WHAT IS AN APPARATUS?

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WHAT IS AN APPARATUS?

and Other Essays

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Translated by David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella

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Frontispiece image: Detail of Giovanni Serodine, *The Apostles Peter and Paul on the Road to Martyrdom* (1624–45), oil on cloth. Rome, Palazzo Barberini.

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Translators' Note

English translations of secondary sources have been amended in order to take into account the author's sometimes distinctive Italian translations. Mandelstam's poem on pages 42–43 was translated from the Russian by Jane Mikkelson. We would like to thank Giorgio Agamben for his generous assistance, which has improved the grace and accuracy of our translation.

WHAT IS AN APPARATUS?

§ What Is an Apparatus?

1.

Terminological questions are important in philosophy. As a philosopher for whom I have the greatest respect once said, terminology is the poetic moment of thought. This is not to say that philosophers must always necessarily define their technical terms. Plato never defined *idea*, his most important term. Others, like Spinoza and Leibniz, preferred instead to define their terminology *more geometrico.*

The hypothesis that I wish to propose is that the word *dispositif*, or "apparatus" in English, is a decisive technical term in the strategy of Foucault's thought.[1] He uses it quite often, especially from the mid 1970s, when he begins to concern himself with what he calls "governmentality" or the "government of men." Though he never offers a complete definition, he

comes close to something like it in an interview from 1977:

> What I'm trying to single out with this term is, first and foremost, a thoroughly heterogeneous set consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the network that can be established between these elements . . .
>
> . . . by the term "apparatus" I mean a kind of a formation, so to speak, that at a given historical moment has as its major function the response to an urgency. The apparatus therefore has a dominant strategic function . . .
>
> . . . I said that the nature of an apparatus is essentially strategic, which means that we are speaking about a certain manipulation of relations of forces, of a rational and concrete intervention in the relations of forces, either so as to develop them in a particular direction, or to block them, to stabilize them, and to utilize them. The apparatus is thus always inscribed into a play of power, but it is also always linked to certain limits of knowledge that arise from it and, to an equal degree, condition it. The apparatus is precisely this: a set of strategies of the relations of forces supporting, and supported by, certain types of knowledge.[2]

Let me briefly summarize three points:

a. It is a heterogeneous set that includes virtually anything, linguistic and nonlinguistic, under the

same heading: discourses, institutions, buildings, laws, police measures, philosophical propositions, and so on. The apparatus itself is the network that is established between these elements.

b. The apparatus always has a concrete strategic function and is always located in a power relation.

c. As such, it appears at the intersection of power relations and relations of knowledge.

2.

I would like now to try and trace a brief genealogy of this term, first in the work of Foucault, and then in a broader historical context.

At the end of the 1960s, more or less at the time when he was writing *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault does not yet use the term "apparatus" in order to define the object of his research. Instead, he uses the term *positivité*, "positivity," an etymological neighbor of *dispositif*, again without offering us a definition.

I often asked myself where Foucault found this term, until the moment when, a few months ago, I reread a book by Jean Hyppolite entitled *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire de Hegel*. You probably know about the strong link that ties Foucault to Hyppolite,

a person whom he referred to at times as "my master" (Hyppolite was in fact his teacher, first during the *khâgne* in the Lycée Henri-IV [the preparatory course for the Ecole normale supérieure] and then in the Ecole normale).

The third part of Hyppolite's book bears the title "Raison et histoire: Les idées de positivité et de destin" (Reason and History: The Ideas of Positivity and Destiny). The focus here is on the analysis of two works that date from Hegel's years in Bern and Frankfurt (1795–96): The first is "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Destiny," and the second—where we find the term that interests us—"The Positivity of the Christian Religion" (*Die Positivität der christliche Religion*). According to Hyppolite, "destiny" and "positivity" are two key concepts in Hegel's thought. In particular, the term "positivity" finds in Hegel its proper place in the opposition between "natural religion" and "positive religion." While natural religion is concerned with the immediate and general relation of human reason with the divine, positive or historical religion encompasses the set of beliefs, rules, and rites that in a certain society and at a certain historical moment are externally imposed on individuals. "A positive religion," Hegel writes in a passage cited by Hyppolite, "implies feelings that are more or less impressed through constraint on souls; these are actions that are the effect of

command and the result of obedience and are accomplished without direct interest."[3]

Hyppolite shows how the opposition between nature and positivity corresponds, in this sense, to the dialectics of freedom and obligation, as well as of reason and history. In a passage that could not have failed to provoke Foucault's curiosity, because it in a way presages the notion of apparatus, Hyppolite writes:

> We see here the knot of questions implicit in the concept of positivity, as well as Hegel's successive attempts to bring together dialectically—a dialectics that is not yet conscious of itself—*pure reason* (theoretical and above all practical) and positivity, that is, *the historical element.* In a certain sense, Hegel considers positivity as an obstacle to the freedom of man, and as such it is condemned. To investigate the positive elements of a religion, and we might add, of a social state, means to discover in them that which is imposed through a constraint on man, that which obfuscates the purity of reason. But, in another sense—and this is the aspect that ends up having the upper hand in the course of Hegel's development positivity must be reconciled with reason, which then loses its abstract character and adapts to the concrete richness of life. We see then why the concept of positivity is at the center of Hegelian perspectives.[4]

If "positivity" is the name that, according to Hyppolite, the young Hegel gives to the historical element—loaded as it is with rules, rites, and institutions that are imposed on the individual by an external

power, but that become, so to speak, internalized in the systems of beliefs and feelings—then Foucault, by borrowing this term (later to become "apparatus"), takes a position with respect to a decisive problem, which is actually also his own problem: the relation between individuals as living beings and the historical element. By "the historical element," I mean the set of institutions, of processes of subjectification, and of rules in which power relations become concrete. Foucault's ultimate aim is not, then, as in Hegel, the reconciliation of the two elements; it is not even to emphasize their conflict. For Foucault, what is at stake is rather the investigation of concrete modes in which the positivities (or the apparatuses) act within the relations, mechanisms, and "plays" of power.

3.

It should now be clear in what sense I have advanced the hypothesis that "apparatus" is an essential technical term in Foucault's thought. What is at stake here is not a particular term that refers only to this or that technology of power. It is a general term that has the same breadth as the term "positivity" had, according to Hyppolite, for the young Hegel. Within Foucault's strategy, it comes to occupy the place of one of those terms that he defines, critically, as "the

universals" (*les universaux*). Foucault, as you know, always refused to deal with the general categories or mental constructs that he calls "the universals," such as the State, Sovereignty, Law, and Power. But this is not to say that there are no operative concepts with a general character in his thought. Apparatuses are, in point of fact, what take the place of the universals in the Foucauldian strategy: not simply this or that police measure, this or that technology of power, and not even the generality obtained by their abstraction. Instead, as he claims in the interview from 1977, an apparatus is "the network [*le réseau*] that can be established between these elements."

If we now try to examine the definition of "apparatus" that can be found in common French dictionaries, we see that they distinguish between three meanings of the term:

a. A strictly juridical sense: "Apparatus is the part of a judgment that contains the decision separate from the opinion." That is, the section of a sentence that decides, or the enacting clause of a law.

b. A technological meaning: "The way in which the parts of a machine or of a mechanism and, by extension, the mechanism itself are arranged."

c. A military use: "The set of means arranged in conformity with a plan."

To some extent, the three definitions are all present in Foucault. But dictionaries, in particular those that lack a historical-etymological character, divide and separate this term into a variety of meanings. This fragmentation, nevertheless, generally corresponds to the historical development and articulation of a unique original meaning that we should not lose sight of. What is this original meaning for the term "apparatus"? The term certainly refers, in its common Foucauldian use, to a set of practices and mechanisms (both linguistic and nonlinguistic, juridical, technical, and military) that aim to face an urgent need and to obtain an effect that is more or less immediate. But what is the strategy of practices or of thought, what is the historical context, from which the modern term originates?

4.

Over the past three years, I have found myself increasingly involved in an investigation that is only now beginning to come to its end, one that I can roughly define as a theological genealogy of economy. In the first centuries of Church history—let's say, between the second and sixth centuries C.E.—the Greek term *oikonomia* develops a decisive theological function. In Greek, *oikonomia* signifies the administration of the *oikos* (the home) and, more generally, management.

We are dealing here, as Aristotle says (*Politics* 1255b21), not with an epistemic paradigm, but with a praxis, with a practical activity that must face a problem and a particular situation each and every time. Why, then, did the Fathers of the Church feel the need to introduce this term into theological discourse? How did they come to speak about a "divine economy"?

What is at issue here, to be precise, is an extremely delicate and vital problem, perhaps the decisive question in the history of Christian theology: the Trinity. When the Fathers of the Church began to argue during the second century about the threefold nature of the divine figure (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), there was, as one can imagine, a powerful resistance from reasonable-minded people in the Church who were horrified at the prospect of reintroducing polytheism and paganism to the Christian faith. In order to convince those stubborn adversaries (who were later called "monarchians," that is, promoters of the government of a single God), theologians such as Tertullian, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and many others could not find a better term to serve their need than the Greek *oikonomia*. Their argument went something like this: "God, insofar as his being and substance is concerned, is certainly one; but as to his *oikonomia*—that is to say the way in which he administers his home, his life, and the world that he created—he

is, rather, triple. Just as a good father can entrust to his son the execution of certain functions and duties without in so doing losing his power and his unity, so God entrusts to Christ the 'economy,' the administration and government of human history." *Oikonomia* therefore became a specialized term signifying in particular the incarnation of the Son, together with the economy of redemption and salvation (this is the reason why in Gnostic sects, Christ is called "the man of economy," *ho anthrōpos tēs oikonomias*). The theologians slowly got accustomed to distinguishing between a "discourse—or *logos*—of theology" and a "*logos* of economy." *Oikonomia* became thereafter an apparatus through which the Trinitarian dogma and the idea of a divine providential governance of the world were introduced into the Christian faith.

But, as often happens, the fracture that the theologians had sought to avoid by removing it from the plane of God's being, reappeared in the form of a caesura that separated in Him being and action, ontology and praxis. Action (economy, but also politics) has no foundation in being: this is the schizophrenia that the theological doctrine of *oikonomia* left as its legacy to Western culture.

5.

I think that even on the basis of this brief exposition, we can now account for the centrality and importance of the function that the notion of *oikonomia* performed in Christian theology. Already in Clement of Alexandria, *oikonomia* merges with the notion of Providence and begins to indicate the redemptive governance of the world and human history. Now, what is the translation of this fundamental Greek term in the writings of the Latin Fathers? *Dispositio.*

The Latin term *dispositio*, from which the French term *dispositif*, or apparatus, derives, comes therefore to take on the complex semantic sphere of the theological *oikonomia.* The "dispositifs" about which Foucault speaks are somehow linked to this theological legacy. They can be in some way traced back to the fracture that divides and, at the same time, articulates in God being and praxis, the nature or essence, on the one hand, and the operation through which He administers and governs the created world, on the other. The term "apparatus" designates that in which, and through which, one realizes a pure activity of governance devoid of any foundation in being. This is the reason why apparatuses must always imply a process of subjectification, that is to say, they must produce their subject.

In light of this theological genealogy the Foucauldian apparatuses acquire an even more pregnant and decisive significance, since they intersect not only with the context of what the young Hegel called "positivity," but also with what the later Heidegger called *Gestell* (which is similar from an etymological point of view to *dis-positio, dis-ponere*, just as the German *stellen* corresponds to the Latin *ponere*). When Heidegger, in *Die Technik und die Kehre* (The Question Concerning Technology), writes that *Ge-stell* means in ordinary usage an apparatus (*Gerät*), but that he intends by this term "the gathering together of the (in)stallation [*Stellen*] that (in)stalls man, this is to say, challenges him to expose the real in the mode of ordering [*Bestellen*]," the proximity of this term to the theological *dispositio*, as well as to Foucault's apparatuses, is evident.[5] What is common to all these terms is that they refer back to this *oikonomia*, that is, to a set of practices, bodies of knowledge, measures, and institutions that aim to manage, govern, control, and orient—in a way that purports to be useful—the behaviors, gestures, and thoughts of human beings.

6.

One of the methodological principles that I constantly follow in my investigations is to identify in the texts and contexts on which I work what Feuerbach

used to call the philosophical element, that is to say, the point of their *Entwicklungsfähigkeit* (literally, capacity to be developed), the locus and the moment wherein they are susceptible to a development. Nevertheless, whenever we interpret and develop the text of an author in this way, there comes a moment when we are aware of our inability to proceed any further without contravening the most elementary rules of hermeneutics. This means that the development of the text in question has reached a point of undecidability where it becomes impossible to distinguish between the author and the interpreter. Although this is a particularly happy moment for the interpreter, he knows that it is now time to abandon the text that he is analyzing and to proceed on his own.

I invite you therefore to abandon the context of Foucauldian philology in which we have moved up to now in order to situate apparatuses in a new context.

I wish to propose to you nothing less than a general and massive partitioning of beings into two large groups or classes: on the one hand, living beings (or substances), and on the other, apparatuses in which living beings are incessantly captured. On one side, then, to return to the terminology of the theologians, lies the ontology of creatures, and on the other side, the *oikonomia* of apparatuses that seek to govern and guide them toward the good.

Further expanding the already large class of Foucauldian apparatuses, I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings. Not only, therefore, prisons, madhouses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, juridical measures, and so forth (whose connection with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones and—why not—language itself, which is perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses—one in which thousands and thousands of years ago a primate inadvertently let himself be captured, probably without realizing the consequences that he was about to face.

To recapitulate, we have then two great classes: living beings (or substances) and apparatuses. And, between these two, as a third class, subjects. I call a subject that which results from the relation and, so to speak, from the relentless fight between living beings and apparatuses. Naturally, the substances and the subjects, as in ancient metaphysics, seem to overlap, but not completely. In this sense, for example, the same individual, the same substance, can be the place of multiple processes of subjectification: the user of cellular phones, the web surfer, the writer of stories,

the tango aficionado, the anti-globalization activist, and so on and so forth. The boundless growth of apparatuses in our time corresponds to the equally extreme proliferation in processes of subjectification. This may produce the impression that in our time, the category of subjectivity is wavering and losing its consistency; but what is at stake, to be precise, is not an erasure or an overcoming, but rather a dissemination that pushes to the extreme the masquerade that has always accompanied every personal identity.

7.

It would probably not be wrong to define the extreme phase of capitalist development in which we live as a massive accumulation and proliferation of apparatuses. It is clear that ever since Homo sapiens first appeared, there have been apparatuses; but we could say that today there is not even a single instant in which the life of individuals is not modeled, contaminated, or controlled by some apparatus. In what way, then, can we confront this situation, what strategy must we follow in our everyday hand-to-hand struggle with apparatuses? What we are looking for is neither simply to destroy them nor, as some naively suggest, to use them in the correct way.

For example, I live in Italy, a country where the gestures and behaviors of individuals have been reshaped

from top to toe by the cellular telephone (which the Italians dub the *telefonino*). I have developed an implacable hatred for this apparatus, which has made the relationship between people all the more abstract. Although I found myself more than once wondering how to destroy or deactivate those *telefonini*, as well as how to eliminate or at least to punish and imprison those who do not stop using them, I do not believe that this is the right solution to the problem.

The fact is that according to all indications, apparatuses are not a mere accident in which humans are caught by chance, but rather are rooted in the very process of "humanization" that made "humans" out of the animals we classify under the rubric Homo sapiens. In fact, the event that has produced the human constitutes, for the living being, something like a division, which reproduces in some way the division that the *oikonomia* introduced in God between being and action. This division separates the living being from itself and from its immediate relationship with its environment—that is, with what Jakob von Uexküll and then Heidegger name the circle of receptors-disinhibitors. The break or interruption of this relationship produces in living beings both boredom—that is, the capacity to suspend this immediate relationship with their disinhibitors—and the Open, which is the possibility of knowing being as such, by constructing a

world. But, along with these possibilities, we must also immediately consider the apparatuses that crowd the Open with instruments, objects, gadgets, odds and ends, and various technologies. Through these apparatuses, man attempts to nullify the animalistic behaviors that are now separated from him, and to enjoy the Open as such, to enjoy being insofar as it is being. At the root of each apparatus lies an all-too-human desire for happiness. The capture and subjectification of this desire in a separate sphere constitutes the specific power of the apparatus.

8.

All of this means that the strategy that we must adopt in our hand-to-hand combat with apparatuses cannot be a simple one. This is because what we are dealing with here is the liberation of that which remains captured and separated by means of apparatuses, in order to bring it back to a possible common use. It is from this perspective that I would like now to speak about a concept that I happen to have worked on recently. I am referring to a term that originates in the sphere of Roman law and religion (law and religion are closely connected, and not only in ancient Rome): profanation.

According to Roman law, objects that belonged in some way to the gods were considered sacred or

religious. As such, these things were removed from free use and trade among humans: they could neither be sold nor given as security, neither relinquished for the enjoyment of others nor subjected to servitude. Sacrilegious were the acts that violated or transgressed the special unavailability of these objects, which were reserved either for celestial beings (and so they were properly called "sacred") or for the beings of the netherworld (in this case, they were simply called "religious"). While "to consecrate" (*sacrare*) was the term that designated the exit of things from the sphere of human law, "to profane" signified, on the contrary, to restore the thing to the free use of men. "Profane," the great jurist Trebatius was therefore able to write, "is, in the truest sense of the word, that which was sacred or religious, but was then restored to the use and property of human beings."

From this perspective, one can define religion as that which removes things, places, animals, or people from common use and transports them to a separate sphere. Not only is there no religion without separation, but every separation contains or conserves in itself a genuinely religious nucleus. The apparatus that activates and regulates separation is sacrifice. Through a series of minute rituals that vary from culture to culture (which Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss have patiently inventoried), sacrifice always sanctions the

passage of something from the profane to the sacred, from the human sphere to the divine. But what has been ritually separated can also be restored to the profane sphere. Profanation is the counter-apparatus that restores to common use what sacrifice had separated and divided.

9.

From this perspective, capitalism and other modern forms of power seem to generalize and push to the extreme the processes of separation that define religion. If we consider once again the theological genealogy of apparatuses that I have traced above (a genealogy that connects them to the Christian paradigm of *oikonomia*, that is to say, the divine governance of the world), we can then see that modern apparatuses differ from their traditional predecessors in a way that renders any attempt to profane them particularly problematic. Indeed, every apparatus implies a process of subjectification, without which it cannot function as an apparatus of governance, but is rather reduced to a mere exercise of violence. On this basis, Foucault has demonstrated how, in a disciplinary society, apparatuses aim to create—through a series of practices, discourses, and bodies of knowledge—docile, yet free, bodies that assume their identity and their "freedom" as subjects in

the very process of their desubjectification. Apparatus, then, is first of all a machine that produces subjectifications, and only as such is it also a machine of governance. The example of confession may elucidate the matter at hand: the formation of Western subjectivity that both splits and, nonetheless, masters and secures the self, is inseparable from this centuries-old activity of the apparatus of penance—an apparatus in which a new I is constituted through the negation and, at the same time, the assumption of the old I. The split of the subject performed by the apparatus of penance resulted, therefore, in the production of a new subject, which found its real truth in the nontruth of the already repudiated sinning I. Analogous considerations can be made concerning the apparatus of the prison: here is an apparatus that produces, as a more or less unforeseen consequence, the constitution of a subject and of a milieu of delinquents, who then become the subject of new—and, this time, perfectly calculated—techniques of governance.

What defines the apparatuses that we have to deal with in the current phase of capitalism is that they no longer act as much through the production of a subject, as through the processes of what can be called desubjectification. A desubjectifying moment is certainly implicit in every process of subjectification. As we have seen, the penitential self is constituted only

through its own negation. But what we are now witnessing is that processes of subjectification and processes of desubjectification seem to become reciprocally indifferent, and so they do not give rise to the recomposition of a new subject, except in larval or, as it were, spectral form. In the nontruth of the subject, its own truth is no longer at stake. He who lets himself be captured by the "cellular telephone" apparatus—whatever the intensity of the desire that has driven him—cannot acquire a new subjectivity, but only a number through which he can, eventually, be controlled. The spectator who spends his evenings in front of the television set only gets, in exchange for his desubjectification, the frustrated mask of the couch potato, or his inclusion in the calculation of viewership ratings.

Here lies the vanity of the well-meaning discourse on technology, which asserts that the problem with apparatuses can be reduced to the question of their correct use. Those who make such claims seem to ignore a simple fact: If a certain process of subjectification (or, in this case, desubjectification) corresponds to every apparatus, then it is impossible for the subject of an apparatus to use it "in the right way." Those who continue to promote similar arguments are, for their part, the product of the media apparatus in which they are captured.

10.

Contemporary societies therefore present themselves as inert bodies going through massive processes of desubjectification without acknowledging any real subjectification. Hence the eclipse of politics, which used to presuppose the existence of subjects and real identities (the workers' movement, the bourgeoisie, etc.), and the triumph of the *oikonomia*, that is to say, of a pure activity of government that aims at nothing other than its own replication. The Right and the Left, which today alternate in the management of power, have for this reason very little to do with the political sphere in which they originated. They are simply the names of two poles—the first pointing without scruple to desubjectification, the second wanting instead to hide behind the hypocritical mask of the good democratic citizen—of the same governmental machine.

This, above all, is the source of the peculiar uneasiness of power precisely during an era in which it confronts the most docile and cowardly social body that has ever existed in human history. It is only an apparent paradox that the harmless citizen of postindustrial democracies (the *Bloom*, as it has been effectively suggested he be called),[6] who readily does everything that he is asked to do, inasmuch as he leaves his everyday

gestures and his health, his amusements and his occupations, his diet and his desires, to be commanded and controlled in the smallest detail by apparatuses, is also considered by power—perhaps precisely because of this—as a potential terrorist. While a new European norm imposes biometric apparatuses on all its citizens by developing and perfecting anthropometric technologies invented in the nineteenth century in order to identify recidivist criminals (from mug shots to fingerprinting), surveillance by means of video cameras transforms the public space of the city into the interior of an immense prison. In the eyes of authority—and maybe rightly so—nothing looks more like a terrorist than the ordinary man.

The more apparatuses pervade and disseminate their power in every field of life, the more government will find itself faced with an elusive element, which seems to escape its grasp the more it docilely submits to it. This is neither to say that this element constitutes a revolutionary subject in its own right, nor that it can halt or even threaten the governmental machine. Rather than the proclaimed end of history, we are, in fact, witnessing the incessant though aimless motion of this machine, which, in a sort of colossal parody of theological *oikonomia*, has assumed the legacy of the providential governance of the world; yet instead of redeeming our world, this machine (true to the original

eschatological vocation of Providence) is leading us to catastrophe. The problem of the profanation of apparatuses—that is to say, the restitution to common use of what has been captured and separated in them—is, for this reason, all the more urgent. But this problem cannot be properly raised as long as those who are concerned with it are unable to intervene in their own processes of subjectification, any more than in their own apparatuses, in order to then bring to light the Ungovernable, which is the beginning and, at the same time, the vanishing point of every politics.

§ The Friend

1.

Friendship is so tightly linked to the definition of philosophy that it can be said that without it, philosophy would not really be possible. The intimacy between friendship and philosophy is so profound that philosophy contains the *philos*, the friend, in its very name, and, as often happens with such an excessive proximity, the risk runs high of not making heads or tails of it. In the classical world, this promiscuity, this near consubstantiality, of the friend and the philosopher was taken as a given. It is certainly with a somewhat archaizing intent, then, that a contemporary philosopher—when posing the extreme question "What is philosophy?"—was able to write that this is a question to be discussed *entre amis*, between friends. Today the relationship between friendship and philosophy has actually fallen into discredit, and it is with a

kind of embarrassment and bad conscience that professional philosophers try to come to terms with this uncomfortable and, as it were, clandestine partner of their thought.

Many years ago my friend Jean-Luc Nancy and I had decided to exchange some letters on the theme of friendship. We were persuaded that this was the best way of drawing closer to—almost "staging"—a problem that otherwise seemed to resist analytical treatment. I wrote the first letter and awaited his response, not without trepidation. This is not the place to attempt to comprehend what reasons—or, perhaps, what misunderstandings—signaled the end of the project upon the arrival of Jean-Luc's letter. But it is certain that our friendship—which we assumed would open up a privileged point of access to the problem—was instead an obstacle, and that it was, in some measure, at least temporarily, obscured.

It is an analogous, and probably conscious, sense of discomfort that led Jacques Derrida to choose as a leitmotif for his book on friendship a sibylline motto, attributed to Aristotle by tradition, that negates friendship with the very same gesture by which it seems to invoke it: *o philoi, oudeis philos*, "O friends, there are no friends." One of the themes of the book is, in fact, the critique of what the author defines as the phallocentric notion of friendship that has dominated our

philosophical and political tradition. When Derrida was still working on the lecture that would be the origin of the book, we discussed together a curious philological problem concerning the motto or quip in question. It can be found in Montaigne and in Nietzsche, both of whom would have taken it from Diogenes Laertius. But if we open a modern edition of the latter's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* to the chapter dedicated to Aristotle's biography (5.21), we do not find the phrase in question but rather one to all appearances almost identical, whose significance is nevertheless different and much less mysterious: *ōi* (omega with iota subscript) *philoi, oudeis philos*, "He who has (many) friends, does not have a single friend."[1]

A visit to the library was all it took to clarify the mystery. In 1616, a new edition of the *Lives* appeared, edited by the great Genevan philologist Isaac Casaubon. Reaching the passage in question—which still read *o philoi* (O friends) in the edition established by his father-in-law Henry Estienne—Casaubon without hesitation corrected the enigmatic lesson of the manuscripts, which then became so perfectly intelligible that it was taken up by modern editors.

Since I had immediately informed Derrida of the results of my research, I was stunned not to find any trace of the second reading when his book *Politiques de l'amitié* was published.[2] If the motto—apocryphal

according to modern philologists—was reproduced in the original form, it certainly was not due to forgetfulness: it was essential to the book's strategy that friendship would be at once affirmed and revoked.

In this sense, Derrida's gesture is a repetition of Nietzsche's. When he was still a student of philology, Nietzsche had begun a work on the sources of Diogenes Laertius's book, and so the textual history of the *Lives* (hence also Casaubon's amendment) must have been perfectly known to him. Nevertheless, the necessity of friendship and, at the same time, a certain distrust of friends were essential to Nietzsche's philosophical strategy. Hence his recourse to the traditional lesson that was already out of date by Nietzsche's time (Huebner's 1828 edition adopts the modern version, adding the annotation, "*legebatur* o philoi, *emendavit Casaubonus*").

2.

It is possible that the peculiar semantic status of the term "friend" has contributed to the discomfort of modern philosophers. It is common knowledge that no one has ever been able to satisfactorily define the meaning of the syntagm "I love you"; so much is this the case that one might think that it has a performative character: that its meaning, in other words,

coincides with the act of its utterance. Analogous considerations could be made regarding the expression, "I am your friend," although recourse to the performative category seems impossible here. I maintain, rather, that "friend" belongs to the class of terms that linguists define as nonpredicative; these are terms from which it is not possible to establish a class that includes all the things to which the predicate in question is attributed. "White," "hard," or "hot" are certainly predicative terms; but is it possible to say that "friend" defines a consistent class in the above sense? As strange as it might seem, "friend" shares this quality with another type of nonpredicative term: insults. Linguists have demonstrated that insults do not offend those who are subjected to them as a result of including the insulted person in a particular category (for example, that of excrement or the male or female sexual organs, depending on the language)—something that would simply be impossible or, anyway, false. An insult is effective precisely because it does *not* function as a constative utterance, but rather as a proper noun; because it uses language in order to give a name in such a way that the named cannot accept his name, and against which he cannot defend himself (as if someone were to insist on calling me Gastone knowing that my name is Giorgio). What is offensive in the insult is, in

other words, a pure experience of language and not a reference to the world.

If this is true, "friend" shares its condition not only with insults but also with philosophical terms—terms that, as is well known, do not possess an objective denotation, and, like those terms that medieval logicians define as "transcendental," simply signify being.

3.

In the collection of the Galleria nazionale di arte antica in Rome, there is a painting by Giovanni Serodine that represents the meeting of the apostles Peter and Paul on the road to their martyrdom. The two saints, immobile, occupy the center of the canvas, surrounded by the wild gesticulations of the soldiers and executioners who are leading them to their torment. Critics have often remarked on the contrast between the heroic fortitude of the two apostles and the tumult of the crowd, highlighted here and there by drops of light splashed almost at random on arms, faces, and trumpets. As far as I am concerned, I maintain that what renders this painting genuinely incomparable is that Serodine has depicted the two apostles so close to each other (their foreheads are almost stuck together) that there is no way that they can see one another. On the road to martyrdom, they look at each other

without recognizing one another. This impression of a nearness that is, so to speak, excessive is enhanced by the silent gesture of the barely visible, shaking hands at the bottom of the painting. This painting has always seemed to me to be a perfect allegory of friendship. Indeed, what is friendship other than a proximity that resists both representation and conceptualization? To recognize someone as a friend means not being able to recognize him as a "something." Calling someone "friend" is not the same as calling him "white," "Italian," or "hot," since friendship is neither a property nor a quality of a subject.

4.

But it is now time to begin reading the passage by Aristotle that I was planning to comment on. The philosopher dedicates to the subject of friendship a treatise, which comprises the eighth and ninth books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Since we are dealing here with one of the most celebrated and widely discussed texts in the entire history of philosophy, I shall assume your familiarity with its well-known theses: that we cannot live without friends; that we need to distinguish between a friendship based on utility or on pleasure and virtuous friendship, where the friend is loved as such; that it is not possible to have many friends;

that a distant friendship tends to lead to oblivion, and so on. These points are common knowledge. There is, though, a passage in the treatise that seems to me to have received insufficient attention, even though it contains, so to speak, the ontological basis of Aristotle's theory of friendship. I am referring to 1170a28–1171b35. Let's read it together:

> He who sees senses [*aisthanetai*] that he is seeing, he who hears senses that he is hearing, he who walks senses that he is walking, and thus for all the other activities there is something that senses that we are exerting them [*hoti energoumen*], in such a way that if we sense, we sense that we are sensing, and if we think, we sense that we are thinking. This is the same thing as sensing existence: existing [*to einai*] means in fact sensing and thinking.
>
> Sensing that we are alive is in and of itself sweet, for life is by nature good, and it is sweet to sense that such a good belongs to us.
>
> Living is desirable, above all for those who are good, since for them existing is a good and sweet thing.
>
> For good men, "con-senting" [*synaisthanomenoi*, sensing together] feels sweet because they recognize the good itself, and what a good man feels with respect to himself, he also feels with respect to his friend: the friend is, in fact, an other self [*heteros autos*]. And as all people find the fact of their own existence [*to auton einai*] desirable, the existence of their friends is equally—or almost equally—desirable. Existence is desirable because one senses that it is a good thing, and this sensation [*aisthēsis*] is in itself sweet. One must therefore also

"con-sent" that his friend exists, and this happens by living together and by sharing acts and thoughts in common [*koinōnein*]. In this sense, we say that humans live together [*syzēn*], unlike cattle that share the pasture together . . .

Friendship is, in fact, a community; and as we are with respect to ourselves, so we are, as well, with respect to our friends. And as the sensation of existing (*aisthēsis hoti estin*) is desirable for us, so would it also be for our friends.

5.

We are dealing here with an extraordinarily dense passage, because Aristotle enunciates a few theses of first philosophy that will not recur in this form in any of his other writings:

1. There is a sensation of pure being, an *aisthēsis* of existence. Aristotle repeats this point several times by mobilizing the technical vocabulary of ontology: *aisthanometha hoti esmen, aisthēsis hoti estin*: the *hoti estin* is existence—the *quod est*—insofar as it opposes essence (*quid est, ti estin*).
2. This sensation of existing is in itself sweet (*hēdys*).
3. There is an equivalence between being and living, between sensing one's existence and sensing one's life. It is a decided anticipation of the Nietzschean thesis that states: "Being—we have no other way of imagining it apart from 'living.'"[3] (An analogous, if more ge-

neric, claim can be found in *De anima* 415b13: "Being, for the living, is life.")

4. Within this sensation of existing there is another sensation, specifically a human one, that takes the form of a joint sensation, or a con-sent (*synaisthanesthai*) with the existence of the friend. *Friendship is the instance of this "con-sentiment" of the existence of the friend within the sentiment of existence itself.* But this means that friendship has an ontological and politi cal status. The sensation of being is, in fact, always already both divided and "con-divided" [*con-divisa*, shared], and friendship is the name of this "con-division." This sharing has nothing whatsoever to do with the modern chimera of intersubjectivity, the relationship between subjects. Rather, being itself is divided here, it is nonidentical to itself, and so the I and the friend are the two faces, or the two poles, of this con-division or sharing.

5. The friend is, therefore, an other self, a *heteros autos*. Through its Latin translation, *alter ego*, this expression has had a long history, which cannot be reconstructed here. But it is important to note that the Greek formulation is much more pregnant with meaning than what is understood by the modern ear. First and foremost, Greek, like Latin, has two terms for alterity: *allos* (lat. *alius*) is generic alterity, while *heteros* (lat. *alter*) is alterity in the sense of an opposition between two, as in heterogeneity. Moreover, the Latin *ego* is not an exact translation of *autos*, which means "self." The friend is not an other I, but an otherness immanent to selfness, a becoming other of

> the self. The point at which I perceive my existence as sweet, my sensation goes through a con-senting which dislocates and deports my sensation toward the friend, toward the other self. Friendship is this desubjectification at the very heart of the most intimate sensation of the self.

6.

At this point we can take the ontological status of friendship in Aristotle's philosophy as a given. Friendship belongs to *prōtē philosophia*, since the same experience, the same "sensation" of being, is what is at stake in both. One therefore comprehends why "friend" cannot be a real predicate added to a concept in order to be admitted to a certain class. Using modern terms, one could say that "friend" is an existential and not a categorial. But this existential—which, as such, cannot be conceptualized—is still infused with an intensity that charges it with something like a political potentiality. This intensity is the *syn*, the "con-" or "with," that divides, disseminates, and renders sharable (actually, it has always been shared) the same sensation, the same sweetness of existing.

That this sharing or con-division has, for Aristotle, a political significance is implied in a passage in the text that I have already analyzed and to which it is opportune to return:

> One must therefore also "con-sent" that his friend exists, and this happens by living together [*syzēn*] and by sharing acts and thoughts in common [*koinōnein*]. In this sense, we say that humans live together, unlike cattle that share the pasture together.

The expression that we have rendered as "share the pasture together" is *en tōi autōi nemesthai.* But the verb *nemō*—which, as you know, is rich with political implications (it is enough to think of the deverbative *nomos*)—also means in the middle voice "partaking," and so the Aristotelian expression could simply stand for "partaking in the same." It is essential at any rate that the human community comes to be defined here, in contrast to the animal community, through a living together (*syzēn* acquires here a technical meaning) that is not defined by the participation in a common substance, but rather by a sharing that is purely existential, a con-division that, so to speak, lacks an object: friendship, as the con-sentiment of the pure fact of being. Friends do not share some*thing* (birth, law, place, taste): they are shared by the experience of friendship. Friendship is the con-division that precedes every division, since what has to be shared is the very fact of existence, life itself. And it is this sharing without an object, this original con-senting, that constitutes the political.

How this originary political "synaesthesia" became over time the consensus to which democracies today entrust their fate in this last, extreme, and exhausted phase of their evolution, is, as they say, another story, which I leave you to reflect on.

§ What Is the Contemporary?

1.

The question that I would like to inscribe on the threshold of this seminar is: "Of whom and of what are we contemporaries?" And, first and foremost, "What does it mean to be contemporary?" In the course of this seminar, we shall have occasion to read texts whose authors are many centuries removed from us, as well as others that are more recent, or even very recent. At all events, it is essential that we manage to be in some way contemporaries of these texts. The "time" of our seminar is contemporariness, and as such it demands [*esige*] to be contemporary with the texts and the authors it examines. To a great degree, the success of this seminar may be evaluated by its—by our—capacity to measure up to this exigency.

An initial, provisional indication that may orient our search for an answer to the above questions

comes from Nietzsche. Roland Barthes summarizes this answer in a note from his lectures at the Collège de France: "The contemporary is the untimely." In 1874, Friedrich Nietzsche, a young philologist who had worked up to that point on Greek texts and had two years earlier achieved an unexpected celebrity with *The Birth of Tragedy*, published the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, the *Untimely Meditations*, a work in which he tries to come to terms with his time and take a position with regards to the present. "This meditation is itself untimely," we read at the beginning of the second meditation, "because it seeks to understand as an illness, a disability, and a defect something which this epoch is quite rightly proud of, that is to say, its historical culture, because I believe that we are all consumed by the fever of history and we should at least realize it."[1] In other words, Nietzsche situates his own claim for "relevance" [*attualità*], his "contemporariness" with respect to the present, in a disconnection and out-of-jointness. Those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. They are thus in this sense irrelevant [*inattuale*]. But precisely because of this condition, precisely through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time.

Naturally, this noncoincidence, this "dys-chrony," does not mean that the contemporary is a person who lives in another time, a nostalgic who feels more at home in the Athens of Pericles or in the Paris of Robespierre and the marquis de Sade than in the city and the time in which he lives. An intelligent man can despise his time, while knowing that he nevertheless irrevocably belongs to it, that he cannot escape his own time.

Contemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is *that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism.* Those who coincide too well with the epoch, those who are perfectly tied to it in every respect, are not contemporaries, precisely because they do not manage to see it; they are not able to firmly hold their gaze on it.

2.

In 1923, Osip Mandelstam writes a poem entitled "The Century" (though the Russian word *vek* also means "epoch" or "age"). It does not contain a reflection on the century, but rather a reflection on the relation between the poet and his time, that is to say, on contemporariness. Not "the century," but, according

to the words that open the first verse, "my century" or "my age" (*vek moi*):

> My century, my beast, who will manage
> to look inside your eyes
> and weld together with his own blood
> the vertebrae of two centuries?

The poet, who must pay for his contemporariness with his life, is he who must firmly lock his gaze onto the eyes of his century-beast, who must weld with his own blood the shattered backbone of time. The two centuries, the two times, are not only, as has been suggested, the nineteenth and twentieth, but also, more to the point, the length of a single individual's life (remember that *saeculum* originally means the period of a person's life) and the collective historical period that we call in this case the twentieth century. As we shall learn in the last strophe of the poem, the backbone of this age is shattered. The poet, insofar as he is contemporary, *is* this fracture, *is* at once that which impedes time from composing itself and the blood that must suture this break or this wound. The parallelism between the time and the vertebrae of the creature, on the one hand, and the time and the vertebrae of the age, on the other, constitutes one of the essential themes of the poem:

> So long as the creature lives
> it must carry forth its vertebrae,

as the waves play along
with an invisible spine.
Like a child's tender cartilage
is the century of the newborn earth.

The other great theme—and this, like the preceding one, is also an image of contemporariness—is that of the shattering, as well as of the welding, of the age's vertebrae, both of which are the work of a single individual (in this case the poet):

To wrest the century away from bondage
so as to start the world anew
one must tie together with a flute
the knees of all the knotted days.

That this is an impossible task—or at any rate a paradoxical one—is proven by the following strophe with which the poem concludes. Not only does the epoch-beast have broken vertebrae, but *vek*, the newborn age, wants to turn around (an impossible gesture for a person with a broken backbone) in order to contemplate its own tracks and, in this way, to display its demented face:

But your backbone has been shattered
O my wondrous, wretched century.
With a senseless smile
like a beast that was once limber
you look back, weak and cruel,
to contemplate your own tracks.

3.

The poet—the contemporary—must firmly hold his gaze on his own time. But what does he who sees his time actually see? What is this demented grin on the face of his age? I would like at this point to propose a second definition of contemporariness: The contemporary is he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness. All eras, for those who experience contemporariness, are obscure. The contemporary is precisely the person who knows how to see this obscurity, who is able to write by dipping his pen in the obscurity of the present. But what does it mean, "to see an obscurity," "to perceive the darkness"?

The neurophysiology of vision suggests an initial answer. What happens when we find ourselves in a place deprived of light, or when we close our eyes? What is the darkness that we see then? Neurophysiologists tell us that the absence of light activates a series of peripheral cells in the retina called "off-cells." When activated, these cells produce the particular kind of vision that we call darkness. Darkness is not, therefore, a privative notion (the simple absence of light, or something like nonvision) but rather the result of the activity of the "off-cells," a product of our own retina. This means, if we now return to our thesis on the darkness

of contemporariness, that to perceive this darkness is not a form of inertia or of passivity, but rather implies an activity and a singular ability. In our case, this ability amounts to a neutralization of the lights that come from the epoch in order to discover its obscurity, its special darkness, which is not, however, separable from those lights.

The ones who can call themselves contemporary are only those who do not allow themselves to be blinded by the lights of the century, and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows in those lights, of their intimate obscurity. Having said this much, we have nevertheless still not addressed our question. Why should we be at all interested in perceiving the obscurity that emanates from the epoch? Is darkness not precisely an anonymous experience that is by definition impenetrable; something that is not directed at us and thus cannot concern us? On the contrary, the contemporary is the person who perceives the darkness of his time as something that concerns him, as something that never ceases to engage him. Darkness is something that—more than any light—turns directly and singularly toward him. The contemporary is the one whose eyes are struck by the beam of darkness that comes from his own time.

4.

In the firmament that we observe at night, the stars shine brightly, surrounded by a thick darkness. Since the number of galaxies and luminous bodies in the universe is almost infinite, the darkness that we see in the sky is something that, according to scientists, demands an explanation. It is precisely the explanation that contemporary astrophysics gives for this darkness that I would now like to discuss. In an expanding universe, the most remote galaxies move away from us at a speed so great that their light is never able to reach us. What we perceive as the darkness of the heavens is this light that, though traveling toward us, cannot reach us, since the galaxies from which the light originates move away from us at a velocity greater than the speed of light.

To perceive, in the darkness of the present, this light that strives to reach us but cannot—this is what it means to be contemporary. As such, contemporaries are rare. And for this reason, to be contemporary is, first and foremost, a question of courage, because it means being able not only to firmly fix your gaze on the darkness of the epoch, but also to perceive in this darkness a light that, while directed toward us, infinitely distances itself from us. In other words, it is like being on time for an appointment that one cannot but miss.

This is the reason why the present that contemporariness perceives has broken vertebrae. Our time, the present, is in fact not only the most distant: it cannot in any way reach us. Its backbone is broken and we find ourselves in the exact point of this fracture. This is why we are, despite everything, contemporaries. It is important to realize that the appointment that is in question in contemporariness does not simply take place in chronological time: it is something that, working within chronological time, urges, presses, and transforms it. And this urgency is the untimeliness, the anachronism that permits us to grasp our time in the form of a "too soon" that is also a "too late"; of an "already" that is also a "not yet." Moreover, it allows us to recognize in the obscurity of the present the light that, without ever being able to reach us, is perpetually voyaging toward us.

5.

A good example of this special experience of time that we call contemporariness is fashion. Fashion can be defined as the introduction into time of a peculiar discontinuity that divides it according to its relevance or irrelevance, its being-in-fashion or no-longer-being-in-fashion. This caesura, as subtle as it may be, is remarkable in the sense that those who need to make

note of it do so infallibly; and in so doing they attest to their own being in fashion. But if we try to objectify and fix this caesura within chronological time, it reveals itself as ungraspable. In the first place, the "now" of fashion, the instant in which it comes into being, is not identifiable via any kind of chronometer. Is this "now" perhaps the moment in which the fashion designer conceives of the general concept, the nuance that will define the new style of the clothes? Or is it the moment when the fashion designer conveys the concept to his assistants, and then to the tailor who will sew the prototype? Or, rather, is it the moment of the fashion show, when the clothes are worn by the only people who are always and only in fashion, the *mannequins*, or models; those who nonetheless, precisely for this reason, are never truly in fashion? Because in this last instance, the being in fashion of the "style" will depend on the fact that the people of flesh and blood, rather than the *mannequins* (those sacrificial victims of a faceless god), will recognize it as such and choose that style for their own wardrobe.

The time of fashion, therefore, constitutively anticipates itself and consequently is also always too late. It always takes the form of an ungraspable threshold between a "not yet" and a "no more." It is quite probable that, as the theologians suggest, this constellation depends on the fact that fashion, at least in our

culture, is a theological signature of clothing, which derives from the first piece of clothing that was sewn by Adam and Eve after the Original Sin, in the form of a loincloth woven from fig leaves. (To be precise, the clothes that we wear derive, not from this vegetal loincloth, but from the *tunicae pelliceae*, the clothes made from animals' skin that God, according to Genesis 3:21, gave to our progenitors as a tangible symbol of sin and death in the moment he expelled them from Paradise.) In any case, whatever the reason may be, the "now," the *kairos* of fashion is ungraspable: the phrase, "I am in this instant in fashion" is contradictory, because the moment in which the subject pronounces it, he is already out of fashion. So, being in fashion, like contemporariness, entails a certain "ease," a certain quality of being out-of-phase or out-of-date, in which one's relevance includes within itself a small part of what lies outside of itself, a shade of *démodé*, of being out of fashion. It is in this sense that it was said of an elegant lady in nineteenth-century Paris, "Elle est contemporaine de tout le monde," "She is everybody's contemporary."

But the temporality of fashion has another character that relates it to contemporariness. Following the same gesture by which the present divides time according to a "no more" and a "not yet," it also establishes a peculiar relationship with these "other times"—certainly

with the past, and perhaps also with the future. Fashion can therefore "cite," and in this way make relevant again, any moment from the past (the 1920s, the 1970s, but also the neoclassical or empire style). It can therefore tie together that which it has inexorably divided—recall, re-evoke, and revitalize that which it had declared dead.

6.

There is also another aspect to this special relationship with the past.

Contemporariness inscribes itself in the present by marking it above all as archaic. Only he who perceives the indices and signatures of the archaic in the most modern and recent can be contemporary. "Archaic" means close to the *arkhē*, that is to say, the origin. But the origin is not only situated in a chronological past: it is contemporary with historical becoming and does not cease to operate within it, just as the embryo continues to be active in the tissues of the mature organism, and the child in the psychic life of the adult. Both this distancing and nearness, which define contemporariness, have their foundation in this proximity to the origin that nowhere pulses with more force than in the present. Whoever has seen the skyscrapers of New York for the first time arriving from the ocean

at dawn has immediately perceived this archaic *facies* of the present, this contiguousness with the ruin that the atemporal images of September 11th have made evident to all.

Historians of literature and of art know that there is a secret affinity between the archaic and the modern, not so much because the archaic forms seem to exercise a particular charm on the present, but rather because the key to the modern is hidden in the immemorial and the prehistoric. Thus, the ancient world in its decline turns to the primordial so as to rediscover itself. The avant-garde, which has lost itself over time, also pursues the primitive and the archaic. It is in this sense that one can say that the entry point to the present necessarily takes the form of an archeology; an archeology that does not, however, regress to a historical past, but returns to that part within the present that we are absolutely incapable of living. What remains unlived therefore is incessantly sucked back toward the origin, without ever being able to reach it. The present is nothing other than this unlived element in everything that is lived. That which impedes access to the present is precisely the mass of what for some reason (its traumatic character, its excessive nearness) we have not managed to live. The attention to this "unlived" is the life of the contemporary. And to be contempo-

rary means in this sense to return to a present where we have never been.

7.

Those who have tried to think about contemporariness have been able to do so only by splitting it up into several times, by introducing into time an essential dishomogeneity. Those who say "*my* time" actually divide time—they inscribe into it a caesura and a discontinuity. But precisely by means of this caesura, this interpolation of the present into the inert homogeneity of linear time, the contemporary puts to work a special relationship between the different times. If, as we have seen, it is the contemporary who has broken the vertebrae of his time (or, at any rate, who has perceived in it a fault line or a breaking point), then he also makes of this fracture a meeting place, or an encounter between times and generations. There is nothing more exemplary, in this sense, than Paul's gesture at the point in which he experiences and announces to his brothers the contemporariness par excellence that is messianic time, the being-contemporary with the Messiah, which he calls precisely the "time of the now" (*ho nyn kairos*). Not only is this time chronologically indeterminate (the *parousia*, the return of Christ that signals the end is certain and near, though not at a calculable

point), but it also has the singular capacity of putting every instant of the past in direct relationship with itself, of making every moment or episode of biblical history a prophecy or a prefiguration (Paul prefers the term *typos*, figure) of the present (thus Adam, through whom humanity received death and sin, is a "type" or figure of the Messiah, who brings about redemption and life to men).

This means that the contemporary is not only the one who, perceiving the darkness of the present, grasps a light that can never reach its destiny; he is also the one who, dividing and interpolating time, is capable of transforming it and putting it in relation with other times. He is able to read history in unforeseen ways, to "cite it" according to a necessity that does not arise in any way from his will, but from an exigency to which he cannot not respond. It is as if this invisible light that is the darkness of the present cast its shadow on the past, so that the past, touched by this shadow, acquired the ability to respond to the darkness of the now. It is something along these lines that Michel Foucault probably had in mind when he wrote that his historical investigations of the past are only the shadow cast by his theoretical interrogation of the present. Similarly, Walter Benjamin writes that the historical index contained in the images of the past indicates that these images may achieve legibility only

in a determined moment of their history. It is on our ability to respond to this exigency and to this shadow, to be contemporaries not only of our century and the "now," but also of its figures in the texts and documents of the past, that the success or failure of our seminar depends.

Notes

What Is an Apparatus?

1. Translators' note: We follow here the common English translation of Foucault's term *dispositif* as "apparatus." In everyday use, the French word can designate any sort of device. Agamben points out that the torture machine from Kafka's *In the Penal Colony* is called an *Apparat*.

2. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. C. Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 194–96.

3. Jean Hyppolite, *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of History*, trans. B. Harris and J. B. Spurlock (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 21.

4. Ibid., 23.

5. Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. D. F. Krell (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 325.

6. Translators' note: See *Théorie du Bloom* (Paris: Fabrique, 2000), by the French collective Tiqqun. The allusion is to Leopold Bloom, the main character in James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

The Friend

1. Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 1, trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 465.

2. Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. G. Collins (London: Verso, 1997).

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