of his adversaries shows, in fact, that the decisive term in the controversy is precisely *anarchos* (without *archē*, in the twofold sense that the term has in Greek: foundation and beginning).

Arius claims that while the Father is absolutely anarchic, the Son is in the beginning (*en archē*) but is not "anarchic," because he has his foundation in the Father.

Against this heretical thesis, which gives to the Logos a firm foundation in the Father, the bishops assembled by the Emperor Constans at Serdica (343) clearly affirmed that the Son is also "anarchic," and, as such, he "absolutely, anarchically, and infinitely [*pantote, anarchōs, kai ateleutetōs*] reigns together with the Father" (qtd. in Simonetti, p. 136).

Why does this controversy, leaving aside its Byzantine subtleties, seem to me to be so important? Because, since the Son is nothing other than the word and action of the Father, indeed, more precisely, the principal actor of the "economy" of salvation, which is to say, of the divine governance of the world, what is in question here is the problem of the "anarchic" or unfounded character of language, action, and governance. Capitalism inherits, secularizes, and pushes to the extreme the anarchic character of Christology. If one does not understand this originary anarchic vocation of Christology, it is not possible to understand either the later historical development of Christian theology, with its latent anarchic drift, or the history of Western philosophy and politics, with their caesura between ontology and praxis, between being and acting, and their consequent emphasis on will and freedom. That Christ is anarchic means, in the last instance, that in the modern West language, praxis, and economy have no foundation in being.

Now we better understand why the capitalist religion and the philosophies subordinate to it have so much need of will and freedom. Freedom and will mean simply that being and acting, ontology and praxis, which in the classical world were closely conjoined, now take their separate paths. Human action is no longer founded in being: for this reason it is free, which is to say, condemned to chance and uncertainty.

Here I would like to interrupt my brief archaeology of the capitalist religion. There will not be a 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. But if there is something that I would like to entrust to your reflection, it is precisely the problem of anarchy.

Against the anarchy of power, I do not intend to invoke a return to a solid foundation in being: even if we ever possessed such a foundation, we have certainly lost it or have forgotten how to access it. I believe, however, that a clear comprehension of the profound anarchy of the societies in which we live is the only correct way to pose the problem of power and, at the same time, that of true anarchy. Anarchy is what becomes possible only when we grasp the anarchy of power. Construction and destruction here coincide without remainder. But, to cite the words of Michel Foucault, what we gain in this way "is nothing more,

and nothing less, than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think” (p. 342).

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Translator's Note: Where English translations are available, works are cited according to the page number of the original text, followed by the page number of the translation, or else by a standard textual division that is consistent across translations and editions. All biblical quotations are based on the New Revised Standard Version. All quotations from the works of Aristotle are based on *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984). Translations, particularly those from Aristotle, have frequently been altered for greater conformity with Agamben's usage. Where no English translation is listed, the translations are my own.

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