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## **Renunciation: Heidegger, Agamben, Blanchot, Vattimo**

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1.

In the essay ‘Das Wort’ (‘Words’) in *On the Way to Language*,<sup>i</sup> Martin Heidegger speaks of ‘renunciation’ (*Verzicht*) as the necessary route towards experiencing that which remains otherwise invisible and unsayable. Heidegger defines the unsayable alternatively as the essence, the origin, Being, *aletheia*. The confrontation with and the conceptualization of origin and renunciation has characterized most of modern and contemporary philosophy and literature, from Heidegger’s contemporary Walter Benjamin to authors and philosophers such as Baudelaire, Kafka, Rilke, Blanchot, Caproni and Agamben. Yet, there remains a large degree of confusion and ambiguity as to the philosophical significance of origin, as well as its supposed privileged entrance, renunciation. Is renunciation the passivity of a cultural state, a habitus between action and negativity; or is it, rather, the deliberate production of a language and of a subjectivity that know and experience otherwise? This article interrogates some of these issues by focusing on Heidegger’s articulation of *Verzicht* and the ways in which his articulation might have influenced authors writing in his wake such as Agamben, Blanchot and Vattimo.

In the ambit of philosophical discourse the discussion of renunciation and its correlation to origin is not the sole precinct of modern and contemporary thought. One of its most enduring articulations is found in the conceptualization of

philosophical exile expounded by Plotinus through the idea of the flight of one alone into one. '*Phygé monou pros monon*', which is usually translated as 'the flight of one alone into one',<sup>ii</sup> is the chosen departure of the philosopher from the life of the polis – a separation that in antiquity was conceived as a necessary step towards a proper contemplative life. For Plotinus, and for a long and important tradition of thinkers who followed in his footsteps, including the Neoplatonists, a life dedicated to thought could only be achieved through self-imposed exclusion from the community. This is the mental enclosure in which writers and philosophers accept they must immerse themselves to achieve an experience of heightened sensitivity and concentration. It is in this sense that the separation from the community described by Plotinus becomes a self-enforced renunciation and exile.

The flight of one into one, the Plotinian steering of philosophers towards a purity uncontaminated by other living presences, is also the ultimate attempt to reconnect with the Platonic idea of subjectivity (as if in philosophical exile the subject could be its own idea). For Plotinus, the production of philosophical thought is also the cipher of the conjunction of 'to be' and 'being', and the moment at which 'being' gives way to 'to be', to the experience of the 'idea' of subjectivity as life. The Plotinian exile is, therefore, a going home, a return journey from 'being with others' to 'being with oneself'. It is a process that rewinds the disclosure of subjectivity and places subjectivity back in the space of concealment. This appears to be the opposite route to the one taken by Heidegger, in so far as the experience of Plotinian exile equates with the experience of closure, and with a subjectivity that turns its back on the will to risk exposure and thrownness. We confront two different notions of origin and two different ideas of renunciation.

The modern and contemporary conceptualization of renunciation is more indebted to the notions of absence and ambiguity, indistinction and suspension than to the Plotinian sense of the presence of a strong idea within which the origin rests. It is in this sense that the narrative work of Kafka is quintessentially modern, the very emblem of a literary and philosophical condition that could be pertinently summarized by Kafka's famous saying that 'while there is no end of hope, this is not for us.'<sup>iii</sup> The work of Heidegger, as we shall see in this essay, has had a major role in promoting a discussion of origin, whose tangibility remains blurred within the indistinction and mutual appropriation of authenticity and inauthenticity. It is from this position that Heidegger can commence his attack on Western metaphysics, and from which Gianni Vattimo inherits his idea and project of 'weak thought'. Derrida's deconstruction, as we all know, is also indebted to Heidegger's gradual dismantling of origin and truth.

But in order to reconnect renunciation, origin and language – the three main vectors of Heidegger's thought, and of this article – it is also useful to remind ourselves of Walter Benjamin's early essays on language, and especially the one on the task of the translator and on the relation between language as such and the language of man, 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers' of 1923 ('The Task of the Translator') and 'Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen' of 1916 ('On Language as Such and on the Language of Man').<sup>iv</sup> Apart from the strong messianic element of these two essays, the main aspects of Benjamin's thought revolve around the discussion of origin and its loss through a reconceptualization of language. Benjamin's distinction between language as such and the language of man (communicative language) in the essay by the same name is not too dissimilar from Heidegger's take on language in *On the Way to Language*. Both Benjamin and

Heidegger, although for different reasons, propose a new experience of language the purpose of which is to regain the very singularity of language as opposed to its instrumentality. This, according to them, will initiate a process of approach to the origin. Of course, their relative understanding of origin is different, but this is not the point that I wish to make here. I want to stress instead the process through which they prepare their conceptualization. If I am not incorrect, both Benjamin and Heidegger invoke renunciation or its cognates, such as suspension.

For Benjamin and Heidegger language has to write itself over ‘pure language’ in order to be *language*. As the subject embarks on the process of translation or renunciation, language must retrace its trajectory backward, first by rewinding itself, by unlearning itself. There is no other way, since the other option, the writing of pure language over language, is impossible. Language’s going back to its alleged purity can never be completed, and its movement is always destined to remain underway, firmly located in the space of reverberating echoes. The wholeness of the self is irredeemably broken by the opposition between a before and an after, but also rehabilitated as potential in the space of indistinction.

If language constructs, it also deconstructs. Language constructs and deconstructs subjectivities, identities and origin just as subjectivities, identities and origin construct and deconstruct language. What is less clear, but potentially more significant, is how language speaks at the threshold of indistinguishability where construction and deconstruction cannot be told apart, and how subjectivities, identities and origin operate as they come to this threshold.

Most of modern production (the language of modernity) is predicated upon the notions of suspension and renunciation, and upon the creative power of ambiguity and antinomy. Examples abound. Discussing the work of Charles Baudelaire, in

*Infancy and History* Agamben claimed that: ‘In Baudelaire, a man expropriated from experience (*espropriato dell’esperienza*) exposes himself to the force of shock. Poetry responds to the expropriation of experience by converting this expropriation into a reason for surviving and making the inexperience its normal condition (*facendo dell’inesperibile la sua condizione normale*). In this perspective, the search for the “new” (*nuovo*) does not appear as the search for a new object of experience; instead, it implies an eclipse and a suspension of experience (*implica al contrario, un’eclisse e una sospensione dell’esperienza*).’<sup>v</sup>

But what exactly does ‘a suspension of experience’ mean, and more importantly, what kind of language and literature are ‘a language and a literature of suspension’?

It is worth reflecting further on Agamben’s emphasis on the suspension of experience. In chapter three of *Infancy and History*, under the sub-heading ‘La poesia moderna e l’esperienza’ (‘Modern Poetry and Experience’), we read:

... modern poetry from Baudelaire onwards is seen to be founded not on new experience, but on an unprecedented lack of experience (*una mancanza di esperienza senza precedenti*). Hence the boldness (*disinvoltura*) with which Baudelaire can place shock at the centre of his artistic work. It is experience that best affords us protection from surprises (*protezione dalle sorprese*), and the production of shock always implies a gap (*falla*) in experience. To experience something means divesting it of novelty (*novità*), neutralizing its shock potential (*neutralizzare il suo potenziale di choc*).<sup>vi</sup>

The word ‘shock’ occupies a central and commanding position in this important passage. It appears to be in close relation to ‘surprise’ and opposed to experience. ‘Shock’ is the ‘surprise’ that upsets experience and relegates experience to the background, puts it out of sight, renders it useless and impracticable. It is not that experience disappears because of exposure to ‘shock’. Rather, experience becomes devoid of meaning, empty, voiceless. It speaks no more, and with its silence comes the *nakedness* of the subject and, at least for Kafka (as Blanchot reminds us, quoting him), the beginning of writing: ‘*Intrépide, nu, puissant, surprenant comme je ne le suis d’habitude que lorsque j’écris*’ (‘brave, *naked*, powerful, surprising as I am usually only when I write.’)<sup>vii</sup>

The notion of shock, which as we have seen is so central to the modern experience of poetry, is not without analogy to what, in *What is Philosophy?*, Heidegger defines as astonishment. For Heidegger, astonishment is an act of self-restraint, where restraint is the active refusal to accept that which is pre-arranged and pre-ordained, pre-packaged, arbitrarily complete. Heidegger invites us instead to break this artificial, un-philosophical and un-poetical reading of life, to destroy it in order to pave the way, the path, to seeing and to saying it ‘otherwise’ (*anders*). It is in this sense that suspension and renunciation as we have articulated them so far must be understood.<sup>viii</sup>

Suspension and renunciation are not therefore devoid of *energeia* (intended here in the Aristotelian sense of actuality), but rather the opposite; they will the suspension of an unproblematic acceptance of life, indeed they renounce it. The act of deliberate renunciation as the necessary route toward a new experience of language – which Heidegger defines as a process of learning – is the philosophical juncture at which the German philosopher is able to reconfigure renunciation as a profoundly

positive and productive conceptual tool. The first section of this article will attempt to shed further light on Heidegger's discussion of renunciation, especially in relation to his work *On the Way to Language*.

Heidegger's thought has informed a strand of critical thought, defined as active passivity,<sup>ix</sup> notable proponents of which are Giorgio Agamben, Maurice Blanchot and Emmanuel Levinas. The second section of this article will be devoted to illustrating some of the conceptual connections between Heidegger, Blanchot and Agamben, as well as introducing some characteristics peculiar to the French and Italian thinkers. For reasons of space, the investigation of Levinas as well as the broader analysis of the impacts that renunciation has had on modern literature, including Baudelaire, Caproni, Celan, Kafka and Rilke, will be the topic of another article to come.

Finally, the article sets out to indicate the degree to which Heidegger's interrogation of renunciation has impacted on Gianni Vattimo's philosophy, and not only in the realm of hermeneutics, but also in those of ethics and politics.

## 2.

The reflection on language as 'the house of Being' permeates Heidegger's work from 'Letter on Humanism' (1946) onwards.<sup>x</sup> Heidegger returns insistently to this reflection, especially with regard to poetic language, and the affinities between poetic language and thinking. Heidegger is said to believe that philosophy does not begin with thought, but with astonishment, surprise, errancy;<sup>xi</sup> in a word, with poetry. And in fact, the entrance into philosophy through poetry gradually becomes Heidegger's favourite route to thinking and for thinking. It is no accident, then, that his attention and investigation of poetry increase dramatically from the mid- 1930s, especially from the 1934–1935 lectures on Hölderlin's hymns to Germany and the Rhein.<sup>xii</sup> It is



in the poetry of Hölderlin first, and later in that of Rilke, George and Trakl that Heidegger looks for that unique trigger to his thought. It does not come as a surprise either if, in the same period, also known as *Kehre*, Heidegger's dealings with pre-Socratic thought, especially Parmenides, Heraclitus, Anaximander, assume the character of poetic readings. It is also perhaps because of Heidegger's penchant for poetry – and of course, because of his 'poetic' style of philosophizing – that some commentators have labelled him, and not always favourably, a poet rather than a philosopher.<sup>xiii</sup>

In the collection of lectures/essays delivered in 1957–1958 and brought under the title of *On the Way to Language* (*Unterwegs zur Sprache*) we find a text which is of particular interest in the discussion of the relation between poetry and thinking. I am referring to 'Words' ('Das Wort'). This lecture is a close reading of a poem by Stefan George, 'The Word' ('Das Wort'). It is also a further attempt on the part of Heidegger to think through the meaning and significance of the statement 'language is the house of Being' that he made in *Letter on Humanism*.

'Words' starts with a puzzling reference to a place (*Ort*): 'From where we are now (*von diesem Ort*)', writes Heidegger, 'let us for a moment think what Hölderlin asks in his elegy "Bread and Wine"...' <sup>xiv</sup> The first inclination is to interpret 'place' as the locus where the thinking is occurring, in this case Heidegger's *On the Way to Language*. We look at the book to see which essay precedes 'Words'. In the English translation the essay in question is 'On the Way to Language', which is therefore assumed as the place from which the thinking through of Hölderlin's elegy, and Heidegger's subsequent investigation, ought to start. The two lectures seem to dovetail rather nicely since the last two pages of 'On the Way to language' engage explicitly with the relation between language and Being in ways that are germane to

‘Words’. Not only does Heidegger insist on the connection language/Being, but he explains it by arguing that ‘Language is the house of Being because language, as Saying, is the mode of Appropriation.’<sup>xv</sup>

Through Saying language appropriates Being by keeping being, the thing, present. But in order to achieve the presencing of being – Heidegger also calls this presencing ‘face to face’ (*das Gegen-einander-über*), whose resemblance with unconcealment and *aletheia* is not without significance – humans must attain a special relation to language, which also implies a transformation of language. ‘In order to pursue in thought the being of language and to say of it what is its own, a transformation of language is needed which we can neither compel nor invent.’<sup>xvi</sup> In other words, through Saying language guards being. But in order to turn this concealment in language into an unconcealment in language, Heidegger invites humans to accomplish a particular exposure to language, which requires a transformation of the relation with language. Language must be approached differently.

It is rather instructive that in order to bring his argument to a close Heidegger chooses to quote a passage from Wilhelm von Humboldt that seems to contradict his entire conceptualization. Here is the quotation: ‘Without altering the language as regards its sounds and even less its forms and laws, *time* – by a growing development of ideas, increased capacity of sustained thinking, and a more penetrating sensibility – will often introduce into language what it did not possess before.’<sup>xvii</sup>

Everything seems to fit apart from the last significant statement: ‘time will often introduce into language what it did not possess before’, which means that for Humboldt being is not at home in language. It might be introduced into it as long as changes of knowledge and sensibility are brought to bear on language. What kind of

place is this from which Heidegger farewells us to greet us again at the following station as if Humboldt had never been mentioned?

3.

And, in fact, this is not the *place*. If one looks at the German edition of *Unterwegs zur Sprache* one soon realizes that ‘Das Wort’ is preceded by ‘Das Wesen der Sprache’ (‘The Nature of Language’) and followed by ‘Der Weg zur Sprache’ (‘On the Way to Language’). This is the original order of the three lectures, which has been radically altered in the English translation for reasons about which one can only speculate. Was it perhaps thought that ‘The Nature of Language’ and ‘Words’ were too similar, the latter being almost a repetition of the former? Would perhaps the reader in English object less to the book should the uncanny similarities between ‘the Nature’ and ‘Words’ be mitigated by interspersing them with ‘On the Way’?

In ‘The Nature of Language’ Heidegger sets the tone for the three lectures on language, which he considers as individual parts of a whole. In ‘The Nature of Language’ he expressly says that the purpose of these lectures is to ‘undergo an experience with language’<sup>xviii</sup> which might be ‘helpful to us to rid ourselves of the habit of always hearing only what we already understand’.<sup>xix</sup> Heidegger wishes to experience, and perhaps write, a language, whose relation with him is different from the one he has with traditional – one might be tempted to say metaphysical – language. In other words, Heidegger intends to experience a meeting with a language which, remaining the same, says things differently. It is in this sense that the preposition ‘a’ before language is strictly incorrect. This is not another language, it is instead the same language that relates to us, and us to it, differently. Heidegger explains this further: ‘In experiences which we undergo *with* language, language

itself brings itself to language. One would think that this happens anyway, any time anyone speaks. Yet at whatever time and in whatever way we speak a language, language itself never has the floor.’<sup>xx</sup>

As we now see, in Heidegger’s terminology ‘a language’ is not language. Language is that which speaks ‘itself as language’. When does this happen? ‘Curiously enough’, answers Heidegger, ‘when we cannot find the right word for something that concerns us, carries us away, oppresses or encourages us.’<sup>xxi</sup>

As an example of the coming of language to itself, Heidegger discusses Stefan George’s poem ‘Das Wort’, whose final line reads: ‘Where words break off no thing may be’ (*Kein ding sei wo das wort gebricht*). What is at stake here is precisely what Heidegger draws attention to when he refers to the breaking of words in the face of ‘something that concerns us’.

This is the *place* from where Heidegger can continue his analysis of George’s poem, together with his investigation of thinking and poetry. As Heidegger tells us, Stefan George first published ‘Words’ ‘in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> series of “*Blätter für die Kunst*” in 1919’.<sup>xxii</sup> He later included it ‘in the last volume of poems published in his life-time, called *Das Neue Reich*’.<sup>xxiii</sup>

George’s poem is about the poetic journey, and the experience of confronting the mystery of life, in the hope of giving this mystery concreteness through language. But this hope is destined to remain unfulfilled since not even the depth of poetry, its magic and inspiration, can say the unsayable. So while the poet holds the mystery in his hands, waiting for poetic language to transform the mystery into the reality of a presence, the mystery slips away, as the poet learns that there is no word that can ‘enfold these depths.’ The last two stanzas read: ‘And Straight it vanished from my hand,/ The treasure never graced my land.../ I then sadly learned renunciation:/Where

word breaks off no thing may be.’ (*Worauf es meiner hand entrann/ Und nie mein land den schatz gewann.../ So lernt ich traurig den verzicht:/ Kein ding sei wo das wort gebricht*).

Heidegger’s investigation focuses on the last two lines, and especially on the notion of renunciation (*Verzicht*). The question and the philosophical problem that Heidegger engages with is whether this renunciation simply leaves the poet empty-handed in the face of such negativity and emptiness. What takes place in the following pages is a great feat of rhetorical and philosophical bravura through which Heidegger turns the notion of renunciation from its conventional negative meaning into a positive one. This reversal of fortune might or might not do justice to George’s poem, but it certainly says a great deal about Heidegger’s philosophy. In other words, while the exegetical interrogation of George’s poem is far from being exhaustive, the conceptual conclusions at which Heidegger arrives are striking and of utmost importance, especially in relation to a philosophical trend characterizing the second half of the twentieth century, including the work of Blanchot and Agamben.<sup>xxiv</sup>

But how is it that ‘renunciation’ becomes positive, and therefore ontologically relevant and consubstantial to Heidegger’s mode of thinking? The key to this question must be looked for in the verb that accompanies renunciation in George’s poem: ‘to learn’ (*So lernt ich traurig den verzicht*). According to Heidegger the poet in ‘Das Wort’ is not simply renouncing, he has learned renunciation.<sup>xxv</sup> To Heidegger the difference between ‘renunciation’ and ‘learning renunciation’ is of paramount importance. To him learning means ‘to become knowing’,<sup>xxvi</sup> that is, to enter a process of active engagement with thinking, and, in this particular case, with language. This process Heidegger equates with a journey, and with a movement of discovery. The subject places himself underway through the action of learning. But

what is it that the poet learns? He learns renunciation. For Heidegger, this renunciation translates into the active affirmation of the predisposition to experience language as language. While it is true that the thing remains unsaid, it is also true that it remains close to language, adhering to language unsaying. Heidegger's punch line comes a little later in the essay when, as already discussed, he argues that language's Saying resides precisely in its non-saying:

Because this renunciation is a genuine renunciation, not just a rejection of Saying, not a mere lapse into silence. As self-denial, renunciation remains Saying. It thus preserves the relation to the word. But because the word is shown in a different, higher rule, the relation to the word must undergo a transformation. Saying attains to a different articulation, a different *melos*, a different tone. The poem itself, which tells of renunciation, bears witness to the fact that the poet's renunciation is experienced in this sense – by singing of renunciation.<sup>xxvii</sup>

It is this qualification that allows Heidegger to distinguish between a lower tone of language (the saying with a small 's') and a higher tone of language (the Saying with a capital 'S'). The latter is brought about through a special exposure to language that is achieved through renunciation. It is this availability to be with language as language that, according to Heidegger, brings about the coming 'face to face with what is primevally worthy of thought, and which we can never ponder sufficiently.'<sup>xxviii</sup> Hence the philosopher, thanks to the self-affirmation of the poet through renunciation, can contemplate and listen to the mystery of the word, whose echo resounds in the singing of the language that has renounced its saying.

4.

This is, as Gianni Vattimo has argued, the Heidegger who has been interpreted as the philosopher who experiences Being by withdrawing Being – as opposed to the Heidegger who chases Being in order to reconnect with it.<sup>xxix</sup>

But exactly what is this renunciation? Is it the romantic celebration of losing oneself in contemplation? It might very well sound like a mystical experience in which, paraphrasing a romantic Italian poet, Giacomo Leopardi, the shipwrecking of the subject in the mystery of life becomes sweet. And yet in Heidegger this sweetness is not so much romantic as phenomeno-ontological. As early as the beginning of the 1920s, Heidegger was lecturing about the need to place oneself before the world (*Vorweltlich*),<sup>xxx</sup> which meant to resist, and indeed abolish, reified and culturally institutionalized attitudes to things. He preached the philosophical significance of looking at things as such in order to regain them to their ‘worldliness’.<sup>xxxi</sup> In the lecture *Das Wort*, Heidegger uses a similar term, ‘bethinging’ (*die Bedingnis*), which becomes the higher rule of the word ‘which allows the thing to presence as thing.’<sup>xxxii</sup> In reality, Heidegger never allowed his phenomenological education to wander too far off from him.

Renunciation, suspension, destruction and errancy will recur again and again throughout Heidegger’s work with the same meaning, that is, opening oneself, unconcealing oneself to a higher experience of the world. It is in this sense, for instance, that the philosophical potency of destruction in *What is Philosophy* (1956), resembles the discussion of renunciation:

Destruction does not mean destroying, but dismantling, putting to one side the merely historical assertions about the history of philosophy. Destruction

means – to open our ears, to make ourselves free for what speaks to us in tradition as the Being of being. By listening to this interpellation we attain the correspondence.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

While here destruction initiates a correspondence with the origin of philosophy, in ‘Das Wort’ renunciation introduces a correspondence with the origin of language. Both experiences set the subject free – unconcealed and open – to undergo an experience of the Being of being.

There is a final philosophical element to the lecture ‘Das Wort’ that is worth mentioning, also because it reconnects and dovetails well with the notion of renunciation: I am referring to the notion of potentiality. We have to remember, is Heidegger’s invitation to the reader, that in renouncing the word the poet does not renounce the Saying, he rather renounces himself to the saying. Heidegger follows this clarification by stating that: ‘He has allowed himself – that is, such Saying as will still be possible for him in the future – to be brought face to face with the word’s mystery, the be-thinging of the thing of the word.’<sup>xxxiv</sup> In other words, by suspending the saying, the poet is brought in the proximity of the mystery, face to face with it.

Is renunciation, then, a kind of scholastic bridge between reality and the origin of reality, between the ontic and the ontological, between the end of metaphysics and the origin of metaphysics? What is it that we have learned, that reality is much more than what we think it is? In a sense yes, but also that our relationship with the world is open to an active potentiality, whose affirmation and action are explicitly articulated by Heidegger. At the same time this articulation cannot but generate a topology of indeterminacy which might very well leave renunciation suspended within an opaque, and ultimately unresolved philosophical event.



5.

Those who follow Heidegger and interpret and study his work have long been dealing with this indeterminacy in the attempt to bring it to fruition. Again, it is useful here to remember Vattimo's *pensiero debole* (weak thought) as a concrete example of philosophical intervention. In *pensiero debole* Vattimo investigates the affirmative and potentially constructive elements of what has also been termed the negative 'existentialism' of Heidegger.

Another Italian philosopher who has interpreted Heidegger's philosophy by zeroing in on the notions of suspension, renunciation and destruction is Giorgio Agamben. Agamben's articulation of biopolitics is informed by ontological and aesthetic issues which can be traced back to Heidegger's discussion of potentiality as the renunciation or suspension of Being. As we now know this renunciation does not give Being up, it rather clings to Being by thinking of a higher ontological event.

It is interesting to remember here that in Heidegger, too, we encounter the notion of nakedness (*die Nacktheit*), interpreted as the moment where things are reclaimed to their wordliness, that is, to their state before the world.<sup>xxxv</sup> For Heidegger, nakedness is life as such, phenomenologically pure and unadulterated. Nakedness is the necessary step towards undergoing a higher experience of the world. It is in this sense that renunciation and destruction, unconcealment and truth (*aletheia*) might also be seen as means towards an experience of life as such.

Whoever is familiar with Agamben's thought will immediately recognize strong semantic affinities. Nakedness is also part of Agamben's vocabulary; and so are potentiality, destruction and suspension. What changes, though, is that in Agamben nakedness is not necessarily positive. In fact, within the context of modern politics and society the most vulnerable moments of life are inscribed in nakedness.

According to Agamben in *Homo Sacer* (1995)<sup>xxxvi</sup> nakedness is the life that can be killed with impunity. A naked life is a life that lacks juridical rights and that can therefore be treated by suspending the law, as in cases of emergencies, as Agamben details in *The State of Exception* (2003).<sup>xxxvii</sup> Whereas for Heidegger naked life is the apex of the philosophical endeavour, for Agamben it is a dangerous state between life and non-life, the moment when sovereignty abuses sovereignty by simultaneously retaining juridical legitimacy.

That is, of course, if we look at naked life from the perspective of biopolitics. And yet, biopolitics is only a recent concern of Agamben, starting from *Homo sacer* in 1995. Up to *The Coming Community* (1990)<sup>xxxviii</sup> the discussion of nakedness articulated around the coextensive terms of suchness, suspension and destruction retains the affirmative characteristics that it has in Heidegger. In *Infancy and History* (1978),<sup>xxxix</sup> for instance, Agamben reads the significant and revolutionary experiences of modern literature through the lens of destruction, whose relations to Heidegger's destruction are far from being casual. In *Language and Death* (1982),<sup>xl</sup> Agamben investigates language, especially poetic language, whose similarities with Heidegger's notion of experiencing language as language are explicitly detailed and discussed. In *The Coming Community*, suchness becomes the starting point for a re-evaluation of identity and community through questioning a set of determining conditions of belonging.

Throughout the 1980s, Agamben's significant discussion of potentiality is based on a lucid and original analysis of renunciation, climaxing with his important essay on Melville's *Bartleby*, 'Bartleby, or on Contingency'.<sup>xli</sup>

It is in a more recent book, *The Open* (2002),<sup>xlii</sup> that the affirmative and negative approaches to nakedness appear to coalesce in an interesting as well as

puzzling way. What Agamben attempts in *The Open* is to go further in his discussion of naked life by investigating the process through which life as such might be brought about. *The Open* is a further stage needed to clarify the event of naked life together with its political and ontological implications. When is it, Agamben asks, that human life meets and encounters animal life? Agamben's answer is that the indistinction human/animal is brought about by undergoing an experience of the open, whose definition and discussion revolves around Heidegger's famous lectures of the late 1940's, later included in the volume *Parmenides*.<sup>xliii</sup>

An entry point into Agamben's understanding of the relation between human and animal is the interpretation he provides of Heidegger's reading of the pre-Socratic notion of *aletheia*. This is contrasted with the poetic narration of the open in Rilke's famous eighth *Duino Elegy*. This is not to say that Heidegger and Rilke are Agamben's only references, far from it. As a matter of fact, in *L'aperto* Rilke is mentioned only briefly to clarify Heidegger's thinking. And yet this comparison – and clarification – takes place in one of the most significant chapters of *L'aperto* titled, emblematically, 'l'aperto' ('The Open'). At the beginning of the chapter we read:

More than ten years later [that is, more than ten years after Heidegger's *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*], in full world war, Heidegger returns to this concept [the open]<sup>xliv</sup> and traces a summary genealogy of it. That it arose out of the eighth *Duino Elegy* was, in a certain sense, obvious; but in being adopted as the name of being ('the open, in which every being is freed ... is being itself'), Rilke's term undergoes an essential reversal, which Heidegger seeks to emphasize in every way. For in the eighth *Elegy* it is the animal (*die Kreatur*)

that sees the open ‘with all its eyes,’ in distinct contrast to man, whose eyes have instead been ‘turned backward’ and placed ‘like traps’ around him. While man always has the world before him – always only stands ‘facing opposite’ (*gegenüber*) and never enters the ‘pure space’ of the outside – the animal instead moves in the open, in a ‘nowhere without the no.’<sup>xlv</sup>

The stark differences between Rilke’s poetization of the open on the one hand and Heidegger’s conceptualization of it on the other are not only useful to make sense of Heidegger’s philosophy but also, and more pointedly, to dig deeper into Agamben’s own refinement of Heidegger’s thought. Agamben states clearly that Heidegger found and took the notion of the open in and from Rilke’s eighth *Elegy* (‘That it arose out of the eighth *Duino Elegy* was, in a certain sense, obvious’). And yet this seems to be the only communality since Rilke’s and Heidegger’s reading are diametrically opposed (Heidegger calls this opposition ‘a gaping abyss’ [*eine Kluft*]).<sup>xlvi</sup> Whereas in Rilke the animal sees the open (*Mit allen Augen sieht die Kreatur/ das Offene*)<sup>xlvii</sup> – is in the open – in Heidegger the animal is unaware of it, and therefore shut out from the open. Both Rilke and Heidegger preserve the paradigmatic distinction opposing humans and animals, but while Rilke does it through romantically anthropomorphizing the animal (Heidegger calls it the ‘hominization of the animal’ (*Vermenschung des Tieres*),<sup>xlviii</sup> Heidegger does it by further emphasizing and insisting on the differences. Heidegger’s conceptualization of the open is arrived at through an original rendition of the pre-Socratic notion of *aletheia* (which might be translated as ‘truth’, ‘uncovering’, but also, although more metaphorically, as the ‘fight against oblivion’). Heidegger thinks of *aletheia* as unconcealment, as the freedom ‘to-be-there’. Humans’ freedom, their breaking from the concealed closure

in which all creatures are housed, is, according to Heidegger, achieved through language. Following in the footsteps of Plato and Aristotle Heidegger traces the gap separating humans from animals back to language. It is the human's ability to speak, and therefore to enter a dialogue with tradition, that enables beings to come face-to-face with the open and, ultimately, with Being.

The systematic critique that Heidegger mounts against metaphysics, and that Agamben inherits in *L'aperto*, is that of having mistaken being for Being and, as a result of this, of treating the subject (being) as always already confronting a separate and distinct object (the open). This, according to Heidegger, is the great shortcoming of Western metaphysics, the final results of which are Nietzsche's philosophy and Rilke's poetry (Heidegger also refers to modern metaphysics as 'popular biological metaphysics' [*biologische Populärmetaphysik*]).<sup>xlix</sup> And yet this is precisely the moment at which Heidegger's philosophical project comes to an end. In fact, while it is clear that for Heidegger Western metaphysics has exhausted its purpose, the reasons for metaphysics' decline are not totally clear. More importantly, while Heidegger's theorization of *aletheia* as unconcealment, as that which exposes the open ('*aletheia* is the looking of Being into the open that is lighted by it itself as it itself, the open for the unconcealedness of all appearance (*offen für das Unverborgene alles Erscheinens*)',<sup>1</sup> finds fruitful outcome in Heidegger's analysis of art and poetry (especially in *Holzwege* and *Unterwegs zur Sprache*), its ethical and moral significance remain unthought.

To recapitulate within this context: suspension and destruction do not mean unlearning, forgetting how to speak, and unlearning and forgetting how to be human in order to start from scratch (as in more nihilistic modern experimentations, including Nietzsche's philosophy, Futurism and Dadaism). It means, rather, to learn

how to be *really* human, and to remember better, more profoundly. And yet this *remembering better* must perforce pass from a form of oblivion, which is, ultimately, the questioning of what Agamben in *L'aperto* calls the anthropological machine constructed by Western metaphysics.

Agamben conceptualizes 'l'aperto' by following closely Heidegger's definition of the open as the name of Being and of the world.<sup>li</sup> From Heidegger, he also takes the main distinction between animals (those which are unaware of the open) and humans (those who face the open), as well as the theory of a possible proximity and similarity between humans and animals.<sup>lii</sup> It is the latter theory that enables Agamben to carry Heidegger's thought further. In *Parmenides* Heidegger compares humans' boredom with the stupefied being of the animal in the open. But whereas stupefaction conceals the world to the animal, boredom, especially if and when understood in the meaning of suspension, has the potential to bring humans into the presence of the world and of Being. Through suspending all the actual possibilities open to being by life, the original potentiality of simply Being might emerge. It is at moments of utter boredom and suspension,<sup>liii</sup> when ordinary life, and all its countless activities, is emptied and void that being might find itself available to the possibility of Being; in other words, to that possibility before and beyond metaphysics, and before and beyond the politics and ethics of metaphysics. The significant difference between Heidegger and Agamben is that for the latter these moments of suspension are precisely the moments when humans and animals become suspended in indistinction, and when animality and humanity are momentarily reconciled.<sup>liv</sup> It is at these moments on the threshold that the anthropological machine (*la macchina antropologica*) comes to a halt.

It is here that one might come to see through Agamben's philosophical project. If on the one hand Agamben is tracing the negativity of naked life in the context of current society and politics – which are based on the institutionalization and preservation of the anthropological machine – on the other he is positing the positive potentiality of naked life in the context of a society and of a politics that have done away with the anthropological machine. In this society life as such might no longer be seen as vulnerable and lawless; it might have regained, instead, a truer and original state.

It is hard to conceptualize, let alone imagine, what kind of society this might be. The problem is compounded by Agamben's conspicuous silence on this matter. He might retort that the task of philosophy is not so much that of giving answers as that of generating questions. And yet this philosophical stance – which again resembles very much the one taken by Heidegger – leaves Agamben's philosophy vulnerable to similar criticism as the kind articulated with regard to Heidegger's. Let us take for instance the intelligent and balanced book *Heidegger's Estrangements: Language, Truth, and Poetry in the Later Writing* by Gerald Bruns. Towards the end of Bruns' book we find this comment on Heidegger which is also a methodological reservation that might be easily extracted to describe Agamben's work:

The folly of trying to follow closely Heidegger's thinking [...] comes out very forcefully when you try to stop, because there is no natural stopping place, no place of arrival where everything falls into place and you can say, 'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.' Instead, the movement you get into is that of going back over what has been said in order to pick up on what is missing or what has been left out of account. So you are always starting over with

something familiar, and then going astray as you try to finish or complete what you think you have in hand. This is why, after a while, repetition and confusion are likely to appear the distinctive features of anything you have to say about Heidegger.<sup>lv</sup>

One way to approach the gaps left behind by individual philosophers is to compare and contrast them with other thinkers, whose work resonates with similar concerns. It is in this sense that Agamben's work might also be used to fill gaps left by Heidegger's thought and vice-versa. The same applies to the work of Maurice Blanchot, whose famous pauses and silences are, to a great extent, informed by Heidegger's philosophy, and whose affirmative passivity can at once be reconnected with Heidegger's 'existentialism', but also employed to supplement Agamben's articulation of suspension.

6.

In Blanchot's work *désœuvrement* – worklessness – is synonymous with renunciation. This is certainly the way in which Agamben appears to understand it. Blanchot's worklessness is at once action and no-action. Its emergence decrees an insubordination, a stop, a 'suspension' in which 'society falls apart completely. The law collapses: for an instant there is innocence; history is interrupted.'<sup>lvi</sup> The similarities between Agamben and Blanchot are obvious; as obvious is the way in which they have arrived at this postulation by following Heidegger beyond Heidegger. The stop Blanchot refers to is something that must be learned and enacted deliberately. Should this action which refuses action be embraced by the community, then the law will collapse and history (the anthropological machine) will grind to a



halt. Innocence, for which one could very well replaced nakedness, will emerge and triumph.

As across Europe with the 1960s generation, the driving force of a section of the Italian operaismo in the 1960s and 1970s was an explicit attempt to bring about a dramatic change in society by way of renouncing accepted values and norms. While innocence was at the core of the hippy movement, insubordination as political and social struggle was the driving force of theoretical and practical activism in Italy. Let us think for instance of the writing of Mario Tronti and Antonio Negri. Their idea of politics was, in essence, nothing other than a politics of withdrawal. **Brett Neilson thus observes correctly in his essay ‘Cultural Studies and Giorgio Agamben’:**

The fundamental move of these Marxist intellectuals, whose work provided the theoretical backbone for a whole generation of protest movements in Italy, was to reverse the classical relationship between labour and capital. By arguing that capital is essentially a social power that requires productive labour, and which evolves through a series of attempts to control or co-opt workers, they introduced the notion that the withdrawal of labour and/or refusal to collaborate with capital in the organization of labour (e.g., by making demands that could not possibly be met) would function to destroy the capitalist system. And, in so doing, they invented a new form of politics that considered the denial of action or, as Tronti (1966) famously called it, ‘the strategy of refusal’.<sup>lvii</sup>

It is worth pausing on the example that Neilson uses to exemplify the ‘strategy of refusal’. This could be achieved, Neilson says, by ‘making demands that could not possibly be met’. There are analogies between ‘demands that cannot possibly be met’,

and the discussion of renunciation as seen in Heidegger and Agamben. But while for Heidegger renunciation is the path towards the freedom to experience language as language, for Tronti renunciation is the path towards political empowerment, and while in Heidegger renunciation remains a solipsistic and almost mystical experience, in Tronti it becomes a collective process of political and social affirmation.

But to come back to Blanchot: in *The Writing of the Disaster* (1980)<sup>lviii</sup> Blanchot distinguishes between two types of refusal or renunciation. The first he calls a deliberate and voluntary refusal, which ‘expresses a decision’. This refusal, according to Blanchot, ‘does not yet allow separation from the power of consciousness.’<sup>lix</sup> Next to this conscious refusal Blanchot speaks of a refusal ‘which is not so much a denial as, more than that, an abdication.’ The ultimate example of this latter refusal is Melville’s *Bartleby*. Blanchot states that *Bartleby*’s abdication is in reality a ‘relinquishment of identity’, leading to a loss of being and thought. With *Bartleby*, intimates Blanchot, ‘we have fallen out of being, outside where, immobile, proceeding with a slow and even step, destroyed men come and go.’

Blanchot’s distinction is of considerable significance. Firstly, it tells us that renunciation can be either positive affirmation (an example of which might be *operaismo*) or passive nakedness (*Bartleby*). Secondly, it appears to announce a problem that might very well be the central one engaging Agamben’s thought; that is, renunciation as consciousness and renunciation as nakedness. While in the first instance renunciation works within the context and the framework of the status quo in order to subvert it, in the second one renunciation abdicates, insubordinate yet deferent to the status quo. It is in this sense that the act of conscious renunciation might destabilize society and history (the anthropological machine), and yet retain it as its guiding principle. The other possibility (*Bartleby*) is abdication as the bringing

forward of an existence without being, whose individual sacrifice might be borne out only at the level of the individual, like in the case of Bartleby and his employer.

7.

Clearly, Agamben operates within a different contextual framework. He is aware that acts of conscious renunciation, as those experienced in the 1960s and the 1970s, are improbable in today's society, given the deep structural and technological changes undergone in the last thirty years. Abdication of life, the other side of the coin, is precisely what Agamben regards as the extreme danger of contemporary societies and the very cause for the implementation and success of the state of exception.

What is left to think is a renunciation that does not abdicate, but which, through a suspension of history, introduces not so much, and not only, a political struggle as an ethical and philosophical turn the outcome of which might as well fall into a mystical and messianic heap or into constructive ethical practices, as, for instance, those announced by Gianni Vattimo in his recent work, especially *Credere di Credere* (1998)<sup>lx</sup> and 'Letà dell'interpretazione' ('The Age of Interpretation').<sup>lxi</sup>

What is of interest, especially in the context of this article which investigates the Heideggerian notion of 'renunciation' and its relevance in contemporary thought, is to interpret Vattimo's discussion as a direct reconceptualization and extension of Heidegger's philosophy which, as we saw earlier, is underpinned by a conceptualization of language and being, the main thrust of which is to rethink and go beyond metaphysics.<sup>lxii</sup> Vattimo recognizes in Heidegger a democratic note, and he proceeds to employ it through a project revolving around what the Italian philosopher identifies as the modality of weakness. Heidegger's alleged democracy is to be found, according to Vattimo, in Heidegger's strenuous attack on metaphysics which is

accused of engendering a series of polarizations rotating around the all-encompassing subject-object opposition. In the context of metaphysics truth, for instance, is always and already external to being, either as the Platonic idea or the Catholic and Jewish God. Moreover, the metaphysical truth is a strong truth that requires obedience and reverence. Heidegger's project is to challenge metaphysics by emphasizing the facticity of life and its thrownness in the world. When, for example, Heidegger says that language is being and that being is language – an equation that Vattimo picks up immediately –<sup>lxiii</sup> he stresses their contiguity and their mutual appropriation. Distinction, exclusion and separateness are removed from Heidegger's thought in the attempt to bring about a new experience of Being, and truth. This is the state of *aletheia*, but also truth, in which individuals open themselves to the world and are appropriated by the world but also appropriate the world. Mutuality and togetherness are some of the concepts that Vattimo hears resonating strongly in Heidegger's philosophy.

To stress this point, Vattimo turns to the Gospels, and especially to Paul, relating Paul's discussion of weakness (*asthenès*) and love (*agápe*) to Heidegger's philosophy, and his discussion of renunciation. Paul's thought is predicated upon weakness (Corinthians 1, 22–29; 2, 1–5; and Corinthians 2, 12, 1–10) as the ultimate strength that first has enabled God to provide the ultimate sign of love by allowing his son to die on the cross for the salvation of humans, and second to establish his Church on the weakness and sins of individuals. But this can be achieved only if the love for the truth, and therefore the love for God, is not thought and seen, as in Catholicism or Judaism for instance, as a love that flows from people to deity, rather from deity to people. It is by demonstrating his unconditional love regardless of laws (Judaism) and sins (Catholicism) that the Christian God comes down from the sky

and the cross and becomes one of many. But in turning from one to many, the love of God becomes the love for each other and a love which is simultaneously within and without.<sup>lxiv</sup> In Vattimo's reflections on religion<sup>lxv</sup> one finds the mutual appropriation of human and God, of being and Being along a path that arrives at an interesting discussion of democracy via Paul and Heidegger's thought.

Weak thought is, thus, the thought that unites the community by suspending truth or, in Heideggerian terms, by 'renouncing' truth, which does not mean that truth is negated; it means that truth is appropriated, questioning the false strength of transcendental and metaphysical truth.

8.

The intention of this article has been to interrogate the philosophical notion of renunciation by following a line of thought, whose influence in modern and contemporary discourse is significant. The main difference marking the modern approach to renunciation against some of its ancient cognates, such as Plotinus' exile, has been attributed to Heidegger's stress on the mutual appropriation of being and world in the experience of the open – which is also a result of being's inherent thrownness. This condition is the product of a process in which being learns to come face to face with the singularity of things and allows things to exist as such. One of the main instruments of this process is, according to Heidegger, renunciation. As he reads the German poets, Heidegger shows that the path towards a new experience of language must pass via the renunciation to speak and use language as a mere communicative and instrumental tool. What is at stake in Heidegger's thinking is nothing less than the attempt to undermine the metaphysical framework of Western thought and culture and its attendant reliance on strong truths.

It is precisely along these lines that Agamben extends Heidegger's project. His target, though, is not only Western metaphysics, but most importantly the biopolitical condition of human beings. In this biopolitical context the human is always and already distinguished against the animal, and on this separation the sovereign bestows rights, which, though, can also be revoked. Agamben identifies the state of exception as the main trait of contemporary biopolitics and the anthropological machine as the force sustaining its power. His work is devoted to describing the risks and the aberrations implicit within the biopolitical system, as well as the strategies to challenge it. One of these, as this article has shown, is renunciation and its cognate, suspension.

The other notable representative of modern passivity is Maurice Blanchot. As in Heidegger and Agamben, in Blanchot too the act of renunciation triggers an existential and cultural shock, the results of which can be far-reaching. Blanchot's reading of Melville's 'Bartleby' is to this end exemplary. Blanchot's entire opus can be read as the attempt to place on stage a language and a narration predicated on the will to renounce the conventional norms of writing. It is perhaps more than coincidental that Blanchot's poetic strategies and his interpretation of passivity exhibit an affinity with that strain of Italian political thought known as *operaismo*; if nothing else, this affinity seems to indicate one possible practical use of renunciation, extending its deployment and meaning far beyond the merely literary and philosophical realm.

This in turn is precisely the course of action that Gianni Vattimo has been pursuing for some years through his project of 'pensiero debole'. The connections linking Vattimo to Heidegger are perhaps even stronger than are those linking Heidegger to Agamben and Blanchot. Vattimo's reading of Heideggerian

renunciation is directly informed by the critique of metaphysics. The novelty is that, in Vattimo, this critique turns into an instrument for democratic change and reform, an instrument built upon the unremitting assault on all those values and rules that we take for granted.

By comparing and contrasting the ideas of some of the main players of this twentieth-century philosophical debate surrounding affirmative passivity, I hope to have given more prominent relief to the line of thought that starts with Heidegger's conceptualization of renunciation and then transits through Blanchot and Agamben to Vattimo. In this trajectory renunciation, quite to the contrary of its semantical surface, which suggests mere passivity and inactivity, finds itself transformed into an active instrument, one effecting changes even beyond the realm of the arts and philosophy from which it derived. If on the one hand the adoption of renunciation as an initially poetical and philosophical strategy and mode of being has had a profound impact on modern and contemporary literary and theoretical discourse, theorists in other disciplines are finding, on the other hand, that its social and political transferability makes it much more widely applicable; indeed, renunciation is today in the process of becoming a central locus of contemporary debates on ethics and biopolitics, **and the starting point for a reconsideration of community action both at local and global level.**

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- i Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to language*, transl. Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982).
- ii Plotinus, *Enneads*, transl. Stephen MacKenna (London: Medici Society, 1917-1930), see especially VI 9, 11, 50.
- iii Max Brod attributes this sentence to Kafka in his book *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, transl. G. Humphreys Roberts and Richard Winston (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 75. 'Viel Hoffnung – für Gott - unendlich viel Hoffnung, - nur nicht für uns.' Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), p. 95.
- iv Walter Benjamin, 'Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen', in *Ein Lesebuch* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996), pp. 27-44; 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers', in *Ein Lesebuch*, pp. 45-57; 'On Language as Such and on the Language of Man', in *Reflections*, transl. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), pp. 314-332; 'The Task of the Translator', in *Illuminations*, transl. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1973), pp. 70-82.
- v Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, transl. Liz Heron. (London and New York: Verso, 1993), p. 41.
- vi Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, p. 41
- vii Maurice Blanchot, *The Work of Fire*, transl. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), p. 17, *La part du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 24.
- viii See Gianni Vattimo, *Essere, storia e linguaggio in Heidegger* (Genoa: Marietti, 1989), p. 121.
- ix See Thomas Carl Wall, *Radical Passivity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999).
- x Martin Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism', in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 213-265.
- xi Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, transl. Ewald Osers (Cambridge & London: Harvard UP, 1998), p. 1.
- xii Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, Band 39, edited by Susanne Ziegler (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1980).
- xiii See Anthony Gottlieb, 'Heidegger for Fun and Profit', *New York Times Book Review*, January 7, 1990; and Allan Megill, *Prophet of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
- xiv Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 139. 'Denken wir von diesem Ort aus für einen Augenblick an das, was Hölderlin in seiner Elegie Brod und Wein (VI. Strophe) fragt.' *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Stuttgart: Verlag Günther Neske Pfullingen, 1975), p. 219.
- xv Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 135. 'Haus des Seins ist die Sprache, weil sie als die Sage die Weise des Ereignisses ist.' *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 267.
- xvi Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 135. 'Um dem Sprachwesen nachzudenken, ihm das Seine nachzusagen, braucht es einen Wandel der Sprache, den wir weder erzwingen noch erfinden können.' *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 267.
- xvii Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 136. 'Ohne die Sprache in ihren Lauten, und noch weniger in ihren Formen und Gesetzen zu verändern, führt die Zeit durch wachsende



- Ideenentwicklung, gesteigerte Denkkraft und tiefer eindringendes Empfindungsvermögen oft in sie ein, was sie früher nicht besaß.' *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 268.
- xxviii Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 57. 'Mit der Sprache eine Erfahrung machen.' *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 159.
- xix Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 58. 'Könnte es förderlich sein, wenn wir uns abgewöhnen, immer nur das zu hören, was wir schon verstehen.' *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 160.
- xx Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 59. 'In Erfahrungen, die wir mit der Sprache machen, bringt sich die Sprache selbst zur Sprache. Man könnte meinen, das geschähe doch jederzeit in jedem Sprechen. Allein, wann immer und wie immer wir eine Sprache sprechen, die Sprache selber kommt dabei gerade nie zum Wort.' *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 161.
- xxi Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 59. 'Seltsamerweise dort, wo wir für etwas, was uns angeht, uns an sich reißt, bedrängt oder befeuert, das rechte Wort nicht finden.' *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 161.
- xxii Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 140.
- xxiii Ibid.
- xxiv On Heidegger and poetry see also Gerald L. Bruns, *Heidegger's Estrangements: Languages, Truth, and Poetry in the Later Writings* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989).
- xxv Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 143.
- xxvi Ibid.
- xxvii Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 147. 'Weil dieser Verzicht ein eigentlicher Verzicht ist und keine bloße Absage an das Sagen und somit kein bloßes Verstummen. Als Sichversagen bleibt der Verzicht ein Sagen. So wahr er das Verhältnis zum Wort. Weil jedoch das Wort sich in einem anderen, höheren Walten gezeigt hat, muß auch das Verhältnis zum Wort eine Wandlung erfahren. Das Sagen gelangt in eine andere Gliederung, in ein anderes melos, in einen anderen Ton. Daß der Verzicht des Dichters in diesem Sinne erfahren ist, bezeugt das Gedicht selber, das den Verzicht sagt, indem es ihn singt.' *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 228.
- xxviii Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 155. 'Gelingen wir vor das uralte Denkwürdige, dem nie genug nachgedacht werden kann.' *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 237.
- xxix Gianni Vattimo, *Oltre l'interpretazione* (Roma-Bari: Editori Laterza, 1994).
- xxx Martin Heidegger, *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie. Mit einer Nachschrift der Vorlesung "Über das Wesen der Universität und des akademischen Studiums"*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, Band 56/57, edited by Bernd Heimbüchel (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987), p. 113.
- Band xxxi Martin Heidegger, *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie*, pp. 71-72.
- xxxii Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 151. 'Das Wort läßt das Ding als Ding anwesen.' *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 233.
- xxxiii Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy ?*, bilingual edition, transl. W. Kluback and J. T. Wilde (London: Vision, 1963), p. 73. 'Destruktion heißt: unser Ohr öffnen, freimachen für das, was sich uns in der Überlieferung als Sein des Seienden zuspricht. Indem wir auf diesen Zuspruch hören, gelangen wir in die Entsprechung.' Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy ?*, p. 72.
- xxxiv Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 151. 'Er hat sich, d.h. sein Künftig noch mögliches Sagen vor das Geheimnis des Wortes, vor die Bedingnis des Dinges im Wort bringen lassen.' *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 233.
- xxxv Martin Heidegger, *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles / Einführung in die Phänomenologische Forschung*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, Band 61, edited by Waler Bröker and Käte Bröker-Olmanns (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985), p. 91.
- xxxvi Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, ed. and transl. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998).
- xxxvii Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, transl. Kevin Attell (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2005).
- xxxviii Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, transl. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
- xxxix Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, transl. Liz Heron (London and New York: Verso, 1993).
- xl Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, transl. Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

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- xli Giorgio Agamben, 'Bartleby, or on Contingency', in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, transl. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999), pp. 243-271.
- xlili Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, transl. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004).
- xliv Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, transl. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1992). *Parmenides*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, Band 54, (Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1982).
- xliv The series of seminars Agamben refers to were later collected in the volume *Parmenides*.
- xlvi Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, p. 57.
- xlvi Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, p. 159.
- xlvi Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, bilingual edition, transl. J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (London: The Hogarth Press, 1942), p. 76.
- xlvi Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, p. 161.
- xlvi Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, p. 158.
- l Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, p. 162.
- li Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, p. 57.
- lii Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, pp. 57-62.
- lii Agamben also calls this experience *désœuvrement* (unemployment/worklessness), borrowing a term coined by Maurice Blanchot.
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- lvi In *The Blanchot Reader*, edited by Michael Holland (London: Basil Blackwell, 1995), p. 250.
- lvii Brett Neilson, 'Cultural Studies and Giorgio Agamben', in *New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory*, edited by Gary Hall & Clare Birchall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 131-132. See also Mario Tronti, *Operai e capitale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1966).
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- lix Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*. This and the following quotations, p. 17.
- lx Gianni Vattimo, *Belief*, transl. Luca D'Isanto and David Webb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).
- lxi Gianni Vattimo, 'L'età dell'interpretazione', in *Il futuro della religione. Solidarietà carità ironia*, edited by Santiago Zabala (Milano: Garzanti, 2005), pp. 47-57.
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- lxiii Gianni Vattimo, 'L'età dell'interpretazione', p. 63.
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