AGAMBEN AND THE SIGNATURE OF ASTROLOGY

SPHERES OF POTENTIALITY

PAUL COLILLI

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Introduction

A significant quantity of literature continues to amass around the name of Giorgio Agamben. This is due, in the greatest part, to the sheer volume of his output as well as to the originality and the controversial nature of his thought. Agamben is a thinker who, to paraphrase an expression he frequently uses when commenting on his preferred writers, produces work that has potential for further elaboration. This book deals with one aspect of the possibilities present in Agamben's *oeuvre* but whose potentialities remain unwritten; namely, the matter of astrology. Precisely because it was perceived as being purely irrational and no longer intelligible, astrology was banished from the tradition of modern thought. As we will illustrate throughout the pages of this study, Agamben's work has activated the possibility of making the present a time for the legibility of astrology.

As the ancient science that sought to prognosticate about the unfolding of human and life and history on the basis of the motion and configurations of celestial bodies, astrology has undergone a series of deaths and resurrections. It flourished during the time of the ancient Greeks and the age of Late Antiquity, but then disappeared with the advent of Christianity. Astrology re-emerged in the Medieval period, which lead it to then achieve a profile of historical importance during the Renaissance, but this was followed by a radical marginalization at the hands of classical rationalism and experimental science. In a subsequent historical phase, the nineteenth century witnessed a philological rediscovery of astrology's significance to Western culture. Yet, in the Modern age astrology remains an historical curio that fails to be perceived as a useful and credible paradigm for understanding the world. In 1975 a group of noted scientists and philosophers, including Nobel Prize winners, published an attack against astrology, whose popularity was on the rise at the time, for not having a scientific foundation.[1] The Catechism of the

Roman Catholic Church continues to reject astrology and horoscopy as dangerous manifestations of divination and magic, and, we might add, as detested remainders of pagan religion.[2] At most, as Theodor Adorno vigorously argued, contemporary astrology is a phenomenon of popular consumeristic culture, where readers of horoscopes seek existential solace in texts that are only able to euphorize reality, and which are bereft of any possibility of tragedy or catastrophe.[3] Modern horoscopy, unlike the practices in the past, excludes the possibility of, in Vasily Rozanov's words, "horrifying horoscopes, horoscopes unrivalled in history, which freeze the soul."[4] In this way it is oblivious to the fuller spectrum of human existence and thus could not capture the subtleties and depths of ontology, of being-in-the-world. It would follow, then, that the astrological practices that have been bequeathed to us are incapable of seriously addressing the questions of human life and history.

Given all of this we ask: does astrology offer possibilities to uncover dimensions of human life that are alternative models to theology, philosophy, and politics, or which explore epistemological data that the other disciplines are not able to articulate or intentionally ignore? At stake in such a *quaestio* is the unthought notion that astrology is an instrument that sheds light on existence, which it was, instead, believed to have obscured, falsified, and rendered unintelligible. The works of Agamben are the context for visualizing the potentialities of astrology as they emerge from a crypt in the topography of contemporary thought in which they are imprisoned.

The point of departure for interrogating the connection between Agamben and astrology is the figure of Aby Warburg. In an interview from 2006, Agamben mentions a potential area of research dealing with the monumental project that Warburg was working on before he passed away in 1929. "I returned to Warburg," Agamben confesses in the interview, "after many years: I needed to, I think, after this turn to the problems of political philosophy. . . . The work I have been doing most recently deals precisely with . . . [*what*] Warburg . . . called *Mnemosyne*."[5] Warburg had begun the *Mnemosyne* project in December 1927; it was to be a work in the form of a picture atlas, consisting of forty panels and approximately one thousand images taken from a variety of different historical periods. The atlas had no captions but there were some texts, although Warburg had planned to write a commentary to accompany it; however, it was left unfinished when he died in 1929. Agamben had spent the autumn of 1974 working at the Warburg Institute in London, and his interest in Warburg's method is evident in *Stanzas* and in other works discussed in this study. One could assume that with the "return to Warburg" Agamben could possibly be referring to *Nymphs* (which was published first in Italian in 2004 and then again in 2007) and *The Signature of All Things*, which first appeared in Italian in 2008. Notwithstanding the important theoretical role played by Warburg in both of these works, they deal only in part with him. On the other hand, however, since the

publication of these two books Agamben continued to work mainly, but not exclusively, on the "political problem of philosophy." We are not given any indication one way or another, but if Agamben's exploration of Warburg's *Mnemosyne* was intended to be at a greater length than what we read in *Nymphs* and *The Signature of All Things*, then his hypothetical or unwritten work on the *Mnemosyne* remains in the same zone of suspended action as does Warburg's planned but unwritten commentary on the images he had collected for this project.

What is of great relevance for this study, however, is that by leafing through the initial pages of an edition of the *Mnemosyne* project, it becomes readily evident that a central driving force was Warburg's profound interest in astrology. To be sure, Christopher D. Johnson reminds us that together with the idea of "life in motion" of artistic images, astrology constitutes a "material cause" of the *Mnemosyne* project.[6] One could realistically speculate that a sustained study of Warburg's *Mnemosyne* project by Agamben would necessarily entail a critical focus on, among other topics, astrology. However, such thinking remains in a purely hypothetical domain. What is not speculation is that there is a critical mass of sites in Agamben's work where astrology makes a thus far neglected appearance. Unlike theology, political philosophy, the philosophy of language, and other themes, astrology is never actualized into a sequential and sustained "thought-in-action."

This book, the first of its kind, presents a living idea of the pure potentiality of astrology as found in Agamben's works. It articulates a series of conjectures on Agamben's thinking in relation to astrology on the basis of the astrological debris scattered and suspended throughout his writings. An epistemological trope, which will orient the direction of this study, is Agamben's claim that "the celestial constellations are the original text in which the imagination reads what was never written."[7] We will be returning to this quotation and its variations in Agamben, but for now let us say that this astrologically laden expression includes in its sphere of influence the dominant themes of potentiality, the signature, ontology, and biopower. However, suggesting that there is a declension of relationships that involve astrological and biopolitical concerns obliges us to identify "which" Agamben we are dealing with.

Antonio Negri once posited there are two "Agambens"; a first one focused on anguishing existential issues in their relations with death, and a second one who instead pays attention to biopolitical matters using the instruments of philology and linguistics. Agamben, Negri concludes, "seems at times a Warburg of critical ontology."[8] It would be fair to presume that what Negri had in mind is the idea that Agamben's suspension of the disciplinary, temporal, and other separations finds a correlative in Warburg's approach to historical subject matter as "living" phenomena. For Warburg, the artefacts of visual culture were to be interrogated through a variety of different disci-

plinary instruments, biology, history of ideas, religious sciences, anthropology, astrology and so on. In any event, the Agamben that has been the object of by far the greatest amount of scholarly attention is the biopolitical one, or, more generally, the political philosopher.[9] There are exceptions such as those that point in the direction of an interpretation of Agamben that seeks not to lose sight of the centrality of the literary and poetic. William Watkin opts for the Agamben that Negri brushes off as the one of the "literary apprenticeships," that is, the "literary" Agamben of the three books published before *Language and Death*.[10] In a robustly polemical tone Justin Clemens laments the preponderance of emphasis on politics and observes that "As soon as the 'question' of the 'political' rises, everyone starts slavering over the signifier, and its crucial nexus with poetry is missed . . . a rigorous vision of poetry and its necessarily fraught imbrication with ontology and politics is at the very heart of Agamben's project, and to mistake this centrality and this rigour is essentially to misunderstand what he is up to."[11] There is much truth in Clemens' assessment if one considers, as he himself does, what Agamben has to say about the original "cohesion" between politics and poetry. What is interesting, as we will see, is that astrology offers the structural possibilities of a mutual nurturing of the political and the poetic.

As already intimated, in Antiquity and during the Renaissance, astrology enjoyed a privileged status and was understood as an intersectioning of religion and of science. The seriousness and utility of astrology was not in question, the way it would be in other ages. In fact, in Otto E. Neugebauer's mind, "Compared with the background of religion, magic and mysticism, the fundamental doctrines of astrology are pure science."[12] Whatever might be the case about the intellectual splendor of astrology in the past, it was eventually expelled from the pantheon of knowledge making. In an account of astrology's own fate proposed by Jacques Chevalier, we see its displacement, effected by Christianity, from a central role in the life of humans to being reduced to poetic elements:

> In John's visions, astral signs are reduced to subordinate spirits and mere metaphors, sign-manifestations of an otherworldly Spirit heralding the Day of Judgment. The New Testament Apocalypse downgrades the astral pantheon that once presided over the bodily motions of time and desire, turning star-gods into time markers, metaphors, messages, and 'the hosts of heaven' (messengers, soldiers, saints, angels, etc.) subserving an immaterial Sign Maker dwelling in eternity. Astralism is disassembled into fragments of itself, retributive manifestations and poetic metaphors harnessed to the Lord dwelling beyond the visible spheres.[13]

What was once an epistemologically impressive instrument that pivoted on a delicate interplay between rational astro-mathematical data and irrational allegorization, and, most significantly, used for orienting and mapping one's

life, astrology witnessed its ontological status transformed to one of a pure metaphorology. Yet, when astrology was an active knowledge-making machine, the poetic side was balanced with the political one. To be sure, the astrological thematics of Warburg's *Mnemosyne* and other writings interface with Agamben's theoretical considerations on the signature, but also with his master themes of biopower and biopolitics. Warburg's "dialectic of the monster," that is, the conflictual situation where humans seek to overcome the devastating force of the planets' controlling powers, is an archaeological element on the horizon of the genealogy of modern biopolitics, which Agamben has sought to discern in a long list of publications. However, in the end, the ruined debris of astrology today occupy purely poetic spaces, as it is bereft of the rational experimental rigour needed to be used as a means of knowledge making.

In its previous role as dispenser of biopower and its current role as otherwise deactivated poetological component, astrology brings to the fore the relationship between poetry and politics: "The original cohesion of poetry and politics in our culture was sanctioned from the very start."[14] Even if it is the political question that dominates any possible relation with poetry, Agamben is very clear on the nature of politics' relevance to poetry: "The question is not so much whether poetry has any bearing on politics, but whether politics remains equal to its original cohesion with poetry."[15] The political dimension of astrology, the rational polarity, was in the guise of a rigorous logico-mathematical science that exercised influence on the lived experiences of individuals, when integrated with the poetic side, which was the irrational polarity that pivoted on the potentialities of the imagination. This latter aspect is also figured in the literariness of the idea of the unwritten text, the deciphering of which is the political act of the constellations that orient biopower.

This study consists of five chapters that seek to illustrate the variegated trajectories of the dispersion of signs belonging to the astrological tradition present in Agamben's thought. The first chapter introduces a central path of access leading to an "astrological" reading of Agamben, namely, the images of a celestial constellation and of human figures with animal heads from the Jewish Bible we find in *The Open*. As well, there is an identification of the components from Agamben's thought that occupy the epistemological constellation that orients the thought movement of this study. Following this, there is a discussion, in the form of a scholium, pivoting on astrology and the philosophy of history. Taking the cue from a series of passages in *Infancy and History* and Walter Benjamin's idea of a "coming philosophy," the second chapter analyzes astrology's connection to experience and knowledge, which involves offering a methodological path for grasping the astrological signs in their scattering throughout history. After commenting on the significance of Agamben's characterization of astrology as a signature, the chapter

concludes with a discussion on the idea of "rational astrology" as a contemporary theory, as espoused by Benjamin, and how it is strategically relevant to Agamben's thought.

The theoretical implications of "reading the unwritten text" are borne out in chapter 3. Following some introductory data on semiotic theories of text, and how they are pertinent to an astrological hermeneutics, the discussion then pivots on the manner in which Agamben's doctrine of potentiality entails a semiotic deactivation, and how this thesis is relevant to an astrological reading of celestial texts. The chapter concludes with an illustration of the astrological file in the allegorical mode of anagogy, and discussions on the connection of Agamben's notions of the contemporary and the living spectre to astrology.

Chapter 4 explores the possibility of speaking about astrology together with ontology and biopower in Agamben. A key element here is the word Agamben employs to translate *dispositif*, namely, "dispositor," which is a technical term from the nomenclature of astrology. The final chapter further elaborates on the theme of biopower by illustrating its manifestation in Warburg and Giordano Bruno, and how this impinges on understanding the man/animal relationship in *The Open*. In fact, Agamben's position on the matter is much closer (more so than to Heidegger's) to that of Rilke's, who in turn reflects a sensibility found in Bruno. The latter part of the chapter deals with the astrological and theological significance of the Last Day as understood through the dialectical images of the illustrations from the Jewish Bible.

As the title of this study indicates, the notion of "signature" is key to interrogating the properties of a deactivated astrology. For the moment let us say that in Agamben a signature is that element in a sign or in a concept which marks it but goes beyond it, with the aim of referring it to a specific interpretation or context; without, however, exceeding its signifying structure, which would create a new meaning or concept. In other terms, "signatures" dislocate and transpose concepts and signs from one context to another "without redefining them semantically." Agamben goes to the extent of intimating that many concepts found in the disciplinary discourse of philosophy are "signatures," which, in a manner that is akin to Benjamin's "secret indices," guide the interpretation of the sign in a specific direction.[16] Moreover, precisely because "they connect different fields and times, signatures operate, as it were, as pure historical elements."[17] In this way astrology, which Agamben qualifies as a privileged signature, is a carrier of "purely historical" interactive data.

The scattered remains of the astrological signature are often in view, yet the modern reader is unavoidably distracted by the epistemological signs that are somehow in consonance with the sanctioned models of legibility, at the expense, unfortunately, of those that appear to present a form whose validity and usability, similar to an expired passport, have been cancelled and deacti-

vated. A brief example will begin to render the idea; the concept of the eternal recurrence, or return, of the same as expounded by Nietzsche (that is, given the infinity of time and the finite possibility of events, these events will recur repeatedly *ad infinitum*). Agamben's use of the concept reveals a kaleidoscopic sequence of different positions.[18] In the *Man Without Content* Agamben claims that the eternal return and will to power "metaphysically mean the same thing,"[19] but later in *Idea of Prose* it comes to refer to "the absence of any final object of knowledge."[20] Agamben dealt specifically with Nietzsche's notion in "The Eternal Return and the Paradox of Passion," where he concluded that "the idea of the eternal return is of the like, something in the order of a total image, or to use Benjamin's words, a dialectical image."[21] However, in *Means without End* Agamben relates the concept to that of potentiality, and suggests that the eternal return is a gesture that neutralizes the distinction between potentiality and actuality.[22] In "Bartleby, or On Contingency," Agamben further contends that the eternal return stands in stark contrast to potentiality's vocation to conserve its impotentiality ("the infinite repetition of what was abandons all of its potential not to be"[23]), while in *Homo Sacer* he rehearses again the idea of the eternal recurrence being an obliteration of the difference between potentiality and actuality, transience and permanence, contingency and necessity.[24] Instead, in *Remnants of Auschwitz* Agamben discards the concept of the eternal return altogether, given that the horrors of Auschwitz categorically and irreversibly invalidate its theoretical premises and grounds.[25] Then, in an interview from 2004 Agamben informs us that he is in agreement "with Benjamin, who said, the eternal return is like the punishment of detention, the sentence in school in which one had to copy the same sentence a thousand times."[26]

The idea of this rapid sketch of Agamben's use of the concept of the eternal recurrence is not to evaluate the significance of his different interpretations of the phenomenon, but to single out what tends to be, in general, excluded from or given little importance in any discussion about it. While it is true that Agamben never uses the eternal return in a cosmic sense, it is also the case that an archaeology of this doctrine shows that when it first emerged on the horizon of Western consciousness, it had an unambiguously astrological significance. In chapter 8 of the *Corpus Hermeticum* we read that "the heavenly beings have a single order that they got from the father in the beginning. And this order is kept undissolved by the recurrence of each of them. The recurrence of earthly bodies, by contrast, is the [dissolution] of their composition, and this dissolution causes them to recur as undissolved bodies—immortal in other words. Thus arises a loss of awareness but not a destruction of bodies."[27] In the commentary to this and the other passages in the *Corpus Hermeticum* that refer to the eternal return, Brian P. Cophenhaver states that we are dealing with the Stoic notion of *apokatastasis* (recurrence or restoration). In a purely astrological sense, *apokatastasis* refers to the fact

that a star returns in a cyclical manner to its location at the exact instant of the birth of an individual or an age. Moreover, the Stoics theorized that the cosmos present at the time would disappear, but would then reappear in a completely identical form and subsequently continue the pattern of disappearance/identical reappearance in eternity.[28] Agamben gives no evidence of having this in mind when he is commenting on the eternal return. Yet, Agamben was the Italian editor of Benjamin's *omnia opera*, and so it is painfully obvious that he would have been aware that Benjamin makes specific use of the term *apokatastasis*, albeit with different meaning. In the *Arcades Project* (N1a, 3) Benjamin writes about integrating the entirety of the past in the present moment by way of an "historic apocatastasis."[29] What Benjamin has in mind here is a mode of analysis that does not discard things, but rather differentiates between the positive and the negative in all items until everything is redeemed.

In writing about Benjamin's use of apocatastasis, H. D. Kittsteiner duly observes that before its transmigration to the lexicon of Christian thought, where Origen used the term to mean the "restoration of Creation to its original state," it was part of astrological nomenclature with the previously mentioned meaning.[30] We thus have a situation where an astrological term assumes a theological one, which is then afforded a secularized semantic content by Benjamin. To be more precise, in "apocatastasis" we have a concept that is part of Benjamin's theological-political vocabulary, but in whose morphology there appears an astrological excrescence that rests as a deactivated remainder. What remains inoperative, however, is the potentiality inherent in the astrological signature. One of the explanations given as to why Agamben was critical of Nietzsche's concept of the eternal recurrence is that it implied emptying the past of any (im)potentiality.[31] In Agamben's mind, "pure potentiality" necessarily entails conjecturing about the potentiality of the past in order to be able to visualize the dispersal of signs and signatures in history, and possibly redeem it. It is at this point that the astrological signature latent in the doctrine of the eternal return speaks to Agamben's concern about (im)potentiality. As we will see, astrology is an epistemological ruin that is located in the unconsciousness of contemporary thought, and so while it is not seen to be functional or operative it has not disappeared. Moreover, one of the specific characteristics of the astrological signature is that it activates meanings that arise from the matrix of potentiality from which, given the Aristotelian scientific nature of the discipline attributed to it in Antiquity, it arises. That is to say, astrology was believed, among other things, to be a conjectural science whose interpretations pivoted on the potentialities as understood by Aristotle. Thus, while the astrological apokatastasis and Nietzsche's eternal recurrence pivot on the repetition of the same, the signature of astrology itself grounds its axis on pure potentiality. It is in this undifferentiated space between, on the one hand, pure (im)potentiality and,

on the other, the eternal recurrence where potentiality and actualization are the same thing, that astrology's signs its territory. It is a cartography where the interplay between a functional semiotics and a deactivated one allow for a multilateral conversation between what was actualized and what could have been actualized, but never was. It is in this manner that the signature of astrology dislocates us from the plane of conscious sign production to the dimension of the unconscious generation of signatures, thus opening a path leading us to understand history, just as theology, philosophy, and politics do in their own way, or, at least in a different colored light they do not recognize.

NOTES

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4. Vasily Rozanov, *The Apocalypse of Our Time*, trans. R. Payne and N. Romanoff (New York: Praeger, 1977), 283.
5. Roberto Andreotti and Federico De Melis, "Analogie e paradigmi. Un'intervista a Giorgio Agamben," *Alias*, supplemento settimanale de *Il manifesto*, 9 settembre 2006, anno, 9, n. 35 (420), 1–5, 8.
6. Christopher D. Johnson, *Memory, Metaphor, and Aby Warburg's Atlas of Images* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press and Cornell University Library, 2012), 89.
7. Giorgio Agamben, *Nymphs*, trans. Amanda Minervini (London, New York, and Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2013), 58.
8. Antonio Negri, "Il frutto maturo della redenzione," *Il manifesto* (Rome), July 26, 2003, 21.
9. The approaches are of course varied. For example, Jessica Whyte quotes the Negri passage as well, and proposes to investigate another hypothesis: "that is precisely from the darkest depths of modern biopolitics, from among the lives that border on death, that Agamben believes that a new politics of creative potentiality may emerge." *Catastrophe and Redemption: The Political Thought of Giorgio Agamben* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2013), 22.
10. William Watkin, *The Literary Agamben: Adventures in Logopoiesis* (London-New York: Continuum, 2010), 2. Negri made the claim in "The Discreet Taste of the Dialectic," in *Sovereignty and Life*, ed. Matthew Calarco and Steven De Caroli. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 111.
11. Justin Clemens, "The Role of the Shifter and the Problem of Reference in Giorgio Agamben," in *The Work of Giorgio Agamben. Law, Literature, Life*, ed. Justin Clemens, Nicholas Heron, Alex Murray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 43, 58.
12. Otto E. Neugebauer, *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1957), 171.
13. Jacques M. Chevalier, *A Postmodern Revelation: Signs of Astrology and the Apocalypse* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1997), 5.
14. Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History*, trans. Liz Heron (London-New York: Verso, 1993), 147.
15. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 147–48.
16. "The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption. Doesn't a breath of the air that pervaded earlier days caress us as well. In the voices we hear, isn't there

an echo of now silent ones? . . . If so, then there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one." Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940,* trans. Edmund Jephcott and Others, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 390.

17. Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and The Glory*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 4.

18. See Leland de la Durantaye's *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 314–23, and Jenny Doussan, *Time, Language, and Visuality in Agamben's Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 77–96. Mathew Abbott (*The Figure of This World: Agamben and The Question of Political Ontology* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014], 136) reminds us that "the eternal return" is the most cited Nietzschean concept in Agamben's *oeuvre*.

19. Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 91.

20. Giorgio Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, trans. Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 56.

21. Giorgio Agamben, "The Eternal Return and the Paradox of Passion," *Stanford Italian Review*, 1986, 6 (1–2), 10.

22. Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 53.

23. Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 268.

24. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 48.

25. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books), 99.

26. Ulrich Raulff, "Interview with Giorgio Agamben: Life, A Work of Art Without an Author: The State of Exception, the Administration of Disorder and Private Life," in "Security, Democracy, and the Future of Freedom," special issue, *German Law Journal* 5, no. 5 (May 2004), 614.

27. *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus. Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation, with Notes and Introduction*, trans. Brian P. Copenhaver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 26.

28. *Hermetica,* 111.

29. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland, Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 459.

30. H. D. Kittsteiner, "Walter Benjamin's Historicism," in *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Osbourne (New York: Routledge, 2005), 262.

31. See de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 323.

Chapter One

Constellations of Unwritten Life

"Astrology is a privileged site of signatures," writes Agamben in *The Signature of All Things*, a work that sets out to explain and justify his own philosophical methodology as it concerns the elaboration of his thought.[1] To be sure, it is within the context of a discussion on astrology that Agamben informs us of the signature being the *locus* where "the gesture of reading and that of writing invert their relation and enter into a zone of undecidability. Here reading becomes writing, and writing is wholly resolved into reading."[2] Agamben is pointing to a central thematic element of the present study, namely the idea that an expanded critical understanding of the role of astrology in Agamben's thought sheds light on the enigmatic concept of reading an unwritten text. We see the polarities of the written and the unwritten celestial texts emerge in antiquity when, on the one hand, in the *Commentary on Genesis* Origen describes the heavenly bodies as a mobile writing, operated by God's hand, containing prefigurations of all that which occurs between Genesis and the end of times.[3] On the other hand, however, in the *Institutes* Cassiodorus, although recognizing that knowledge of celestial bodies is of great use for farmers and navigators, indicates that any attempt to read the skies for the purposes of investigating one's fate is strongly ill advised: "But along the other things which go along with the knowledge of the constellations, that is, things pertaining to knowing men's fates, which are without any doubt contrary to our faith, ought to be so far unknown to us that they seem not even to have been written."[4] To be sure, Origen claimed that God's celestial text is intended for the eyes of divine powers such as angels, whose role it is, as good ministers, to assist with the unfolding of the prefigured coming history. In any event, the written sidereal text meant to instruct the angels, must, for Cassiodorus, appear as if it were unwritten as far as humans are concerned.

In other terms, the person who looks to the stars for insight into the fate of humans must make the exegetical effort of looking at the skies and imagine a blank page. That is, while the heavens might be populated with planetary bodies, any element that might be understood as speaking to the matter of fate must be mentally erased, thus leaving an imagined empty sky. In *Il fuoco e il racconto* Agamben proposes an insight concerning the process of thinking that sheds light on the (im)potentiality of the (un)written celestial text. "Thinking," Agamben informs us, "means remembering the blank page while writing or reading."[5] He is specifically referring to blankness as the materiality of a page containing no writing whatsoever, and suggests that the blank page is "the symbol, at once anxious and fruitful, of pure possibility."[6] What Agamben has in mind here is Aristotle's comparison of pure potentiality to a tablet "on which nothing is yet written."[7] In other terms, a central element that directs our thinking about the (un)written text is that of potentiality, which characterizes the signifying repertoire of astrology as a signature. What is equally germane is the fact that the written/unwritten polarities of the celestial texts concern the unfolding of human life, but what remains stubbornly unthematized in contemporary thought is astrology's potential to produce signatures that allow us insight into human history. With this in mind, the pages that follow introduce the conceptual categories and the thematic *foci* that constitute the form and substance of this book.

ICONOLOGICAL EPISTEMES

In a writing dealing with the figure of Kore/Persephone, Agamben speaks about "the power and potentiality of a joyfully and intransigently *in-fantile* existence."[8] Agamben's position is articulated within the context of a critical re-evaluation of the theoretical significance of art, and that of the Renaissance in particular. Precisely because the allegories depicted in Renaissance art communicate a more substantial elaboration of thought than do the philosophical writings of that age, Agamben contends that "the very nature of thought is illuminated."[9] He suggests that Renaissance art ultimately expressed a philosophy that the works of figures such as Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola were not able to sufficiently convey. In fact, in his commentary on the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Agamben acknowledges the absence of a discipline of knowledge, an "*iconologia philosophica*" (that existed for about a century during the Renaissance beginning with Alciato's *Emblemata*) "for which we lack today even the most elementary principles."[10] While the present book does not intentionally deal with art history or art theory, the implications of Agamben's assessment impinge directly on the discursive formulations of notions, such as potentiality, biopolitics, the signature, and others, that are key to his thought but also to

contemporary theory in general. Moreover, the importance of Benjamin's doctrine of the "dialectical image" to Agamben's work activates a frequent use of eidetic thinking on the part of the Italian philosopher. Connal Parsley comments on the relevance of the dialectical image to Agamben by noting that it is of fundamental importance to understand the image "as a dialectically tensive relation between the elements it might be thought to separate: the individual and the shared intellect, the sensible and intelligible, and above all, separate historical instants."[11] To be sure, Agamben goes to the extent of suggesting that what he terms 'the image of thought' constitutes "a mystery wherein that which cannot be discursively presented shines for a moment out of the ruins of language."[12] The image of thought is a potentiality that exists in a bipolar relationship with the actualization of thought, figured in the fragments left behind by language. Eidetic representation thus becomes an epistemological territory on which the "unspeakable" potentialities are mapped. However, the idea here is not to create a hierarchy by placing thought or image above language; rather, it is a question of exploring all the potential pathways to knowing the present moment.[13] As W. Tatarkiewicz suggests, iconology is a means to gain simultaneous access to different openings leading to knowledge: "The fundamental objective . . . of iconology was that of connecting all things together: 'mystica, naturalis et occulta rerum significatio,' to quote the words of Antonio Ricciardo (1591)."[14]

A significant example of this notion, that is, when visual representation becomes the gateway leading to what thought desires to grasp, is found in Agamben's *The Open*, where his philosophical archaeology makes use of the images found in a Medieval Jewish Bible (figures 1.1 and 1.2). For Agamben, the images (which we can characterize as an iconological episteme as they contain archaeological data that become a medium for a specific thought experiment) are a figural displacement of a transition, at the end of history, leading to the existence of humans and animals outside of being:

> And if one day, according to a now-classic image, the 'face in the sand' that the sciences of man have formed on the shore of our history should finally be erased, what will appear in its place will not be . . . a regained humanity or animality. The righteous with animal heads . . . do not represent a new declension of the man-animal relation so much as a figure of the "great ignorance" which lets both of them be outside of being, saved precisely in their being unsaveable.[15]

Agamben identifies the images from the Jewish Bible as an archaeological source for the existence outside of being. Yet, while, as Agamben himself recognizes, the images were originally meant to represent man's reconciliation with his animality, they are now witnesses to the impossibility of such an intent. Moreover, Agamben is mostly concerned with how the biopolitical scission of man from his animality took place. In any event, the illustration

contains both the original meaning of a newfound union of man and animal, as well as its non-possibility. It is in this way that it constitutes a *sui generis* dialectical image, as it is a frozen image from which two chronothetic polarities of meanings enter into contact.

Agamben employs the images as a philosophical instrument (or, to be more precise, as a "paradigm"), which activates a pertinent epistemological content, and in passing he reminds the reader of their astrological ascendancy. However, while the relevance of the images to potentiality, bare life, and biopolitics becomes evident throughout *The Open*, the matter of their astrological file (beginning with the first image of the celestial bodies) is of a much greater importance than Agamben and his commentators have been willing to acknowledge. The images, it turns out, are a depository of data belonging to the astrological tradition and constitute an iconological episteme connected to, in a much larger sense, the questions of biopolitics, governmentality, ontological epistemology, and others. However, the unprecedented claim being made in this study is that the images (within the context of the biopolitical theory Agamben cultivates in *The Open*) create a passage way leading to a critical reimagining (within the context of the astrological tradition) of the issues of potentiality, bare life, biopolitics, and other cognate themes relative to contemporary theoretical concerns.[16] If we were to understand the illustrations as dialectical images, the verbal signs that accompany them would read as follows: *the celestial constellations are the most originary place where the human, the divine and the animal emerge as unseparated from one another. However, at the end of history man and animal are together suspended in pure potentiality, in an unwritten life outside of being.* Let us say that this is the motto of the present book, whose idea is to map an archaeological trajectory that follows the epistemological valence of signs, which are pertinent to the motto, in their dispersion.

THE DOCTRINE OF POTENTIALITY

The main threads of the present study are potentiality, astrology, and the points where they intersect in the domain of the "unwritten text of life." While potentiality (which is genetically tied to "impotentiality") constitutes the central fount of inspiration for Agamben's thought, there are three writings that offer its most focused theoretical profile, namely, "On Potentiality," "Bartleby, or on Contingency," and chapter 3 of *Homo Sacer* titled "Potentiality and Law." The source for Agamben's use of potentiality is to be found in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (Book Theta) where the Greek philosopher argues against the Megarians' contention that a potentiality can only exist as something that becomes an act (since a potentiality must always transform into an actuality). Aristotle counters this argument by proffering that the potentiality

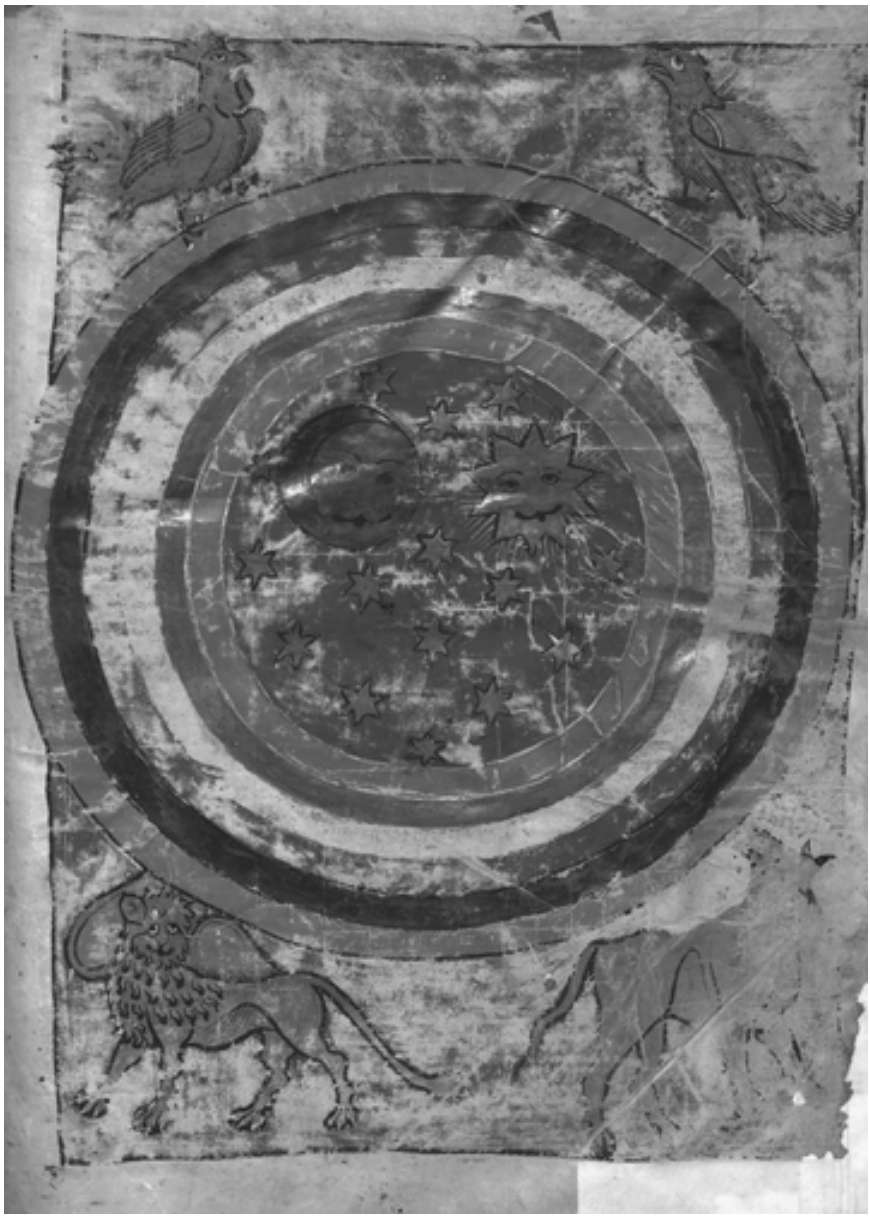

Figure 1.1. Ambrosiana Jewish Bible, Inv. B 32 inf., folio 135*v* (Paralipomena, parchment manuscript from 1201–1300). Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan. *Source:* Illustrations from the Ambrosiana Jewish Bible, © Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana—Milano/De Agostini Picture Library

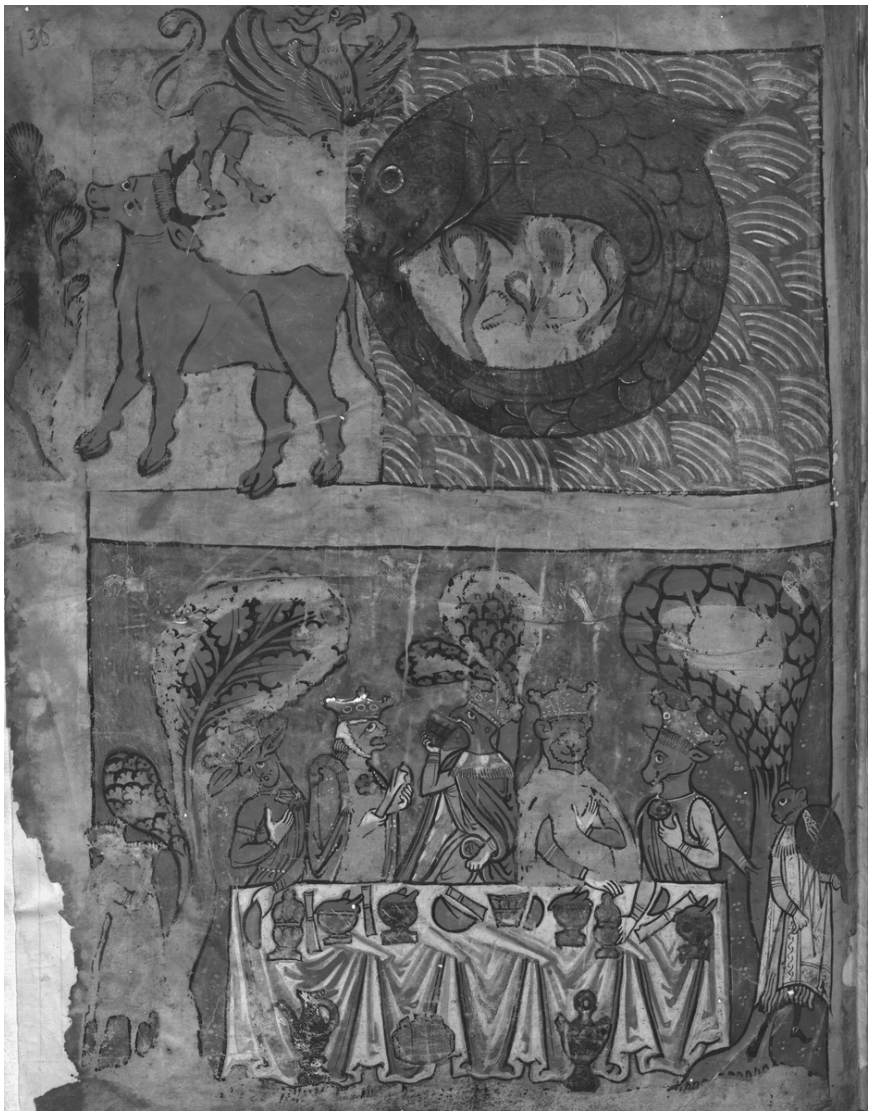

Figure 1.2. Ambrosiana Jewish Bible, Inv. B 32 inf., folio 136*r* (Paralipomena, parchment manuscript from 1201–1300). Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan. *Source:* Illustrations from the Ambrosiana Jewish Bible, © Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana—Milano/De Agostini Picture Library

to make or to be must at the same time implicate the potentiality to not make or not be. This is necessary not only for there to be a potentiality, but also to bring about a transformation from potentiality to actuality. Aristotle claims

"'impotence' and 'impotent' stand for the privation which is contrary to the potency of this sort, so that every potency belongs to the same subject and refers to the same process as a corresponding impotence" (*Metaphysics* 9.1 1046a 32).[17] If the situation were anything different from this, we would then have a scenario where, in Kevin Attell's words, "all potentialities would immediately realise themselves as particular actualities and all potentialities-not-to would always have been absolute impossibilities, or more simply, there would *be* only a static and unchanging actuality. Thus, potentiality as such must pose some resistance to or independence from actualisation, and this resistance or independence is the potentiality *not* to pass over into the act."[18]

This "resistance" is synonymous with an intransigent "immobility," the refusal to move along an axis that leads to the fulfilment of an actualization. Thinking (im)potentiality entails arresting thought by freezing its content, which arrives randomly and simultaneously from the past, the present, and the future. Thinking is thus an iconological activity as it stands before arrested images that open new paths. Within the context of a study on Agamben, David Kishik contends that photography and thought have the vocation of stopping the movement of time. Moreover, Kishik continues, "potentiality may thus be likened to the film in the camera before it is exposed to light and impressed with a particular situation in the world. When we look at the true image of thought, what we see is not this or that colorful picture of an actual state of affairs but . . . simply 'darkness,' which is, according to Agamben, 'in some way the color of potentiality.'"[19]

Agamben underlines the notion that impotentiality is an inseparable element from the non-signifying status of potentiality. The impotential to not create meanings is constitutively tied to the potential to not cultivate a channel of communication: "The being that is properly whatever is able to not-be; it is capable of its own impotence."[20] The significance of potentiality for the ontological theory that Agamben proposes in his writings is of crucial importance; any question related to being must be filtered through the non-signifying dynamics of potentiality as Agamben frequently maintains, such as in the following passage from *Homo Sacer*: "Potentiality (in its double appearance as potentiality to and potentiality not to) is that through which Being founds itself *sovereignly*, which is to say, without anything preceding or determining it (*superiorem non recognoscens*) other than its ability not to be. And an act is sovereign when it realizes itself by simply taking away it own potentiality not to be, letting itself be, giving itself to itself."[21] In other terms, potentiality, as Agamben conceives it, signals the deactivation of any ontology based on, or which imitates, the actualization of a being that imposes itself as a signifying plenitude and, by doing so, exhausts non-signifying impotentiality (such as in the case of Aquinas's theological God, who breathes being into humans, or, for that matter, the planets that imprint a signature as existential

content in humans). The idea of a biopolitics that controls bare life finds its originary source in the process of a transcendent, be it the Christian God or the pagan astral divinity, which, through the instrument of the "signature," predetermines and "signs" the existential content of human life.

THE DOCTRINE OF SIGNATURES

In *The Signature of All Things* Agamben speaks about a system of reading signs that pivots on the signature, where the relationship is not based on cause and effect but on resemblance and analogy. Using Paracelsus and Jakob Böhme as central points of reference for his theorization on this subject matter, Agamben maintains that the "signature" is not actually a sign; rather it is that element which makes the sign intelligible. If anything, the signature is a sign without a content and thus gives rise to a pure identity deprived of any meaning or signification. The link between the signature and the thing that is semiotically marked is characterized by analogy and the idea of resemblance. As a result of this, "Signatures, which according to the theory of signs should appear as signifiers, always already slide into the position of the signified, so that *signum* and *signatum* exchange roles and seem to enter into a zone of undecidability."[22] What is of significance for the purposes of our investigation is that the signature is an impotentiality that permits a potentiality to be altered through a movement to actuality without having potentiality dissipated or revealing the actuality as a semiotic fullness. The point is that, as Watkin observes, the signifying and non-signifying properties of the signature bring together the two major aspects of Agamben's thought: "the logic of potentiality or the ontology of potential . . . and the epistemological project of the method."[23]

Paracelsus identifies three *signators*, namely, man, the Archeus, and the stars, but Agamben acknowledges the centrality of astrology in that, on Paracelsus's authority, it reveals "'the supernatural force and virtue of things.'"[24] Thus, while the divinatory sciences such as geomancy, chiromancy, physiognomy, and so forth, are dedicated to interrogating these signs, astrology is concerned with how "the forces of celestial bodies are gathered and concentrated into a point in order to influence terrestrial bodies," and the operations through which this occurs are called *ymagines* in the *Picatrix*.[25] In any event, it would only be in the post-Renaissance age (when mathematics and experimental science removed the cloak that hid the depleted existential energy of the astral divinities) that humans would be convinced of being free of the stars' biopower. Until then the astrologer held the key to revealing the future history of an individual's being in the world. The logic of this sidereal power pivoted on the *ymago* as well as the characteristics of the planet as both "are signatures through which the influence of the stars is realized."[26] The stars

condition the ontological structure of lived existence by way of impressing signatures on the pneumatological space humans were thought to contain. In this way the question of the astrological signature intersects with that of ontology, which is the point of departure for Agamben's theory of bare life.

PHILOSOPHICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Agamben's philosophical archaeology, as illustrated in *The Signature of All Things*, is genetically tied to Nietzsche's and Foucault's theorizing about genealogy. In Agamben, however, there emerges a further element in the guise of Warburg's idea of the survival of antiquity. "The greatest lesson of Warburg's teaching," Agamben tells us,

> may well be that the image is the place in which the subject strips itself of the mythical, psychosomatic character given to it, in the presence of an equally mythic object, by a theory of knowledge that is in truth simply disguised metaphysics. Only then does the subject rediscover its original and—in the etymological sense of the word—speculative purity.[27]

Ultimately, Agamben proposes a particular form of historical analysis that pivots ("in antithesis to ideology . . . which has dissolved politics' cohesion with poetry")[28] on envisioning our relationship with the past as one that is constructed on the process of collecting ruins or verbal and pictorial signs. History for Agamben is the present that invests (non)signifying charges into the equally (non)signifying ruins transmitted form the past. Agamben structures his approach on the pillars of what he terms an "archaeological regression," whose aim is not to locate a previous state in the past and reconstruct it in its original form. On the contrary, the objective of archaeological regression is to think a previous state with the view of understanding the manner and circumstances in which it first emerged on the horizon of intelligibility. By this Agamben means that archaeological regression is the opposite of the eternal return of things, as the goal vis-à-vis the past is to free both it as well as the subject who is gazing at it. In this way the subject is able to move beyond the received past and thus have access to what was never experienced and never written.

THE POTENTIALITY OF ASTROLOGY

In the domain of astrology we are not so much dealing with signs as we are with signatures articulating a functional similarity linking a constellation with those born under the given constellation. Moreover, not only are we not dealing with signs, we are dealing with what has never been written:

> in the sky, according to the profound image proposed by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, learned perhaps for the first time "to read what was never written." . . . "The image is called image because the forces of the spirits are conjoined here: the operation of the imagination [*cogitacio*] is included in the thing that contains the virtue of the planet."[29]

It is at this point that Agamben teases out the dimension of potentiality inherent in astrology's signature. The same idea of reading the unwritten is present as well in Agamben's *Nymphs*, when dealing with Warburg's cognitive mapping of the astrologically charged frescoes in the Palazzo Schifanoia. Agamben writes that "the celestial constellations are the original text in which the imagination reads what was never written."[30] He is here commenting on what Warburg defined as "dynamograms" (engrams), that is to say, signs physically possessed by potentiality. With this in mind, Leland de la Durantaye proposes that "reading what was never written" refers to "a form of thinking—a thinking about potentiality. . . . To read what was never written is a way of reading the potentiality inhering in thought and life. . . . When we read, we assimilate both the actuality on the page in front of us and something more—what we ourselves bring to the reading table, the most general name of which is the potentiality of thought. To read what has never been written is thus to read in a creative fashion."[31] However, reading "what was never written" can be effectively represented through Benjamin's "dialectical image," and, as Tyson E. Lewis contends in a study on Agamben, "astrology is dialects at a standstill."[32] Moreover, potentiality is theoretically linked to the dialectical image, which offers a glimpse of pure potentiality in the guise of image in the state of arrest.

Astrology is a potentiality precisely because it contains data that is (im)potential and void until it comes into contact with something that activates the content into a communicable entity, while still conserving its impotentiality. Along with being a potentiality, astrology is also a signature that gives rise to an unprecedented ontological epistemology: "Only because astrology . . . had conjoined heaven and earth, the divine and the human, in a single subject of fate (in the work of Creation)" writes Agamben in *Infancy and History*, "was science able to unify within a new ego both science and experience, which hitherto had designated two distinct subjects."[33] In a subsequent chapter we will explore the extent to which this intuition offered by Agamben opens up the potential for an "astrological" reading of his theories. Astrology's contribution was to have created a link between the stars' pneumatology and the experiences lived by the human body, thus creating a sort of bio-pneumatology. This is consistent with the astrological tradition where there is the contamination of the celestial body with the human body, eternity with the transitory nature of historical time, as in the specific case of *melothesia*, that is, the assigning of various parts of the body to the influence of

the various signs of the zodiac.[34] One of Agamben's writings that particularly lends itself to an astrological reading of his thought is, as already intimated, *The Open*, whose purpose was to continue the line of investigation found in the previous works such as *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995), and *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (1998), but with an eidetic orientation.

THE PARATEXTUAL VOCATION OF IMAGES

The interpretive frame of *The Open* is iconological in nature as Agamben pivots the theoretical development of his book on an interpretation of the previously mentioned biblical depictions. The images are miniatures that are found in a Jewish Bible of the thirteenth century held at Milan's Biblioteca Ambrosiana (figures 1.1 and 1.2). One attestation provides the following information about this bible, made in thirteenth-century Germany:

> The Bible was copied by Jacob ben Samuel and massorated and vocalized by Joseph ben Kalonymus . . . The first part was completed between 1236 and 1238 . . . Illustrations with biblical scenes are located mainly within the initial word panels of the various biblical books . . . Some of the illustrations carry a messianic or eschatological meaning. A distinct example of this can be seen in the two miniatures stretching over two entire pages at the end of the Bible. One illustrates the seven heavens, accompanied by the four animals of Ezekiel's vision and the luminaries (fol. 135*v*). The opposite page depicts the three symbolic messianic beasts—Leviathan, Behemoth and Ziz—above the banquet of the righteous in Heaven (fol. 136*r*) . . . The Bible was used mainly for study.[35]

The scene that is at the centre of Agamben's attention is the bottom half of fol. 136*r* that depicts the messianic banquet of the righteous, which will take place at the end of time.[36] What is striking, for Agamben's purposes, is that the righteous are presented as theriomorphic entities, that is, human bodies with heads of animals. While Murray acknowledges the relevance of the image (terming it a "dialectical image of sorts"), Agamben scholarship has so far passed on exploring the multifaceted implications of these images that serve as a major paratextual element of *The Open*.[37]

Agamben cites the authority of Zofia Ameisenowa, according to whom the images belong to the gnostic-astrological tradition: "the bodies of the righteous," writes Agamben as he paraphrases Ameisenowa, "ascending through the heavens after death, are transformed into stars and are identified with the powers that govern each heaven."[38] On her part Ameisenowa includes the testimony of a series of ancient sources. We are reminded, for example, that Origen had purported that following their death humans took on the shape of celestial divinities that govern the decades of the elliptic.[39]

This is consistent with teachings from Classical Antiquity such as Plato, who in the *Timaeus* suggests that the soul, which departs terrestrial life in a state of purity, will be elevated to the astral region and be transformed into a heavenly body. In the *Moralia in Job* (XVII, 16), Gregory the Great, reasoning on the basis of the Gospels, makes a similar argument. Ameisenowa also cites the authority of the Talmud, where we read that "The countenance of the just in the next world will shine like the sun and moon and the stars of heaven" (Berachoth 17a).[40] Ameisenowa sums up the Gnostic perspective on the post-death by indicating that "they would become stars; they would be transformed into the living souls of gods, that is into the animal-headed astral gods of the 36 decades of the solar year, and they would live forever in the heaven of the planets in undisturbed peace and purity."[41]

We do need to observe that Agamben qualifies his use of Ameisenowa's comments by suggesting that all of the scholars who have dealt with these images do not offer interpretations that are convincing. Moreover, he reminds us that the justification for the theriocephalous depiction of the astrological deacons and the Gnostic archons remains an open question with scholars.[42] However, the fact remains that we are dealing with a triptych of sorts, with three images depicting i) the celestial world with the four eschatological animals, the cock, the eagle, the ox, and the lion (figure 1.1), ii) the primeval animals and, iii) the messianic banquet with the theriomorfic images, which include three of the eschatological animals, the eagle, the ox, and the lion (figure 1.2). In other terms, it is the first of the three images that constitutes the semiotic frame of the triptych by activating an iconological file that is imbued with astralism. Will-Erich Peuckert claims that the four eschatological animals in the first chapter of Ezekiel have celestial characteristics that link them to the signs of the zodiac.[43] Bruce Malina, following Franz Boll, identifies the eschatological animals in Ezekiel as "the four Babylonian seasonal constellations. . . . Leo (the lion), Taurus (the bull), Scorpio (the human-faced), Pegasus (the flying eagle.)."[44] There is no reason for the eschatological animals to possess an astral content in the first image, and then have it emptied in the third image: the three images are bound by the same constellational signifying properties.

While pagan astrology was extraneous to the economy of Jewish teaching, the astral tradition lies hidden within the Old Testament. With Ezekiel 1 and 10 in mind, Chevalier suggests that the prophet had two goals: "abolishing the cult of nature (sun, moon, stars) while also recuperating the powers of astromythology under the rule of God who reigns in heaven."[45] Chevalier articulates this claim within a tradition of scholarship, which argues that the *Book of Ezekiel* (as well as *Revelations*) makes extensive use of features and elements originating from the astrological tradition.[46] Chevalier sums up this current of inquiry by indicating that Ezekiel's vision sought to "reduce the

cult of heavenly bodies to silence, demoting the astral pantheon (Leo, Dragon, etc.) to mere zoological metaphor."[47]

The images are iconological epistemes in the sense that iconology is concerned with, among things, the conscious and unconscious mechanisms and logic underlying the emergence of visual and linguistic phenomena onto "the surface of history."[48] In Panofsky's mind, the intellect is "another sector or segment of the image,"[49] thus reinforcing the importance of viewing images as an expression of unconscious messages, which future commentators must seek to analyze with interpretative instruments that open the paths to different forms of understanding. For the present purposes, let us say that the hidden astrological element in Ezekiel, the messianic banquet, and Agamben's biopolitical use of the images constitute an unthematized unconscious, an unsaid within the context of contemporary theory.

Clearly, *The Open* is not intended to be an all-encompassing critical scrutinization of the iconological spheres of the images from the Jewish Bible. In fact, Agamben indicates that he is interested specifically in the third image, namely, the banquet scene and how it relates to the idea of anthropogenesis. However, does focusing on the astrological file of the celestial image and how it conditions both the messianic banquet and (as is being claimed in this study) Agamben's central theses of the book divert from his stated intentions? The fact is that Agamben himself assists us in responding to a question such as this one. In commenting on the variants found in recent critical editions of Hölderlin and Kafka, where there is no hierarchy of preferred versions of manuscripts that would point to the "intended" authorial text, Agamben opines that the idea of a text possessing a unified and transfixed identity needs to be radically rethought. If anything, Agamben is convinced that an author never completes a work but abandons it. The "cesura," or interruption, completion, of a work by an author does not mean that it enjoys the status of completeness. A work, whether completed or in progress, always presents itself as a "fragment of a potentially infinite temporal process" moving toward both the past and the future.[50] In all of this Agamben is pointing to the fictive nature of a text that is believed to be a hermetically sealed monad that is impervious to the seismic tremors emanating from an external force, namely the reader. If anything, the three images that Agamben places at the very outset of his book are fragments within the larger fragment of *The Open*. A central thesis of this study is that the celestial image, in particular, becomes a mobile fragment that orbits throughout *The Open*. That is, it exerts an interpretative energy that assumes a new legibility in relation to both the other two images and Agamben's thought within a context such as the present one, namely, of an examination of astrology's signature.

The three images are, technically speaking, paratextual paraphenalia. In essence, the term "paratext" refers to the multitude of elements that surround the purportedly ontologically superior "main text," from which, traditionally,

the pertinent signifying matters were believed to emerge.[51] The paratextual elements, as Gérard Genette conceives it, are "those liminal devices and conventions, both within the book (peritext) and outside it (epitext), that mediate the book to the reader."[52] Paratextual research contributes to the deconstruction of the hierarchy that privileges the body of the text over its prosthetic components. In essence, we are dealing with the pragmatics of transmission, in that in the category of the paratext we find elements such as the title, the subtitle, the preface, the book cover, the dedication, the table of contents, reproduced figures, images, engravings, along with notes, indices, and so on. In Genette's mind, a paratext is that which allows a text to present itself as a book to a reader and to the public in general, and it is not the limit or closed frontier, but rather the "threshold," the "undecided zone," which constitutes the channel that makes possible the flow of communication between the outside to the inside. In fact, although the paratext situates itself on the external margin as well as in the internal fringe (a "zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side [turned toward the text] or the outward side [turned toward the world's discourse about the text]"[53]) it inevitably conditions the interpretations of the "main" body of the text. Genette is careful to point out that although the paratext occupies a threshold, it is not a space of transition, but rather one of transaction. That is to say, the paratext is the *locus* of a pragmatics and of a strategy to negotiate an optimal reception and a more pertinent reading of the text in the service of and in the eyes of the reading audience. In other terms, as purely material and paratextual items, the images become the place where the reader transacts with Agamben's stated intentions as to their role, function, significance, and importance within the typographic economy of *The Open*.

A paratext becomes a sphere of meaning, thus presenting itself as a medium or vehicle for the messages that are being transmitted. In a more specific sense, as a result of their materiality, the paratextual components themselves communicate messages and meanings to the reader. In this way, although Agamben states that his focus is on the messianic banquet scene, the other two images, precisely because they were placed in *The Open*, become sign-producing instruments that activate messages, which inhabit the spaces of Agamben's theory making as it concerns, for example, the man/animal relation discussed in the book. As a result, if it is true that textuality could be perceived as a cultural product made up of what is left behind or deposited by the process of semiosis, it could also be argued that the paratext exercises a central role in organizing the structures that allow the text to produce meanings. The celestial image plays a key role in, potentially, directing the flow of thought in a direction that was unintended or unthought. While it is true that all readings are hypotheses or conjectures (or, misreadings, as Harold Bloom would have it), it is also true that all authors (wittingly or unwittingly) implant an unconscious in their texts, leaving it up to the reader to fathom,

identify, and measure it. Among other functions, one of the roles of a paratext is to lead the reader to the text's unconsciousness.

However, we cannot exclude the possibility that the paratext could also be understood as the "exposed" unconscious of the text, and for this reason, it has the potential to radically problematize the entire issue of a text's signifying properties. In a general sense, although texts assimilate the structural characteristics of the signifiers of which they are composed, it does not follow that they are conceptually equivalent to the sum of their signifieds. To a definite degree, a paratext possesses semiotic autonomy, and thus has the potential of undoing any "ideal" unity or compositeness that could be attributed to the text. As we have already conjectured, by placing the three images at the outset of *The Open*, Agamben is negotiating with the reader on how they will be perceived. It is for this reason that paratexts allow for the realization of the multiple meanings that the text has to offer. Ultimately, the search for structure does not short circuit the text by weakening the signifying currency of its semantic components. If anything, investigations into the paratextual units of which texts are composed maximize the reader's potential to perceive their transtextual networks. In the present case, the network (in a purely semiotic sense) is thematically governed by the identity and characteristics of astrology's signature as theorized by Agamben.

THE SILENT CELESTIAL BODIES

Before proceeding we need to take a step back and pose the following question: to what extent can we invoke the astrological tradition in an attempt to align it with Agamben's thought? Studying astrology as a purely historical phenomenon provides us with the metaphoric distance necessary to fathom the temporal folds of its rational/irrational nexus. However, thinking of astrology as a potential instrument for contemporary theory making obliges us to confront it with theories emanating from the present, thus forcing us to re-evaluate how the past emerges in the present.[54] Astrology emerges from within the context of ancient astralism and secularizes the beliefs by employing the celestial bodies as an instrument to understand human behavior, since it was believed there existed an axis of influence emanating from the planets onto the sublunar world. The astrology that was rediscovered in the Renaissance is a manifestation of Late Antiquity, when a series of allegorical figures became the signifying instruments of advanced logico-mathematical practices that were coupled with a predilection for esoteric thought. It sought to find geometric similarities between humans on earth and the sidereal deities, and this resulted in it being a singular intersectioning of quantification and allegorization. However, astrology cannot be characterized as a science in the modern sense, in that its interpretative gaze is fixed on figures

that are ultimately allegorical in nature, although the allegorical meanings are undercut by the logico-mathematical, thus, conjectural, nature of astrology. Astrology codifies, in purely cosmic terms, one's lived experiences in relation to other events, that is, the synchronicity of events is understood as an occurrence of fate, but the explanations are allegorical configurations of the governing celestial signatures. Carl Jung purported that astrology is an immense archive of what the ancients knew about human psychology.[55] Astrology's role turned out to be that of secularizing the nature of the pagan divinities who have provided the technical terminology for human characteristics (martial, jovial, saturnine, erotic, logical, lunatic, and so on).

These points touch upon the main *cruces* of the astrological experience, however, one element we need to add is the profound extent to which astrology was able to condition and structure everyday existence, and thus control the bare life of the human subject. We are by now accustomed to considering Agamben's writings such as, say, *Opus Dei* or *The Kingdom and the Glory* (under the acknowledged influence of Benjamin, Carl Schmitt, and Michel Foucault) as the scene where theology, albeit in its secularized version, continuously emerges as an originary source of modern governmentality.[56] What we are not used to, however, is envisioning Agamben's works as a *locus* that consciously and unconsciously evokes the millennarian struggle faced by astrology over control of the degree zero of human existence. Just as theology accounted for God's infusion of being into humans, astrology documented the imprinting of astral signatures as existential content into them. Both theology and astrology are archives of the degree zero of existence, or what Agamben calls *nuda vita* (bare life). Agamben employs theology in its secularized form in a wide-ranging manner as a means to illustrate the characteristics of bare life as it is subjected to governmentality. To be sure, in an essay which appears in *Potentialities*, Agamben cites a passage from Benjamin to explain his own relationship to theology, analogous, that is, to that of a blotting pad (his thinking) to ink (theology): "It is soaked with it. But if it were up to the blotting pad, there would be no ink."[57] While astrology does not share the predominance that theology has in Agamben's thinking (for that matter, it is detectable only in the shadows of his writings, or what we could consider the de-centered aspects of his thought), it is nonetheless true that in his writings the astral science is attributed roles which, together with theology, allows for an intensification of the archaeological richness of the theory of potentiality and, consequently, of the idea of bare life, and the question of biopolitics. The issues that pertain to the thematic constellation of astrology intersect with a number of major issues Agamben deals with in his works, including the theory of signatures, the genesis of power, the cognito-epistemological nature of images, and, of course, bare life. Of the thematic elements shared by astrology and theology, one of the most important ones is that of detecting the hidden presence of the future in the ruins or fragments of

the present. Theological allegory would identify this as anagogy, while the astrologer would call it reading the text that was never previously composed through the instruments of astronomical and mathematical data coupled with the imagination's potential to allegorize.

In Late Antiquity, Firmicus Maternus was thinking along these lines when he gave advice on how to practice astrology: "having attained the true knowledge of this divine art, when you calculate the destinies of men and chart the course of their lives, you will be directed not only by your readings but also by the conclusions of your own reasoning. Thus your own divinely inspired ideas may be of more profit to you than the traditions of the written word."[58] Implicit in this directive is the notion that the imagination supersedes the written text as the instrument allowing us to see what has not yet occurred, and as the place where we read things for the first time. The implication is that in its ability to "calculate the destinies of men" astrology not only offers prognoses on the future of individuals, but it also charts how the planets will exercise their influence on them. The art of foreknowledge is closely tied to the question of the distribution of power among the planets and how humans are subjected to this power. For this reason, the conceptual categories of bare life and biopolitics as articulated by Agamben are part of a genealogy that includes astrology, along with the already established presence of theology.

BARE LIFE

In its most important respects, Agamben's interest in theology arises out of an impasse of time and the subject he detected in modern politics. In writings such as *Homo Sacer* and *State of Exception*, Agamben sought to unveil the insidiousness of modern politics, whose paradigm is not based on the city (that is, the State that arose out of a rationality applied to the law), but instead on the concentration camp: namely, the State based on exception and the suspension of the law. According to Agamben, Auschwitz essentially unmasked the workings of a system that has blossomed since World War II. The fact is that power is no longer exercised by citizen subjects, who have been reduced to objects and are instead the victims of power, or bare life, whose only possession is the silence of refugees, deportees, or the banished. The new subject is a *homo sacer* "whose biological body is exposed, without mediation, to the action of a force of correction, of imprisonment and of death."[59] *Homo sacer* constitutes the object of modern anti-politics which Agamben terms "biopolitics." Agamben appropriates the term *homo sacer* form Roman law, that is, where the condemned person became *sacer*, namely, banished and essentially outlawed. *Homo sacer* did not possess an identity that was religious, as he was not eligible for sacrifice, nor one that was

civil, as he could be executed without there being a punishment for the executor. In Agamben's mind, the modern State, in a way which is very similar to a camp, unyieldingly performs a desubjectivization on its citizens, only to later perform a resubjectivization whose aim it is to realize the subjugation of individuals who have ceased being persons, and are instead bare life in the guise, for example, of numbers.

Pivotal to understanding these issues are a series of terms that inform the terminological substance of "biopolitics," namely, *zoē, bios* and *bare life,* upon which much has been written.[60] Agamben defines *zoē* as "the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animal, men, or gods)."[61] *Zoē* refers to pure existence, without any other qualification, and it exists prior to the advent of language and community. Consequently, it constitutes the condition out of which we emerge to become something "other." *Bios,* instead, articulates "the form or way of living proper to an individual or group."[62] It is that structure of existence that arises from *zoē* and is ultimately seen in connection to ethics and politics. What is important to consider here is that in Agamben's mind *zoē* refers to a pre-linguistic state, while *bios* has to do with a linguistic one. Moreover, Murray reminds us that as far as language is concerned, "we can map *zoē* on the realm of the voice, or infancy. Agamben does not suggest that infancy is a state to which we can return, no more than we can hope to return to a pre-political world beyond the *polis*. Instead his concern is with how the split between *bios* and *zoē*—as in the split between voice and language—produces a space of both the negative and, through rendering it inoperative, a radical potential."[63] The third term is "bare life," which Agamben appropriates from Benjamin's "Critique of Violence," where it is presented as "the bearer of the link between violence and the law."[64] Bare life is the result of the scission of *zoē* from *bios* and exists in the domain of the political. In being a further installment of Agamben's cultivation of his biopolitical thinking, the point of departure for *The Open* is the idea that was articulated in *Homo Sacer*, and summarized below by Paul Patton:

> the key to understanding modern political phenomena lies in their biopolitical character: not only National Socialism's concentration camps, its genocidal 'final solution' and programs designed to eliminate incurably ill and geneticallly unfit members of the non-Jewish population, but also the manner in which democratic states have used prisoners and other marginal populations for medical experimentation, along with the increasingly political character of biomedical interventions into the human organism.[65]

To this we add the notion that governmentality, regardless of any ideological orientation, pivots its operative vocation on the bare life of individual subjects, citizens and non-citizens. The consequence of rooting governmentality in bare life is that "traditional political distinctions (such as those between

Right and Left, liberalism and totalitarianism, private and public) lose their clarity and intelligibility and enter into a zone of indistinction."[66] As part of this condition is that as far as the modern state is concerned "what lies at its basis is not man as a free and conscious political subject but, above all, man's bare life, the simple birth that as such is, in the passage from subject to citizen, invested with the principle of sovereignty."[67]

BIOPOLITICS

Agamben argues that Western governmentality has assumed a guise of biopolitics from its inception, and he proposes the notion that the "fundamental activity of sovereign power is the production of bare life as the originary political element and as threshold of articulation between nature and culture."[68] Rather than signalling the passage from classical sovereignty to modern democracies by means of the politicization of bare life, which, according to Agamben, is a concept attributable to Foucault, there was no Copernican turn when it came to political-philosophical models. In fact, what actually occurred was that "the inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original—if concealed—nucleus of sovereign power. It can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power."[69] However, bare life cannot be reduced to a neuro-biological entity, but one characterized by a specific status that is accomplished "by the subjection of an individual life to sovereign power, albeit in the form of an exclusion from the protection otherwise afforded by the sovereign. It is biological existence, that is, in addition, subjected to a particular form of inclusive exclusion from the political domain."[70]

Moreover, as Agamben contends in *Means without End*, today the "opacity" of what we mean by "life" is augmented "in proportion to the sacralisation of its referent [*which*] designates the naked presupposed common element that it is always possible to isolate in each of the numerous forms of life."[71] Yet, in a much more general sense, bare life and biopolitics are characterized by the lack of a priori elements that would predetermine the outcome of their potentiality. In Thanos Zartlaloudis's words, in Agamben "the term biopolitics is characterized by indeterminateness, which forms a peculiar problem with precise regard to the indeterminateness of the life that lies as its object (bare life). It could be said that biopolitics produces or presupposes a *homo sacer* or bare life, that is, 'a remnant that happens, not to 'be,' but to be 'around'."[72] The reason for this last point, as we will see, is that for Agamben ontology is not a predetermined knowledge but the archaeology of all knowledges, whose specificities differ from context to context.

At this point we should note that along with the theme of biopolitics, which permeates the spectrum of Agamben's writings, there is a substantial

host of other issues that are significant to the formulation of his ideas, yet which could appear to constitute a body of incoherent elements. In Agamben we find language, potentiality, politics, poetry, philology, biblical hermeneutics, iconology and so on. Agamben is being consistent with Benjamin's dictum that all experiences have an epistemic valence, and, as Jessica Whyte contends, what is key in his cultivation of a new ontology of potentiality is considering "those historical and contemporary forms of praxis that seek to create new possibilities for individual and collective life."[73] Astrology, in its relation to biopolitics and beyond, constitutes the type of "historical forms of praxis" that allows to envision new potentialities emerging from the shadows of the present.

The conflation of human and animal in the image from the Jewish Bible in *The Open* is a figure for the fact that the political conflict which influences all other political conflicts is the one between man's animality and humanity: as a result, Agamben believes, Western politics is originally biopolitics: "In our culture, the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man. That is to say, in its origin Western politics is also biopolitics."[74] In a subsequent chapter we will consider the relationship between man and animal from the point of view of the potentiality that occupies the space between voice and meaning. In a specific sense, it is when man is not able to find the words to speak, and thus is silent (that is, without the potentiality to make utterances) that, in Claire Colebrook's words, "he at once draws close to animality at the same time as he offers the opportunity to think of human potentiality, precisely when that potentiality is not actualized."[75] Agamben aims to measure the weight of the divide that separates man from animal and does so by using theriomorphic images, which have a conceptual presence both at the beginning and at the end of the book. The meanings of the images reside in the fact that "on the last day, relations between animals and men will take on a new form, and that man himself will be reconciled with his animal nature."[76] However, an important notion to keep in mind is just as bare life is characterized by an indeterminateness, so are the categories of "humanity" and "animality." In other words, these two terms are not stable concepts that, as Zartaloudis writes, "through either a hypothesis of immediacy (animality as sensual being) or of mediacy (humanity as intellectual being) can be taken for granted. Instead, no hypothesis, no presupposition can be any longer invoked in their name, but only an exposition of the threshold wherein they form and simultaneously deform."[77]

The present study transposes the biopolitical, but ultimately, ontological question of the relationship between humanity and animality to the domain of the ruined science of astrology. That is, a discipline that by its very nature is trans-disciplinary, given the relevance of science, logico-mathematics, religion, and art. Thus, if the idea advanced by this study is that an astrological

image becomes the iconological guise of the constellation of issues that orbit around bare life, it is because in the past astrology was intertwined with the practice of being, and thus constitutes an area of archaeological inquiry replete with signs marked with the existential signature of the sidereal bodies. This is the dimension that remains unspoken in contemporary thought: that is, the role played by celestial bodies in a theory concerning humans living in pure potentiality and who, as Agamben writes in *The Open*, once history has been deactivated, live in a zone of non-knowledge, "outside of being," and saved only because they are unsaveable.[78]

DEACTIVATION

Agamben associates being unsaveable with deactivation or being inoperative, that is, the condition of this life is *otium* (idleness/inactivity) and the only thing which remains is to think "a human nature that has been rendered perfectly inactive" given that life has lost its mystery and man is bereft of any historical task to accomplish.[79] The scenario at the end of history Agamben is here depicting is characterized by a de-activation of history leaving humans in a state of inoperativity, thus allowing them to find a new use for things whose previous use or function has been deactivated (or what Agamben calls "profanation"). Let us summarize Agamben's thinking on this matter by way of Carlo Salzani's succinct articulation of the link between profanation and inoperativeness:

> The new use takes the form of study, play and festivity. . . . Play frees humanity from the sphere of sacrality but without abolishing it. What was sacred is restored to a special use, different from the utilitarian form, which opens the gate to a new happiness. Play and inoperosity [*sic*] are brought together in festivity: The inoperosity [*sic*] that defines festivity (the Shabbat) is not mere inertia or abstention but rather, "sanctification," a peculiar modality of doing and living. . . . What defines festivity is not what is not done in it but, rather, the fact that what is done is not so much different from what one does every other day, but is freed and suspended from its 'economy', from the reasons and aims that define it during weekdays.[80]

Deactivation and profanation are inexorably linked to not only the theme of the Last Day, but to the issue of messianism, a term Agamben employs to contextualize his use the images. Commenting on the messianic as figured in Agamben's thought, Colby Dickinson suggests that what it does "as it moves through the given representations of our work is precisely to hollow them out, to eradicate their content and restore then to a place of pure potentiality beyond the reaches of sovereign power."[81] Emptying the content of our own individual book of life leaves us with blank pages, a dimension of textual unwrittenness that orients us to read for the first time what was never written.

THE POTENTIALITY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

Pagan astrology was damned to the underground of civilization with the advent of Christianity. However, while the Renaissance created an epistemological space for the resurrection and flourishing of astrology, the emergence of modern experimental science brought about a subsequent expulsion of this "irrational art" from the consciousness of culture. The only place for this form of "unreason," which expresses itself in the guise of astrology, is the unconscious mind. Moreover, the place of the (un)conscious mind constitutes for Agamben a *locus amoenus* for the potentialities of (im)potentiality. As already intimated, potentiality is a domain that Agamben represents (when commenting on Aristotle's use of the metaphor) as a mental writing pad: "the mind is like a tablet on which nothing is written . . . the nature of intellect is pure potentiality."[82] An iconological portrayal of Aristotle's theory of the imagination provides a manner of envisioning the unconscious potential intellect. A source for this possibility is Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1603), an encyclopedic repertoire of images and rational allegories with commentary that offer insight into ideas and notions that are usually the domain of purely discursive theology or philosophy. "*Imaginatione*" (Imagination) is depicted as a woman "dressed of various colors, hirsute, and having wings on her temples similar to Mercury's."[83] The point of reference for illustrating why this image is the "imagination," we are told, is Aristotle, *De Anima* (Book III) and the *Divinatione Per Somnum*. In fact, the commentator establishes correspondences between the *De Anima* and the figure of the woman, by noting that "The clothing of various colours demonstrates that the imaginative potentiality receives the phantasms of whatever object from what is in the exterior." The large variety of colors refers to the great multiplicity of what is in the exterior world. What is of particular interest, however, is the meaning of the bristly hair and the winged temples which "signify the rapid operation of said potentiality both in receiving said Phantasms, as well as presenting them to the intellect, we add that said imagination is in continuous movement, as much when we are awake as when we are sleeping as it is explained in the *de divinatione per somnia*."[84]

In a general sense, potentiality's inextricable link with the unconscious sleeping or dream state (portrayed by Mercurian winged temples) is a figure for the critic's imperative to consciously explore the latent (im)potentiality, that is, what the object of study does not know or has ignored. We should note that Ripa's use of Mercury's wings to represent the sleeping state is not casual or random. In the astrological tradition one aspect of Mercury's powers was associated with sleep. For example, in the astrologically themed third book Marsilio Ficino's *Book of Life* (*Liber de Vita* or, *De Vita Triplici*) titled "On Making Your Life Agree with the Heavens," the author is concerned with finding potential ways so that "our spirit can draw in a lot of the spirit

and the life of the world" and with identifying "which planets create and refresh the spirit."[85] One planet that is singled out is Mercury, as it is capable of imposing its powers on the subject in sleep. Mercury is able to put subjects "to sleep with his wand" and "when he has his aspect one way or another he can stupefy the mind, or sharpen it, or weaken it, or strengthen it, vex it or calm it marvellously."[86] As an astrological entity, Mercury is able to control a range of potentialities that can be actualized into positive or negative elements, and the sleep state is one domain where these existential possibilities arise. Moreover, this astral divinity reveals the potentiality of unconscious state through his capability of reawakening (an actualization where potentiality conserves its impotentiality) the subjects he puts to sleep.[87]

The unconscious as a place of potentiality is a notion we find in Agamben, as in the case where he makes use of Foucault's idea of dreams as "the movements of freedom," in order to articulate the notion that the oneiric state is a source for an unconscious cultivation of ontology.[88] Ultimately, the oneiric state, as a *locus* where ontology emerges on a horizon, has as another objective, that of finding an opening that leads to an "absolute truth," namely, potentiality that is figured in the guise of an "indestructible kernel of night." Agamben cites the following passage from Foucault to render this idea: "all imagination, in order to be authentic, must learn to dream; and 'poetic art' has meaning only insofar as it teaches itself to break the spell of images in order to open to the imagination the free path toward the dream, which offers, as absolute truth, its 'indestructible kernel of night."[89]

The idea that potentially could be linked to dreaming finds a cinematic correlative in the concluding frames of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *The Decameron* (1972). Pasolini (who casted Agamben as the apostle Philip in his *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 1964) plays the role of an artist who had studied under Giotto and is commissioned to paint religious murals in a Neapolitan church. The artist portrayed by Pasolini falls asleep in the church and has a dream (which flashes onto the screen like a dialectical image) in which the Virgin Mary, surrounded by saints and angels, appears holding the infant Jesus. The dream is interrupted, but the following day the artist puts the finishing touches to the painting in which he sought to graphically transpose what he had seen in his dream. As the movie ends Pasolini, portraying the artist, asks the viewers the following question: "Why create a work of art when it is so beautiful simply to dream of one?" Pasolini's question touches on an issue that has profound implications for Agamben's thought, and the issue of potentiality in general. De la Durantaye comments on the relevance of Pasolini's question to Agamben by asking, "why not revel in potentiality, as Pasolini suggests, rather than subject oneself to the travails of realization and the disappointments of actuality?"[90] While Agamben frames the theme of potentiality within the context of Artistotle's thought, de la Durantaye's questions point to, whether intended or not, a Neoplatonic epistemological

sensibility that privileges the perfect Idea, which is not contaminated with the agents of change imposed by the logic of actualization. To a definite extent, elements of this Neoplatonic mind set come into play in Agamben's comments on the "image of thought." That is, where the Aristotelian "intransigent" potentiality-impotentiality becomes interchangeable with the "unmoveable" Neoplatonic Idea. What is pertinent to the present study is that what the astrologer reads in the stars is the unconscious of being and of history. The unconscious is unwritten precisely because, as Foucault suggests, it refers not to what has happened but instead, and through the vehicle of the "movements of freedom" of dreams, to what has not yet taken place. The unwritten dream (or nightmare) is a pure potentiality until it is subsequently reported by the astrologer to the client, who then actualizes it by integrating it into the political logic of history.

NECESSARY ANACHRONISMS

The subject of potentiality is at the nucleus of the signifying dispositions of Agamben's theory of the signature, in which astrology plays a prominent role. Moreover, astrology interacts with signs and paradigms that are limited to one specific historical context, as they belong only to the horizon or context in which they emerge. This follows Agamben's idea that "The phenomenon, exposed in the medium of its knowability, shows the whole of which it is the paradigm. With regard to phenomena, this is not a presupposition (a 'hypothesis'): as 'non-presupposed principle,' it stands neither in the past nor in the present but in their exemplary constellation."[91] Sophie Fuggle comments on the relationship between the signature and philosophical archaeology by observing that in Agamben, "what is at stake is very much the idea of history as the way of explaining the present but in terms and according to concepts that only belong in the present."[92] This entails that the signature functions "anachronistically" as it operates outside of or against the chronological thematic demarcations, which are vital for any formulation of an essentialist "spirit" of an age; that is, which justify the interpretations of objects and events from the past on the basis of how they are genetically connected to the given date in time. The signature, instead, operates on the basis of a random interconnectedness, where the objective is not to identify a mythic "origin," but rather to determine when the dispersed signs first emerged on the horizon of perceptibility. It is for this reason that the celestial context of Ezekiel's vision, the messianic banquet of the righteous, and Pasolini's dream in *The Decameron* constitute viable eidetic representations of potentiality: each in their own different way reveal potentialities in the context of a deactivated history and a suspension of temporality.

The homeland of thought is located in the mind's potentiality, its capability for images from the past, present and future, which the mind allows to appear all at once as thought. This is exactly what Ripa states when describing the iconology of *Pensiero* (Thought): "Dante in the ninth of Inferno, says that thought is the very rapid movement of the mind, which immediately flies where intention directs it, and which is capable of all images, past, present, and future."[93] The epistemic valence of the iconological (similar to that of the dialectical image) in this case pivots on the image's ability to freeze data without being obstructed by any historical contingency, or the need to "faithfully" depict the spirit of the historical age linked to the data. A way for potentiality to preserve its impotentiality when it is actualized is to elude the logic of historical time, which orients actualizations toward a state of political plenitude, but which can be redeemed if there is a space conserved for impotentiality.

(UN)WRITTEN LIFE

In "The Idea of Communism," from *Idea of Prose,* which has more to do with pornography and celestial bodies than it does with communism, Agamben writes

> Bazlen said: what we have dreamed, we have already—a long time ago; so long ago that we don't even remember. Not in a past, therefore—we do not have any records of it. Rather, the unfulfilled dreams and desires of humanity are the patient limbs of the resurrection, always ready to reawaken on the last day. And they don't sleep enclosed in rich mausoleums, but are fixed like living stars in the farthest heaven of language whose constellations we can barely make out. And this at last we didn't dream.[94]

Reading the surface of this passage informs us that, among other things, Agamben is conflating the theological tradition, with the reference to the resurrection and the last day, with the astrological one, with the reference to the astral bodies. The point is that this is more than merely a conflation, as the theological and the astrological are profoundly intertwined when it concerns the theme of the end of history. What is interesting is that in the concluding words of "The Idea of Communism" we are able to detect a latent solidarity between the potentiality implicit in the sidereal images and the deactivation or "new use" of pornography. Agamben concludes the piece by suggesting that "To know how to grasp the stars that fall from the never-dreamt-of firmament of humanity is the task of communism."[95] The fact is, because of the contamination of the divine with the human and the animal in zodiacal images, Christianity viewed pagan astrology as pornography. In any event, the celestial bodies share with pornography not only the deactivation

of their original function, but also the potentiality of a new use. The hypothesis this study is exploring is that stars and planets are spheres of potentiality, which have an archaeological presence in ontology, that is, in (un)written life.

In *The Time That Remains*, Agamben speaks about a dimension of "unwrittenness," which he terms "The Unforgettable," and where we see a figuration of the polarities of the written/unwritten in human culture:

> Despite the efforts of historians, scribes and all sorts of archivists, the quantity of what is irretrievably lost in the history of society and the history of individuals is infinitely greater than what can be stored in the archives of memory. In every instant, the measure of forgetting and ruin, the ontological squandering that we bear within ourselves far exceeds the piety of our memories and consciences. But the shapeless chaos of the forgotten is neither inert nor ineffective. To the contrary, it is at work within us with a force equal to that of the mass of conscious memories, but in a different way. Forgetting has a force and a way of operating that cannot be measured in the same terms as those of conscious memory, nor can it accumulated like knowledge. Its persistence determines the status of all knowledge and understanding. The exigency of the lost does not entail being remembered and commemorated; rather, it entails remaining in us and with us as forgotten, and in this way and only in this way, remaining unforgettable.[96]

Agamben approaches the semiotic implications of the unwritten texts in different ways. For example, in *The Highest Poverty*, he suggests that the written text "only lives through the reading that is made of it,"[97] meaning, one could surmise, that the status of being unread implies that the text is not alive or, for all intents and purposes, is unwritten. In *The Sacrament of Language*, we read that precisely because an oath "is defined by the verification of words in facts,"[98] it is thus possible to conclude that it constitutes the actualization of an unwritten text. However, to return to the master theme of this study, namely, the signature of astrology, it would be very instructive at this point to reconsider Cassiodorus's admonition (in consonance with Christian doctrine) to those who seek to read their fate in the stars in light of this passage from *The Time That Remains*. Cassiodorus is not only a prohibition for humans to divine the meanings of the signs the heavenly world produces, it is also an invitation to pretend to view the celestial texts, even though they contain ciphers that would be interpreted as phenomena of divinatory and scientific astrology, as unwritten. Moreover, what is necessarily implied in Cassiodorus's directive is that the sidereal writing must be understood and conserved as "forgettable" accounts of human fate. However, the history of astrology tells us that humans were driven to read the texts of the constellations as a result of their purportedly inextricable connection to life. Precisely because this link was the object of the Christian command to forget, it be-

came the unforgettable that was to shape, for example, the cultural ideology of Renaissance Humanism. In fact, according to Peuckert the Renaissance was about the rebirth of the occult sciences (including astrology, alchemy, and so on) of Late Antiquity, more so than it was a resurrection of classical philology and a forgotten vocabulary.[99] In our specific case the re-emergence of astrology is a signature or power whose (un)writtenness has the (im)potential to activate meanings in human life and human history.

NOTES

1. Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, trans. Luca D'Isanto and Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 54.
2. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 56.
3. See Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (London-New York: Routledge, 1994), 75.
4. Cited in Jim Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1987), 123–24.
5. Giorgio Agamben, *Il fuoco e il racconto* (Roma: Nottetempo, 2014), 111.
6. Agamben, *Il fuoco e il racconto*, 107.
7. Agamben, *Il fuoco e il racconto*, 111.
8. Giorgio Agamben and Monica Ferrando, *The Unspeakable Girl: The Myth and Mystery of Kore,* trans. Leland de la Durantaye and Annie Julia Wyman (London-New York-Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2014), 13.
9. Agamben and Ferrando, *The Unspeakable Girl*, 37.
10. Giorgio Agamben, *Stasis. La Guerra civile come paradigma politico [Homo sacer, II, 2]* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2015), 35.
11. Connal Parsley, "Image," in *The Agamben Dictionary*, ed. Alex Murray and Jessica Whyte (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 101.
12. Agamben and Ferrando, *The Unspeakable Girl*, 39.
13. Jenny Doussan addresses this issue in Agamben when she observes that "it is not that thought transcends language, but, rather, that cognition is not solely governed by or limited to the linguistic model of Benveniste's theory of the double signification of language. . . . The snapshot of Agamben's exception is a procedural separation of conscious data from its communicability and its transformation into a picture through a mechanistic process in which we can never have our own thought." Doussan, *Time, Language, and Visuality in Agamben's Philosophy*, 219.
14. W. Tatarkiewicz, *Storia dell'estetica. Volume terzo, L'estetica moderna*. Ed. Giampiero Cavaglià (Torino: Einaudi, 1980), III, 292.
15. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 92.
16. One tendency, for example, has been to analyze *The Open* from the perspective of how Agamben diverges from Heidegger's notion of the "open." For Mathew Abbott, *The Open* transposes Heidegger's ontological analytic "onto biological categories." Agamben thus alters the Heideggerian interpretation of the question of human life: "Dasein is not just the being for which being is an issue, but also the animal for which animality is an issue." *The Figure of This World: Agamben and The Question of Political Ontology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 129. For different approaches see Doussan, *Time, Language, and Visuality in Agamben's Philosophy,* 107–16; Thanos Zartaloudis, *Giorgio Agamben: Power, Law, and the Uses of Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 216–24, 233–38; chapter 8 of de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben,* and the first chapter of Aaron Hillyer, *The Disappearance of Literature: Blanchot, Agamben, and the Writers of the No* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). In none of these or other studies on Agamben (or, for that matter, on contemporary thought in general) does astrology emerge as a theme or an epistemological signature.

17. Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 821.
18. Kevin Attell, "Potentiality/Impotentiality," *The Agamben Dictionary*, 160. For extended discussions on Agamben and potentiality see de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, particularly 1–25; Zartaloudis, *Giorgio Agamben: Power, Law, and the Uses of Criticism*, 233–77.
19. David Kishik, *The Power of Life: Agamben and the Coming Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 43.
20. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 35.
21. Agamben*, Homo Sacer*, 46.
22. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 37. For insightful remarks on the "signature" see Doussan, *Time, Language, and Visuality in Agamben's Philosophy*, 123–33; William Watkin, *Agamben and Indifference: A Critical Overview* (London-New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 3–28.
23. Watkin, *Agamben and Indifference,* 23.
24. Paracelsus cited in Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 34.
25. Paracelsus cited in Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 55.
26. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 55.
27. Agamben, *Potentialities,* 102.
28. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 148.
29. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 57.
30. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 8
31. De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben,* 152.
32. Tyson E. Lewis, *On Study: Giorgio Agamben and Educational Potentiality* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 89.
33. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 20.
34. See Fritz Saxl, *La fede negli astri,* ed. Salvatore Settis (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2007), 51.
35. *The Grove Encyclopedia of Medieval Art and Architecture, Volume 2,* ed. Colum Hourihane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 53.
36. For relevant information on the images see Luisa Mortara Ottolenghi, "Description of Decorated and Illuminated Hebrew Manuscripts in the Ambrosian Library," in Aldo Luzzatto and Luisa Mortara Ottolenghi, *Hebraica Ambrosiana* (Milano: Il polifilo, 1972), 115–44.
37. Murray, *Giorgio Agamben*, 44. De la Durantaye and Abbott make a reference to the images without any commentary on a more extended significance. In his *Introduzione a Giorgio Agamben* (Genova: Il Nuovo Melangolo, 2013), Salzani does not even mention the images from the Jewish Bible.
38. Agamben, *The Open*, 2.
39. Zofia Ameisenowa, "Animal-Headed Gods, Evangelists, Saints and Righteous Men," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 12 (1949), 3.
40. Ameisenowa, "Animal-Headed Gods, Evangelists, Saints and Righteous Men," 29.
41. Ameisenowa, "Animal-Headed Gods, Evangelists, Saints and Righteous Men," 24.
42. Agamben, *The Open*, 2.
43. Will-Erich Peuckert, *L'astrologie*, trans. R. Jouan and L. Jospin (Paris: Payot, 1965), 80.
44. Bruce J. Malina, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation. Star Visions and Sky Journeys* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 99, 100.
45. Chevalier, *A Postmodern Revelation*, 223.
46. For examples of the types of "hidden use" of astral elements in Ezekiel, see Franz Boll, *Auf der Offenbarung Johannis: Hellenitsche Studien zum Weltbild der Apokalypse* (Berlin: Teubner, 1914), p. 35; E. W. Maunder, *The Astronomy of the Bible* (Chatham: Clements Brothers, 1923), 167; G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*. The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh and New York: Clark and Scribner's, 1960), 23; Bruce J. Malina, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation,* 97ff.; Chevalier, *A Postmodern Revelation: Signs of Astrology and the Apocalypse*, 235–48.
47. Chevalier, *A Postmodern Revelation*, 246.

48. Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 14–15.

49. Giulio Carlo Argan and Rebecca West, "Ideology and Iconology," *Critical Inquiry* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1975), 297.

50. Agamben, *Il fuoco e il racconto*, 93.

51. See Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretations*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin with a foreword by Robert Scholes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). See also Paul Colilli, "Paratextology," in *Semiotica* 166-1/4 (2007), 445–51.

52. Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 10.

53. Genette, *Palimpsests*, 2.

54. The present study is not intended as a history of astrology, and so the bibliographical sources are not meant to be exhaustive, but, instead, to provide a general and precise idea of the scholarly work being done on astrology. The important contributions include, Paola Zambelli, *Astrology and Magic from the Medieval Latin and Islamic World to Renaissance Europe: Theories and Approaches* (Farnham, Surrey–Burlington, VT: Ashgate Variorum, 2012); *Horoscopes and Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology*, ed. Guenther Oestmann, H. Darrel Rutkin, and Kocku von Stuckrad (Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005); Nicolas Weill-Parot*, Les "images astrologiques" au moyen âge et à la renaissance: spéculations intellectuelles et pratiques magiques [XIIe-XVe siècle]* (Paris: Champion, 2002*);* Steven J. Green, *Disclosure and Discretion in Roman Astrology: Manilius and His Augustan Contemporaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Nicholas Campion, *History of Western Astrology*, *Volume II, The Medieval and Modern Worlds* (London–New York: Continuum Books, 2009); Mary Quinlan-McGrath, *Influences: Art, Optics, and Astrology in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago-London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013); Monica Azzolini*, The Duke and the Stars: Astrology and Politics in Renaissance Milan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); *Il linguaggio dei cieli: astri e simboli nel Rinascimento*, a cura di Germana Ernst e Guido Giglioni (Roma: Carocci, 2012); *Nella luce degli astri: l'astrologia nella cultura del Rinascimento: Convegno di studi, Firenze, 14–15 dicembre 2001*, a cura di Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, presentazione di Michele Ciliberto (Sarzana, La Spezia: Agorà, 2004); Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, *Lo specchio alto: astrologia e filosofia fra Medioevo e prima età moderna* (Pisa: F. Serra, 2012).

55. Carl G. Jung, "Richard Wilhelm: In Memoriam," in *The Spirit of Man, Art and Literature, Collected Works,* Vol.15, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1971), 56.

56. See, for example, Colby Dickinson, *Agamben and Theology* (London-New York: T and T Clark International, 2011); *Die gouvernementale Maschine: zur politischen Philosophie Giorgio Agambens*, ed. Janine Böckelmann and Frank Meier (Münster : Unrast, 2007).

57. Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy,* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 152.

58. Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos Libri VIII,* trans. Jean Rhys Bram (Astrology Classics: Bel Air, MD, 2005), 70.

59. Giorgio Agamben, "Une biopolitique mineure. Un entretien avec Giorgio Agamben," by Stany Grelet and Mathieu Potte-Bonnevile *Vacarme* 10: 4–10, http://www.vacarme.eu.org/article255.html.

60. A partial list of useful studies would include, *Politics, Metaphysics, and Death: Essays on Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer*, ed. Andrew Norris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Kishik, *The Power of Life*; *The Work of Giorgio Agamben: Law, Literature, Life*, ed. Justin Clemens, Nicholas Heron, and Alex Murray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008); John Lechte and Saul Newman, *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights: Statelessness, Images, Violence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

61. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

62. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1.

63. Murray, *Giorgio Agamben,* 61.

64. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 65.

65. Paul Patton, "Agamben and Foucault on Biopower and Biopolitics," in *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life*, ed. Matthew Calarco and Steven De Caroli (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 203.
66. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 122.
67. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 128.
68. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 181.
69. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 6.
70. Paul Patton, "Agamben and Foucault on Biopower and Biopolitics," 211.
71. Agamben, *Means without End*, 3.
72. Zartaloudis, *Giorgio Agamben : Power, Law, and the Uses of Criticism*, 164.
73. Jessica Whyte, *Catastrophe and Redemption: The Political Thought of Giorgio Agamben* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2013), 34.
74. Agamben, *The Open*, 80.
75. Clare Colebrook, "Animal," *The Agamben Dictionary*, 23.
76. Agamben, *The Open*, 3.
77. Zartaloudis, *Giorgio Agamben: Power, Law, and the Uses of Criticism*, 216.
78. Agamben, *The Open,* 92.
79. Agamben, *The Open*, 90.
80. Carlo Salzani, "*Quodlibet*: Giorgio Agamben's Anti-Utopia"*Utopian Studies* 23, no. 1, 2012, 227.
81. Dickinson, *Agamben and Theology*, 89.
82. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 215. Agamben repeats this metaphoric episteme when discussing the figure of Bartleby: "The mind is therefore not a thing but a being of pure potentiality, and the image of the writing tablet on which nothing is written functions precisely to represent the mode in which pure potentiality exists" (*Potentialities*, 245).
83. Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia*, a cura di Piero Buscaroli, prefazione di Mario Praz (Milano: TEA, 1992), 511–12.
84. Ripa, *Iconologia*, 512.
85. Marsilio Ficino, *Book of Life*, trans. Charles Boer (Woodstock, Connecticut: Spring Publications, 1994), 115.
86. Ficino, *Book of Life*, 118.
87. Ficino, *Book of Life*, 118.
88. To make this point Agamben quotes a passage from Foucault's *Dits et écrits* that tells us that in the dream state "there occurs the transition from anthropology to ontology," that is, where "existence itself . . . in the fundamental direction of the imaginary indicates its own ontological foundation." Cited in Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 105.
89. Quoted in Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 105.
90. De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 21.
91. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 28.
92. In the sentences that follow Sophie Fuggle adds that "Consequently, we must concede that any access we may have to a source or origin can only ever be via tradition and it is tradition that bars access to the source. Tradition constitutes our way of understanding the past and as such never actually belongs to the past and can never allow us access to the past. Tradition functions in a similar way to the Freudian notion of trauma. It refers to an experience that is always a non-experience existing only in the present, never in the past." "Excavating Government: Giorgio Agamben's Archaeological Dig," *Foucault Studies*, No. 7 (September) 2009, 87.
93. Ripa, *Iconologia*, 345.
94. Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, 75.
95. Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, 75.
96. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 39–40.
97. Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life,* trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 77.
98. Giorgio Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 21.

99. Ioan Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, trans. M. Cook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 177.

Scholium

Astrology and the Philosophy of History

Agamben is convinced that angelology (the most ancient, sustained and comprehensive reflection on power/governmentality, as he informs us) and philosophy of history have a connection that is "inextricable."[1] The justification for this insight is that angels occupy both sides, namely that of "economy" and "glory," of what Agamben terms the "governmental machine." In other terms, angels are at once choir members who sing praises to God's glory, and bureaucrats who ensure the unfolding of God's plan for sacred history, thus making them players in "historical" life. However, Agamben then points to the possibility of suspending the link between angelology and philosophy of history, that is, between poetry and politics, in a movement leading "towards the very heart of the present."[2] The interruption of the connection could potentially lead, we might add, to the rethinking of the space of potentialities that rests between glorification and governmentality, but also to the possibilities of these two acts or functions themselves. We also need to note that Agamben hints at an archaeology of governmental functions linking the angels to the stars when he speculates that "angels are originally cosmic powers which the celestial God needs to subject in order to govern the world."[3] Could a similar claim be made for astrology having a link to the philosophy of history? Eugenio Garin is convinced that during the Renaissance astrology was indeed perceived unambiguously as, among other things, a philosophy of history.[4] If, in a general sense, philosophy of history is concerned with the theoretical premises inherent in the multifaceted investigations relative to history and historiography, then there is no question that astrology sheds crucial light on the modes in which we perceive the magmatic flow of historical time. Sensing that one's character and destiny are either necessitated by

the celestial bodies, or "inclined" by them, inevitably leads to a particular understanding of all that occurs under the rubric of "history."

Historical consciousness arose, from an astrological perspective, the moment a subject sensed a profound affinity (which is not merely optical, but psycho-physiological) with celestial deities, as an experience of knowledge. Astrology securalized this relationship with the cosmos by way of a logico-mathematical methodology. For example, Ornella Pompeo Faracovi's research on the history of astrology points in the direction of a secularization of ancient pagan religions through the signatures of human psychology. Her main argument rests on three cardinal axes:[5]

- Astrology is neither a religion, nor a philosophy, nor a system, even though it overlaps with these three elements. If anything, astrology is knowledge of specific techniques related to its practice.
- Some of the methodologies on which astrology is based, such as the highly influential one codified by Ptolemy, are in the domain of the logico-mathematical sciences, without any link to the occult or magic.
- As we saw with Jung, even though astrology originates from ancient astral religions, it secularizes their contents. Thus, what were once planetary deities became codes employed to determine human "inclinations." Individual types of behavior were seen in relation to the former planetary god (Saturn=saturnine, Mars=martial, Jupiter=jovial, moon [luna]=lunatic, and so on).

Just as biblical sacred history was to be eventually secularized and become a basis for post-Medieval philosophies of history, astrology produced a secularized understanding of man's relationship to the biopower of the constellations. Of course, astrology's function was radically deactivated precisely because modern psychology and modern astronomy, as two separate and autonomous disciplines, are able to provide a more grounded, reliable, and useful account of what astrology sought to achieve as a single discipline. However, before astrology's potential was suspended it had left indelible marks on human consciousness as it concerns the terror of fate and destiny. While the marks are now submerged in the human unconscious, there are signs to indicate that the imagination turns to its astrological substratum when the task is to explain how it is possible, as Agamben does, to read something as if it were always the first time. In this situation, it is ultimately the case of figuratively transposing the text from the heavens to our hands, as the distant reading became a close reading. The most originary understanding of history occurred when the transformations and movements in the skies were noticed. However, to get a sense of how the idea of astrology as a philosophy of history was transmitted to posterity, its relationship with Christianity needs to be considered.

Theology obscured astrology as it sought to appropriate its science of prognosis, and so centuries before the advent of modern science the ontological status of astrology was revised in a decisive way; astrology was traumatized, and was forced to assume a new role vis-à-vis sacred history. At its inception Christianity assumed an unambiguous position on astrology; the astral science ruled over man until the advent of Christ, which suspended the "biopower" of the stars. This is highly indicative of the tension between theology and astrology concerning the control of human existence. In the exact moment in which the Magi, who were themselves astrologers guided by the star, began adoring Christ the new king, writes Gregory of Nazianzus, astrology reached its final demise, as now the stars moved according to an orbit determined by Christ.[6] In an account dealing with the visit of the Magi, Augustine takes great pains to clarify that the coming of Christ brought about not solely the disactivation of astral influence, but an actual reversal of the direction of the power as the stars were now subject to the will of God made man:

> The star which the Magi saw when Christ was born according to the flesh was not a lord governing his nativity but a servant bearing witness to it; it did not subject him to its power but in its service pointed the way to him. What is more, that star was not one of those which from the beginning of creation keep their regular courses under the Creator's law, but at the new birth from the Virgin a new star appeared, which performed its office by going before the faces of the Magi in their search for Christ until it led them to the place where lay the infant Word of God. . . . So Christ was not born because it shone forth, but it shone forth because Christ was born; so if we must speak of it, we should say not that the star was fate for Christ, but that Christ was fate for the star.[7]

In this commentary there rests an unthought crux of Western thought as it concerns biopower. That is to say, the idea that there was a specific bond linking astrology to theology, the discipline preoccupied solely with maintaining God's name present in the mind and memory of humans. If we were to follow Augustine's and Gregory's line of thinking, it would appear that astrology paved the way for theology. Erich Auerbach's notion of *figura* comes to mind here; in other words, theology is the fulfillment of the historical task initiated by astrology, which had, in turn, pre-figured theology itself. Put differently, let us say that theology constitutes the interruption of astrology and appropriates the logic concerning not only that which comes to pass for our daily being, but also the one dealing with the determination of our character and personality.

The ghost of the astrological past has traditionally been an easy target of intellectual disdain. In *The Stars down to Earth*, Adorno writes that the contemporary proponents of occultism "inveigh about materialism. But they want to weigh the astral body."[8] "The real absurdity," Adorno continues, "is

reproduced in the astrological hocus-pocus, which adduces the impenetrable connections of alienated elements—nothing more alien than the stars—as knowledge about the subject."[9] Reviewers of Adorno's have, however, been critical of his work's intentions. For example, Dennis Dutton finds that *The Stars down to Earth* "seems now and again almost as obsessive as the astrology it analyzes."[10] Faracovi instead refers to Adorno as an example of the severe shortcomings of contemporary anti-astrological literature that tends to not to pivot on an informed examination of astrology as a discipline. Rather, the supposed monolithic irrationality of astrology is not illustrated, but instead simply assumed. Thus, since it is presupposed that astrology can only be superstition, being uninformed about a subject matter becomes, according to Faracovi, a virtue. To be sure, Adorno gives only the slightest indication of being familiar with the discipline and techniques of astrology.[11]

In short, the historical phenomenon of astrology has been grossly misrepresented. Yet, a more balanced and informed perspective on the historical significance of astrology does indeed exist. Anthony Grafton is by no means overstating the case when he suggests that astrology "represents the most consistent, unified and durable body of beliefs and practices in the western tradition."[12] Grafton is essentially echoing the sort of sentiment found in Boll, according to whom astrology constitutes the most tenacious survival of ancient religions known in the West.[13] But this ancient religion *cum* science speaks to the most basic aspect of human existence, namely the multifaceted dimension of lived experience. Grafton offers us a description of the office of the astrologer, which is attuned to our contemporary sensibilities:

> Astrologers—now as in the past—see themselves as sensitive interpreters of stars and humans alike. They know how to pick out from the thousands of intersecting geometrical relationships among the planets in any given geniture those that will affect the body, character and fate of a given client. The possession of this key enables them to read the visible language of the stars, as delicately and precisely as a couturier or a fashion columnist reads the visible language of clothing.[14]

By this definition the astrologer is the semiotician *par excellence*, with the sharp interpretative eye required to measure and then verbally and iconologically transcribe the signs and signatures resting on the surface of the planets. Any account of astrology must be cognizant of the more than two millennia worth of documentation of its history and practices.[15] To be sure, one of the failings of anti-astrological scholarship is the absence of an informed understanding of, for example, the logico-mathematical instruments used by the practitioners of this art, and the cartographies of the celestial bodies they plotted. It would appear that the anti-astrological literature has preyed on one of the polarities of astrology's schizophrenic (by the standards of post-Renaissance science) status. In brief, astrology requires an irrational veneration

of the heavens, on the one hand, and the proper ratio-logical measurement of the heavenly bodies, on the other, in order to calculate the distances, movements, orbits and other astrophysical details. The anti-astrological literature has almost exclusively focused on the former polarity, thus falling into the trap of often-unfounded critiques of astrology. Unfounded, that is, because the irrational component needs to be integrated into the ratio-logical one in order to get a more historically and methodologically correct understanding of astrological practices.

How did what Agamben calls a "dispositor" such as astrology go from being an instrument necessary to gauge social, political, economic movement and other phenomena to a talisman of madness? The simple answer is the advent of modern experimental science. But what haunts this answer are the mnemonic records and archives of those humans whose lives were held in the astrologer's hands, given the subjects' pathological fear of the planets. Astrology has ceased to exist as a science, but the halos and phantasms of the anxieties it inculcated in the minds of individuals has not disappeared, as they are archived as living tensions in the cultural products bequeathed to us from the past. In other words, astrology is "pure unreason," it comes to us today as a series of ruins, a severely damaged machine we no longer know how to reassemble and use as a modern epistemological instrument. Yet, the debris of astrology infiltrates specific domains of modern cultural production. For example, as we will see with Agamben, Warburg, and Benjamin, the "pure unreason" of astrology constitutes a signifying entity that allows us to gauge the cognitive territory Newtonian science expelled from any epistemological framework.

During its history astrology has been challenged with the accusation of being a purely irrational way of reading temporal events, as in the case of Cicero who discarded it since it was nothing but an "unconceivable madness."[16] While criticisms of this sort surfaced repeatedly over the centuries, it is equally true that astrology enjoyed the reputation of being a credible science. In the *Adversus mathematicos* Sextus Empiricus proposes a critique of the methodological premises of the liberal arts, in which he includes astrology. Of course, the point is that while Sextus Empiricus is critical of how astrology operates, he does indeed recognize it as an authoritative body of knowledge. A figure that played an important role in defining the philosophical parameters of astrology was Ptolemy, who, through his *Tetrabiblos*, cultivated the idea of astrology as being a rational science of conjectures. Ptolemy espoused the Aristotelian scientific method, and argued that the heavens project their influence on the terrestrial world and thus affect the lives of humans and earthly phenomena in general. The office of the astrologer is that of establishing the nature of the celestial influences on the basis of data drawn from the observation of the skies. However, Ptolemy was careful to point out that he was not intent on announcing predictions, but instead pro-

posing conjectures, not certain actualities, we might add, but pure potentialities, as understood in Aristotelian terms. Instead, the theory that served to rationalize the possibility of planets directly exercising influence on humans arose out of the context of Neoplatonic philosophy, which had speculated about the existence of sympathies that created a network of material communication including all of the dimensions of reality in the universe. The Neoplatonists purported that the human body was compartmentalized into different faculties and manners of being, and that planetary influence was thought to affect the soul's pneumatological, or material aspect.[17]

Paleo-Christianity, unlike the pagan religions, had no tolerance whatsoever for other religions, including those who worshiped the planets and the *Sol invictus* as divinities. Moreover, it promised its followers the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, domination over the constellations and the destiny of subjects, which the astral deities controlled. Boll and Carl Bezold frame the matter in the following way:

> the Apocalypse of John, which also owes a great part of its most efficacious images to astral mysticism, in promising to the faithful victor not only the dominion over the nations until death, but also over the morning star, ended up communicating to the believer the idea that he was able to powerfully compete with the great charmer, that he was thus able to bend to his own service the angel of the astral announcer of day break. . . . Even the *Letter to the Romans* (8, 38) celebrates the triumph of God over all of the astral powers and over destiny. [18]

In the *De idolatria* Tertullian had argued that God permitted astrology until the advent of Christ, but once Christ arrived the ontological currency of astrology was radically devalued. The only permissible form of knowledge was Christ's astral science, not that of Mercury, Jupiter, and all of the other "dead" planetary deities. In fact, in an allegorizing commentary on the trip to return home the Magi undertook after visiting Christ, Tertullian indicates that the significance of the dream "sent to the Magi telling them to return home by a different route,"[19] (in other words to alter how they lived), was that Christ had neutralized the power of the stars. In their post-death stage Saturn and Mars were no longer able to know and communicate their knowledge to humans in need of a guide for personal redemption. The advent of Christ eternally erased any salvific function the constellations might be able to offer.

Different strategies were employed to bury the effective potentiality of astrological images. For example, Chevalier notes that in Revelations "the scorpion-tailed demons of Revelation 9 are assigned zoological 'appearances' that preclude a literal reading of an astrological code into John's use of the scorpion motif. The animal code is visibly preferred over the astral . . . treating Scorpio as a member of the zodiacal pantheon is simply incompat-

ible with the logocentric distinction between immaterial spirits and the bodies made visible on earth (animals, humans) or in heaven (stars)."[20] In other words, at the level of word-image, of logo-iconography, Revelations actualizes the separation between divine/non-divine, spiritus/corpus, and so on.

We could summarize the effects of the subjugation of astrology by noting one of its most important consequences, namely, that it was rendered inoperative, while its signifying structures are appropriated by Christianity. This provided Christianity with the verbal elements necessary to speak anagogically, that is of promises of coming events, such as the resurrection of the body, that are however faintly visible in the present moment. As we will see, the prophetic nature of anagogy that actualizes certainty was meant to obliterate the conjectural nature of astrology, which instead pivots on the potentialities that conserve their impotentialities.

However, it was no easy task on the part of the Christians to completely banish astrology to the margins of knowledge. For example, the Gospels place Christ's existence on Earth in a very close relationship with astrology. To be sure, the existential content of Christ's bare life includes extremely important astrological signatures. There are, for example, the star that guided the three Magi to the *locus* of Christ's birth, and the miracle of the lunar eclipse at the site of the crucifixion. To this we could add a retroactive signature, the fact that during the fourth century CE the Church replaced the pagan *Sol invictus* with Christ, the true "Sun of justice," by moving his day of birth to December 25, which, for the pagans, was the Sun's genethliac, when the sun's new annual cycle began. Moreover, it was also true that since pagan times there existed the belief that the stars were not operative in causing things to happen or, as in the case of the Christians, in tempting the faithful to commit sin. The stars' function was not to be an agent in terrestrial events, but to essentially warn or advise of things that were about to happen. This is exactly what many early Christians believed, including Origen who was of the opinion that only angels and the blessed were capable of reading the writings on the stars. There were a series of legislative actions that sought to banish astrology from the spheres of cultural practices. For example, in either 364 or 367 the Council of Laodicea was the first official occasion in which Christianity condemned astrology.[21]

In any event, the relationship between theology and astrology has been one of conflict, as what was at stake was the source of a governing power over subjects. For this reason astrology (precisely because it deals with how the heavenly bodies are potentially able to control human bodies) shares with biopolitics the thematics of the preservation of biopower, as is the case for theology. Moreover, theology and astrology were in competition over the anagogical file (that is, the ability to represent and perceive the future in the present) hidden in human experience. But while it is theology that plays a central role in Agamben's writings, the idea being proposed in this study is

that if we heed close attention to works such as *The Open* and others, and to the significance Agamben attributes to astrology when he speaks about it, we will see a different world emerge, one where the regressive archaeology key to Agamben's methodological practices unhides unthought relations and connections among the debris of scattered historical signs.

The virulent attack by Christianity coupled with the radical decline in the cultivation of knowledge that was actuated by classical antiquity brought about a monumental devaluation and near disappearance of astrology in the aftermath of the death of the Roman empire of the West. In fact, M. L. W. Laistner has suggested that it was "Not persecution or prosecution, but the lack of proper manuals [*that*] caused the disappearance of 'scientific' astrology in the West for four or five centuries after Firmicus composed his astrologer's handbook."[22] However, the advent of Islam brought about a renewed interest in astrology, informed by data gathered from the Indian, Persian, Greek and Syrian traditions. The result was, among other particulars, the fact that the Arabs conceived of new sidereal formations, such as the great conjunctions, and employed astrology extensively for therapeutic purposes. Moreover, while medicine was categorized as an art, astrology was instead designated as being a science given that, unlike the medical arts, it had a connection to philosophy.[23] Through the Arabic matrix astrology was transmitted to Europe in the guise of Greek and Arabic translations, moreover, astrology was to assume a disciplinary presence in the universities of Early Modern Europe.[24]

There is no question that during this period the idea of the heavenly bodies exercising influence over human life was well received. However, it is worth noting that while figures such as Thomas Aquinas and Robert Anglicus were convinced of the existence of celestial influence, others such as Hervaeus and Nicole Oresme purported that transformations and growth would continue on earth even if the celestial bodies were immobile.[25] In any event, Thomas Aquinas constructed his philosophical understanding of astrology on the basis of Aristotle's claims concerning the causality of the heavenly spheres within the terrestrial world. The most pertinent Aristotelian texts in this regard are the *De Caelo* (I: 23), the *Metereologica* (I:2, 339a21–23; II.2, 345b24–33), *On Generation and Corruption* (II:10) and *Physics* (II:2, 194b13–14; VII:1, 242a13f; VIII:9, 265b35f). However, the question of Christianity's strategy to deactivate the planets' dispensation of biopower on humans was dealt with by Thomas Aquinas with the idea that while the celestial spheres "incline" humans, they do not cause or control behaviors, actions and events. Thus, the stars had no influence whatsoever on human free will or on divine providence.

Ultimately, in Early Modern Europe astrology, astronomy and mathematics were considered to be the highest manifestations of science. In fact, Peter of Blois writes that "Mathematicians are those, who, from the positions of

the stars, the aspect of the firmament, and the motion of the planes, discover things that are to come."[26] A decisive characteristic of this triumvirate of sciences is that they overlap in such a way so as to bolster and expand the potential of any understanding of the relation between humans and the universe. This is exactly the sense of Adelard of Bath's description of astronomy, which "describes the whole form of the world, the courses of the planets, the number and size of the orbits, the position of the signs. . . . By this science, a man acquires knowledge, not only of the present condition of the world, but of the past and the future. For Beings of the superior world, endowed with divine souls, are the principle and cause of the inferior world here below."[27] During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries astrology enjoyed a further intellectual, but also artistic, expansion in European culture. The dominant names are Marsilio Ficino and Gerolamo Cardano, both of whom privileged horoscopic astrology. Cardano, in fact, under the influence of Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, cultivated the idea of astrology as a conjectural art, which focused on potentialities. However, Pietro Pomponazzi proposed a more fatalistic understanding of how the stars affected human life, while Pico della Mirandola attacked any potential for celestial influence on terrestrial beings. Moreover, the object of Pico's attack was divinatory astrology, while he pays very little attention to "physical" astrology as theorized within the context of Ptolemy's scientific domestication of the heavens and the potential of their influence on the sublunary world. The fact is, even after Pico's assault on astrology, it conserved its standing as scientific discipline in the universities, it found its apologists in figures such as Pontano, Giuntini, and Melanchthon, and continued to be a subject of cultivation at the hands of astronomers such as Regiomontanus and Bianchini.[28] Moreover, following the Copernican revolution, there was an attempt to sketch out an astrology that offered a level of astro-mathematical precision that was consistent with the new discoveries.[29] It has become commonplace to be distracted from the fact that Kepler seriously reflected on the possibility of a renewed astrology (*De fundamentis astrologiae certioribus*), and that Galileo actually casted natal horoscopes (*Astrologica Nonnulla*).

Once we transition from the seventeenth century to the eighteenth, astrology undergoes a repeated displacement to the netherworld of intellectual oblivion. The important astrological works, such as the *Tetrabiblos*, were no longer published, while what was already in print (manuscripts for the greater part) remained unread and forgotten in the libraries of Europe. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that classical philologists and historians of religions realized that any understanding of their subject necessarily entailed a disciplinary transmigration through the astrological tradition. Ultimately, it was a question of interrogating the rationality/irrationality bipolar axis of the roots of European thought, which had tended to focus on the Apollonian or rational pole at the expense of its darker side. In his review of

Auguste Bouché-Leclerq's *L'astrologie grecque*, H. Usener claimed that it was becoming progressively more difficult to view humans as the "children of light" given that before they emerge into light they are born and exist in darkness.[30] Moreover, the line of demarcation separating light from darkness is not as distinct as one might have thought and hoped. To be sure, as Warburg was to eventually contend, reason and magic have the same source, and it was thus important to shed light on the irrational component of science and reason.

This intellectual mind set gave way, beginning in the last decades of the nineteenth century, to works such August Engelbrecht's edition of Hephaestion of Thebes, Eric Riess on the fragments of Nechepsos-Petosiris, Boll on Ptolemy, W. Kroll on Firmicus Maternus, Franz Cumont's *Catalogus codicum astrologorum*, and Bouché-Leclerq's *L'astrologie grecque*. The renewed philological interest in astrology produced a series of important results. For example, through the testimony of forgotten Byzantine period *excerpta*, Boll was able to identify a celestial territory, the *sphaera barbarica* that was distinct from the *sphaera grecanica*. Boll discovered that the *sphaera barbarica* was compiled from the list of stars (the *paranatellonta*) that are present in the emergence of the zodiacal signs. This list (from circa the first century BCE) was the work of Teukros of Babylon, but it was also known, having passed through Persia, to the Arab astrologers. In fact, Teukros's compilation was, in the ninth century CE, included in the astrological works of Abu Ma'shar, which, in turn, were translated into Latin and made their way to Early Modern Europe beginning in the thirteenth century CE. With the historical reconstruction of this astrological data, Boll was able to illustrate the complex migration of astrological practices from their ancient Mesopotamian origins through the various iterations in ancient Greece, followed by Late Antiquity, Islamic culture, and Medieval Europe.[31]

The survival of astrological practices through an extended and multifaceted geo-spatial movement as documented by Boll, was a decisive element in Warburg's notion of the survival of pagan antiquity and the idea of the *pathosformeln*. Moreover, the results of Warburg's interrogation of astrology under the influence of Boll's discoveries, such as the *Mnemosyne* project, were to have a defining influence on Agamben's formulation of the theory of the signature, the idea of living images, and, we might add, an implicit evaluation of astrology in relation to the philosophy of history. One of Warburg's most significant interlocutors, Ernst Cassirer, in works such as *Language and Myth* and *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, characterized astrology as being the middle point between mathematical rigor and a "fantastic and abstruse mysticism." Cassirer suggests that astrology constitutes one of the most notable efforts made by humans to delineate a system of order and organization in the world, precisely because it established a connection between events and the celestial bodies. However, astrol-

ogy's irrational polarity is what prevented it from achieving a higher degree of unveiling the logic of human culture in that it failed to work toward envisioning the events of earth as something that was part of the pure universality of mathematical laws.

In their study on Saturn and Melancholy, Fritz Saxl, Erwin Panofsky, and Raymond Klibansky laid bare the pertinence to astrology of the theme of melancholy, which is articulated with a conceptual expanse that cuts across art, literature, and philosophy. The idea of an important link between astrology and the philosophy of history is by no means an exaggeration of intentions. The connection pivots not only on the fact that astrology was understood to be imbibed with philosophical concepts, but also because astrology was seen as an instrument that allowed significant insights into the dynamics of the course of history. To be sure, commenting on the significance of the theory of the great conjunctions in Renaissance Europe, Grafton posits that as an astrological doctrine it helped promulgate the notion that astrology is ultimately "a hermeneutics of the end of the world."[32] Astrology's relevance to the philosophy of history pivots in many ways on its potential to shed decisive light on the elements that condition how a human subject lives and ultimately acts, as in the case, for example, of the doctrine of humorology. "The theory of melancholy," Benjamin writes with Saturn in mind, "has a very close connection with the doctrine of stellar influences."[33] Benjamin has Warburg in mind in the discussion on the melancholy and the planetary influences. "According to Warburg," Benjamin informs us, "in the Renaissance, when the reinterpretation of saturnine melancholy as a theory of genius was carried out with a radicalism unequalled in the thought of antiquity, 'dread of Saturn' . . . *[occupied]* the central position in astrological belief."[34] As Benjamin writes these words he is paraphrasing and quoting from Warburg's "Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther" (1920). A central notion in this work by Warburg is the extent to which astrology was perceived as means and as a science that would contribute in a decisive way to safeguarding frail human life. "Celestial bodies," Warburg speculates, "were visualized in human form in order to limit their daemonic power by analogy," moreover the Renaissance astrological documents, "are to be regarded as hitherto unread records of the tragic history of freedom of thought in modern Europe."[35]

Warburg considered astrology to be a necessary evil, as for example, in his piece from 1912 on the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara where he speaks of astrology as "that dangerous enemy to all creative invention," and, he underlines, astrology "is no more than a form of onomastic fetishism, projected onto the future."[36] However, what is important in this discussion is the sensation of fear and particularly the fear of madness and annihilation that is present in Warburg's thinking on astrological images. The sense of "dread" Warburg and Benjamin point to is the catastrophic file that belongs to astrol-

ogy as a philosophy history. Benjamin's theory of allegory, especially as far as its context in the history of the time of decay is concerned (that is, where, as in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," transience and catastrophe play a role that is not limited to being purely thematic), incorporates an astrological file. The time of destruction that we find in Renaissance and Baroque writing is essentially, in Garin's mind, an astrological motif as it refers to the theory of the great conjunctions; that is, the idea of the major cosmic cycles, which is at once a rational interpretation of what has occurred and a prophecy of what will happen. Garin reminds us that the idea of the "new life," of "re-novatio," "new world," "new heavens," are astrological common places which point not only to a new beginning but as well to potentially destructive, mortifying ends.[37] What needs to be underlined is that the dialectic of "re-novatio" and apocalyptic finalities is one that nurtures the manner in which history reveals itself to humans.

Warburg distilled the renewal/destruction dialect into a narrative that accounted for the cosmic tension that pitted man's (im)potentiality against the perceived demonic biopower of the planetary deities. A central element in Warburg's thinking as it concerns astrology is that there exists a source of cognitive/epistemological paralysis that humans have sought to overcome, namely, the destructive charge of astral divinities in the guise of images. Agamben makes reference to this conflict and suggests that humans must liberate themselves from the "memory of images" so as to "open, beyond the 'interval' between mythico-religious practice and the pure sign, the space for an imagination with no more images."[38] To a definite extent, Agamben is here troping on one of his major themes, the deactivation of things, rendering inoperative a system of control and of signification with the objective of "finding a new use." In fact, the notion of deactivating the use of images in an astrological context brings to mind a passage from "The Idea of Peace," in *Idea of Prose*, where Agamben suggests that true peace will come about when all signs are "fulfilled and exhausted."[39] Peace is realized by overcoming the simulacra of signs and images, more specifically in "the fact that we cannot recognize ourselves in any sign or image." Agamben conflates the human with the celestial and concludes that "Peace is the perfectly empty sky of humanity; it is the display of non-appearance as the only homeland of man."[40] What needs to be considered in this passage from *Idea of Prose* is the significance of the term "non-appearance." Elsewhere in the same book Agamben looks at the issue of "appearance" within the context of Plato's thinking about celestial bodies, and on the significance of "hypotheses" in general. Agamben concludes by describing an "idea of appearance" where "appearance" is not predetermined by an hypothesis, but by itself: "the thing no longer separated from its intelligibility, but in the midst of it, is the idea, is the thing itself."[41]

Thus, the "non-appearance" is actually "appearance" that is not predetermined by the hypothesis of an image that seeks to exercise control or, to put it into Warburghian terms, exacerbate the bipolar tension by way of further paralyzing the imagination of the subject. In any event, the history of humanity is, in Agamben's mind (as he comments on the affinities Warburg shares with Bruno's horoscopal epistemology), "always a history of phantasms and images." This is so since it is within the context of the imagination that the ruptures between individual/impersonal, multiple/one, sensible/intelligible arise.[42] However, Agamben is careful to point out that it is also within the space and time of the imagination that "the dialectical recomposition" of this rupture occurs.

What is extraordinary about Agamben's comments about the image within the context of Warburg, Bruno, and astrology, is that he is pointing in the direction of a philosophy of history: "The images are the remnant, the trace of what men who preceded us have wished and desired, feared and repressed. And because it is within the imagination that something like a history became possible, it is through imagination that, at every new juncture, history has to be decided."[43] If Agamben's philosophical or regressive archaeology is indeed a method for coming to terms with the dispersion of signs in history, it would follow that it constitutes a philosophy of history. What no one has ever acknowledged is that some of the most important traits of Agamben's philosophical archaeology are present in Warburg's own philosophy of history. In "Warburg and the Nameless Science," Agamben quotes a passage from a Warburg lecture from 1912 on "Italian Art and International Astrology in Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara," where the art historian claims that "antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the modern age are in fact one interrelated epoch."[44] This assertion runs counter to the idea, born in the Renaissance and in effect to this very day, that the Medieval period is a rupture separating antiquity from the Renaissance and Modernity. Warburg implies that antiquity and the Medieval period never actually ended, or, more precisely, experienced an unending post-death phase. This has implications for the entire question of the "post-death" or, in Warburg's words, "posthumous life" of the past. For now, let us say that Warburg's assertion constitutes his philosophy of history expressed in his notion of "*pathosformeln*" inspired by his research on the astrological and other traditions. As a precursor to the theoretical implications of Agamben's philosophical archaeology, Warburg's thought envisioned the collapse of divides separating one epoch or period from another, with the aim of grasping the dispersed patterns and rhythms of the posthumous life of images. Astrology deactivates the divide between the past, the present, and the future with the view of reading the text that was never written on the celestial bodies.

There is one final idea we need to consider, namely, the manner in which Agamben characterizes the function of the imagination in relation to history.

A question that Agamben sets out to explore in *Nymphs* is "How can an image charge itself with time?"[45] One of the findings he proposes in an attempt to deal with this *quaestio* is that the "defining principle" of humans is not the intellect, but instead the imagination. To be sure, Agamben bases his rationale for such an assessment on Averroes's commentary on the relationship between the general intellect and the phantasms produced by the human mind.[46] While the significance of an Averroistic vein in Agamben's thought has been afforded scant attention by his commentators, a recent study on Averroism makes the claim that *Infancy and History* is to be considered "one of the most intense and profound testimonies of Averroism's *Nachleben* in modernity."[47] Moreover, in *Stanzas* Agamben makes usage of Averroes to explain the bio-cognitive process that informs the Medieval conception of eroticism. In so doing he provides a formulation of the central tenets of Averroistic doctrine when he explains that Averroes "saw the intelligence as something unique and supraindividual—within which individual persons are simply . . . *colocataires* (co-tenants, co-inhabitants), each one limited to furnishing its distinct point of view to the intelligence . . . the possible intellect is unique and separate: incorruptible and eternal, it is nevertheless joined . . . to individuals, so that each of them may concretely exercise the act of intellection through the phantasms that are located in the internal sense."[48]

The separate mental faculties enter into a relationship of receptivity with the transcendent general or possible intellect through the mediation of the phantasms. The general intellect is the elevated entity to which the minds gravitate. It is as if the general intellect were a transcendent signature that actualizes the potentialities of the faculty of the imagination. That history is a consequence of the operations of the imagination is a notion that is consistent with this train of thought. In *Nymphs* Agamben writes that an image emanating from memory is consistently "charged with an energy capable of moving and disturbing the body."[49] The imagination is the place where time becomes imbued with a signifying structure, that is, where the state of unknowing is temporarily interrupted or suspended. What follows is the actualization of a series of signs containing the imprint of temporality. However, all of this occurs under the aegis of the general intellect's interaction with the imagination. To be more precise, this scenario, as Emanuele Coccia has observed, underscores the rupture between the thinking "I" and the object of thought. What is of interest for our purposes is that Coccia's observation is articulated in reference to a passage from Averroes' *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, dealing with the relationship between celestial bodies and humans on earth. In Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle, Coccia notes, there is "an irreparable fracture between thought and subject, between a *logos* (that is a life without accretion, genesis or death, life without images or experience, of which the celestial bodies are a perennial actuality), and a *zoē* which instead moves and reproduces itself but does not think, is without ideas and knowl-

edge, is actualized by the dispositions of elemental movements, of composition and decomposition."[50] Human history is, again, "always a history of phantasms and images," in that, we might add, the mind signs its immersion in temporality in the presence of celestial signatures, with which it cultivates a schizophrenic relationship, but which are the sidereal archives of the imagination's interaction with life.

NOTES

1. Giorgio Agamben, "Angels," trans. Lorenzo Chiesa, *Angelaki*, vol. 16, no. 3 (September) 2011, 123.
2. Agamben, "Angels," 123.
3. Agamben, "Angels," 120.
4. Eugenio Garin, *Lo zodiaco della vita. La polemica sull'astrologia dal Trecento al Cinquecento* (Bari: Editore Laterza, 1976), 29.
5. Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, *Scritto negli astri. L'astrologia nella cultura dell'Occidente* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1996).
6. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Dogmatic Poems*, V, 53–64, in *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1857–1866) 37, 428–29.
7. Cited in S. J. Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (Suffolk, England: Boydell Press, 1987), 112.
8. Adorno, *The Stars Down to Earth*, 177.
9. Adorno, *The Stars Down to Earth*, 175.
10. Dennis Dutton, "Astrology, Computers and the Volsgeist," *Philosophy and Literature* 19.2 (1995), 428.
11. Faracovi, *Scritto negli astri*, 14–15.
12. Anthony Grafton, "Starry Messengers: Recent Work in the History of Western Astrology," *Perspectives on Science*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2000), 72.
13. Franz Boll and Carl Bezold, *Le stelle. Credenza e interpretazione*, trans. Maurizio Ghelardi (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2011).
14. Grafton, "Starry Messengers: Recent Work in the History of Western Astrology," 72.
15. See footnote 54 in chapter 1.
16. Cicero, *De divinatione*, ed. W. Armistead Falconer (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), II.89, 472.
17. On this issue see D. P. Walker, "The Astral Body in Renaissance Medicine," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 21 (1958), 119–33; J. North, "Medieval Aspects of Celestial Influence: A Survey," in *Astrology, Science and Society*, ed. P. Curry (Woolbridge and Wolfeboro: The Boydell Press, 1987), 5–17.
18. Boll and Bezold, *Le stelle. Credenza e interpretazione*, 45.
19. Cited in Benson Bobrick, *The Fated Sky: Astrology in History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 82.
20. Chevalier, *A Postmodern Revelation*, 17.
21. Tester, *A History of Western Astrology*, 55.
22. Cited in Tester, *A History of Western Astrology*, 113.
23. See F. Klein-Franke, *Iatromathematics in Islam: A Study on Yuhanna Ibn as-Sat's Book on Astrological Medicine* (Zurich: Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms, 1984), 108.
24. See Tullio Gregory, "La nouvelle idee de nature et savoir au XIIe siècle," in *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, ed. R. S. Cohen and M. W. Wartofsky (Dordecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1975), 193–218.
25. See E. Grant, "Medieval and Renaissance Scholastic Conceptions of the Influence of the Celestial Region on the Terrestrial," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 17 (1987), 1–23.

26. Cited in Ellen McCaffery, *Astrology: Its History and Influence in the Western World* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), 193.
27. Cited in McCaffery, *Astrology: Its History and Influence in the Western World*, 193.
28. Garin, *Lo zodiaco della vita*, 95–106.
29. See J.D. North, "The Reluctant Revolutionaries: Astronomy after Copernicus," in *The Universal Frame. Historical Essays in Astronomy, Natural Philosophy and Scientific Method* (London: Hambledon Press, 1989), 17–32.
30. Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, "Encomio dell'astrologia," *I Castelli di Yale*, III, 3, (1998), 58.
31. Faracovi, "Encomio dell'astrologia," 60–61.
32. Anthony Grafton, *Cardano's Cosmos. The Worlds and Works of a Renaissance Astrologer* (Cambridge, Massachusetts–London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 43.
33. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne, introduction by George Steiner (London-New York: Verso, 1985), 148.
34. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 150–51.
35. Aby Warburg, "Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther," in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, intro. Kurt W. Forster, trans. David Britt (The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1990), 650.
36. Warburg, "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara," in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, 566.
37. Garin, *Lo zodiaco della vita*, 20–21.
38. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 61.
39. Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, 81.
40. Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, 82.
41. Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, 123.
42. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 60.
43. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 61.
44. Quoted in Agamben, *Potentialities*, 92.
45. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 6.
46. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 54–55.
47. Emanuele Coccia, *La trasparenza delle immagini. Averroè e l'averroismo* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2005), 41.
48. Agamben, *Stanzas*, 83.
49. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 8.
50. Coccia, *La trasparenza delle immagini*, 38.

Chapter Two

Interstellar Archaeology

Astrology appears in Agamben's thought as an infrared pure potentiality bereft of an actualized epistemological status. The fact is, astrological technical nomenclature, as a consequence of the properties of the signature, offers the possibility of imagining unthought links with other domains of knowledge. An example of this is a term used by Firmicus when discussing the figure of the decan (which constitutes a division of the signs of the zodiac, and with each sign possessing three decans). Firmicus claims that each decan in turn has "three divinities . . . which they call *munifices*, that is *liturgi*."[1] In Latin *munifex* is someone who performs a service or duty, while *liturgus* refers to a person who occupies a public office, or is a servant of the government or state. Tester sought to specify exactly what Firmicus meant by *liturgi*, since nothing else is said about this term in the *Matheseos*, nor is it present in other astrological literature from antiquity, or, for that matter, referred to in Bede's work on astronomy and in later writers. Tester notes that its use by Martianus Capella, John Scottus Erigena, and Remi of Auxerre clearly indicates that the *liturgi* functioned as ministers.[2] One source Tester does not mention is *Excerpt VI* in the *Stobaeus*, in a passage where we find Hermes explaining the role of the decans to Tat:

> Moreover, there are other stars also which travel in heaven and obey the Decans, namely, the so-called Liturgi, whom the Decans have under their command as servants and private soldiers. The Liturgi, commanded by the Decans, are borne along floating in the aether, filling all the region of that element, that there maybe no place in heaven that is empty of stars; and they help maintain the order of the universe, putting forth a force that is their own, but is subject to the force put forth by the six and thirty Decans. From the Liturgi come the destructions of other living beings that take place in this or that region, and the swarming of creatures that spoil the crops.[3]

The *liturgi* operate as officials whose role it is to ensure the avoidance of any interruption of celestial power on the sublunary world. This is formulated with the objective of having a sidereal topography that is bereft of empty spaces, as well as the *liturgi* exerting destructive powers if necessary. In many ways, the *liturgi* have a function that is very similar to that of the angels, and so it is not surprising that, as Tester reminds us, in an anonymous Gnostic source cited by Boll in the *Sphaera* (1903), the *liturgi* are included in a list that also comprised angels and archangels.[4] Within the economy of Agamben's thought, we could say that the *liturgus* is a signature that arises on a horizon of intelligibility in which there appears a lexical item that possesses the same semantic and morphological characteristics, the Greek *leitourgia* (from which the word "liturgy" arises) that is the etymological matrix of the Latin term.

The word *leitourgia* recites a central role in *Opus Dei* where Agamben suggests that the office and function inherent in the notion of the priesthood as elaborated in the early centuries of Christianity has, over time, become the model for public administration and other types of civil or secular functions. Agamben's strategically pivots his argument on an examination of the semantic evolution of the term "liturgy" from its earliest Greek form (*leitourgia*, working for the benefit of the public) and claims that "the priesthood was seen in some way as public service and this can be among the reasons that will lead to the specialization of the term *leitourgia* in a cultic sense in the sphere of Greek-speaking Christianity."[5] An archaeology of the word "liturgy" leads Agamben to envision the history of ontology in a new light. What distinguishes classical philosophy from the theological practices cultivated by the Christians is that while in the former action is subordinated to being, in the latter one must act in order to be. The main notion here is that the ontological model that characterizes the office of the priest as developed by the history of theological commentary became the ontological model of secular administration and politics: the commands enunciated to encourage spiritual behaviour unwittingly became the commands to ensure the observance of civil law and military objectives.

The astrological *liturgi* and the ecclesiological *leitourgia* are signatures that function in a signifying system, which structures the activity of the dispensation of power, whether it is to ensure terrestrial order or to provide direction for the Christian pastorate. The continued use of the term in Christianity and the fact that it never appeared again after Firmicus points to an evident exclusive appropriation by the former. Of course, what is of significance for our purposes is that there remain unexposed or "infrared" examples of astrological elements that have the potential to actualize meanings characterized by unthought epistemological content. Detecting the content of the infrared energy that astrology inhabits necessitates an archaeology of the astrological signature, which pivots on the suspension of experience and

knowledge. With this notion in mind, this chapter will 1) address the question of the astrology's relationship to the experience/knowledge nexus, 2) provide a methodological template for following astrological signs in their dispersion, 3) outline the nature of potentiality identifiable in the signature of astrology, 4) illustrate how Benjamin's "rational astrology" is a contemporary reuse of the astrological tradition.

THE SUSPENSION OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

In *The Open* Agamben sets about to ascertain the conclusiveness of any definition that seeks to qualify the "human," and concludes that any characterization of the human as having a determined and well-defined content is doomed to unreliability. The use of the theriomorphic images serves, among other reasons, to reinforce the idea that any proposed definitive characterization of what is human encounters great difficulties, the main obstacle being that of measuring the link and relationship between man and his animality. On this matter the astrological tradition offers us a singular model. Namely, in the astrological tradition the powers over the terrestrial subjects emanated from entities that were not human; in fact, they often assume the guise of mythological figures and animals. One has only to think of the zodiacal signs that give evidence of a seamless ontological cluster where the human, the animal, and the divine (Virgo, Scorpion, Gemini and so on) partake in the same mysteric gesture of cosmic silence. The astrological signature is imprinted through the agency of something non-human, and so any attempt to become human means not only an inner scission eliminating the animal, but it also involves the interiorization of an in-humanity that, in functioning as a signature, makes existence possible. To be sure, the struggle that humans encountered over the centuries (and which lead to the advent of modern science) was to completely excise the inner astral signature by means of reversing the power relation with the stars: from being subjected to astral influence to measuring, quantifying the stars so as to become immune from their psychological malevolence, and conquering them with the newly magnified power of the human imagination.

The history of astrology is marked by traumatic interruptions, which were characterized by the suspension of experience as codified by the multifaceted tradition of astrological thought. Such a deactivation widened the difference separating divinity from humanity and animality, along the lines of what Agamben suggests when he indicates that the advent of Christ inaugurated in traumatic fashion a new ontology: "The Greeks experienced the animal and the divine but not the human as a separate autonomous sphere. Christ separated us from the animal and the divine, thereby condemning us to humanity."[6] The suspension of planetary influence was to give rise to the theologi-

cal sources of modern politics. What has never before been acknowledged is that Agamben theorized an early version of what was to become the theme of bare life within the context of the "destruction of experience" and which involved the tradition of astrology.

In a previously cited passage found in *Infancy and History* that is highly relevant to the question of bare life and biopower, Agamben makes specific reference to astrology with the view of underscoring the precise nature of the genealogical trajectory that led to what he terms, following Benjamin's example, "the destruction of experience": "Only because astrology (like alchemy, with which it is allied) had conjoined heaven and earth, the divine and the human, in a single subject of fate (in the work of Creation) was science able to unify within a new ego both science and experience, which hitherto had designated two distinct subjects."[7] This passage appears in a discussion where Agamben is seeking to make the point that the scientific validation of lived experience takes place within the context of an experiment, which sets out to achieve the goal of codifying human experience within the limits of numbers and of scientific instruments; thus removing what is most valuable and most useful of the experience as far away as possible from the human body that first lived the experience. In the spirit of his yet-to-be-formulated philosophical archaeology that aims to understand the nature of contemporary lived experience, Agamben claims that "experience is incompatible with certainty, and once experience has become measurable and certain, it immediately loses its authority. There is no formulating a maxim nor telling a story where scientific law holds sway."[8] The problem, as Agamben presents it here, is that a discipline such as astrology was symptomatic of the coming expropriation of the modern human's experience. In fact, Agamben begins the first chapter of *Infancy and History* by unambiguously positing that we need to approach the subject matter of experience by realizing it is something "that is no longer accessible to us."[9] However, while astrology is an index of the expropriation of experience, it is also an archaeological relic that needs to be reconsidered in order to be able to epistemologically envision the experiences that have disappeared into the archives of Western culture. It is Benjamin, as we will see, who establishes an epistemic paradigm that allows us to imagine astrology as element that must be rethought.

Agamben's trajectory of thinking is as follows. Up until the advent of modern science, experience and knowledge had separate and autonomous functions and authorities. Experience had as its subject the *sensus comunis* that each individual possessed as, for example, in the case of the *vis aestimativa* of Medieval philosophy. The subject of knowledge was instead the impassible and divine *noûs* or the intellect that is removed from experience.[10] If anything, in Antiquity the problem was not between subject and object, thus it involved the one and the multiple.[11] An important characteristic of modern science is the fact that it discards the distinction between experience and

science or knowing. According to Agamben, the major achievement of the scientific revolution consisted in unifying and codifying experience and knowledge into "a single subject, which is none other than their conjunction at an abstract Archimedian point: the Cartesian *cogito*, consciousness."[12] The consequence of this radical turn is that modern science removes itself from the passions of the body and from the union of the human and divine knowledge; these same elements, which inform the essence of mysticism, the occult science, and Neoplatonic thought, lose their epistemological authority and currency.

To Agamben's assessment of the situation we can add that astrology's position was singular in that, on the one hand, it pivoted on a religious worldview that contained the doctrinal prerequisites of mysticism, which were ultimately grounded in the potentialities of experience that permitted a sense of union with the divine. On the other hand, however, astrology required the suspension of the difference between the *noûs* and *psyche*, and between the *Unus* and the multitude in order to make the unwritten text of life intelligible. In Agamben's mind, Neoplatonic mysticism and astrology (rather than Aristotelian *noûs* and *psyche*) experience a revival in the post-Medieval age as a result of the emergence of science. Aristotelian cosmology made a clear distinction between the celestial spheres as incorruptible divine intelligences, on the one hand, and the transient matter of the terrestrial world, on the other. This distinction, Agamben emphasizes, only makes sense if we accept experience and knowledge and science as two separate fields. Astrology, instead, operates on the basis that experience is inseparable from logico-mathematical and astro-physical data. Existence, or, to be more precise, coming life, is understood as the results or interpretative conclusions of planetary geometrical calculations and topologies.

Agamben thus views astrology's rebirth as being indissolubly linked to the emergence of modern science, but notes as well that it was eventually marginalized because "its fundamental principle—the union of experience and knowledge—had been so much assimilated as a principle of the new science through the constitution of a new subject that its essentially mythic-divine apparatus became superfluous."[13] In other terms, the issue is not whether astrology was "true" (as it was believed to be) or "false" (as the anti-astrological literature purported on the basis, for the greatest part, of very limited information and data). The matter was instead the usefulness of astrology's conjectures and the methods that produced them. This was, for example, the basis of Pico della Mirandola's critique of astrology: not so much and not only that it was a false science, but that there were other and more effective ways of reaching the conclusions it promulgated.[14]

What is of central relevance for this study is the fact that Agamben makes reference to what could constitute an "archaeology of astrology" within the

context of a discussion on the origins of the bipolarity of rationalism/irrationalism present in contemporary culture:

> The rationalism/irrationalism which is so irreducibly a part of our culture has a hidden genesis in the primary kinship between astrology, mysticism and science; the astrological revival among Renaissance intellectuals is the most striking symptom of this. Historically, this genesis is linked to what has now been firmly established thanks to Warburghian philology: that the humanistic restoration of Antiquity was a restoration not of classical Antiquity but that of the culture of late Antiquity, in particular of Neoplatonism and Hermeticism. Thus a critique of mysticism, astrology and alchemy must necessarily imply a critique of science, and only the recovery of a dimension in which science and experience were to each find their own place of origin could prevail over the rationalism/irrationalism opposition.[15]

While astrology does not assume the prominence that, say, theology and political philosophy do in Agamben's *oeuvre*, the fact remains that the above-cited comments on astrology constitute, together with the images from the Jewish Bible and a series of many other elements explored in this study, a previously unacknowledged portal leading to a dimension of his philosophical archaeology that has implications for themes such as biopower, the signature, the inoperative, and so on. If the modern rationalism/irrationalism bipolarity is rooted in the reduction of experience and knowledge (or the contamination of the two) into a single subject, and if astrology is a discipline that is an icon of this reduction/contamination, it would follow that a "critique," or regressive philosophical archaeology that follows the signs of astrology in their dispersion, would lead us to a point where experience and knowledge had previously emerged as two separate and autonomous categories. Of course, Agamben never undertook the critique of astrology mentioned here, even if he establishes the ontological parameters of such an investigation, namely the search for the *locus* where experience (understood in its purely existential identity) finds its "own place," in full autonomy from knowledge or science. The implication in Agamben's programmatic statement is that the question of being (and, we might add, of biopower) is hidden in the layered and segmented mass of writings, data, and other details concerning astrology over the centuries. Moreover, a philosophical archaeology of astrology exposes an event that has significance for the genealogy of biopolitics: namely, a decisive moment of the agency controlling and administrating biopower emerged when theology appropriated from astrology the ability to influence and control human existence.

Agamben does indeed provide an indication of what might be discovered in the critique of astrology when he suggests that in Mysteries the momentary "conjunction of experience and knowledge consisted of an event without speech, which culminated in the death and rebirth of the silenced initiate."[16]

In *The Unspeakable Girl*, Agamben suggests that the initiate into the Mysteries experienced their own silencing as ecstasy, in other words, they experienced the power and potentiality of a joyfully and intransigently *in-fantile* existence."[17] However, the codification of experience and knowledge into a single subject expelled what was unsayable and only permitted what is "already spoken in every thought and every utterance; not a *pathema*, but a *mathema* in the original sense of the word: something that is always prescient in every act of knowledge, the basis and subject of every thought."[18] In a manner akin to the Mysteries, astrology possesses the experience of the unutterable in the guise of the unwritten text of life. More precisely, reading the unwritten text was an expression of pure speech, of silence, and the astrologer required a skill that would allow him to preserve the unsayable in the letters and statements formed by the celestial bodies. This is the sense of Firmicus's advice on how to read the skies: the astrologer must observe in silence all of the movements of a given planet, and then "compare the ascendant with the powers of the twelve houses; notice the effect of planet combined with planet; also which planets are aspected to the ascendant and in what way."[19] The astrologer must fix his gaze on the void of the heavens and read the motions of the planets carrying the untranscribed ciphers of coming existence. At the same time, however, astrological hermeneutics operates on the suspension of temporal structures, in the sense that reading the future entails a momentary suspension of the present. Along not too dissimilar lines, Agamben suggests that any attempt to rethink, or what he would eventually call a philosophical archaeology, "traditional experience" would need to have as a point of departure "a cessation of experience, a suspension of knowledge."[20] In the present case, the suspension of knowledge entails thinking astrology as a pure potentiality, in the aftermath of it being rendered inoperative by modern history of ideas.

EXCURSUS: ALCHEMY AND "FORMS-OF-LIFE"

In "*Opus alchymicum*," found in the collection *Il fuoco e il racconto*, Agamben offers a philosophical archaeology of alchemy that illustrates the great lengths to which his research on the general topic of biopolitics is able to find a home in discredited and deactivated forms of knowledge. Agamben frames the discussion concerning alchemy on the notion that writing is an aspect of "an ascetic practice, in which the production of the work [*opera*] is of secondary importance compared to the transformation of the writing subject."[21] In *Means Without Ends* Agamben characterizes "form-of-life" as a "life that can never be separated from its form, a life which it is never possible to isolate something such as naked life."[22] To be sure, the "form-of-life" is the space where the effort expended on producing a work and the care for oneself

become perfectly and mutually inextricable.[23] Ontology and aesthetics undergo a process of fusion but always as a work in continual progress, precisely because we are dealing with an experience that is lived in a forever changing temporal flux. Alchemy thus becomes for Agamben an epistemological model that allows us to envision the potentialities present in making this form-of-life. In the *opus alchymicum* the transformation of metallic substances is indeed a parallel process to the transformation of the alchemist himself. Moreover, the creation of the philosopher's stone occurs simultaneously with the invention or reinvention of the spiritual identity of the alchemist, to the point where the alchemist is transformed into the philosopher's stone.[24]

Agamben appeals to Foucault's idea of the "care of oneself" to illustrate the living connections between the ancient alchemical practices and the concerns of the present. Toward the end of his life, Foucault was particularly interested in the themes of governing oneself, of how one becomes a moral subject, and the aesthetics of existence. This last theme focused on how the self and life could be perceived and created as a work of art.[25] However, any attempt to cultivate a relationship with oneself in this manner leads to a collapse into a bottomless pit, which Agamben characterizes as an alchemical *nigredo*, the dark night in which the search for oneself begins. (*Nigredo* [or blackness] is an initial stage in the alchemical process that entails putrefaction or decomposition. It was believed that to realize the philosopher's stone it was necessary to remove all of the extraneous elements in the alchemical substances and ingredients, which were to be cooked until they were transformed into black matter.) The central issue, as Agamben sees it in his reading of Foucault, is that before one enters into a relation with oneself, a subject does not exist. If anything, the subject is specifically the relationship one cultivates with oneself, and therefore what is privileged in all of this is the creative act of forming one's form-of-life.[26] In fact, the idea of happiness, the ultimate goal of any attempt to invent a form-of-life, rests suspended as a potentiality in writing as it can be actualized solely by means of a creative act.[27]

What is key in this discussion is that potentiality, which is the matrix for any creative practice, does not extinguish itself in an actualized work of art, and remains latent in it as a potentiality that conserves its impotentiality. For this reason, Agamben continues, the external work (*opera*) allows the work on oneself to occur only if the former enters into a relationship with potentiality.[28] One who seeks to acquire a form-of-life exclusively through one's work risks confusing the work itself with one's life and reality. "The true alchemist," Agamben concludes, is one who "in the work and through the work—contemplates only the potentiality that created it."[29] By this he means that subjects who practice creative acts disactivate the works produced by language, vision, and bodies, and are focused on constructing a relationship

with potentialities, with the result being the constitution of one's form-of-life.[30] In this way form-of-life is experienced as creative practices that temporarily interrupt a suspension in a potentiality. In any event, it is in the suspension of knowledge, in the *nigredo* that the potentiality to actualize a creative act emerges.

A PHILOSOPHY OF DETRITUS

In a more general sense, Agamben's idea of "suspending knowledge" is genetically connected to his philosophical archaeology, which pivots on the notion that philosophy must admit a much fuller range of experiences. It was Benjamin who played a central role in encouraging Agamben to theorize about the need to investigate the emergence of experience as an autonomous category. In one interview, Agamben synthetically formulates a philosophical conviction inspired by Benjamin, according to whom,

> the Messianic Kingdom can be present in the world only in forms that appear low and discredited. For this reason in his great book on Paris he concentrated his attention on things that historians had hitherto neglected: the scraps and refuse of culture. For me this is a fundamental methodological principle. What is more, we live in a society where the most beautiful things can only exist in distorted form, can be expressed only through parody.[31]

There is no lack of examples of Agamben philosophizing on the basis of "cultural refuse." That is to say, microphysical elements that escape the radar of any cartography of knowledge that privileges the major monuments of human cultural production, and which we read about, for example, in works such as *Profanations* and *Nudities*. In Agamben's writings we encounter the metaphor of the shadow, which is understood as that which conceals the historical phenomena which he seeks to uncover. Agamben mentions Foucault, who claimed, according to Agamben, "that historical research was like a shadow cast by by the present onto the past. For Foucault, this shadow stretched back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For me the shadow is longer. I tend to work in crepuscular regions, at sunset, where the shadows are very long. For me they reach into the deepest past."[32] This ultimately entails, among other things, privileging the epistemological valence of the refuse of culture, as Benjamin had predicated. Agamben adheres to such a methodological concept in his writings, and a central tenet of the present study is that the fragmented and ruinous elements of the astrological tradition fall within this purview. The method which seeks to read the deactivated signs of the past as obscurely present in the operations of the now is, as already intimated, philosophical archaeology or archaeological regression. What is implied here in Agamben's approach is that we are not reconstruct-

ing the past; rather we are accessing the present by envisioning in the past the emergence of the many presents hidden in temporal shadows.[33]

Not only does Benjamin recite an important role in Agamben's philosophy of the epistemological detritus, in fact, in his attempt to assign a new dignity to historically discarded instruments of knowledge, Benjamin sought to restitute to astrology its vocation of credible intellectual practice, as we will see. Benjamin's call for a wider and more comprehensive epistemological territory is formulated in work he undertook in the period 1917–1918, and which challenged Immanuel Kant's metaphysics. The point was not that Kant needed to be overcome, but rather that the Kantian metaphysical horizon needed to be radically expanded. In fact, in "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" Benjamin acknowledges that Kant's system "has, by virtue of its brilliant exploration of the certainty and justification of knowledge, derived and developed a depth that will prove adequate for a new and higher kind of experience yet to come."[34] However, at the same time Kant's system pivots on an understanding of experience that is suspect as it greatly limits the types of experience that meet the criteria of the subjective conditions of knowledge. As Philip Andrew Quadrio has observed in this regard, "Kant produces a metaphysics of experience which is based on the presupposition that empirical consciousness is the sole realm of experience and the sole source of theoretical knowledge. Any metaphysics that moved beyond empirical consciousness were as the dreams of a spirit seer—a Swendborgian fantasy."[35] The consequence of this is the necessary exclusion of mystical and religious experience as well as the refuse of culture that Benjamin, Agamben, and contemporary thought in general now perceives as having its own epistemic dignity.[36]

Benjamin attributes Kant's inability to theorize a "higher experience" as a basis for philosophy to "the hollowness of the experience available to him," the consequence being that Kant's epistemology is not actually receptive to metaphysics as "it contains within itself primitive elements of an unproductive metaphysics which excludes all others."[37] The coming philosophy that Benjamin has in mind is one that deconstructs the boundaries of empirical and scientific verification of any philosophical utterance. In this matter, the problem for Benjamin is the relation between experience and knowledge, as he makes reference to the idea of "pure transcendental consciousness" (distinct from "empirical consciousness"), which is at the basis of all "genuine experience." This is clearly an important source for Agamben's notion of experience that finds its autonomy from knowledge. What Benjamin has in mind is a new philosophy where knowledge remains neutral to both the subject and the object, and where the happening of experience is distinct from the knowledge of experience: the final intention is to "discover the autonomous, innate sphere of knowledge in which this concept in no way continues to designate the relation between two metaphysical entities."[38]

However, just as knowledge must (re)-discover its autonomy, so too must experience, as Benjamin theorizes a new understanding of experience, which, like knowledge, is not constrained by empirical consciousness. The ultimate goal of Benjamin's coming philosophy is the "discovery or creation of that concept of knowledge which, by relating experience exclusively to the transcendental consciousness, makes not only mechanical but also religious experience logically possible."[39]

Benjamin is seeking to legitimize all aspects of human experience as possible sources of philosophy, which, in being rooted in existence, must not ignore what appears to not adhere to the conditions of empirical consciousness since, as he suggests, "the source of existence lies in the totality of experience." Among other arcane forms of knowledge (which were also the acknowledged experiences of given historical communities) that Benjamin refers to in his writings, there are clairvoyance, soothsaying, physiognomy, and astrology. Benjamin's interest in these forms of knowledge, which in the past enjoyed an experiential currency of value and use, constitutes a devaluation of empirical consciousness, which concerns itself with what has a palpable presence or actualities, in favor of a philosophy that deals with what is not actual, but which is a possibility. The point is not that Benjamin necessarily believes that the arcane sciences are of use; rather, as Quadrio suggests, he seeks "to presage a new notion of experience, one that is not yet actual, one whose actuality lies in the future. Benjamin is forced to use examples of past forms of experience as a vehicle to destabilise the Kantian notion of experience because he cannot say what the future will bring."[40] An important characteristic of these arcane forms of experience and knowledge is that any attempt to rediscover them moves the experiential axis from one of actuality to one of pure potentiality. Astrology opens a celestial and ultimately terrestrial cartography of potentialities, as it speaks to the possibilities of interaction between humans and heavenly bodies, which have an existential structure and content. The emphasis of potentiality over actuality is present in Chevalier's assessment of astrology as a science of the subject's experience, where, that is to say, potentiality assumes the form of "desire" (Lat. *Sideralis*, "concerning the star"): "While science ignores the subject, and while sign theories address questions of origins (historical, intentional) and root forms (logical, conventional) only, astrology persists in paying attention to signs of the future and the motions of desire."[41]

The ideas of a "coming philosophy" and astrology as interpreter of "coming existence" find a conceptual correlative in the notion of the "coming community," theorized by Agamben in the book by the same name. The issue Agamben was dealing with is that all notions of community are rooted in the principle of inclusion, which necessarily makes exclusion part of its dynamic. Instead, Agamben deactivates the ideas of belonging and identity in favor of what he terms a "whatever singularity," which privileges "being

such as it is." Agamben is flashing the spotlight on the relationship between the immanence of the being on Earth and a Transcendent signified, which purportedly furnishes it with a meaning. The point is that the notion of a "whatever singularity" creates the potentiality of a new ontological status as "Singularity is thus freed from the false dilemma that obliges knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal."[42] Agamben thinks of the coming community as something that is bereft of a being proper, and thus it intersects with all potentialities: "These pure singularities communicate only in the empty space of the example, without being tied by any common property, by any identity."[43] What we have here is the equivalent of legitimizing all aspects of human experience as sources of philosophy in that there is no epistemological classification that would assign importance to objects of thought on the basis of a hierarchy of value.

If Agamben critically appropriated Benjamin's radical openness to an unrestricted spectrum of experiential possibilities as terrain for philosophical inquiry, he assumed a similar position as far as Warburg's thinking concerning historical objects and memory. Agamben has in his writings worked under the sign of what he terms a "nameless science," that is, an approach to the interpretation of and theorization about culture that defies characterization. It claims to be continuously developing a discipline that does not exist, or which exists solely as an impotentiality, and for which there is thus no name. Agamben appropriates the idea of a "nameless science" from Warburg, which pivots on the notion of the "iconology of the interval," or the fluctuation of causes as signs and images. Ultimately, for Warburg the "nameless science" would constitute an attempt to propose a diagnosis of Western culture by means of a study of its phantasms.[44] In many respects, the ideas that Warburg was nurturing find their correlative in the manner in which Agamben works with verbal signs emanating from the past. Ultimately, Agamben seeks to grasp, to whatever degree possible, the dispersive and aimless direction of, say, ancient theological textual fragments by stripping them of the layers of psychosomatic segmentation accumulated over the centuries. For our present purposes, this entails identifying the space between science and experience in astrology, and opening a new access to the present, which circulates in a biopolitical order.

A model for the transmission of signs and signatures within a temporal framework where anachrony, or a contraction of the past and present, prevails is something that Agamben found in Warburg's idea of art history. Warburg proposed a spectral account of history where, to paraphrase Georges Didi-Huberman, the idea of time was not based on the conventional academic transmission of knowledge, but rather by way of those material forms that survived or returned, "that is, through non-knowledge, through the unthought, through the unconsciousness of time."[45] Didi-Huberman's main

point is that this model is at once "psychic," in the sense that the optic is not a purported regression to the perspective of the Ideal, but the option of its theoretical deconstruction, and "symptomal" (that is, belonging or relative to the symptom) where the becoming of what has survived is understood as a collection of polarities, for example, as tensive elements such as normalcy and pathology, or data that serves as evidence and data that is unthought.[46] The key notion is that for Warburg the history of art does not correspond to the concept of an absolute beginning, or to the image of a beginning where there was absolutely nothing. Instead the history of art is a vortex in the river of the discipline, a potentiality that provokes an actuality "beyond which the flow of the river of things is deeply modified, if not ravaged."[47]

Just as Agamben traces and critically measures the survival of ancient signs, signatures, texts, images, and so on in his reuse of ancient writings with the object of opening doors onto the present, so to Warburg, his mentor in iconological matters, perceives the Renaissance as a cauldron of "living residues" transmitted from classical antiquity. Warburg's model of the survival of antiquity in Renaissance art subverts any linearly transparent chronology or filiations that are basic to understanding the transition from one historical age to another. If anything, his conception of the evolution, transition, and transmission of art is much closer to what we could call a model of anachronism. According to Didi-Huberman:

> Survival, as understood by Warburg, gives us no possibility to simplify history, in fact it imposes a fearful disorientation for any fanciful attempt for a periodization. It is a notion that cuts across any possible chronological break. It describes *another time*. It disorients history, it opens it, it renders it more complex. In one word, it anachronizes it. It imposes the paradox that the more ancient things at times come *after the less ancient ones*: thus, the Indian variety of astrology—the most remote one there is—finds a value of use in XV century Italy *after* having been replaced and superseded by Greek, Arab and Medieval astrology. This sole example, developed over a long period of time by Warburg, demonstrates how survival *disorients history*: how each period is interwoven with its own nucleus of antiquities, of anachronisms, of presents and propensities toward the future.[48]

To summarize Didi-Huberman's understanding of how Warburg perceived the relationship between past, present and future, let us say that survival thus works to anachronize history by deconstructing any attempt to thematize chronological quantification. According to Didi-Huberman, survival anachronizes the past, the present, and the future, and in so doing weakens the effective value of the marked separations that distinguish them from each other:

- the present: survival subverts any notion of a "Zeitgeist" or spirit of the age. For Warburg, the importance of a work of art is defined by its ability to not conform to, to refute the given spirit of the times.
- the past: Warburg characterized the Renaissance as being "impure," that is, something that is made up of residues, leftovers of all sorts transmitted from the Classical past.
- the future: survival has the capacity to anachronize the future in the sense that Warburg perceives it as a power able to create style.

In terms of archaeological regression we need to keep in mind that any attempt to bring to light objects or signs from the past implies an intrusion into the present, thus transforming it, as well as a transformation of the past. To what extent can we refer to the debris of textual or iconological signs as fossils? Let us keep in mind Gaston Bachelard's reflections on the question of the fossil: namely, any form contains life, and a fossil is not merely something that once existed. If anything, it is a "being that still lives, asleep in its form."[49] The signature plays an important methodological role in allowing the hidden elements, the detritus from the past to emerge on the horizon of visibility. In the case of astrology, it sheds light on the originary space separating experience from science.

ASTROLOGY'S SIGNATURE

Agamben's previously cited claim that "Astrology is a privileged site of signatures"[50] is in many ways pivotal to envisioning what we could term Agamben's Warburghian astrology. Faithful to his tendency of putting deactivated or profaned systems of thought to a new use, the main point of reference for Agamben's theory of the signature is the arcane, unused, and forgotten Renaissance natural philosophy of Paracelsus on the one hand, and Jakob Böhme on the other. According to Paracelsus, himself an astrologer, the science of signatures is what allows everything on Earth and the Universe to be intelligible and known to humans. Paracelsus maintains that everything in nature is marked with a sign, and consequently the signature operates as a science that sets out to reveal the signs occulted in things. Moreover, as Agamben observes, in Paracelsus *signatura* becomes more than the designation of a science as it constitutes the process and consequence of marking. However, humans are not condemned to being passively subjected to the influence of the stars as they have the potential to reverse the biopolitical charge, which tended to favor the stars. To be sure, according to Paracelsus,

> The wise man can dominate the stars, and is not subject to them. Nay, the stars are subject to the wise man, and are forced to obey him, not the stars. The stars compel and coerce the animal (bestial) man, so that where they lead he must follow, just as a thief does the gallows, a robber the wheel, a fisher the fishes, a

> fowler the birds, and a hunter the wild beasts. What other reason is there for this, save that man does not know or estimate himself or his own powers, or reflect that he is a lesser universe, and has the firmament with its powers hidden within himself.[51]

However, the fuller message here is that humans can overcome the stars only once they learn how to imitate their potentiality, that is, to experience the power of the planets as the experience of potentiality, thus creating a new space of ontological autonomy arising from the deactivation of the sidereal biopolitical charge. Agamben hints at a notion such as this one at the conclusion of *The Open*, where humans exist "outside of being" in a "zone of non-knowledge" and are redeemed only because they cannot be redeemed by the Transcendent.

The signature of astrology, as it hides and unhides itself as debris in Agamben's thought in the most fleeting manner, constitutes a "pure historical element" by way of creating links between different historical moments and fields. The constellation of signs that orbit around the signature of astrology follow a defined path of message making in that, as Agamben suggests, the sign produces meanings as a result of entering into a semiotic relationship with signatures.[52] One element that the signature of astrology activates is a profound epistemological tension: the rational/irrational bipolarity implicit in astrology is what Agamben, in commenting on Warburg and in reference to the beginnings of modernity, perceives as "the symptom of a conflict at the origin of our civilization, which cannot master its own bipolar tension."[53] In fact, Agamben quotes a passage from Warburg's "Astrology under Oriental Influence" (1927) in order to underline an idea that is a mirror of the epistemological battles that have been fought in the West. That is, the Occident lives in a schizophrenic modality where the desire to know through the collection and verification of signs emitted from the past clashes with the will to divine the truth through the assistance of portals to the irrational. In this writing Warburg is introducing an exhibit of astrological images, which illustrate "beyond all doubt that European culture is the result of conflicting tendencies, of a process in which—as far as these astrological attempts at orientation are concerned—we must see neither friends nor enemies, but rather symptoms of a movement of pendular oscillation between the two distinct poles of magico-religious practice and mathematical contemplation."[54]

However, the bipolar tension present in the astrological signature also encapsulates the conflict as it relates to biopower, between Christianity and the astral sciences. In fact, the anxiety that humans felt due to the assumed capability, attributed to the stars, to control existence is in good part explained, as Agamben writes in *Nymphs*, by the idea that, as historical phenomena, images are fossilized and are transformed into ghosts which subju-

gate humans, who continuously seek to find paths leading to the liberation from their yoke.[55] While Agamben is in the general discussion referring to the figure of the nymph, it is the astrological signature that serves as the most disquieting idea of a sovereignty of severe anguish. "Warburg's interest in astrological images," Agamben explains, "has its roots in the awareness that the observation of the sky is the grace and damnation of man, and that the celestial sphere is the place where men project their passion for images."[56] By invoking "grace" and "damnation" Agamben is here rehearsing the aforementioned bipolar tension, but, more importantly, he is underlining a significant aspect of any attempt to read the surface of an astrological signature. Specifically, in the sentence that follows the quote, Agamben comments on Warburg's interpretation of an astrological decan, *Vir niger*, who the art historian identified in the Palazzo Schifanoia frescoes. As in the example of this "enigmatic astrological decan," Agamben continues, "in the encounter with the tension-charged dynamogram, the capacity to suspend and reverse the charge and to transform destiny into fortune (*fortuna*) is essential."[57] As a signature and as a domain of pure potentiality, astrology has the capacity to establish connections by transcending chronological limits and considerations. This point speaks to the issue of "necessary anachronisms," but one of the consequences of the deactivation of temporal delimitations is that the sidereal world unveils to the probing eye of the astrologer the potentiality of potentiality, expressed by the aforementioned idea of the celestial bodies being the text where humans read "what was never written."

In *The Signature of All Things* Agamben makes reference to Warburg's *Mnemosyne* project as a way to illustrate the extent to which the art historian's idea of *Pathosformeln* constitutes a singular example of a paradigm in movement. Warburg's visual atlas contains a number of images emanating, for the greater part but not exclusively, from antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance. In Agamben's mind this atlas of images (which Warburg defined as a "ghost story for adults") "was a kind of gigantic condenser that gathered together all the energetic currents that animated and continued to animate Europe's memory, taking form in its 'ghosts.'"[58] In a more general sense, the *Mnemosyne* project addressed an epistemological obsession Warburg displayed *vis à vis* images. Agamben points out that the significance of images, as far as Warburg is concerned, rests in the idea that they are not conscious, nor are they unconscious, and for this reason they establish "the ideal terrain for a unitary approach to culture, one capable of overcoming the opposition between history, as the study of 'conscious expressions,' and anthropology, as the study of 'unconscious conditions.'"[59]

Thus, by deactivating or suspending the opposition between "conscious expression" and "unconscious conditions," one could say that Agamben contributes to setting the stage, in a much later writing, for employing the images of nymphs in plate 46 of the Warburg's atlas as singular examples of suspen-

sion (as in their being neither human or animal, they are "suspended" between *zoē* and *bios*[60]), and of a paradigm. The nymph, Agamben tells us, "is neither archaic nor contemporary; she is undecidable in regards to diachrony and synchrony, unicity and multiplicity. This means that the nymph is the paradigm of which individual nymphs are the exemplars. Or to be more precise, in accordance with the constitutive ambiguity of Plato's dialectic, the nymph is the paradigm of the single images, and the single images are the paradigms of the nymphs."[61] For Agamben, plate 46 with the images of the nymphs is a paradigm of a paradigm, given that, if we consider some of the theses he formulates with the objective of defining paradigm,[62]

- it is a variety of knowledge founded on movement from singularity to singularity, and it is analogical, rather than inductive or deductive;
- its historicity is not located in either diachrony or in synchrony, but in their intersectioning.

Watkin makes usage of the epistemological form and space of the plate from Agamben, used in his comments on Warburg, in order to conceptualize paradigm and signature:

> What we have are two plates, the paradigm plate which operates via the logic of belonging indifference and the signatory plate, which operates via the logic of inclusion-indifference. . . . The paradigm plate is made up of elements which are said to belong to the signatory situation, underneath which of course are all signs which at any point can belong to a situation but only after they have been included. All statements are included in every signature, but those which belong, paradigms, are controlled by the signature. That is indeed all the signature does: control which of its included elements, statements, can be said to belong at any one time or discursive place, paradigms. . . . The plates are the paradigm level, the closed covers of the book the signatory level, all the mobile elements that are included or excluded as the project developed over time, all statements to hand.[63]

By designating the Warburghian plate a figure for the signature and the potentiality which inheres in it, distinct from the paradigmatic plate as described by Agamben, Watkin opens up what we can consider a significant interpretative possibility: that of being able to materially visualize the implications of the theory of the signature within the context, in this case at least, of Warburg's atlas where astrology is the signatory plate.

In Warburg's atlas we observe, as already intimated, that there are a substantial number of plates that deal with astrology, constellations, cosmology and zodiacal signs. In fact, leafing through an edition of Warburg's *Mnemosyne* containing the plates of the project, one is struck by the sensation that Warburg's atlas of images could serve as a visual companion to Agamben's theory making, above and beyond the example of plate 46. The

plates present themselves not only as exemplifications of the paradigm or the signature, but also as dialectical images. In a general sense, the series of plates resemble the potentiality of the epistemological migrations that Agamben (within the spirit of philosophical archaeology) undertakes in his endeavor to follow signs in their dispersion within the cartographies of knowing and unknowing. To begin with, let us consider the three images in plate A, that deals with the different systems of relations that govern humans ("cosmic, terrestrial, genealogical"). The top image, dealing with orientation, depicts celestial constellations; the middle one (the "Map of Transmigrations"), which pertains to exchanges, shows the major cities in Europe and the Middle East; the bottom one, which refers to social order, is the genealogical tree of the Medici/Tornabuoni families.[64] However, whatever extent of stability and knowledge that these three intellectual acquisitions are able to project is undermined by the insidious powers arriving from the zodiacal entities that imprint astrological signatures in humans, as in the case of the first ("Man in the circle of cosmic potentialities") and third ("Zodiacal man") images in plate B that show human figures encircled by celestial powers.[65] In plate C we are able to envision how Mars as a phenomenon becomes, like the nymphs, a paradigm of a paradigm. To be sure, one sees the astrological Mars displaced into an astro-physical context by way of Kepler's observations, following this into a Renaissance military context, and finally Mars is depicted as a zeppelin in three images from 1929.[66] The paradigm of Mars is not limited to one specific historical context, as it belongs only to the horizon or context in which it emerges.

The sign, as we have already intimated, "signifies because it carries a signature that necessarily predetermines its interpretation and distributes its use and efficacy according to rules, practices, and precepts that it is our task to recognize."[67] "Predetermining an interpretation" is synonymous with activating messages through contact with a signature. The interval between the sign in the state of arrest and the actualization that arises following contact with the signature is an epistemological space that Warburg sought to expose with his atlas. The science of culture, which he conceptualized, was to be "a psychological history through images capable of illustrating the distance that runs between impulse and action."[68] At this point we can equate "impulse" with potentiality and "action" with actualization. The distance between the two is at once a zone, for the former, of stasis and indifference while, for the latter, of movement and difference. There are two notions that we need to underline here. First, the interval between "impulse" and "action" arises in a context of images hailing from different historical periods which are then "stratified in an a-chronological manner,"[69] thus privileging the non-differentiated temporality of anachrony. Second, gesture, which Warburg repeatedly mentions as a driving element in his project,[70] is what ultimately defines the interval between potentiality and actualization. That is to say, with

Agamben, gesture is understood as the emergence of a mediality, as a mechanism to make a thing visible,[71] and (specifically as it concerns Warburg) as "the crystal of historical memory . . . in its [*gesture*] petrifaction as destiny."[72]

As a signature, astrology has a "zero degree" presence in Agamben given that, as Nikolai Trubetzkoy defines the term, it is a "sign lacking a sign."[73] As a pure uncontaminated signature, astrology makes flash appearances in Agamben's work such as in the case of, for example, *Stanzas*, *Infancy and History*, and then much later in *Nymphs* and *The Signature of All Things*. Of course, the number of its appearances are in no way comparable to those of signatures such as, say, Poetry, Potentiality, Secularization, Kingdom, Power, Glory, Economy, and Life. An important reason why astrology appears to be undetectable is that it often emerges unannounced as an unidentified semiotic ruin. Moreover, astrology becomes visible in Agamben's thought only once we shed the ultraviolet light energy of the signature on his writings, only to expose the radical zero degree presence of astrology. As Agamben informs us, "The zero degree is not a sign but a signature that, in the absence of a signified, continues to operate as the exigency of an infinite signification that cannot be exhausted by any signified."[74] In other terms, as a signature astrology begins to exhibit or to be involved in the production of meanings only once it has come into contact with thematically related signs or paradigms, which are themselves carriers of potential meanings that, in turn, are activated only once they enter into contact with a signature. In this situation, Watkin suggests, an important role is played by impotentiality, which "operates as a strategic interim mode of privation linking, essentially, potentiality to the signature. . . . The signature is the impotentiality that allows a potentiality to come to actualisation without negating potentiality as such or presenting actualisation as plenitude."[75]

However, any "estrangement from impotentiality" brings about an emptying of lived experience and the demise of freedom. As we saw, this was a central reason that characterized Agamben's critique of the eternal recurrence. Agamben's point is that it is our realization of "what we cannot be" that provides certainty to "the truth of what we are" and it is in the understanding of what we are not able to or will not do "that gives consistency to our actions."[76] Astrology reaffirms our impotentiality as it reminds everyone that there is much that we will do or choose not to do. The planets, as an oppressive force, and through a double movement, imprint the potentiality on the subject, which is a mirror reflection of their own. Once the planets' power is deactivated, and the human imagination liberated, as Bruno and Warburg describe it, the only potentiality that is on the horizon is the one humans possess. Once the anxiety felt by humans toward to the planets, or the conflict between the transcendent and the immanent potentialities, disappears, so too does the search for resemblances throughout the universe.

Agamben paid particular attention to Warburg's critical sensitivity to the dread and anxiety archived in the visual artefacts bequeathed from the past. These artefacts would be manifested as seemingly secondary details and minutiae in an artwork, yet, Agamben contends, as far as Warburg is concerned, "what might have appeared as an unconscious structure par excellence—the image—instead showed itself to be a decisively historical element, the very place of human cognitive activity in its vital confrontation with the past."[77] Agamben makes reference to Ernst Gombrich's biography on Warburg that illustrates the extent to which the art historian was influenced by Robert Semon's notion of *engram*. Semon, Gombrich tell us, contends that "memory is not a property of consciousness but the one quality that distinguishes living from dead matter. It is the capacity to react to an event over a period of time; that is, a form of preserving and transmitting energy not known to the physical world. Any event affecting living matter leaves a trace which Semon calls an '*engram*.' The potential energy conserved in this 'engram' may under suitable conditions, be reactivated and discharged—we then say the organism acts in a specific way because it remembers the previous event."[78] In astrological literature we read of analogous situations: that is, in the moment a person is born they are imprinted with an astrological signature that is at once empty, but at the same time activates existential files that were shared by others in the past. For example, in the *Matheseos Libri VIII*, Firmicus reminds us of the charge of astrology's signature by indicating that "our individual complexions and our shapes, our character, and our personalities are given to us by none other than the motion of the planets."[79] Yet, as personalized as the imprinting is, the elements activated by the signature are ones that are common to those born under the same astronomical conditions.

Agamben contends that Semon's idea of the *engram* finds its objective correlative in the manner that Warburg interprets the image and symbol in works of art, that is, "as the crystallization of an energetic charge and emotional experience that survive as an inheritance transmitted by social memory and that, like electricity condensed in a Leyden jar, become effective only through contact with the 'selective will' of a particular period."[80] In its most important respects, the charge contained in the *engram* resembles the phenomenon of the signature, a communicative content that rests in a state of potentiality and which achieves actuality or communicability once a channel of transmission is made available by way of direct contact with another message-creating system. Warburg perceived the potential communicability of the dread and anxiety stored as archives in the material images of the astrologically themed work with which he came into contact through his iconological mind. Warburg's encounter with the ghost of astrology in art was an example of the theme of confrontation with objects from the past

charged with latent energies, that could be either welcomed or could act as objects of conflict. As Agamben understands it,

> For Warburg, the attitude of the artists toward images inherited from tradition was therefore conceivable in terms neither of aesthetic choice nor of neutral reception; rather, for him it is a matter of confrontation—which is lethal or vitalizing, depending on the situation—with the tremendous energies stored in images, which in themselves had the potential either to make regress into sterile subjection or to direct him on his path toward salvation and knowledge. For Warburg, this was true not only for artists who, like Dürer, polarized and humanized the superstitious fear of Saturn in the emblem of intellectual contemplation, but also for historians and scholars, whom Warburg conceives of as extremely sensitive seismographs responding to distant earthquakes, or as "necromancers" who consciously evoke the specters threatening them.[81]

As we will see, Benjamin is exactly the sort of individual who felt the "distant earthquakes" as he was able to read the ghosts of the astrological past in such a way as to propose astrology as a contemporary theory.

RATIONAL ASTROLOGY

In an attempt to follow the dispersion of the archaeological debris bequeathed to us by the astrological tradition, we encounter a phenomenon that sheds light on the role of astrology: that is, what Benjamin calls a "rational astrology," which is a modern theory of astrology that constitutes a reframing of an ancient concept. In his work on celestial physiognomy (*Coelestis physiognomoniae*, 1603), Giovan Battista Della Porta (1535–1615) argued that celestial bodies and zodiacal signs had no influence whatsoever on human character and behavior, to the point that the Neapolitan philosopher set out to illustrate, to use Alfonso Paolella's words, "that the stars cannot be described if not in their perceptive iconicity or in their semiotic representation transmitted by tradition."[82] An individual's personality and fate, according to Della Porta, are instead influenced by "the elemental qualities that give shape to the human body."[83] Consequently, humans seek in some measure to imitate the stars, which means discovering an important secret concerning the universe, that is, the heavenly bodies, like humans, are microtextual elements that are part of a macrocosmic network, an *Unum*, that contains all of creation. Della Porta's thinking leads us to the conclusion according to which both the planets and man are created and formed by the same matter, and, therefore, to fix one's gaze on the sky means seeing the reflection of one's own bare life in a cosmic mirror. In following a train of thinking that is consistent with what we find in Della Porta, and which we already saw in Paracelsus, Friedrich Nietzsche claimed that "he who looks into himself as into vast space and bears galaxies within also knows how irregular galaxies

are; they lead into the chaos and labyrinth of existence."[84] Humans not only see the empirical manifestation of stars, but they also feel within themselves the vast constellations populated by numerous celestial bodies, thus transforming bare life into a micro-universe. If we allow Della Porta's celestial physiognomy to come into contact with Nietzsche's astral intuition, we can observe that the two thinkers offer us the principle characteristics of what Benjamin calls a "rational astrology."

With its epistemological credibility and viability banished to the archives of oblivion, astrology lacks a place in the modern cartography of conscious knowledge making. Benjamin sheds light on this situation when he associates astrology with the experience of altered consciousness. He does so by contaminating the subject of astrology with the experience of the consumption of hashish, as we see in this quote concerning an episode from experimentation with the drug: "Earlier, when lifting his arm: 'Now then, let us turn to astrology.' The upraised arm appears here as a telescope. Test subject suddenly falls asleep (1:15am)."[85] Hashish and astrology deactivate conscious rationality by, for the former, intoxicating the mind with organic biochemical substances, and, for the latter, exploring the potentialities of cognition through a polarizing irrationality. Yet, in Benjamin's mind they are portals to a type of transcendent experience of knowledge that escapes the Kantian model. Moreover, Benjamin acknowledges the loss of a mimetic sensibility (of which astrology was an important manifestation) in contemporary culture as we see in this comment: "That the stars are absent from Baudelaire's poetry is the most conclusive sign of its tendency to eradicate semblance."[86] The motif of semblance, or "mimetic forces," is the element that allows for the actuation of any potentiality of meaning contained in the astrological signature, and it is at the heart of Benjamin's idea of a "Rational Astrology."

In 1932 Benjamin composed a fragment ("On Astrology") that was to be published posthumously, but which contains the seeds of what he calls a "rational astrology." This *novantiqua astrologia* pivots on the deconstruction of a transcendent metaphysics, thus operating an epistemological turn that is not dissimilar from Heidegger's destruction of onto-theology. The Copernican turn initiated by Heidegger implied the destruction of the metaphysical world which was like a dead weight on humans. The devaluation of astrology was one of the frontiers of such a destruction, that is, the undoing of the confining ties that the stars imposed on human bodies and on human actions. In this fragment, Benjamin's point of departure is that of outlining an idea of astrology that is emptied of any doctrine that speaks of magical influences or radiant energies. The point is that rational astrology does not pivot on astral influences; instead it hinges its communicative properties on the "mimetic powers" that link all the elements present in the universe. According to Benjamin, the resemblances that we are able to identify in people's faces, in

plants, in buildings and so on are but micro details of a universe of resemblances. However, this capacity to perceive the resemblances, that are not visible only in human faces but also in the human body, was very typical of the ancients, even though today these "manifest configurations" and "mimetic resemblances" escape us. Agamben had something similar in mind when he describes the potentialities of the "face":

> The face is not a *simulacrum*, in the sense that it is something dissimulating or hiding the truth: the face is the *simultas*, the being-together of the manifold visages constituting it, in which none of the visages is truer than any of the others. To grasp the face's truth means to grasp not the *resemblance* but rather the simultaneity of the visages, that is, the restless power that keeps them together and constitutes their being-common. The face of God, thus, is the *simultas* of human faces: it is "our effigy" that Dante saw in the "living light" of paradise.[87]

The face constitutes pure sayability, a dimension that is in the domain of a radical potentiality and deactivation, but it reveals a truth that is bereft of any content, which is possible once there is a movement from potentiality to actuality. The face instead reveals the pure potential for being to experience "opening." The truth that the face reveals is achieved by radicalizing the search for similarities, which leads to perceiving the simultaneity of all faces.

In another fragment ("Experience") composed at some time in the period 1931–1932, Benjamin writes that "Experiences are lived similarities." The formulation of this idea is key to envisioning a vital connection between Benjamin and Agamben's critique of experience and the main theoretical underpinnings of astrology:

> There is no greater error than the attempt to construe experience—in the sense of life experience—according to the model on which the natural sciences are based. What is decisive here is not the casual connections established over the course of time, but the similarities that have been lived. Most people have no wish to learn by experience. Moreover, their convictions prevent them from doing so. That experience and observation are identical has to be shown. . . . Observation is based on self-immersion.[88]

Benjamin's insight here is mirrored in Agamben's aforementioned claim that experience "is no longer accessible to us." Moreover, Benjamin has here isolated experience from science, thus unveiling the originary autonomy of experience in astrological thought. As we will see, the "similarities that have been lived" are a reflection of Benjamin's theoretical interest in mimetic powers, but at their very root, they refer to astrology's existential files. A defining element of the construction, or, to be more precise, progressive accumulation of the heterogeneous corpus of astrological literature is the illustration of not only how the planets affect human life, but the specific

detailing of the varieties of lived experience that were purportedly influenced. In the *Matheseos Libri VIII* Firmicus indicates which situations in life are conditioned by the positions of the celestial bodies at the exact moment of one's birth. The point is not only the influence of the stars, but also the fact that these experiences are understood as celestial-existential outcomes that have been shared and transmitted throughout the centuries. For example, Firmicus describes how the various positions of the heavenly bodies can determine the "native's" (or, a person born in a given astronomically measured moment) social, juridical and economic status, health, relationship with parents and others, number and kinds of marriages, sexual orientation, type of occupation, conditions surrounding death, and a host of other existential structures that characterize one's life.[89] These are the "shared similarities of experience" that Benjamin ultimately has in mind when he writes that "imitation may be seen as the only authority that gave to astrology the character of experience."[90] For Benjamin, a horoscope needs to be perceived as a primal totality that astrology seeks to read and interpret. In other terms, the celestial spheres presented themselves to the ancients as a "characteristic union," and as a consequence of the role played by each of the planets we are able to understand their "character."[91]

Modern humans, Benjamin laments, are not able to experience the cosmos in the same edifying way as did the ancients. As he claims in "One-Way Street," before the advent of modern experimental science, humans were able to gain "ecstatic" knowledge from the constellations that was not only at one with being and experience, but was shared by a community. Kepler, Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, Galileo, and modern astronomers in general, were mostly interested in establishing an individualistic "optical connection" with the universe. The ancients, instead, had developed a radically different relationship with the cosmos, what Benjamin terms an "ecstatic trance: "For it is in this experience alone that we gain certain knowledge of what is nearest to us and what is remotest to us, and never of one without the other. This means that man can be in ecstatic contact with the cosmos only communally."[92] Immediately following this quote Benjamin describes the fate of an astrology deprived of any epistemological dignity when he comments on the practice of modern humans to not consider this type of cosmic experience as being of fundamental importance, and of relegating it to the status of a purely personal phenomenon felt as "the poetic rapture of starry nights." Yet, the significance of the shared cosmic experience is something of much greater importance than the isolated moment of poetic reverie. At the basis of the astrological experience is a powerful "mimetic force" operating from within things. However, in "Doctrine of the Similar" Benjamin suggests that, while we no longer possess the ability of the ancients to readily perceive and interpret the signs and signatures of "nonsensuous" similarity "which might exist between a constellation of stars and a human," we do have available to us a "canon"

that allows us to shed light on the nonsensousness, namely, language.[93] The human ability to read the stars, that is to identify resemblances through a "mimetic gift," with the view of determining the nature of the coming future eventually "found its way into language and writing over thousands of years, thus creating for itself in language and writing the most perfect archive of nonsensous similarity."[94] By this Benjamin means that language inherited the communicative potential that allow things to "encounter and come into relation with one another . . . in their essences, in their most transient and delicate substances, even in their aromas."[95] The mimetic faculty of the astrologer has become subsumed in language's ability to identify and create meaning by way of arresting sound that "flashes up in an instant." (A suggestive correlative of this notion is found in *L'uso dei corpi* where Agamben comments on Benjamin's definition of Platonic love [namely, that love which unabatedly safeguards the name of the beloved], and suggests that love, as an ontological category, is a caring for the "the relationship between a thing and its name, the assuming without reservations of the relationship between the being and its being in language."[96])

We encounter similar astrologically charged formulations in Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History": for example, in the seventeenth thesis Benjamin writes that "Thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions, it gives that constellation a shock, by which it crystallizes as a monad." While in eighteen A he speaks of the type of historical thinking that pivots on grasping the astrologically-charged "constellation [*but it might be more correct to speak about a 'conjunction'*] into which one's own era has entered, along with a very specific earlier one." In this way one "establishes a conception of the present as the now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time."[97] But it is in the *Arcades Project* (N3, 1) that Benjamin provides a definition of the "dialectical image" that pivots on the "constellation" of astrological nomenclature: "It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill."[98] The search for resemblances, and the conjunctions of celestial bodies as well, shares a close genealogy with an image in the state of standstill. When applied to Agamben, rational astrology thinks the petrifactions of an astral entity, as we will see, in the guise of a fossilized constellation outside the designs of destiny and fate. This petrifaction occurs in a world where salvation finds its place outside the redemptive trajectory that accompanies the historical tasks of humans. At the end of time the celestial bodies will remain immobile (like dialectical images) and watched over by humans who now live outside of being, as we read in *The Open*.

The watcher of the stars, Benjamin tells us in "On Mimetic Faculty," was charged with the task "to read what was never written," that is, read and interpret what is written in the stars as if there were no language and script. The reason for this is that this type of mimetic reading is the most ancient, and it was practiced before the advent of all languages.[99] Thus, the constellations of unwritten life implies a type of perception of the world forged by the nonsensuous communication that escapes the consciousness of lived experience. It is present in language and writing, but it becomes visible in the space of the suspension of meaning. As we will see in another chapter, potentiality pivots on the deactivation of semiotics. The most foundational episode of this suspension is that of birth, as what concerns the astrologer is the arrested or frozen image of the constellations in their "photographed" sidereal topology. In this sense, one's nativity arises out of a pure (and however temporary) suspension of the motion of the planets. As Benjamin understands it, "What the state of the stars—millennia ago, at the moment of their birth—wrought with one human existence was woven there on the basis of similarity."[100] Of course, this is perfectly consistent with astrological theory and practice for which the celestial coordinates of the exact instant of birth constituted the data that provided the rationale for any narrative dealing with the prognosis for the future.

Thus spake Benjamin on the elements pertinent to rational astrology, but we now need to pose the question concerning about whether or not and, if so, how, these elements are present in Agamben's thought. Apart, that is, from the references to Benjamin's conflation of the heavenly bodies and the dialectical image ("For Benjamin, this constellation is dialectical and intensive . . . capable of placing an instant from the past in relation to the present)."[101] One port of entry into this matter is the moment of birth and its relationship to natal horoscopes. In both versions of "Agesilaus Santander" Benjamin mentions that his birth took place "under the sign of Saturn—the planet of the slowest revolution, the star of hesitation and delay" and that this was not an indifferent fact as it concerned his life.[102] The technical term in astrological theory that concerns the day of birth is "genethliac," but this term also refers to the position and thus potential influence of the celestial bodies at the moment of birth. "Genethlialogy" instead refers to the art and science of determining the configuration of the sidereal bodies at the time of birth. In a more general sense, genethliac refers to the fact that at the time of birth one is given something that remains with them for their entire life, and which also influences how life is lived. In fact, in Book III of the *Tetrabiblos* Ptolemy theorizes that the position of the celestial bodies at the moment of birth has the same causative influence as that of the configuration at the moment of conception. For our present purposes, this term appears in *Profanations* when Agamben sets out to activate the potential meanings of the concept of "Genius." To be sure, Agamben underlines the fact that "Birth-

days are sacred to genius, and for that reason we still use the adjective *genetliaco* (birthday) in Italian."[103] Agamben is clearly establishing an etymological matrix that interconnects genius with *genetliaco*, which in astrological terminology is the exact equivalent of genethliac. Implied here is a conceptual interconnection as well, as the thread of Agamben's thinking in the piece is the significance of what one receives at the moment of birth: "In Latin, *genius* was the name used for the god who becomes each man's guardian at the moment of birth."[104] In other terms, Genius, as Agamben employs the notion, functions in a manner similar to an astrological signature, by way of imprinting a potential existential structure in the newborn. The tutelary deity shares the same relationship with the individual as he or she does with the astrological signature, that is, a connection based on nonsensous similarity.

However, this connection emerges in, or is characterized by, the space between two polarities that affect humans: that is, "the part that has yet to be individuated and lived and another part that is marked by fate and individual experience."[105] The Genius, exactly like the astrological signature, imprints a template of destined life on the subject, who in turn is in possession of a free will. There is thus a dialectic between the potentiality of influence exercised by the Genius, and human potentiality figured in the doctrine of free will. Living in this space between the two polarities implies "remaining constantly in relation to a zone of nonconsciousness," and it is manifested in the guise of "an everyday mystical practice, in which the ego, in a sort of special, joyous esoterism, looks on with a smile at its own undoing . . . Genius is our life insofar as it does not belong to us."[106] The reason Genius is not in our possession is because, like the astrological signature, it is an external element transmitted to us in an instant of temporary stellar motionlessness, which bore witness to the moment of birth. In a subsequent chapter, the matter of the scission separating the potentiality of the stars from that of humans will be afforded closer attention. However, what needs to be underlined at this point is that Agamben's idea of Genius presents concepts that are not only consistent with Benjamin's rational astrology, but in many ways they constitute a potential commentary on the questions of mimetic force, search for semblances, and nonsensuous similarities, even if they manifest themselves as a perfect dissymmetry, as in the case of the individual and his or her Genius. The ruined fragments of the astrological tradition are scattered in Agamben's works as conceptual files that bear witness to a past deactivation of the potentialities of astrology's signature.

Another example of astral artifacts that serve a different function, after having been rendered inoperative, is to be found in "K" from *Nudities*. Agamben is interested in deciphering the significance of the letter *K* in the name of K/Josef K from Franz Kafka's *The Castle* and *The Trial*. Agamben suggests that what is of major import are not the jurisprudential matters, but

rather the limits and separations between spatial realities and practices. More precisely, Agamben argues on the basis of the work performed by the *agrimensor* (the land surveyor of ancient Rome, with the character *K* in *The Castle* known as a land surveyor) that the significance of the *K* is that it stands for *Kardo* (cardinal point), which is a technical term referring to the location and division of land.[107] Agamben's conclusive point is that "K is the 'new land surveyor,' who renders inoperative the limits and the boundaries that separate (and at the same time hold together) the high and the low, the castle and the village, the temple and the home, the divine and the human."[108]

In providing the agrimensorial semantic constellation from which K arises, Agamben duly notes, on Hyginus' authority, that *kardo*, as a conceptual element in the *constitutio limitum*, has a celestial origin. Agamben cites the following passage from Hyginus' *Constitution of Limits*: "Among all the rites and the acts that have to do with measurements, the most eminent is the constitution of limits. It has a celestial origin and a perpetual endurance . . . since limits are constituted in their reference to the world; indeed the *decumani* are traced by following the course of the sun, and the *kardines* according to the axis of the poles."[109] Agamben underlines this semantic technicality when he indicates that *K* signifies *kardo* as it "directs towards the cardinal point in the sky," and that the character and land surveyor K is the *kardo,* "the one who directs himself toward the cardinal point in the sky."[110] The astrological pertinence to the meaning of *kardo* could not be more evident in Agamben's "K," moreover, we have here an illustration of how rational astrology hides itself in discursive practices without garnering much attention, regardless of whether it is due or not.

As already indicated, the motif of astrology as man's means to achieve orientation is a pivotal element in Warburg's *Mnemosyne* project, and a driving force in his valorization of astrology as a product of human culture. The cardinal points were key structural components in any attempt to identify the heavens as the *locus* of any orientation. Firmicus reminds us that the cardinal point of the nativities are four: Ascendant, Descendant, *Medium Caelum* and *Imum Caelum*. The Greeks instead called them *Anatole* (East, Sunrise), *Dysis* (West, Sunset), *Mesuranima* (Meridian, Zenith), *Ypogeon* (below the Earth).[111] Using these four *cardines* as a matrix to read the text of the heavens is of fundamental importance as they allow one to "set forth the most correct revelation of the whole pattern of destiny."[112] Manilius dedicates a section of the *Astronomica* (2:788–840) to the *cardines* and illustrates that, similar to temples and quadrants, they do not actually contain power in themselves, rather they orient the power of the zodiacal degrees in which they are respectively situated in the direction of specific zones of human life experience. The Ascendant, which Manilius calls the Horoscope, pertains to character and life in general; the Descendant, which he terms the Occident,

deals with the consumption of things; the *Medium Caelum* influences the honors in life; the *Imum Caelum* deals with wealth. However, Manilius underlines the fact that the decisive strategy in measuring and interpreting the data pertinent to the *cardines* is what rests between them: "Nor must you rest content with observing each cardinal point; you must note with retentive mind the spaces between them, which extend over a larger range and possess special powers" (*Astronomica* 2:841–43). The original Latin employs "*intervalla*" for the translated English "spaces between them." Thus, it is in the intervals, which establish the limits of each of the *cardines*, that life unfolds. Stated in a different manner, it is not in the actual *cardines*, but in the movements to and away from them that any lived experience is possible. In other terms, it is due to the temporary suspension, for example, of the Descendant or Occident that humans are able to live their potentiality.

K, then, effects two conceptual transgressions. As Agamben describes it, as the new land surveyor he is "an assault against the boundaries that separate the castle (the high) from the village (the low)."[113] However, by deconstructing the separation between high and low, K inadvertently deactivates the limits between the cardinal points, thus dissolving the interval between life and death. This situation is at the heart of the question posed by Agamben at the end of the piece: "What would happen to the high and the low, the divine and the human, the pure and the impure, once the door (that is, the system of laws, written and unwritten, that regulate these relationships) is neutralized?"[114] There are at least two approaches to this question. In a first one, we could say that K is a latecomer, as Giordano Bruno had operated, as we will see later, a similar destruction of the limits separating immanence from transcendence and life from death by thinking a magmatic continuum that included all matter in the universe. As Warburg observed, Bruno developed such an epistemological framework within the context of the deconstruction of traditional astrology, where all the separations and divisions of the Neoplatonic ontological hierarchy were undone.

However, we could argue that the astrological tradition unequivocably points to a vision of the cosmos where the things on Earth are mirrored in what occurs in the heavens (and the inverse is the case as well) to the point that any rigorous distinction between the sublunary and celestial worlds appear to be very faint and unobstrusive. In his commentary on Franz Cumont's research on the astrological traditions of Antiquity, Garin heeds close attention to the fact that the planets and constellations were not only understood in a scientific manner (physical astrology), but they were also perceived as astral divinities that displayed the same biological (they possessed a gender and a voice) and psychological-behavioral characteristics as humans on Earth. Garin's conclusion is that any distinction between a religious or divinatory astrology and a scientific or physical one cannot hold, precisely because elements of the former continuously emerge in the rigor of the latter to

the point where a transparent distinction between the two is difficult to locate and visualize. It is in this sense that understanding the work of astrologers is of fundamental importance. In fact, Garin contends that "it is not possible to investigate the origins of beliefs and of the sciences without carefully interrogating the astrologers, who often did nothing more than project terrestrial events onto the heavens and onto the astral images."[115] The suspension of any difference between astral religion and scientific astrology finds its correlative in a similar suspension between the vicissitudes that take place in the sublunary world and the ones that occur in the sidereal realm. Just as Benjamin had in the modern age theorized a rational astrology bereft of celestial influences but characterized by intuited similarities, the scenarios from Antiquity depicted by Cumont and Garin do not point solely or necessarily to influences, but also to parallel worlds or dimensions that share similar experiences.

It is in this way that we can perceive the texts produced by astrologers as materials essential for any interstellar archaeology, in the same way that works produced by historians are essential for any archaeology of human culture. In fact, Garin formulates an analogy between the astrologer and the historian that highlights this point: "Just as the astrologer had projected human events onto the heavens in order to identify in a 'divine' plan the profound rhythms and the hidden structures, the historian brings back from the heavens down to earth the data, the references, the events and restores them to their original dimensions."[116] The work of the astrologer was to extend the dimensions of human life beyond the events taking place on earth, to the point where the difference, which Agamben speaks about, between the high and the low, between the divine and the human is suspended. However, even with this being the case, that is, even if humans in the past felt a psychological and biological bond with the celestial world, the fact remains, as we will continue to see, the constellations were viewed as entities that exercised biopolitical control, whether by influencing or by inclining, over human life. Whereas in Benjamin, rational astrology is in a certain way de-politicized precisely because astral influence is neutralized. It is in this undifferentiated space between a celestial biopolitics that is active, and one where it is instead suspended, that humans (given the potentialities promised by a coming liberation from the terror of the stars) begin constituting new dimensions of forms-of-life.

NOTES

1. Firmicus, *Matheseos Libri VIII*, 36.
2. Tester, *A History of Western Astrology*, 116–17.
3. *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings Which Contain Religious Or Philosophical Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus*, trans. Walter Scott (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), 415, 417.

4. Tester, *A History of Western Astrology*, 117.
5. Giorgio Agamben, *Opus Dei. An Archaeology of Duty*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 3.
6. Agamben, Ferrando, *The Unspeakable Girl*, 44.
7. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 20.
8. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 18.
9. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 13.
10. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 18.
11. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 18–19.
12. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 19.
13. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 21.
14. On this matter see Ornella Pompeo Faracovi, *Scritto negli astri. L'astrologia nella cultura dell'Occidente* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1996), 224–33.
15. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 21.
16. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 21–22.
17. Agamben, Ferrando, *The Unspeakable Girl*, 13.
18. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 22.
19. Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos*, 180.
20. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 23.
21. Agamben, *Il fuoco e il racconto*, 113.
22. Agamben, *Means without Ends*, 3–4.
23. Agamben, *Il fuoco e il racconto*, 142.
24. Agamben, *Il fuoco e il racconto*, 126.
25. Agamben, *Il fuoco e il racconto*, 134.
26. Agamben, *Il fuoco e il racconto*, 137.
27. Agamben, *Il fuoco e il racconto*, 138.
28. Agamben, *Il fuoco e il racconto*, 140.
29. Agamben, *Il fuoco e il racconto*, 141.
30. Agamben, *Il fuoco e il racconto*, 142.
31. "Giorgio Agamben with Leland de la Durantaye," http://www.bidoun.org/magazine/28-interviews/giorgio-agamben-with-leland-de-la-durantaye/.
32. Giorgio Agamben, "Der Papst ist ein weltlicher Priester," interview with Abu Bakr Rieger. *Literaturen* (Berlin), June 2005. Cited in de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction*, 246.
33. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 89.
34. Walter Benjamin, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Vol. I, 1913–1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 102.
35. Philip Andrew Quadrio, "Benjamin Contra Kant on Experience: Philosophising beyond Philosophy," *Philament: An Online Journal of the Arts and Culture*, http://sydney.edu.au/arts/publications/philament/issue1_PhilQuadrio.htm.
36. Cf. Watkin's discussion on Kant's theory of the universality of the subject within the context of Agamben's idea of communicability in *Agamben and Indifference*, 12–13.
37. Benjamin, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," 102.
38. Benjamin, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," 104.
39. Benjamin, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," 105.
40. Quadrio, "Benjamin Contra Kant on Experience: Philosophising beyond Philosophy," *Philament: An Online Journal of the Arts and Culture*.
41. Chevalier, *A Postmodern Revelation*, 43.
42. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 1.
43. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 11.
44. Agamben, "Aby Warburg and the Nameless Science," in *Potentialities*, 89–103.
45. Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'immagine insepolta. Aby Warburg, la memoria dei fantasmi e la storia dell'arte*, trans. Alessandro Serra (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2006), 30.
46. Didi-Huberman, *L'immagine insepolta*, 30.

47. Didi-Huberman, *L'immagine insepolta*, 30.
48. Didi-Huberman, *L'immagine insepolta*, 82.
49. Gaston Bachelard, *La poetica dello spazio*, trans. Ettore Catalano (Bari: Dedalo, 1993), 137.
50. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 54.
51. Paracelsus, "Concerning the Signature of Natural Things," in *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings: Vol. 1,* ed. Arthur Edward Waite (London: James Elliott, 1894), 174, cited in Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 34.
52. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 64.
53. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 98.
54. Cited in Agamben, *Potentialities*, 98.
55. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 58.
56. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 58.
57. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 58.
58. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 95.
59. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 99.
60. Watkin, *Agamben and Indifference*, 39.
61. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 29.
62. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 31.
63. Watkin, *Agamben and Indifference*, 44.
64. Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne: L'Atlante delle immagini*, a cura di Martin Warnke e Claudia Brink, edizione italiana a cura di Maurizio Ghelardi (Torino: Nino Aragno editore, 2002), 8.
65. Warburg, *Mnemosyne*, 10.
66. Warburg, *Mnemosyne,* 12.
67. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things,* 64.
68. Warburg, *Mnemosyne,* 3.
69. Warburg, *Mnemosyne,* 4.
70. Warburg, *Mnemosyne,* 3, 4, 5.
71. Agamben, *Means Without End,* 58–59.
72. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 83.
73. Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 101.
74. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 78.
75. Watkin, *Agamben and Indifference*, 23.
76. Giorgio Agamben, *Nudities*, trans. David Kishik and Sefan Pedatella (Stanford, CA: Standford University Press, 2011), 45.
77. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 102.
78. Ernst Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (London: The Warburg Institute and University of London, 1970), 242, cited in Agamben, *Potentialities*, 93–94.
79. Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos*, 19.
80. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 94.
81. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 94.
82. Alfonso Paolella, *G. B. Della Porta e l'astrologia: la Coelestis physiognomia. L'edizione nazionale del teatro e l'opera di G. B. della Porta. Atti del convegno, Salerno 23 maggio 2002*, a cura di Milena Montanile (Pisa-Roma, Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2004), 27.
83. Giovan Battista Della Porta, *Coelestis physiognomonia* e in appendice *Della celeste fisonomia*, a cura di Alfonso Paolella (Napoli, Edizioni Scientifiche, 1996), 189.
84. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (322), ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 180.
85. Walter Benjamin, *On Hashish*, trans. Howard Eiland and Others. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006. 80.
86. Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingston, Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2006), 163.
87. Agamben, *Means without Ends*, 99.

88. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1931–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard, Eiland, Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), Volume 2, Part 2, 553.
89. Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos*, 233–65.
90. Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1931–1934*, Volume 2, Part 2, 685.
91. A distinctive element of Benjamin's rational astrology, by way of the focus on analogy, mimetic powers, and physiognomy, is the "gesture." In turn, the gesture is a key element in Agamben's thought precisely because it opens to the unconcealment of potentiality. According to Deborah Levitt, "Gesture, for Agamben, is what takes place when all definitive locations—life and art, text and execution, reality and virtuality, power and act, personal biography and impersonal event—are suspended. In this opening, what appears—or plays—is gesture" (Deborah Levitt, "Gesture," in *The Agamben Dictionary*, 79). Gesture is thus for Agamben the emptiness that houses pure potentiality, which manifests itself in the guise of a specific form of non-communicability (cf. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 78). Although gesture is not strictly speaking a non-linguistic event, it is present in language as an encoding that is more archaic than "conceptual expression" (Agamben, *Potentialities*, 77). In another work Agamben describes gesture as a "mediality," that is, something that is not the same as but akin to the concept of the signator, which activates the creation of meanings by deciphering the presence and significance of signatures in things. Thus, the gesture has "nothing to say because what it shows is the being-in-language of human beings as pure mediality" (Agamben, *Means without Ends,* 58–59).
92. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA and London: 1996), Vol. 1, 486.
93. Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1931–1934*, Volume 2, Part 2, 696.
94. Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1931–1934*, Volume 2, Part 2, 697.
95. Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1931–1934*, Volume 2, Part 2, 697–98.
96. Giorgio Agamben, *L'uso dei corpi* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2014), 218.
97. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland, Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), Volume 4, 396, 397.
98. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 463.
99. Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1931–1934*, Volume 2, Part 2, 722.
100. Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1931–1934*, Volume 2, Part 2, 698.
101. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 32.
102. Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1931–1934*, Volume 2, Part 2, 713, 715.
103. Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 9. See Thanos Zartaloudis, "Soulbind, or On Profanation," in *The Work of Giorgio Agamben: Law, Literature, Life,* 132–48.
104. Agamben, *Profanations*, 9.
105. Agamben, *Profanations*, 11.
106. Agamben, *Profanations*, 13.
107. Agamben, *Nudities*, 33.
108. Agamben, *Nudities*, 36.
109. Cited in Agamben, *Nudities*, 32.
110. Agamben, *Nudities*, 33, 35.
111. Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos*, 44.
112. Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos*, 47.
113. Agamben, *Nudities*, 35.
114. Agamben, *Nudities*, 36.
115. Garin, *Lo zodiac della vita*, viii.
116. Garin, *Lo zodiac della vita*, x.

Chapter Three

A Theory of Unwritten Texts

In an analysis of the themes of Agostino Chigi's geniture as depicted on the ceiling of the Villa Farnesina in Rome, Fritz Saxl comments on the difficulties inherent in positing interpretations of horoscopal eidetic narratives, as in this case where we do not exactly know what the astrologers told Chigi about his future. In a general sense, however, the issue is that the texts produced by astrologers lack the mechanisms that allow us to establish or test the reliability of their statements. The problem, Saxl acknowledges, is that "the hypotheses of astrology—a pseudo-empirical science—are all impossible to be demonstrated, all equally 'true' or 'false.'" It comes to a point, Saxl laments, that the same astrologer will offer a myriad of different possible interpretations of the same celestial configuration.[1] However, in the shadows of Saxl's critique of the astrologer's lack of "clear inequivocability," there rests a problem inherent in all textual production. Namely, from the moment that an author suspends or abandons the writing of a text, it assumes the potentiality of not being understood. In commenting on the New Testament writings, Franz Overbeck suggested that "in the moment they were constituted into a canon, they ceased being able to be understood."[2] Overbeck's idea is that in any canon of literature the potentiality of its texts being unintelligible is inherent. Coccia applies this notion to textuality in general and argues that the genetic incomprehensibility of all works points to a future moment when the non-understandibility will be interrupted by a time of readability, or, as he terms it following Benjamin and Agamben, "the purgatorial waiting for its day of redemption."[3] In any event, when the moment of a text's legibility arrives, it would still be read as if for the first time.

If with each different analysis of the same stellar phenomenon, as Saxl's critique appears to suggest, the astrologer is reading it as if for the first time, it would be fair to observe that the unwrittenness of the celestial text is at

various points interrupted by moments of writing. The astrologer's work is a blank (im)potentiality, whose potentialities allows for writing to actualize without the (im)potentiality being lost. That is to say, the (im)potentiality is not only the astrologer's purported reluctance (or, a variation on Bartleby's "I prefer not to") to provide a stable, unequivocal reading, but also the fact that after each successive reading of the same sidereal configuration, the reading is experienced as if it were actualized for the first time. Each different reading is a momentary interjection in the space of suspension that (im)potentiality occupies.

The unwritten text that is always being read for the first time occupies a territory characterized by (non)signification. The present chapter will focus on a series of different elements that will shed light on this recurring theme by isolating and identifying the particulars that characterize it. After having referenced selected semiotic theories of text, and how they interface with an astrological world view, the focus moves to illustrating how Agamben's thinking on potentiality points to the deactivation of the process of message production, and the manner in which it is pertinent to an astrological reading of celestial texts. Finally, the astrological file of the allegorical mode of anagogy is identified, and the relevance of Agamben's notions of the contemporary and the living spectre to astrology are explicated.

SPEAKING OF TEXTS

The idea of reading "what was never written" implies, among other things, a particular way of understanding a text and of establishing a cognitive relationship with it. There are paradoxes such as, for example, the notion of reading a text that is blank in the sense that the semiotic markers, the signifier and the signified, have disappeared and what is left is the space of the suspension of meaning housed in the interval separating the two markers. This is what Agamben might possibly have in mind when troping on the concept of deciphering the unwritten text. In any event, before discussing these matters in relation to Agamben and astrology, some thought needs to be afforded to the question of texts and their potentiality to produce, archive, and communicate messages.

In a very general sense the "text" is understood as the artifact generated by a signifying system and open to inquiry. M. Bakhtin claims that the notion of text is "the primary datum of the human sciences . . . the immediate reality (reality of thought and of experience) within which this thought and these disciplines can exclusively constitute themselves. Where there is no text, there is neither object of inquiry nor thought."[4] As we have already indicated, textuality is a cultural product composed of the remains left behind or deposited by the process of semiosis, and from which the event of communi-

cation can be extracted. Precisely because the materiality of the text is an intricate structure that distinguishes it from a given context, the concept of the text forces us to consider that the items under investigation are never a datum. If anything, we need to carefully consider the manner in which they were produced, isolated, presented to attention. In fact, for any text, we must think about signification itself as a problem, rather than as a given. As Jonathan Culler maintains, this means that we need to investigate the analyst's methods "not just prior to the inquiry to decide what will be done, but in the process of considering the objects of study themselves."[5]

For Roland Barthes the text is something previously unthought and unseen, the text is "what is situated at the limits of the rules of speech act (rationality, readability, etc.)."[6] Barthes makes a distinction between "work" and "text": the work is something that can be located and described, while the text cannot be located nor be counted. All works contain some presence of text; however, the pure text is something that resists locatable presence and analysis.[7] The enigmatic notions that the text under analysis is absent, did not previously exist, or whose constitution is radically provisional and tentative surface frequently in contemporary semiotic theories of text. Julia Kristeva speculates that language systems and texts are diametrically opposed, where the latter operates as that element which undoes the system: "Submerged in language, the 'text' is consequently . . . that which changes it, which dissolves it from the automatism of its habitual development. . . . The (poetic, literary or other) 'text' digs into the surface of speech a vertical shaft where the models of that significance are sought which the representative and communicative language does not recite even if it indicates them." To the notion of the text immersed in the signifying properties of language, Kristeva adds that the "text is not the communicative language codified by grammar. It is not satisfied with representing or meaning the real. Wherever it signifies . . . it participates in the transformation of reality, capturing it at the moment of non-closure."[8] In "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," Kristeva discards the traditional concepts of the author's "influences" and the text's "sources," and claims that all signifying systems are structured in accordance to the way they alter previous signifying systems. Consequently, a literary or philosophical work is more than the result of a single author's efforts. If anything it is the result of the text's relationship to other texts and to the components of language itself. "[A]ny text," Kristeva tells us, "is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another."[9] In this way, intertextuality constitutes a manner of explaining the role of literary and extra-literary elements without needing to make reference to traditional concepts such as authorship. The notion of intertextuality weakens the idea of the text as self-sufficient entity, and reinforces, instead, the fact that all textual production occurs in the presence of other texts. In an analogous fashion, the astrologer's text is a collection of shards or mirror-

surfaced tesserae that reflect the many possibilities that the configuration of sidereal bodies hold for human life.

All texts are, in essence, a seemingly infinite series of connected palimpsests. In Barthes's mind, intertexuality permits the text to come into presence, precisely because a text is a "new tissue of past citations." By this Barthes implies that the text is constituted by "[B]its of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages," and so on, all of which "pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text." Barthes reiterates a notion that is key to conflicts with traditional notions of textual authority when he explains that "[I]ntertextuality, the condition of any text whatsoever, cannot, of course, be reduced to a problem of sources or influences; the intertext is a general field of anonymous formulae whose origin can scarcely ever be located; of unconscious or automatic quotations, given without quotation marks."[10] Consequently, the reader's own previous readings, experiences, and place within the cultural environment constitute important intertexts as well. The idea of intertexuality weakens the boundaries of the text, by subverting unity and assimilation and replacing it with a limitless texture of connections, associations, paraphrases, fragments, texts, and con-texts. In other terms, a text comes into being always for the first time in the event of its reading since, as Barthes claims, the text is "a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred."[11] *Let us intersect Barthes and Agamben and say that the text is an entity that searches for and pivots on "imitations" or resemblances, and is always projected toward the future ("deferred"); moreover, it already contains the unwritten future it defers as "tissues of signs" that momentarily disappear in the event of its being read, which is always for the first time.*

If we turn to the *Sacrament of Language* we see that there is another manner of understanding the implications of the unwritten text in Agamben, specifically the "oath," which is defined as a "linguistic act intended to confirm a meaningful proposition (a *dictum*), whose truth or effectiveness it guarantees."[12] The oath is an unwritten text that governs actions between humans and, as Agamben frames the discussion, the gods as well. While legislated laws, for example, are articulated in a material text, oaths instead are formulated in the immaterial textuality of speech. As a speech act, the oath communicates a message that precedes or causes the constitution of a material text in the sense that "it calls into question the very nature of man as a speaking being and a political animal."[13] The absence of a written text in the event of oath taking assumes a counterpunctual relation with the "consecration of the living human being through the word to the word,"[14] which the oath brings about. This relation underscores a hidden function of written texts in human life: a text's absence, its unwrittenness during the performance of the "sacrament of language" (given that oath taking is what Agamben terms a "sacrament of power"), points unequivocally to the potentialities

of unwritten life. A form-of-life that is always unwritten and read for the first time upon its being experienced, precisely because the oath is "an anthropogenetic operator by means of which the living being, who has discovered itself speaking, has decided to be responsible for his words, and, devoting himself to the *logos*, to constitute himself as the 'living being who has language.'" Moreover, the oath is possible only if humans are able "to distinguish, and to articulate together in some way, life and language, actions and words."[15] In any event, the undifferentiated space between the written text and the writtenness of the oath is occupied by the awareness of the fact that between the subject that speaks and the language there exists an ethical relation: "The human being is that living being that, in order to speak, must say 'I,' must 'take the word,' assume it and make it his own."[16] In a more general sense, the unwritten text of life is the element that radicalizes the potentialities of what is written in that it suspends the interruption or abandonment of a work through the impotentialities inherent in any unwrittenness.

However, any conceptual movement seeking to arrive at a theory of the text necessarily involves a transmigration through the cartography of (non)signification, otherwise the "unwrittenness" of the text becomes only vaguely perceptible. The coming into being of the text and the pure experience of language are unconsciously contemporary events. To anticipate the discussion concerning elements found in *Infancy and History*, let us observe that the interplay between non-signification and signification, potentiality and actualization is the domain wherein the pure experience of language becomes a possibility. However, Agamben underlines the idea that such an experience is transcendental and, similar to human infancy, is bereft of the subject as well as of "psychological substratum." The example that Agamben uses is Johann Georg Hamann's reference to human language as being a "translation" from divine language, thus identifying "the origin of language and of knowledge in a *communicatio idiomatum* between human and divine."[17] While Agamben does not have astrology in mind here, it is nonetheless true that the notion of a communication between human and divine beings constitutes a structure that would be consistent with the idea of communicating with the stars by way of reading the signs inscribed on them. In a more specific sense, Agamben is here speaking about what he terms a "transcendental history," which he characterizes as the "*a priori* limit and structure of all historical knowledge."[18] That is, we are dealing with historical origins and events that escape the fossilization that historicizing brings about precisely because, as unactualized potentialities, they have not "ceased to occur."

The transcendental trait that Agamben speaks about is ultimately connected to a dynamic that involves human infancy and experience: "The individual as not already speaking, as having been an infant—this is experi-

ence."[19] Agamben invokes Wittgenstein's idea of the mystical limit of language and posits that we are not dealing with spiritual mysticism, but with the transcendental origins of language located in human experience: "Experience is the mysterion which every individual intuits from the fact of having an infancy."[20] In the end we are dealing with the abyss separating language from speech, between the semiotic and the semantic. Unlike animals who are continuously within language, and thus never able to enter it for the first time: "man's nature is split at its source, for infancy brings it discontinuity and the difference between language and discourse."[21] What needs to be underlined is that the space of the disjuncture is a zone of suspension of meaning, a deactivation of the signifying properties of what is involved. If potentiality is to conserve its impotentiality, this implies that it must preserve its possibility to not produce meanings.

In many ways this notion is connected to what Agamben writes about concerning the event of "the end of the poem": "As if the poem as a formal structure would not and could not end, as if the possibility of the end were radically withdrawn from it, since the end would imply a poetic impossibility: the exact coincidence of sound and sense. At the point in which sound is about to be ruined in the abyss of sense, the poem looks for shelter in suspending its own end in a declaration, so to speak, of the state of poetic emergency."[22] We could interpret the idea of sound disappearing into the "abyss" of meaning as the consequence of a potentiality of non-meaning that is actualized into signification that compromises the (im)potentiality of (non)signification, while the suspension of the poem's end is instead a means to conserve the (im)potentiality of an actualized potentiality. In an unconsciously analogous fashion, the astrologer reads the (un)written text of life not as an exact, predetermined account of things to come, but rather as a conjecture of possibilities; that is to say, the astrological readings provide shelter for the possibility and impossibility of events from the abyss of certitude and exactitude, thus conserving its "unwrittenness."

THE TABLET OF THE CELESTIAL SCRIBE

Herman Melville's Bartleby becomes for Agamben the figure who escapes the yolk of the eternal return of the same, where the unceasing recurrence of what has occurred forfeits its impotentiality. Precisely because he declines the assignment his employer gives him, Bartleby's position signals, in fact, the safeguarding of the "potentiality not to be."[23] In describing Bartleby's singularity, Agamben, even if momentarily, transforms Melville's scrivener into an astrologer: "On the writing tablet of the celestial scribe, the letter, the act of writing, marks the passage from potentiality to actuality, the occurrence of a contingency. But precisely for this reason, every letter marks the

nonoccurrence of something; every letter is always in this sense a 'dead letter.'"[24] The syntactic proximity linking "writing," "tablet," "celestial" and "scribe" makes one think of a similar syntactic arrangement in a previously cited passage, dealing with astrology, from *Nymphs*: "the celestial constellations are the original text in which imagination reads what was never written."[25] Besides the adjective "celestial," the elements that reinforce the connection between the two passages are the "non-occurrence" that each "letter marks" and the "celestial constellations" that constitute the text which "was never written." Thinking potentiality inevitably entails thinking the latent territory of impotentiality, where "what happened and what did not happen are returned to their originary unity in the mind of God," and "what could have not been but was becomes indistinguishable from what could have been but was not."[26]

The connection with astrological exegesis is inescapable, especially if we consider how Agamben frames his depiction of Bartleby's (im)potentiality. We are presented with the image of the Palace of Destinies as described by Leibniz, and which contains a figure for God's intellect (in the guise of a pyramid of all that is possible) whose ideas, as Agamben cites Leibniz, "contain possibilities for all eternity."[27] Moreover, Agamben further describes the "pyramid of possible worlds" as an entity that "projects an infinite shadow downward, which sinks lower and lower to the extreme universe—which even celestial beings cannot comprehend—in which nothing is compossible with anything else and nothing can take place."[28] With the above mentioned quote from *Nymphs* in mind, we are here dealing with the idea of the sidereal constellations as the unwritten text of life. Just as Bartleby preserves impotentiality in his preference to not write, the astrologer, by offering (to Saxl's dismay) many conjectures concerning the same stellar configuration, preserves the potentiality of non-occurrence in his reading of the skies. In doing so, the astrologer is not activating unlimited semiosis, but instead positing the disactivation of semiosis as a message-producing machine. The thing that safeguards the (im)potentiality of what has not occurred is the suspension of signification.

A version of this idea is present in Manilius, who writes in the *Astronomica* that the text of human life pivots on the potentiality of a suspended end of life:

> At birth our death is sealed, and our end rests in suspension upon our beginning. Fate is the source of riches and kingdoms and the more frequent poverty; by fate are men at birth given their skills and characters, their merits and defects, their losses and gains. None can renounce what is bestowed or possess what is denied; no man by prayer may seize fortune if demur, or escape if it draw nigh: each one must bear his appointed lot.[29]

The original Latin of the opening words reads "*Nascentes morimur, finisque ab origine pendet*": the end of life hangs in suspension ("*pendet*"), and generates actualizations as a potentiality. However, we need to remember that Manilius is projecting a Stoic vision of life that was profoundly fatalististic: "destiny governs the world, all things are subject to a precise law, and the articulation of time is marked by established events" (Manilius, *Astronomica*, Bk. IV). Yet, the role of astrology, in this case, was to educate man as to the nature and significance of destiny, with the aim of allowing him to wilfully accept a fate that has been rationally explained by a careful reading of the heavenly bodies. For the Stoics, astrology becomes a means to accept destiny by knowing it before it arrives, knowing it while it is in suspension. In any event, if the book of life is bound in the suspension of a coming end—whether it be due to a transcendent necessity or the biological laws of nature—its signifying constitution is unsigned. That is to say, the astrologer reads not so much the book of life, but that of "coming life." Since we are dealing with a potential future event that has not yet taken place, the signifying properties are not available to the book of life and are thus temporarily deactivated. Until the astrologer actualizes a reading of the unwritten text, the grammatological space from which the reading will eventually arise is semiotically suspended. It is at this point that there emerges an epistemic territory shared by Agamben's thinking on potentiality and the astrologer's (un)written text: just as the latter hovers over a space of suspension, the former is rooted in the suspension of the signifying properties of language, as we will see. Potentiality as a phenomenon of human experience becomes so only within the disjuncture of voice/language, while astrological hermeneutics pivots on the momentary flash that separates the unwritten text from the conjectures that its readings activate.

This zone of suspension is characterized by the deactivation of signification, as it is in this (non)signifying space that the astrologer reads the unwritten texts of the life of "coming being." Reading the unwritten text of life necessarily entails rendering inoperative the schism between voice and meaning, thus giving rise to the potentiality of potentiality. This is so because the ciphers imprinted on the stars and reflected in the guise of *phantasmata* inside the human body brings about, on the astrologer's part, the suspension of signifying temporal structures. The signs that emerge on the celestial bodies speak of what has not yet been actualized, and so they are pure potentiality. In this situation, the separation between voice and meaning is occupied by the (im)potentiality of signification which conserves non-signification at its core. The astrologer's utterance is pure speech that rests outside of the events of history that have occurred, and whose echoes are heard in the dark recesses of the present moment. The unwritten text of life is read by the astrologer with "unspeakable . . . unsayable . . . pure speech offerings,"[30] which, as Agamben (commenting on this passage from the *Cor-*

pus Hermeticum) reminds us, is an attempt to represent the abysmal and underground dwelling of logos (and, we might add, of pure potentiality as well) as the horizon on which language emerges.[31]

As we will see, Agamben's thinking on how the experience of language and, ultimately, philosophical thinking are possible, constitutes an alternative, and highly pertinent commentary on the semiotically deactivated space wherein the astrologer reads the texts of unwritten life. With this in mind, the following pages will isolate and identify the signifying and non-signifying properties of the domain of potentiality.

POTENTIALITY AS THE DEACTIVATION OF SEMIOTICS

In the opening paragraph of *Stanzas*, Agamben formulates what one could call the philosophical/aesthetic motto of his intellectual enterprise: he advocates for a critical modality that, like creative writing, does not need to bear the weight of proposing and verifying a thesis with the cumbersome assistance of the voices of others ensconced in the endnotes.[32] In one interview Agamben levelled an objection against academic writing, accusing it of privileging what should only be paratextual ephemera of secondary importance; namely, the convention of notes, quotations, bibliographies and other instruments acknowledging sources that "refer to a subject of knowledge hidden like a ventriloquist behind the speaking subject."[33] In another work where Agamben comments on Ludwig Feuerbach's notion of the "capacity for development" that exists in a writer's work, he goes to the extent of confessing that reaching a point where it is no longer possible to distinguish what belongs to an author and what belongs to the person reading, thus leading to the disappearance of concerns dealing with copyright and originality, "fills me up with joy."[34] In any event, Agamben expresses disillusionment with contemporary academic writing precisely because it unwittingly sanctions what he terms the scission separating an "authentic experience of language" from "knowledge."[35]

Agamben does single out two modes of writing as inspiration for his own, "the medieval commentary and the brief and erudite notes of the great philologists of the nineteenth century."[36] One could surmise that these two modes of writing somehow approximate Agamben's "idea" of experiencing language and knowledge as a single monad, thus giving life to a continuum where creative writing and critical prose are no longer ontologically separated. This "idea" is a figure for the domain of a pure potentiality, where there is a conscious will to elude any movement into actualization. However, such a realm of pure potentiality has as its basic resource raw, material signification which does not signify anything. We are dealing with a notion of semiotics which hinges on the sign that experiences its own non-signification as an

inexhaustible potentiality. Not only does Agamben never propose semiotics as a means to overcome the metaphysical tradition, in his mind semiotics is the problem, it "is as much a part of metaphysics as supersensuous modes of philosophical thinking."[37] If modern semiotic theory is critiqued by Agamben because it proposes a "negative" knowledge (the signifier) which defers to a future moment (the signified) to fulfill its meaning, it is because it is a secularized form of theological meaning, which perceives the present moment of experience as being equally negative, as it can only be anagogically fulfilled in the future. In the post-Cartesian scheme of things, where signification pivots on a detached and deferred referent, the presentness of the sign will always be empty. Agamben's deconstruction of such structures pivots on the idea that the present is filled with a sea of potentiality which allows us to experience nowness precisely as a presence of the now.

An important feature of Agamben's theory of potentiality is that it deactivates the Sausseurean interplay between signifier and signified. This is evident beginning in Agamben's earliest works where he confronts the problem of the privileging of sense over sound, a matter he deals with by using semiotic signifying paradigms. For Agamben, semiotics is not a science of signifying systems, rather it refers to the material existence of signification within its potential to not signify: semiotics is the potential to signify without signifying anything. The Agambenian idea of semiotics could be glossed with Macbeth's assessment of the signifying constellations in which we exist; that is, life as something that signifies nothing (*Macbeth*, Act 5, scene 5). "Signifying nothing" here refers to the difficulty in constructing meanings that can somehow bring an existential profit. To this notion we can add that the degree zero of human existence is the non-creation of meanings that would otherwise eventually become a codified corpus of metaphysics in a culture or a civilization. With Agamben's *Infancy and History* in mind, the "nothing" is the language that exists before or which is divorced from the metaphysical prerequisite that language must signify something. In other words, the potential that language has to signify something, but which instead of giving life to an actualization of meaning decides to remain focused within its impotentiality, its ability to not signify. A correlative of this phenomenon would be the plethora of communicative stimuli (such as advertising, announcements, messages produced by various kinds of media, and so on) we encounter in the world, and before which we remain inert. That is, being fully cognizant of their existence, but choosing to not decodify or interpret their messages (which would result in adding to a metaphysical codified canon) and simply viewing them as potentialities of being in the world.

However, given the existence of material signification that does not signify (asemiotic impotentiality), how does this non-signification fit into and condition our existential structures? Understanding the semiotic in this man-

ner is not necessarily a paralysis of signification, nor is there a hidden agenda on the part of the subject to retreat into a total denial of the existence of the world. Rather, the idea is to explore the many "presents" and "nows" occulted from our eyes. Agamben's philosophical program is based on the will to deactivate specific cognito-epistemological structures, such as dialectics, which limit and obstruct our view of potential objects of knowledge, which in Agamben, following Benjamin, are found in the ruinous debris of culture, as in the case of astrology. The reference is of course to the epistemological method of philosophical archaeology, but for the moment we will consider the semiotics-related conceptual materials found in Agamben's earlier writings with the view of further sounding the link between potentiality and the deactivation of the "Sausseurean" connection between signifier and signified.

In *Stanzas* the reader is presented with an unambiguous emphasis on the fracture or interval of suspension that inheres in the Sausseurean concept of the sign:

> In modern semiology, the forgetting of the original fracture of presence is manifested precisely in what ought to betray it, that is, in the (/) of the graphic S/s. . . . Every semiology that fails to ask why the barrier that establishes the possibility of signifying should itself be resistant to signification, falsifies with that omission, its own most authentic intention. . . . The question that remains unasked is the only one that deserved to be formulated: why is presence deferred and fragmented such that something like "signification" even becomes possible?[38]

It is in the interval between the two cardinal points of message making, of the signifier and the signified, that the enigma of language hides in a state of unrevealability. Like the ascendant and the descendant *cardines*, the signifier as isolated linguistic element is devoid of any meaning. Signification arises when these two empty elements come into contact with the zone of semiotic disactivation, which Agamben refers to as the barrier in S/s. In order to formulate his theorization of the question of signification, Agamben makes reference to Oedipus and the riddle of the Sphinx and singles the latter out as the unthought enigma of Western thought, "that constitutes the original problem of signification."[39] The significance of the Sphinx's fable is not only that it is a matrix for obscure utterance, but also that it is "a more original mode of speaking."[40]

It is in this interval of semiotic suspension that we find the space of pure (im)potentiality, which appears as obscurity, where there seems to be no clear and visible meaning on the horizon. It is not unlike staring up at a nocturnal sky, which offers the vision of isolated sidereal elements that could or could not have a meaning. The sky is the element that remains open and potentialized in the fracture of signification. Agamben tells us the original

source of semiosis is to be found in neither the signifier nor the signified, "but in the fold of the presence on which they are established; the *logos* . . . is this fold that gathers and divides all things in the 'putting together' of presence. And the human is precisely this fracture of presence."[41] The human orients itself, while lodged in this scission of presence, according to the potentialities willed by the celestial coordinates. That is to say, the Sphinx not only utters the most original form of speech, but (to overlook the astrological file of a Greek myth would be to radically denaturalize it[42]) in being part woman and part lion, she mirrors the chronological zodiacal movement from Leo [*tergum*] to Virgo [*frons*]("the enigma proposed by the ferocious jaws of the virgin"[43]). In such a physiognomy we have, among other elements, a material fusion of human and animal with the implicit celestial union with the divine. If all of this is indeed the case, then we need to observe that the part of the Sphinx that utters the riddle is Virgo. Ptolemy informs us that, similar to Gemini, Sagittarius, and Pisces, Virgo is a bicorporeal sign as it rests in the interval "between the solid and the solstitial and equinoctial signs and share, as it were, at the end and beginning, the properties of the two states of weather."[44] We find the same concept in Manilius when he writes that "at the middle of the Virgin [*media sub Virgine*] summer on one side ceases and autumn on the other begins."[45] It would be fair to hypothesize at this point, that, first, the bicorporeality of the Sphinx is mirrored in that of the zodiacal Virgo, and, second, the fracture of presence represented by the Sphinx is in syntony with the meteorological interval figured in Virgo. The barrier (/) or interval, which the Sphinx and Virgo respectively contain in their bodies, constitutes the potentiality of the emergence of meaning generated by the pure impotentiality to signify.

The matter of the fracture between signifier and signified that opens up a space of indeterminacy is a template for the discussion on the scission between voice and meaning in the book that followed *Stanzas. Infancy and History* was originally published in Italian in 1978, however in a later edition of the work Agamben added a preface that constitutes an example of potentiality: "Every written work can be regarded as the prologue (or rather, the broken cast) of a work never penned, and destined to remain so."[46] He then makes reference to a pseudo-Platonic letter that speaks of "the counterfeit of a book which cannot be written."[47] At face value we could assume that what Agamben has in mind is the idea that, for whatever reason or sets of circumstance, authorial intention frequently does not coincide with the end result. What we are dealing with here is not so much the disconnect between intention and finality, as it is with the non-actualization of potentiality; that is, the indefinite suspension itself between pure thought or conceptualization and its realization. When we transpose this notion to the domain of the sign, it is not only as if the signified were delayed in an attempt to theologically fulfil the signifier. It is also as if there were no dialectic scission dividing the two. To

be more precise, the potential life of the sign, its potentiality, is, to use Agamben's words, "to let language finally communicate itself, without remaining unsaid in what is said."[48] In this quotation Agamben is not referring to the sign but to poetry, which in his mind constitutes an effective exemplification of the suspension or delay of interaction between sound and sense, a signifier and a signified. This space of "willed" suspension is the place of potentiality.

Agamben makes specific reference to a work of his that remains "stubbornly unwritten," which bears two different titles: "The Human Voice" and "Ethics, an Essay on the Voice." He cites a passage from this book that was never written; of course, the paradox rests on the idea that he has cited from work that has been written, and it would be reasonable to suspect that he wants the reader to think, by way of suspension of judgement, that he is quoting something that has not been written, that does not exist. Something, that is, which Agamben presents as being at once written and unwritten. Agamben identifies what was to be the central theme of the unwritten work, namely the unthought nature of the "voice,"[49] whose significance he was able to identify only after having worked at some length on the question of infancy. The question that is of significance to Agamben is the relationship between sound and sense. What is the link between a sound a human voice can utter and the meaning or interpretation attributed to it? Is there a signifying or non-signifying process that is latent in our existential structures of which we are not conscious? "If," Agamben posits, "every thought can be classified according to the way in which it articulates the question of the limits of language, the concept of infancy is then an attempt to think through these limits in a direction other than that of the vulgarly ineffable."[50] It is at this point that Agamben makes an important distinction, namely, between the sign's ability to signify and to not signify, between the actualization of sense and the pure potentiality of meaning. Wordlessness and unexpressedness are not necessarily non-signification, as they could constitute, for example, rhetorical or communicative strategies employed to render a meaning: "The ineffable, the un-said, are in fact categories which belong exclusively to human language; far from indicating a limit of language, they express its invincible power of presupposition, the unsayable being precisely what language must be in order to signify."[51]

What Agamben is instead interested in is the removal of the unsayable from language, and to expose the unique characteristic of language,[52] and the context for his inquiry is infancy, and, specifically, the relationship between language and experience. More precisely, however, Agamben informs us that we can characterize this issue in the paradigm of the "transcendental experience," a possibility, to be sure, that Kant had excluded. However, Agamben seeks to think through the notion of the transcendental in its connection to language. While Kant had spoken about the transcendental, he had done so

without heeding due acknowledgement to the role of language. For Agamben, instead, "'transcendental' must instead indicate an experience that is undergone only within language, an *experimentum linguae* in the true meaning of the words, in which what is experienced is language itself."[53] Infancy, then, is an *experimentum linguae* precisely because it reveals the boundaries of language, which emerge not externally to language in search of the signified, but rather in the experience of the uncompromising referentiality of language, in its state of pure potentiality.[54] Heidegger had suggested that we experience language in the moment we are not able articulate names, or in our momentary inability to utter words. Agamben instead purports that infancy offers an experience of language that "is not merely a silence or a deficiency of names, but one whose logic can be indicated, whose site and formula can be designated, at least up to a point."[55] In a more specific sense, the sought-after transcendental experience occurs in the divide separating language and speech, and Agamben singles out Emile Beneviste's lexical items, semiotic and semantic, as being the nomenclature for such a philosophical undertaking. Benveniste distinguishes between semiotic and semantic dimensions of language: the semiotic referring to the relations of signs to one another, while the semantic constitutes the referential or enunciatory domain. The semiotic must be recognized, while the semantic must be understood. The semiotic is concerned with the identification of units, description of characteristic features, discovery of distinct characteristics. In other terms, the sign exists when recognized as signifier by all members of linguistic community who understand associations and oppositions. The semantic mode is instead concerned with the meaning that is generated by discourse in the semantic mode. Meaning is actualized and divided into specific signs, words, and the semantic order is identified when enunciated and within discourse.

One of the conclusions that Agamben reaches is that without the experience of language as a fracturing of language and speech, humans would never have infancy, knowledge, and history. Humans would be at one with "linguistic nature and would nowhere find any discontinuity or difference where any history of knowledge might be produced."[56] Beneveniste's semiotic/semantic paradigm plays a central role in Agamben's thought above and beyond *Infancy and History*. In Paolo Bartoloni's words: "If, on the one hand, language merely shows, on the other discourse denotes, and this passage and relation are mediated by the potentiality of humans who are naturally able to progress, as well as individually capable of manipulating language. The voice, which Agamben identifies as a stage of indeterminacy between language and discourse, allows him to expand not only on the categories of actuality and potentiality but also on that of the potentiality not-to-be."[57] The matter of potentiality in relation to signification/non-signification is indeed a theme that permeates Agamben's *oeuvre*, but as an avenue of inquiry involv-

ing a comprehensive and sustained consideration, the issue of Agamben and semiotics remains relatively unexplored.

The intersectioning of the categories of language and speech provides us insight into what Agamben terms the significance of the dichotomy of between *dynamis* and *energeia*, that is, potentiality and actuality, as theorized by Aristotle.[58] The substance in Aristotle's philosophy in this regard is that potentiality, which Agamben makes synonymous with knowledge, is the singularly human cognitive and epistemological category of connectedness as lack: "and language, in its split between language and speech . . . is nothing other than this connectedness."[59] What is of course notable in Agamben's work in general is the extent to which he seamlessly incorporates elements from semiological thought, philosophy, literary culture, political science, anthropology, art history, and so on, in such a way as to make it conceptually impracticable to not heed continuous attention to the various strands of his thinking. Moreover, it is difficult to speak about what amounts to his "theory of the sign" without paying due attention to the question of biopolitics. The connection to Agamben's theory of non-signification to the matter of power is at the heart of the following quotation, which is at once a defining characterization of not only the objectives of *Infancy and History*, but of his writings in general: the human is a *Homo sapiens loquendi*, and this interconnectedness between knowledge and language brought about a situation whereby "The unprecedented violence of human power has its deepest roots in this structure of language."[60] Given the profound nexus between potentiality as signification/non-signification and the question of life as it appears in discussions on power and biopolitics in general, it would be fair to describe what we are here proposing as Agamben's theory of the sign as a "living semiotics." This is so because any consideration that Agamben gives to the question of signification is in connection to life, rather than to an exclusively abstract and theoretical consideration. In the end, this is a case of an important trait of the Italian tradition of thought as articulated by Roberto Esposito, namely, "the philosophically irreducible problem of the historicization of the nonhistorical," which has unyieldingly directed philosophy to interrogate life given the epistemological prerequisite to engage "with the inevitable and insoluble relation between origin and history."[61]

Humans exist between the *cardines*, between the ascendant, descendant, *medium caelum* and *imum caelum*. In other terms, humans are mortal (as they inevitably arrive at the Occident) but are able to speak in order to describe their life in the cardinal intervals. In *Language and Death* Agamben observes that "humans appear as both mortal and speaking."[62] The fact that, as Heidegger suggests, the link between these two human elements remains unthought in Western philosophy provides Agamben the pretext to argue how thinking language and death implies identifying the human in the specific topological *locus* of negativity. This topological coordinate also constitutes

the place of infancy, the Voice, and of potentiality. Or rather, similar to the Sphinx, who houses the fracture of existence, and Virgo, who embodies the interval between the seasons of the world, the human is that which contains all of the elements associated with the place of negativity. In the *Homiliae in Leviticum* (5, 2), Origen exhorts the faithful to acknowledge the presence of a silent universe within them: "Know that you are another world in miniature and have in you Sol and Luna and even the stars."[63] The human at once resembles the universe by being a microcosm of it, but is also that which, through an interruption activated by the difficulty of reconciling *verba* and *res*, as well as signifier and signified, maintains the difference between the macro- and microworlds. The space of discontinuity is the negative that humans live as an existential orientation, as if it were the stars that guided travellers over the surface of the Earth. This situation runs a parallel course to the manner in which Agamben describes, using italics, the relationship between the "animal" and "human" voices: "*The taking place of language between the removal of the voice and the event of meaning is the other Voice . . . that, in the metaphysical tradition, constitutes the originary articulation of human language.*"[64]

This signals, as far as Agamben is concerned, that the Voice, precisely because it contains the separation of the animal voice from human language, is the *locus* of a two-pronged negativity since it ceased being voice but it is also "not yet (meaning)."[65] Ultimately, this *locus negativus* constitutes the negative "ground," and what Agamben implies by this is "that it goes *to the ground* and disappears in order for being and language to take place."[66] There is an uncanny similarity between what Agamben is describing here and the formulation of the idea of a "poetic madness." In a study dealing with Ficino's astrological psychology, Thomas Moore likens the destruction brought about by poetic fury to an alchemical *solution* and concludes that "Through poetic madness the opaque, brittle shells of meaning we have built and protect egoistically shatter and become visible as images themselves."[67] The debilitation of the metaphysical tradition by way of shifting the attention of thought from a fossilized communicative convention to what we are not accustomed to thinking reveals, in Agamben's case, the disactivation of semiosis and (im)potential negativity, and in Moore's, the suspension of meaning that is replaced by purely eidetic potentiality. In Norman O. Brown's terms, it is a question of identifying and then isolating "The word within the word, the unheard melody, the spirit ditties of no tone . . . a restoration of the unsullied sense-activity of man in paradise." Brown is referring to what we could call the unmarked language of paradise, where the signifier and signified have been rendered inoperative, and where all that remains is the interval or barrier that had separated them. In the end, however, our instrument of existential orientation is rooted in the ground of the Earth, to which, Brown reminds us, we need to "remain faithful," as "the

earth has no other refuge except to become invisible: *in us*." Once it does become invisible in us, along with the rest of the universe, being and language emerge.[68]

In *Remnants of Auschwitz* Agamben picks up the line of thinking he introduced in *Infancy and History* concerning the suspension of signification that defines the space of infancy. The point of departure is Benveniste's idea of a semantics of enunciation, which Agamben describes as having an aporia precisely because enunciation does not refer to the material textuality of the utterance, but to the specific moment of when the utterance occurred. In other terms, if enunciation is essentially language's acknowledgement of its existence, it is not exactly clear what constitutes the semantics of enunciation. The conclusion Agamben reaches is that, similar to the idea of being as understood by philosophers, enunciation refers to a unique and unrepeatable event of spoken language. However, "it is what is most vacuous and generic, since it is always repeated without its ever being possible to assign it any lexical reality."[69] We are here dealing with the deactivation of semiotics, a space (im)potentiality that renders inoperative the actualization of meanings.

Agamben acknowledges Foucault as his source for envisioning enunciation from an ontological perspective; Foucault had purported that a statement does not constitute a structure, but is instead an operation of existence. Agamben comments further on this by suggesting that "enunciation is not a thing determined by real, definite properties; it is, rather, pure existence, the fact that a certain being—language—takes place."[70] Philosophical archaeology is for Agamben what concerns itself with the emergence onto the horizon of the pure happening of a discourse act. This event of language is constituted by the failed interfacing of the living being and the utterance, which results in a void characterized by the suspension of significations. Agamben further elaborates on this idea by proposing the notion of "testimony." While the "archive" refers to "the general system of the formation and the transformations of statements,"[71] "testimony" refers instead to the network of connections between what is sayable and unsayable: "that is, between a potentiality of speech and its existence, between a possibility and impossibility of speech."[72] In such a situation, "testimony" constitutes the territory of pure potentiality, of radical conjecture as it is concerned with gathering together possibilities and impossibilities in order to present a landscape of potentialities. Just as the astrologer situates his reading of the sidereal text in a domain of conjectural plateaus that are in a relation of disjuncture with temporality, thinking "a potentiality in act as potentiality" or to think enunciation as an event of being is to "inscribe a caesura in possibility, a caesura that divides it into a possibility and an impossibility, into a potentiality and an impotentiality."[73] In *Idea of Prose* Agamben presents "caesura" as that disjunctive element in poetic verse which reveals the "pure word" and which allows for the representation of representation,[74] and, for that matter,

the emergence of the invisibility of the text, which becomes being in the moment of being read for the first time.

EXCURSUS: WITHOUT ITS OWN ICONOGRAPHY

While the figure of the angel as divine messenger was to become a staple element in Christian artistic practices, it was absent in the earliest phases of sacred art. In a study dealing with the iconography of the three Jewish children from Daniel 3:1–30, Carlo Carletti illustrates how before the fourth century CE the works on this subject matter never include the angel.[75] Thus, the angels as divine winged entities were absent even if the biblical account being depicted called for their presence. Marco Bussagli contends that in strictly iconographical terms (the totality of properties and characteristics that define an image), up until the end of the fourth century CE the angel is without its own iconography, let alone a divine one: "the Angel of the paleo-Christian hypogea and sarcophagi is a man: he dresses like man of his time, he behaves like a man, he eats, drinks, walks."[76] While some scholars such a Bussagli attribute the absence of the angel in early Christian iconography to purely stylistic choices on the part of the artist, others instead believe that the matter was a theological one. For example, Henri Leclerc suggests that the refusal to depict angels was due to the fact that as winged creatures, their resemblance to pagan divinities would have been too great a reminder of the false gods.[77] After all, there existed a tendency in paleo-Christianity to associate the Christian angel with the pagan *daemones*, even though the former emerged in the Judeo-Christian tradition, while the latter was a product of pagan polytheism.[78] Whether the Christian angel were genealogically linked to celestial pagan deities or not, it was generally understood that the winged angel replaced the astral gods as administrators of human existence. In this case the presence of the winged angel in the catacombal world of Christianity could have been mistakenly interpreted as an acknowledgement of the detested and dangerous pagan astrology. If this is indeed the case, then the art of the catacombs communicated the purest (im)potentiality, namely God, and the absence of the winged angel served to represent the deactivation of the powers of the sidereal divinities attributed to them by pagan religion. However, the question also pertains to the terrain of potentiality communicated by early Christians in their art, and how this signifying system was in turn eventually rendered inoperative.

Cartesian thought brought about a radical change as far as the signifying constitution of both the sign and the symbol are concerned. In other words, Descartes replaces the "reasonable" with "reason," thus ensuring the hegemony of a pure semiotics. This implied the privileging of the sign over the symbol, and of the geometric spirit over the spirit of *sprezzatura*, subtlety,

and grace. As a consequence, mathematical algorithms deposed a poetological model of thought, and this is evident in the phenomenon of scientific positivism of the nineteenth century, which encouraged a semiotic understanding of the world that attributed importance to verifiable scientific data and marginalized any knowledge whose source was intuitive. The outcome of this epistemological upheaval is that the "knowing" imagination is radically marginalized, and the artistic imagination is severely debilitated by the pragmatic power of the sign. Consequently, art becomes pure entertainment and ornamentation devoid of any "practical" import.

But what exactly is the relationship between the sign and the symbol? The function of the sign is to inform; moreover, its content is minimal and, most importantly, it is devoid of any "presence." One need only to think of mathematical signs, road signs, chemical formulas, and other variety of signs we encounter in our daily existence. There is no relation of communion or of presence between the signifier and the signified. The symbol instead presents very different properties as in the case, for example, of the liturgical tradition and that of Patristic thinking and writing, where the symbol actually contains the presence that it is meant to symbolize. In Pavel Nikolajevic Evdokimov's words:

> It [*the symbol*] accomplishes the revelatory function of "sense" and, at the same time, it allows the presence of what it cloaks to emerge. Symbolic knowledge, always indirectly, makes appeals to the contemplative faculty of the spirit, to the true imagination, both evocative and invoking, so that it discovers its meaning, the message of the symbol, and grasps the epiphanic characteristic of *presence*, figured, symbolized, but real, of the transcendent.[79]

We turn again to the figure of the angel who offers a story that is in many ways emblematic of the emptying of the symbol at the expense of the rationalized sign. As the Middle Ages was gradually coming to an end angels were no longer perceived as real entities, and at best they were thought to be allegorical constructs. Aristotelian philosophy played an important role in this regard, as direct thought reduced both indirect thought and the symbolic imagination to a shell of what they once were. Transcendence has a marginalized role in Aristotle's thought, that is to say, the intellect extracts the idea from *res*, but it does not lead it back to its transcendental dimension. In Scholastic writings angels are divested of their function as mediators and are reduced to "virtues" that are part of the natural order. They are given as products of logic and no longer as living entities. The move toward perceptual and sensorial realism ends up privileging the signifier over the signified to the point whereby the latter is completely emptied. This has implications as far as aesthetic creation is concerned, because Aristotle pivots his poetics on the logic of imitation, with artistic production operating as an imitator of nature. Evdokimov comments on the consequences of this aesthetic ideolo-

gy: "If the icon of Christ is inspired by the Sacred Face, made so to speak from God's own hand, Western art will more and more be the representation, made solely by the hands of man, of a human model. A 'religious' picture represents man and implies God-Man, the icon represents the hypostasis and shows God in man."[80] The gradual move toward any expression of artistic or cultural production that is completely autonomous finds its origins in the deactivation of the hypostatic epiphany, which was purported to be contained in the signifying structures of the artifact. For example, in the Christian catacombs we find what we could term a "pure sign," one that signals redemption by means of cipher-signs such as 1) everything referring to water (Noah's ark, Jonas, Moses, the fish, the anchor, or to 2) bread and wine, or, finally to 3) images of salvation. The images present in the catacombs essentially indicate the act of salvation. There is very little care given to artistic form, technique or style, and to any variety of theological depth:

> Everything converges toward the same message which is that there is no eternal life outside of Christ and his sacraments. Everything is reduced to a single sign and everything is joy, because the resurrection of the dead is inscribed on the sarcophagi ("eaters of flesh"). The absence of any art here signals the decisive moment of the destiny of this art: its apex, still close in time, being the high creation of Antiquity, is no longer relevant and functional for the moment; it renounces itself, it goes through its own death, it submerges itself in the waters of baptism, signified and represented by the graffiti in the catacombs, only to emerge from the baptismal fonts of the fourth century in the form, never before seen, of the icon. It is the art which is resurrected in Christ: neither sign, nor painting, but icon, symbol of the Presence and the luminous place, liturgical vision of the mystery made into image.[81]

The pictorial signs inscribed in the underground catacombs in Rome were understood as being real. God was believed to be present in person in the catacombal images, or in the icons in the Christian Orthodox tradition. This ancient signifying system is continued today in the Roman Catholic dogma of transubstantiation, according to which Christ is truly present in the host the faithful receive in the sacrament of communion.

The current purely secular or scientific understanding of the sign does not allow for presence of any sort, it only permits indirect referrals and deferrals to something outside of it. In modern semiotics, the sign is a pure nothingness with its role being that of encouraging us to extract meaning from the dense forest of signifieds and perceptible elements that confront us. This is so because there is no transcendental or "mystical" union of signifier and signified, only a relationship of practical usage that can change depending on the context of the usages. To be sure, a "mystical" union would result in something similar to the pictorial signs of the catacombs, that is, where there exists no fracture between signifier and signified, but only a pure sign that

contains what all the faithful seek, namely, being in the presence of God. What was once the hypostatic presence of the divine in the pure sign of the catacombal images, or the icon, is now understood as a pure potentiality. As a radically secularized version of the theological divine, the non-signifying sign is the radical (im)potential of signification and non-signification.

In fact, Agamben cultivates his theoretical thinking on potentiality in such a way, wittingly or not, so as to occupy the space that was vacated by the ancient signifying system we have just described. The pure sign of the catacombs was in fact a pure potentiality, as it represented the actualization of a potentiality, which, however, never lost its impotentiality. The God perceived in the art of the catacombs and in the hypostatic epiphanies of the icon is the God who unhides his potentiality. The passage from potentiality to actuality would have occurred once the faithful followed the teaching imparted by the given pictorial image or icon. Precisely because the faithful observed the material potentiality of God as the source for life, the existential parameters of the paleo-Christians were framed within pure potentiality. The function of the pictorial sign was to make God's pure potentiality materially present through its (non)signifying structures, and substitute, for example, the pornography of the deactivated zodiacal signs, guilty of merging the human, animal, and divine. This demonic union of what should be separate and hierarchically ordered ontologies would have been strongly implicit, in the mind of early Christians, in the figure of the winged angel.

DIVINATION OF THE SIDEREAL TEXT

To summarize the issue of the deactivation of semiotics, we can claim that,

- The interplay between non-signification and signification, potentiality and actualization is the domain wherein the pure experience of language becomes a possibility. Agamben's description of how the experience of language and philosophical thinking arise shares analogies with the semiotically deactivated space wherein the astrologer reads the texts of unwritten life.
- The astrological file that we conjecture in Agamben's interpretation of the fracture between signifier and signified posits that the bicorporeality of the Sphinx is mirrored in that of the zodiacal Virgo. The barrier (/) or interval which the Sphinx and Virgo respectively contain in their bodies constitutes the potentiality of the emergence of meaning generated by the pure impotentiality to signify.
- The astrologer reads the (un)written text of life not as an exact, predetermined account of things to come, but rather as a conjecture of possibilities; that is to say, the astrological readings provide shelter for the possibility and impossibility of events from the abyss of certitude and exactitude.
- The human at once resembles the universe by being a microcosm of it, but is also that which, through an interruption activated by the difficulty of

> reconciling *verba* and *res*, as well as signifier and signified, maintains the difference between the macro- and microworlds. The space of discontinuity is the negative that humans live as an existential orientation, as if it were the stars that guide travellers over the surface of the Earth.

Implicit in all of this is the bipolarity involving the potentiality to read and utter what is yet to come and the suspension of knowledge. In other words, we enter a domain of "unknowing," *ignorantia*, where not knowing becomes a portal to an unexpected fold of being. By reading the stars the astrologer is interpreting what exists in a state of pure suspension, given that the heavenly bodies, in being fixed in a repetitive orbital movement, are themselves literally suspended. Thus, the suspension implied in potentiality is an actualized metaphor for life that hangs on earth the way the celestial bodies hang in the heavens. The event or destiny that the astrologer formulates or calculates exists in a zone of non-signification before the astrologer identifies it, but it remains so even after the prognosis. The astrologer does not speak in terms of actualities, as Ptolemy would argue, but rather in those of potentialities. It is lived existence that actualizes whatever had been predicted or conjectured, and the (un)written text of life precedes the life that actualizes into existence. Thus, in being an art of pure conjecture, astrology produces speculative hypotheses that only the coming future could or could not actualize. To maximize the communicative possibilities of conjecturing about or divining the future, writings on astrology make use of the writing metaphor, treating the stars as letters or texts that hold a message that the astrologer is trained to read.

In the *Tetrabiblos* Ptolemy describes a hermeneutics of the celestial bodies. His approach considers the relationship between the planet and the sign, which hosts it, as well as the four angles of the horoscope:

> the quality of each of the stars must be examined with reference both to its own natural character and that also of the signs that include it, or likewise from the character of its aspects to the sun and the angles, in the manner which we have explained. Their power must be determined, in the first place, from the fact that they are either oriental and adding to their proper motion—for then they are most powerful—or occidental and diminishing in speed, for then their energy is weaker . . . they are most powerful when they are in mid-heaven or approaching it, and second when they are exactly on the horizon or in the succedent place; their power is greater when they are in the orient, and less when they culminate beneath the earth or are in some other aspect to the orient; if they bear no aspect at all to the orient they are entirely powerless.[82]

Ptolemy is concerned with identifying the celestial topologies that allow us to understand the things that occur in human life; thus, the "mid-heaven" is a significator of professional aptitude, while the "succedent place" pertains to one's relationships with others. On the basis of the stars/letters analogy, we

could surmise that the heavens contain an individual's potential "coming biography." Unlike the Stoics, Ptolemy believed that the stars allowed only for a conjectural reading of the future, rather than a *fait accomplit*. A conjecture (*conicere*) is a putting together of possibilities and impossibilities in order to give rise to other (im)possibilities. In this way, the astrological practice espoused by Ptolemy pivots on the (im)potentiality of (non)signification arising from the celestial text of life. It is at this point that Agamben's theory of potentiality conjoins with astrological hermeneutics: the point of disjunction between voice and language.

A means that allows us to envision the non-indifferent affinity between astrological readings of the (un)written text of the heavens and Agamben's thinking on infancy/voice/existence is the way in which the celestial bodies are represented as letters and statements. For example, Giovanni Gioviano Pontano in *On Celestial Things* (1512) perceived the stars as being similar to the language of the humans, in the sense that each planet constituted a specific letter endowed with its own powers. In fact, any sidereal combination of different planets resulted in words or statements that the astrologer would read as a manifestation of a coming being or event. Pontano describes the alterations in the topology of the celestial bodies and the potentialities of their influence by indicating the manner in which words modify meaning by the changing of the spelling, adding and removing of prefixes and suffixes. Moreover, the stimulation of the passions provoked by the rhetorical manipulation of words and statements, are, in Pontano's mind, very much akin to the manner in which the heavenly bodies stimulate sensations in the humorology of humans:

> Just as from the structure of a speech laid forth in a series by speakers there is produced in the auditors an impulse for hilarity, sadness, severity, levity, mockery, joking, tears, joy, vengeance, clemency, as well as for other affections, so from the mixtures of stars and signs and from the irradiations and diverse configuration the bodies of men are rendered into varied and different appearances and their dispositions are manifested in such diversity according to that variety reflected by the bodies themselves.[83]

The implication, of course, is that the language of the heavens is not yet exclusively that of mathematics and geometric forms, as Galileo would later advocate, but that of the Latin alphabet and with a grammar that resembled that of verbal language; consequently, the astrologer would operate in a way similar to the grammarian or philologist by paying close attention to the fine paralinguistic details of the celestial bodies.

Pontano is in many ways rehearsing the idea of the stars as letters already present in antiquity in a philosopher such as Plotinus, according to whom the heavenly bodies constitute texts that contain data pertinent to the future. Plotinus suggests that only those beings without a soul are subjects of fate;

for them the stars are not merely signs, but the fulfilment of their existence. Humans endowed with a soul are not subject to the fate written on the stars, as the soul is the space where potentiality exposes its (im)potentiality in temporal history. Thus, for Plotinus the stars do not cause things to happen, but are rather signs that compose a text of what is to come:

> Nor may we think that these divine beings [*the stars and planets*] lose or gain in goodness as they see this one or another of the company in various aspects, and that in their happier position they are benignant to us and, less pleasantly situated, turn maleficent. We can but believe that their circuit is for the protection of the entirety of things while they furnish the incidental service of being letters on which the augur, acquainted with that alphabet, may look and read the future from their pattern—arriving at the thing signified by such analogies as that a soaring bird tells of some lofty event. (*Enneads*, III, 1, 6)[84]

What we need to underline here is that Plotinus is not speaking about a celestial text that contains information or data concerning events that magically emerge before their established moment in the future. If anything, the stars and the planets carry inscriptions, whose decipherer must be able to interpret through a signifying process that involves analogies with other things in the world. These inscriptions produce messages by means of an analogical semiotics, and through the agency of the astrologer's exegetical mind; but until that occurs, the letters and statements metaphorically etched on the stars constitute a grammatological landscape where signification is deactivated. Moreover, precisely because what the astrologer claims to read are conjectures about the future, the eventual messages produced through the readings are pure potentialities, whose future actualizations cannot be exactly predicted.[85]

If the stars are indeed texts that require an interpretation, what approach would an astrologer use to undertake a reading of the letters and language of the heavens? Moreover, how can the planets, stars, constellations that inhabit the skies be used to interpret a single moment, such as the birth of a person? Most significantly, how can an astrologer read what is not yet written? An answer is possible only if some celestial bodies exert more power than others that have less power given the situation of the heavens at the given moment in question. It is important to establish a specific point in the heavens from where one can calculate what is to occur in the future. Thus, one needs to focus on specific elements in the firmament that allow for the determination of the relative strengths and weaknesses of all of the planets and constellations.[86]

The unwritten text of coming life finds itself suspended in the actual working document that the astrologer employs to shed light on the shadows that engulf the future hidden in the present. To begin with, the astrologer would make note of the technical information pertinent to the question that a

client poses, say, concerning the moment of birth. The data would be organized in four separate groupings, and it would be structured in such a way as to facilitate accessibility to a vast amount of astronomical data. The zodiac, which constitutes the trajectory of the sun's movement through the celestial bodies, consists of twelve signs, each one possessing a length of thirty degrees and identified by an animal or some other eidetic element. Of critical importance was that each sign possessed a specific character and potentiality of influence: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces. The lunar, solar, and planetary movements were measured with this zodiacal topology in mind. However, in order to measure the influence of the celestial bodies at a specified moment in time, the astrologer would section the zodiac into the twelve "houses" of the geniture (the celestial configurations at the moment of nativity). Although Boll does remind us that they were known as the twelve *loci* or *domicilii*, and thus "house" is not a correct rendition of the idea.[87] The divisions were structured according to the movement of the sun, as they commenced at nine o'clock, that is, in the moment in which the sun's ecliptic trajectory passes across the horizon from the view of the observer at the given point, and proceeded from one to twelve in counter-clockwise fashion.

The twelve houses were assigned a number and a technical designation, so that the term "angles" referred to the fourth, seventh and tenth section. Each house influenced, within the context of a geniture, a specific aspect of an individual's life. The interpretative template with which the astrologer worked was imbued with such a degree of existential potentialities that it could be argued they constitute an intentionally forgotten chapter of the history of ontology. During the Medieval period, the twelve houses were conveniently summarized with two verses:

> Vita lucrum fratres genitor nati valetudo
> Uxor mors pietas regnum benefactaque carcer.[88]

The verses corresponded to the existential divisions of the twelve houses as follows:

1. The first house, also known as "horoscope," influenced the course of lived experience.
2. *Inferna Porta* influenced material possessions and wealth.
3. *Dea* concerned one's siblings.
4. *Hypogeion* or *Imum Caelum* dealt with one's parents.
5. *Bona Fortuna* provided information on one's children.
6. *Mala Fortuna* furnished news about one's health and illness.
7. *Occasus* offered prognosis on marriage.
8. *Mors* provided foresight on how one dies and inheritance.
9. *Deus-Sol* dealt with religion and travelling.

10. *Medium Caelum* here one finds notions about place and country of residence, as well as on recognition and how one leads their life.
11. *Bonus Genius* deals with friends and good works.
12. *Malus Genius*, finally, furnishes information on incarceration and on enemies.

Boll offers the example of war as a way to read the unwritten text of life. In getting ready for combat a ruler would need to know in which of the twelve houses Mars was found in order to establish what was at stake. If the god of war was in the first house, then it would be life; if in the second house, possessions; if in the third, succession and inheritance; the fourth, the country and the tomb of the ancestors; the fifth, a woman or a city; the ninth referred to gods or laws that were broken.[89] It was of crucial relevance to establish which planets were in the houses at the moment in question, and to keep in mind the fact that the most powerful houses were the ones located in the *Centra* or *Cardines*, namely the first, the fourth, the seventh, and the tenth. On the other hand, the second, the eighth, and the twelve were weak.[90]

A literary work that sheds copious light on how the celestial spheres constitute instruments of biopower is found in Friedrich Schiller's *The Death of Wallenstein*. The opening scene offers a dramaturgical unfolding of the exegesis of the unwritten text of life, as Wallenstein and Seni read the signs and signatures that emerge on the celestial bodies:

> (*A room fitted up for astrological labors, and provided with celestial charts, with globes, telescopes, quadrants, and other mathematical instruments. Seven colossal figures, representing the planets, each with a transparent star of different color on its head, stand in a semicircle in the background, so that Mars and Saturn are nearest the eye. The remainder of the scene and its disposition is given in the fourth scene of the second act. There must be a curtain over the figures, which may be dropped and conceal them on occasions.*)
> WALLENSTEIN at a black table, on which, a speculum astrologicum is described with chalk. SENI is taking observations through a window.
> WALLENSTEIN.
> All well—and now let it be ended, Seni. Come,
> The dawn commences, and Mars rules the hour;
> We must give o'er the operation. Come,
> We know enough.
> SENI.
> Your highness must permit me
> Just to contemplate Venus. She is now rising
> Like as a sun so shines she in the east.
> WALLENSTEIN.
> She is at present in her perigee,
> And now shoots down her strongest influences.

[Contemplating the figure on the table.]
Auspicious aspect! fateful in conjunction,
At length the mighty three corradiate;
And the two stars of blessing, Jupiter
And Venus, take between them the malignant
Slyly-malicious Mars, and thus compel
Into my service that old mischief-founder:
For long he viewed me hostilely, and ever
With beam oblique, or perpendicular,
Now in the Quartile, now in the Secundan,
Shot his red lightnings at my stars, disturbing
Their blessed influences and sweet aspects:
Now they have conquered the old enemy,
And bring him in the heavens a prisoner to me.
SENI [who has come down from the window.]
And in a corner-house, your highness—think of that!
That makes each influence of double strength.
WALLENSTEIN.
And sun and moon, too, in the Sextile aspect,
The soft light with the vehement—so I love it.
Sol is the heart, Luna the head of heaven,
Bold be the plan, fiery the execution.
SENI.
And both the mighty Lumina by no
Maleficus affronted. Lo! Saturnus,
Innocuous, powerless, in cadente Domo.
WALLENSTEIN.
The empire of Saturnus is gone by;
Lord of the secret birth of things is he;
Within the lap of earth, and in the depths
Of the imagination dominates;
And his are all things that eschew the light.
The time is o'er of brooding and contrivance,
For Jupiter, the lustrous, lordeth now,
And the dark work, complete of preparation,
He draws by force into the realm of light.
Now must we hasten on to action, ere
The scheme, and most auspicious positure
Parts o'er my head, and takes once more its flight,
For the heaven's journey still, and adjourn not.[91]

The entire scene pivots on the most significant doctrine as far as understanding the *ratio* of stellar influence is concerned, namely, that of the "aspects" (*radiationes*, *schematismoi*). The aspect is the angular distance the planets assume with respect to each other, as well as to the ascendant, *medium caelum*, descendant, *imum caelum*, and other topological points of relevance, in the horoscope. The measurement of the aspect pivots on the angular distance, from the perspective of the viewer's position on Earth, in terms of

degrees and minutes of ecliptic longitude that separate any given points. The data is of significance for the astrologer's reading as it clarifies the chronology of transitions and alteration of events for those living in the sublunary world. Precisely because they were theorized and applied in the *Tetrabiblos*, they are at times referred to as Ptolemaic aspects. The most important aspects are the ones employed to divide 360 evenly, but which in turn can be divided by 10:

- conjunction, this aspect is created by two planets with the same sign and degree of longitude
- sextile, this aspect arises when two planets are located in the same degree of longitude separated by 60 degrees.
- square, this aspect arises when two planets are located in the same degree of longitude separated by 90 degrees.
- trine, this aspect arises when two planets are located in the same degree of longitude separated by 120 degrees.
- opposition, this aspect arises when two planets are located in the same degree of longitude separated by 180 degrees.

With the continued reference to mathematical language in describing the context for reading the skies, it is more than evident that any astrological interpretation of the heavens pivots on the potentiality of the mathematical instruments employed that allow the stars to emerge on a horizon of rational intelligibility. The disjuncture between voice and language we saw in Agamben is mirrored in a similar disjunction between the observation of a celestial body and the mathematical and geometrical calculations on which the astrologer relies to read what is not yet written. The celestial body itself is the manifestation of a pure potentiality, but once it is mathematically identified its (im)potentiality passes on to an actualization in the guise of numerical ciphers that become the non-verbal elements which verbal language cannot express, save as a transcendence that aspires to unite utterance and meaning. However, rather than Galileo's we are here speaking about the kind of mathematics for which the poet Novalis felt a profound sense of nostalgia. "None really comprehend mathematics," Novalis writes, "who do not undertake the study with reverence and devotion as a revelation from God." Associating mathematics with religious devotion, as we see here with Novalis, is symmetrically echoed in Boll's assertion that "astrology seeks to be religion and science at the same time."[92]

The mathematics as understood by the ancient and Renaissance astrologers was not self-referential/auto-sufficient, as the numbers achieved their meanings in relation to a transcendent referent. In this way mathematical numbers, symbols, shapes and so on assumed a hyper-numeric significance; as in the case of Novalis's statement that "Every line is the axis of the world."[93] In other terms, the astrologer understood any expression of mathe-

matics as a potentiality of the universe that would be felt by humans on Earth. Novalis expressed a sense of loss for this sort of perception of the world when he suggests that "Nature is a fossilized city of enchantment. Our latest experimental philosophers theorize on the construction of the universe, but seem to make no real progress. One must either be satisfied with mystery, or else work steadily with mind and brain to elucidate difficulties."[94] Novalis laments the perceived disappearance of a universe that had already revealed itself to humans as "enchantment," but which has now been relegated to the status of a fossilized ruin. The message implicit here is that only a mathematics that links itself to "mystery" allows us to fathom this lost enchantment; it is for this reason that Novalis claims that "The true mathematician is at home in the East. In Europe he is warped by technicality."[95] In any event, the mathematics of the ancient and Renaissance astrologer carried with it a metaphysics that contaminated the celestial bodies under the astrologer's observation. The unwritten text occupies the zone that differentiates the star as a pure potentiality from the mathematical calculations that identified it by way of imposing a metaphysics upon it. For example, in both the *Mysterium Cosmographicum* (1596) and the *Tertius Interveniens* (1610), Kepler speaks about the "harmonic convergence of two rays of light, called *Aspectum*," which constitutes proof that "the nature of God is image and the *geometria archetypes pulchritudinis mundi.*"[96] The space separating the image of the planet from the meta-mathematical metaphysics, which the astrologer superimposes on it, is analogous to the zone of suspension between voice and language we see in Agamben. It is from this space of the suspension of meaning that Wallenstein and Seni utter pronouncements about the potentialities held by the future.

The Death of Wallenstein opens with the description of a room that could be a temple dedicated to astrology, given not only the instruments necessary for reading the heavens but also the images ("seven colossal figures") that represent the seven planets. More than conventional theatrical props, the seven figures address the need to understand one's position in the universe. "The fundamental act of human knowledge," Saxl informs us in a lecture he gave on December 5, 1929, commemorating Warburg's death, "is to orient itself amidst chaos through the position of images or signs." What provides order for Wallenstein's world are the images of the planets, which allow a transcendent order to emanate to and be mirrored on Earth. In other words, Wallenstein does not construct a metaphoric distance between himself and the planets, but rather experiences a radical identification with the celestial bodies. Saxl, following Warburg, had suggested that man's relationship with the heavens consists of two polarities: "either he brings the cosmos down towards him, making himself an equal through magic, and scatters zodiacal signs on his body so as to exercise his own influence on the universe, or he creates a distance through mathematics, and in the place of the demon planet

Mars, with the severed head of his enemy, there is the mathematical sign, the elliptic curve of planetary orbit."[97] Wallenstein's polarity is the former as he seeks to interpret the heavens as if he were reading a book he himself had written; he occupies the space of the celestial bodies and of the interpretation of their significance. The principles of divination in the first scene of Schiller's play are rooted in astrological trigonometry, with the "Auspicious aspect! fateful in conjunction," the trine of "the mighty three corradiate," the sun and moon "in the Sextile aspect," along with the other examples. But there is no distance created between the human body and the celestial bodies, regardless of the astral mathematics. This is similar to Benjamin's rational astrology, as there is a pathos of shared experiences linking Wallenstein to the stars. However, unlike rational astrology, Wallenstein is under the spell of a magical influence emanating from the stars. In any event, Wallenstein is reading an unwritten text that is his own making, he is imagining this text of life in the guise of celestial aspects of what has not yet occurred. Seni, however, is at the window directly observing the celestial topology of the very moment, and is seeking to read the movements of Venus. In the end, however, the difference between the perception of the planet and the meaning attributed to it is a pure potentiality of the imagination. The meaning, or rather, the actualization of a future event remains suspended in the statements uttered by those who claim to envision what is coming. The zones between a planet and its metaphysical attributions, between the human body (immersed in an *astrologica ratio*) and the planets are, like the zone between sound and sense as theorized by Agamben, territories of possibilities and impossibilities.

ANAGOGICS

Cassirer argued that Christianity was presented with two strategies in order to assume control of astrology's purported influence over the sublunary world (or, put in another way, to appropriate the biopower astrology exercised on humans): "the one consists in negating the content of this [*astrological*] view; the other, in the attempt to clothe the content in a new form to give it a new methodological foundation."[98] The fact is that Christianity managed to do both, in fact, as Chevalier observes, "Astrology is disassembled and recuperated in such ways to provide Christianity the language needed to talk about . . . anagogical representations of constant principles (promises of heavenly resurrection, the sun-likeness of God, etc.)."[99] To be sure, it is the theological mode of anagogy (seeing glimpses of the redeemed future in the darkened present) that in its most important respects resembles astrological exegesis, which pivots on the reading of the unwritten text. However, precisely because anagogy and reading the future inscribed in celestial bodies

transcend the obstacles posed by the physics of time, we are ultimately dealing with anachronies, understood in the present case as a complete disavowal of the controlling logic executed by the rational distinctions between past, present, and future. The implications of such a situation is that it suspends the eternal recurrence of the same, thus safeguarding the impotentiality latent in any possibility of anything.

Astrology pivots on the deactivation of the temporal structures that allow us to speak of the interchangeability between the past, the present, and the future. The "future anterior" is not only the verbal tense the astrologer uses to relate what the subject is to expect in the future, but it is also the figure for the future that is moving backwards toward the present. In order for the astrologer to be able to reveal the future to the client, the future must emerge as the present moment. This implies that diachrony and synchrony are darkened by the shadow of anachrony, which brings about an upheaval in any attempt to represent a chronology that allows us to distinguish what is and what will come from what has been. Anachrony is a shadow precisely because it darkens and obscures the structures of temporal divisions, however arbitrary they might be, and in so doing it allows things to regress to a state of potentiality as the idea of chronological order becomes deactivated. De la Durantaye, commenting on Agamben, has had the occasion to observe that "potentiality is by nature shadowy, and it is the task of the philosopher to identify and utilize what in that shadow can be illuminated and employed."[100] De la Durantaye is basing this assessment on Agamben's reading of a passage from the *De Anima* (418b–419e) where Aristotle deals with vision. Agamben writes:

> *Diaphanes* [*transparency*] refers not to transparent bodies (such as air and water) but to 'nature,' as Aristotle writes, which is in every body and is what is truly visible in every body. Aristotle does not tell us what his 'nature' is; he says only "there is *diaphanes*." . . . But he does tell us that the actuality (*energeia*) of this nature is light, and that darkness (*skotos*) is its potentiality. Light, [Aristotle] adds is so to speak the color of *diaphanes* in act; darkness, we may therefore say, is in some way the color of potentiality.[101]

The umbratile nature of anachrony that safeguards (im)potentialities shares with the unconscious the unhindered ability to peregrinate above the confines of chronological separations/divisions, while at the same time experiencing the openness of potentiality. Precisely because it deactivates temporal order, anachrony allows for a reimagining of the relationships of all those elements that are contained in a temporal reality. The potentiality implicit in anachrony allows for a negation of time, but also for a negation of the negation. With this in mind, the following pages consider another aspect of the "exegesis of the unwritten text" by considering how astrological prognosis and theologi-

cal anagogy combine to shed light on the significance of the relationship between the present and future moments in Agamben's thought.

"Like a camera generating motion pictures," Chevalier writes, "astrology projects onto the sky stories that beg to be told as they unfold."[102] The constellations are a picture book from which there emerge images that have the potentiality to actualize into a narrative or, for that matter, remain unwritten. Astrology claims to see in the present moment both the coming future and the future that will not be. The coming moment assumes the guise of an image, whose eidetic syntax dissolves the physics and metaphysics that seeks to keep the present distinct from the future. This is exactly what anagogy seeks to do as well, by momentarily revealing in the present the signs of the resurrection of the body. Agamben, in fact, singles out photography as being "a prophecy of the glorious body."[103] However, as already indicated, while anagogy reveals coming events that are shielded by certainty, astrology grounds itself in the potentialities of conjectures. Yet, astrology and anagogy, albeit very different from each other, travel a similar path. An anagogical reading be it of a word, passage, or text transcends the literal, allegorical, and moral levels and posits a fourth and final spiritual or mystical sense. Hugh of St. Victor characterized the anagogical level of meaning in the following manner: "*Anagoge id est sursum ductio, cum per visibile invisible factum declaratur*" (Anagogy, that is, an uplifting [takes place] when, through a visible fact, an invisible one is declared).[104] What Hugh has in mind is that the anagogic level of reading allows the faithful to project his or her gaze toward a dimension which is unavailable to the unrepentant sinner lost in the labyrinth of unredeemable immanence, namely, the future wherein God's Glory emerges. Of course, what is unique about this earned privilege is that the vision of the coming world is latent in the confused present awaiting redemption. The astrologer's client, instead, receives, or rather, pays for a similar vision, not necessarily dealing with the Glory of God, but usually dealing with advice sought regarding what one's personal future holds.

Yet, there is a point where astrological and anagogical hermeneutics enter into a relation of textual conjunction. Henri de Lubac's research on the levels of scriptural interpretation shows that anagogy, or anagogics, consists of a hierarchical sequence of steps, beginning with reading the grammatical order of the text, followed by skimming randomly through it. Then only the chapter headings would be read, and finally, there would be a purely mental reading of the same text, but without any material text present.[105] Or, as Hugh of St. Victor suggests, a level of reading based on "invisibilia," as in a blank, unwritten text. One implication here is that the text has been internalized in the mnemonic archives, akin to the individual with a photographic memory who is able remember, say, every letter, word, or page, of a given text. Another implication, which is Neoplatonic in nature, is that the text was already present in the reader's memory and thus the reading of the material

text stimulated an act of recollection. However, a third implication is that the reader, through his/her hermeneutical skills reinforced by faith, is able to effect a mental rewriting of the text. Consequently, we would be dealing with a text which was never written, precisely because it is not the same text, or because it deals with what could not be.

When dealing with astrology one is by implication dealing with the science of the future, with a hermeneutics and semiotics of the celestial bodies in order to understand the here and now. However, we need to observe that Agamben's thought is focused on the past which no longer exists, but which in turn sheds light on the events of the coming redemption. In Agamben the future comes toward us from the past; the interplay between the past and the future provides us, by means of dialectical images, access to what we are, namely the present moment in which we are biologically alive. Agamben explicitly states that the task of any writer is to operate in such a way as to "lead back" (*reductio*) her or his writings "to the work of redemption, to mark it with the signature of salvation and to render it intelligible. Only for those who will have known how to save it, will creation be possible."[106] Let us rephrase Agamben's insight and say that the history of literature (or for any communicative art or science, for that matter) must be at once a history of spectres as well as one of prophecies and symptoms that dislodges conventional temporal structures.[107]

Adorno had wished something very similar for philosophical inquiry:

> The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects—this alone is the task of thought.[108]

What Adorno is purporting here is consistent with the medieval exegetical tradition of bringing events, episodes from the past into relation with a future moment of redemption and expressed with the trope of anagogy. Precisely because we can read Agamben's work as literature which finds its point of reference in a "coming philosophy," understanding his thought as "anagogical" and heeding close attention to the idea of astrology, allows us to probe the manner in which he constructs this coming philosophy. In the specific case of *The Open*, an astrological file is introduced so as to shed light on the unfolding of a future post-historical event that was prophesized in ancient Jewish literature. At the same time Agamben's use of Christian theological materials speak to the advent of a deactivation of human history in theological-astrological terms.

Agamben provides the discursive contours of what we could describe as a research program intent on understanding and envisioning historically deactivated signification:

> It is possible, for example, to imagine a practice that without infinitely dwelling in pure signatures or simply inquiring into their vital relations with signs and events of discourse reaches back beyond the split between signature and sign and between the semiotic and the semantic in order to lead signatures to their historical fulfillment. Whether a philosophical inquiry is possible that reaches beyond signatures toward the Non-marked that, according to Paracelsus, coincides with the paradisiacal state and final perfection is, as they say, another story, for others to write.[109]

Among other things, we are dealing here with "a practice" where the future is readily available in the present in that the ability to read has been revised to the point that the grammatical constructions of verbal semiosis are eliminated and replaced with message-producing machines that are not encumbered by the weight of "fallen" language; that is to say, of the provisional language arbitrarily formulated and used while waiting for the redemption of mankind, and thus, of language itself. In other words, the future was readily "viewable" for those who inhabited the Garden of Eden before the Fall precisely because there was no imperfect human language to impede the visibility of the future's being-there or presence.

Any attempt to sound the signifying properties of the astrological within the context of Agamben's thought implies envisioning the juxtaposition of astrology and anagogy together with archaeological regression. By considering astrology we see the contours of the anagogical. Let us focus on the question of anagogy by means of the following biblical passage: "Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise'" (Luke 23:43). Nicola Masciandaro makes use of this biblical quote to suggest that Agamben is an anagogic philosopher, as "anagogy is constituted by the immanence of a redemptive future that is impossibly already sensible in the fractured terms of the present."[110] This line of thinking runs a course that is parallel, for example, to Calcidius's claim that even though the stars do not cause things to happen on earth, they nonetheless contain in the present moment data that preannounce the future events.[111] The etymological construction of "anagogy" (Greek *ana* [up], *agein* [lead]) points to an upward movement, and, in a general theological sense, a movement upward toward, or, more specifically a "return to," the presence of God. The element of regression has not escaped scholars, in fact Paul Rorem reminds us that in works such as Bonaventure's *De Reductione Artium ad Theologiam*, the term *reductio* is employed to translate the Greek "anagogy," in the sense of "leading back up to God."[112] To be sure, René Rocques goes to the extent of

suggesting that anagogy is the regressive movement of a fractured sign to a previous moment of its being a seamless and composite entity:

> to . . . discover the profound meaning of the symbols . . . we should undertake the inverse movement of that which gave them birth: the divine condescension has disclosed to us its unity in multiplicity, its identity in changing figures, its purely spiritual and simple nature in material and composite forms: by a movement rigorously inverse, our intelligence ought to know how to return from these complex and impure forms to the pure simplicity of God, from their instability to his inalterability, from the multiplicity of their components to his unity. It is necessary that the anagogy correspond to the condescension.[113]

Masciandaro, who comments on the same quote by Rocques, underlines the fact that "Unpinning anagogy from its theological determination as participatory perception of an eternal beyond . . . anagogy becomes intelligible as its own movement: the return of the word to itself."[114] Moreover, Masciandaro points to Agamben's thinking as an exemplification of this ultra-semiotic landscape, that is to say, when the Italian philosopher focuses his interpretative energies on the rupture that undoes the expressive and the representational unity, whose signature is imprinted on words: "Crossing over time and the scission that reveals itself in the place of language, the word must return to itself and, absolving itself of this scission, it must be at the end there where, without knowing it, it was already in the beginning; that is, in the Voice."[115]

However, something's (or "whatever" thing's) return or regression to what it was before is not anticipated to be without difficulty, anxiety, or failure. According to Garnier of Rochefort, anagogy is a condition whereby the psyche "by advancing fails in a marvellous way, and then advances more when it has arrived at its failure."[116] What is implied here is that even in its historical and theological sense, the trajectory that operates under the sign of anagogy follows a regressive dispersal that reaches a point beyond which there is nothing else. In a very definite sense, anagogy is a version of archaeological regression in that it pivots its energies on leading back so as to trace the dispersed fragments of the soul with the objective of envisioning them as they emerge on the horizon of being, and collecting them in order to form the composite soul beyond which there is nothing else.

A similar strategy of regression is present in writings that construct the movement back to the horizon of origins as interstellar transiting. The *Corpus Hermeticum* speaks of a regressive movement undertaken by human beings with the objective of undoing the signatures of influence imposed by the planets:

> Thence the human being rushes up through the cosmic framework, at the first zone surrendering the energy of increase and decrease; at the second evil

> machination, a device now inactive; at the third the illusion of longing, now inactive; at the fourth the ruler's arrogance, now freed of excess; at the fifth unholy presumption and daring recklessness; at the sixth the evil impulses that come from wealth, now inactive; and at the seventh zone the deceit that lies in ambush. And then, stripped of the effects of the cosmic framework, the human . . . has his own proper power, and along with the blessed he hymns the father.[117]

Of course, one could attribute aspects of the overlapping of theological anagogy and astrology to the influence of Neoplatonism on Christianity; that is, when pagan philosophy provided the Christians with the conceptual instruments necessary to develop a tradition of thought. This notion serves to underscore the fact that Christian theology conserves a mutated astrological file, which is present in any claim that the archaeology of modern politics leads to theological writings. Augustine, for example, had in the *De Doctrina Christiana* provided a rationale for the Christian appropriation of what was most useful from pagan culture based on the fact that the useful elements "belonged" to God and were important elements in sacred history.

Agamben's approach to the theological tradition is informed by the letter and spirit of archaeological regression. Put succinctly, his will is not to examine theological literature with the view of grasping the original intention of the authors (and similar to all interpretations, reconstructed intentions are pure hypotheses), but rather to tear these writings from their ancient contexts and follow their dispersion in the present. With the finality, that is, of obtaining access to the present rather than seeking to reconstruct the past. The theological shards of the past thus become for Agamben the looking glass through which we gaze at the present. However, what is key to Agamben's formulations is the anagogic marker, which speaks to the existence of the future hidden in the present. Agamben unveils anagogic signatures in a variety of different ways and contexts. For example, in a discussion dealing with ethics we read that the transcendent "is not a supreme entity above all things; rather the pure transcendent is the taking-place of everything."[118] In other words, the final sign to which everything leads back is present in the fractured, scattered signs that emerge on the surface of the Earth. The transcendent transcends itself by way of losing itself in signatures and temporarily suspending its unmarked status so that there can be the taking place of things in the world. This is what Agamben has in mind when he writes that "God or the good or the place does not take place, but is the taking-place of the entities, their innermost exteriority."[119] As Agamben intimates, this is a variation of a heretical notion that brought Amalric of Bena (d. 1210) to be burned at the stake, namely, the idea that Paul's statement "God is all in all" is in many ways a heterodox reading of the Platonic concept of the *chora*: "God is in every thing as the place in which every thing is, or rather as the determination of the 'topia' of every entity."[120] If the transcendent is the end

of all the signs and signatures in the world, and if the transcendent is present in everything, then the taking-place of a thing already contains and reveals what its end will be. The taking-place of something thus contains an anagogical file, which marks it for and announces a future unmarking. This notion is symmetrically consistent with the previously cited quote from Manilius, according to which "In birth we die, the end rests in suspension from the beginning" (Manilius, *Astronomica* IV). In pagan astrology we see the ability to envision potentialities and their future (un)actualizations that are latent in the now of the present moment. Christianity appropriated this aptitude through the instrumentalization of anagogy and transformed it into a dogma of truth.

Ptolemy had stressed that what is of pertinence to astrology are the geometric coordinates of the constellations, rather than their visual representations. In the end, however, an astrological reading presents itself as a combination of numerical ciphers and images. This is so because the future is an image of itself that emerges in the present moment. In Bruno's art of memory the emphasis is on the eidetic dimension of the astrological signs, which constitute the materials of the image of the now-future. Agamben's use of photography to represent the unrepresentability of what is at once present and forthcoming is consistent with Bruno's employment of visual horoscopes. On the one hand the photographer captures an image that will serve as a posthumous archive, but on the other hand that same image already contains, in the present tense, its own destiny:

> What quality fascinates and entrances me in the photographs I love? I believe it is this: for me, photography in some way captures the Last Judgment; it represents the world as it appears on the last day, the Day of Wrath. It is, of course, not a question of subject matter. I don't mean that the photographs I love are ones that represent something grave, serious, or even tragic. The photo can show any face, any object, or any event whatever. This is the case with photographers like Mario Dondero and Robert Capa, active journalists who practice what could be called photographic flanerie: walking without any goal and photographing everything that happens. But "everything that happens"—the faces of two women riding bicycles in Scotland, a shop window in Paris is called forth, summoned to appear on Judgment Day.[121]

The chronogenetic relation between past, present, and future is here totally undermined. The dynamic of temporal dilation or interval that would allow one to distinguish a "now" from an "after" which follows it assumes a secondary importance; or at least, the rigour of its determinativeness is thoroughly weakened. The future is always present in what we make or communicate, and the Medieval theological halo that brightens an anagogical perspective assumes a secularized guise in the form of signifying fragments which are hidden, yet which project toward a future anterior.

> There is one example that shows with absolute clarity how this has been true ever since the history of photography began. The daguerreotype Boulevard du Temple is very well known; it is considered the first photograph in which a human figure appears. . . . I could never have invented a more adequate image of the Last Judgment. The crowd of humans—indeed, all of humanity—is present, but it cannot be seen, because the judgment concerns a single person, a single life: precisely this one and no other. And when has that life, that person, been picked out, captured, and immortalized by the angel of the Last Judgment—who is also the angel of photography?[122]

What needs to be underlined here is Agamben's emphasis on "the crowd of humans," who are present yet cannot be seen. Anagogy exacts from the reader an interpretative effort that pivots on perceiving experience as being connected to a pure transcendent consciousness, as reading what is not written. Anagogy, much like astrology, encourages the reader to think or conjecture in terms of the pure potentiality of a coming existence. However, as we have been underlining, the important difference between the two is that anagogy dogmatizes the envisioned future as an actualization of a certitude, since the revelation of what is to come operates within the economy of sacred history: that is, the coming event actualizes but also depletes the impotentiality of what was written. This interpretative logic was meant to suppress and permanently substitute the astrologer's approach of reading the ciphers imprinted on the celestial texts by the pagan astral divinities.

"IN THE FIRMAMENT THAT WE OBSERVE AT NIGHT . . ."

In reminding us of the importance of temporality in Bruno's astrological thinking as articulated in the *De Principiis Rerum*, Faracovi suggests that what is of major significance is not the identification the conditions of each single moment of existence, but rather what connects them.[123] That is to say, the phase of transformation or mutation that links one arrested moment to another is what provides us insight into the photogrammic sequence of lived experience. While temporality hides these points of change, any attempt to uncover what is hidden in the "now" leads to unexpected connections between human life in the "now" and the idea of the "now" itself. Temporality pivots on the interplay between the polarity of timeliness and that of untimeliness. The question of temporality and of (un)timeliness is inherent to astrology as it pivots its *raison d'être* on the stars and planets whose movement dictate to the sublunary world the mode of measuring the passage of time. Moreover, the astrologer assumes the role of one who is able to transcend the present moment by being able to read and communicate the future as if it were lived experience in the present tense. For the astrologer, the *now* is the future that arises from the act of reading a previously unwritten text in a pure

nowness. In other terms, the "contemporary" is for the astrologer an untimeliness provoked by the projection of the future backward toward the now. This line of thinking is analogous to the position that Agamben takes when he addresses the question of "contemporaneity," which is based on "*that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disjunction and an anachronism.*" Subjects who are in perfect consonance with their age cannot be called contemporaries, Agamben informs us, since they fail to perceive it, "they are not able to firmly hold their gaze on it."[124]

The astrologer is the historian of what has not yet taken place or happened, unlike the historian who is instead concerned with the signs emanating from the past. In this way, the astrologer is able to perceive the signs of the future scattered in the dark shadows and light of the present. In fact, the astrologer is most concerned with the darkness, not just of the skies, but also the *loci* of obscurity located in the present. The "obscurity," of course, here refers to the zones of unknowing. In this way the astrologer bears a resemblance to Agamben's description of the "contemporary": "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."[125] Which is of course exactly what the astrologer does, namely, transcribing, within the obscurity of the present moment, the signs emanating from the future. The coming light erupts into the dark present and creates a temporal dissonance, an anachronization of the now in that the present moment contains (as a result of the astrologer's act of transcribing) elements that belong to a chronology that is yet to occur.

In his discussion on the "contemporary" Agamben eventually resorts to images from the domain of astro-physics to make his point (astro-physics, one could argue, is a secularized form of astrology, in the same manner in which modern governmentality is a secularized form of theology and, as is being suggested, of astrology as well. Forecasting of any type, the economic one in particular, is a key strategic component of modern politics. While the astrologer performed forecasting by allegorically interpreting scientific data, the economic forecaster works with data that is treated not allegorically, but by means of a rigorously constructed ratio-logical, but nonetheless arbitrary, method):

> 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 what we perceive as the darkness of the heavens 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 a contemporary.[126]

In this passage, which is key to establishing the figurative parameters for articulating the cognito-espistemological sense of contemporariness, we can detect hermeneutical signatures that constitute the astrologer's approach to reading the stars. The astrologer's ability to read the future pivots on the capacity to maintain a fixed gaze on a transcendent darkness that will permit small openings into coming events only to the readers who are patient and informed of the scientific data necessary in order to allegorize about what is about to happen. One of the most significant of these occurrences that requires the informed and patient attention of the astrologer is the conjunction of planets. The astrologer is a functional example of what Agamben means by being "contemporaneous"; that is, one who is ready to grasp the hidden signs that belong to neither one of the past, present, or future, but which exist in a pure anachrony. According to Agamben, the "appointment" with time that is in question does not only occur in chronological temporality; to be sure, there is something in chronological temporality that moves to the point of changing 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.'"[127]

The astrologer, thus, as historian of the anachronies hidden in our present, is able to orchestrate and edit history before it occurs, but in a manner that follows not his subjective whim, but rather the potential will of an ancient mode of mapping and allegorizing what the heavens dictate. This is consistent with two other notions we find in *What is a Contemporary?* First, when Agamben indicates that only the person "who perceives the indices and signatures of the archaic in the most modern and recent can be contemporary."[128] By this Agamben means that the *arkhē* (that which is close to the origins) is not only located in the past, but it is an integral part of historical becoming. In the same way that the neuro-bio-physiological elements present in the child continue to play an active role even at the phase of adult maturity and beyond. The elements of the astrological tradition also play an operational function as the astrologer reads the celestial signs so that they are present in a future becoming. However, in a more extended fashion, the astrologer, like the true contemporary, has the capacity to write, read, and edit the text of temporal flux, and does so from the optic of pure anachrony: "the contemporary . . . is capable of transforming it [*time*] 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 respond."[129] The astrologer must be in the position to read history as a simultaneous exposition of different layers or segments of temporality, including what has occurred, what is occurring, and

what will occur. Reading the future, however, is the most dangerous and insidious of operations; there is no empirical data the way there is for reading the past and present. Any attempt to pronounce oneself about what has yet to happen is akin to collapsing into a dark abyss. This is the position of the astrologer, whose role depends on the ability to locate the invisible light in the present, the same light that, as Agamben states, sheds light on the past and, in turn on the present: "It is as if this invisible light that is the darkness of the present casts its shadows on the past, so that the past, touched by this shadow, acquired the ability to respond to the darkness of the now."[130] But what can we say about the future? The astrologer exerts his interpretative energies on combining the light in the present that moves retrogressively with the light that moves backward from the future, and in the moment or conjunction when those two lights meet the astrologer transcribes the dictation of coming signs that follow. The dominant idea here is that regression moves toward the present moment, thus making it all the more accessible. In Agamben's mind regression brings us to a present characterized by greater visibility, something that contains presence and absence at the same time.[131]

THE ASTROLOGER AS ABSENT AUTHOR

The interplay between living image and specter, as we see in the following quotation from Agamben dealing with the figure of the nymph, not only underlines a central feature of both Warburg's and Benjamin's thought, but it also establishes the tone for the phantasmological nature of astrology:

> To work on images means for Warburg to work at the crossroads, not only between the corporeal and the incorporeal but also, and above all, between the individual and the collective. The nymph is the image of the image, the cipher of the *Pathosformeln* which is passed down from generation to generation and to which generations entrust the possibility of finding or losing themselves, of thinking or not thinking. Therefore images are certainly a historical element; but on the basis of Benjamin's principle, according to which life is given to everything to which history is given (the principle could be reformulated as: life is given to everything to which an image is given), it follows that nymphs are, in some ways, alive. We are used to attributing life only to the biological body. Instead, a purely historical life is one that is *ninfale*. In order to be truly alive, images, like Paracelsus' elemental spirits, need a subject to unite with them. However, as in the union with the undine, this encounter hides a mortal danger. Indeed, in the course of the historical tradition, images crystallize and turn into spectres which enslave men and from which they always need to be liberated anew.[132]

Astrology is a living spectre precisely because it sought to crystalize the future in order to make it readable and intelligible for those seeking to know

what was to come. The only manner in which the astrologer could make the planets speak was to produce texts, images that freeze or fossilize a specific moment of their celestial movement. In a more general sense, however, astrology has all of the properties of a living ghost, that is to say, it is deceased as far as modern science is concerned but still operational according to popular culture. However, just as the secularized theology vitalizes modern governmentality, the dispersed archaeological signatures of astrology have something to tell us as far as the genealogy of bare life and biopower are concerned. Astrology is a spectre who continues to guide those willing to be guided by it, and thus it is akin to a stone cold sepulchral statue that utters information for, actually, all to hear. To be sure, thanks to the Italian Renaissance, astrology became living proof that pagan deities and their religion are enjoying a post-death phase, somewhere in the undifferentiated space separating the center of culture from its margins. As Agamben claims, "Spectrality is a form of life, a posthumous or complementary life that begins only when everything else is finished. Spectrality thus has, with respect to life, the incomparable grace and astuteness of that which is completed, the courtesy and precision of those who no longer have anything ahead of them."[133]

But we are nonetheless dealing with a spectre, regardless of its singularity, and, as Agamben intimates, living with ghosts is something that is part and parcel of living in a civilization. Of what exactly is a spectre constituted?: "Of signs, or more precisely of signatures, that is to say, those signs, ciphers, or monograms that are etched onto things by time. A spectre always carries with it a date wherever it goes; it is, in other words, an intimately historical entity."[134] The partially effaced signatures of astrology's phantasm continue to operate not solely within the context of popular culture but also as the unsaid that haunts contemporary thought. The haunting takes place not so much at the level of conscious speech as it does at the stratum of unconsciousness, together with the epistemological thought forms of all the other disciplines (alchemy, physiognomy, nephrology, and so on) that have been relegated to the underground of knowledge. The most fertile neuro-physiological moment for the expression of unconsciousness is the dream state: "In dreams the eyes of the dreaming person seize on each and every thing; each and every creature exhibits a signature that signifies more than its traits, gestures, and words could ever express."[135] More than directions and specifications concerning how to make the ruins of a deceased instrument operational, the function of the signs depicted by the spectre at the level of the unconscious is to essentially remind the subject that what is hidden in the world has the potential to erupt into presence at the appropriate moment of its readability, to appropriate a concept from Benjamin.

Like classical Latin or other languages that are no longer spoken, but for which there is a written record, astrology has the properties of a "dead lan-

guage," if we can categorize no longer functioning sciences or systems of thought this way, and in many ways a dead language is a spectral one:

> The truth is that a dead language . . . is a spectral language that we cannot speak but that still quivers and hums and whispers in its own special way, so we can eventually come to understand and decipher it, albeit with some effort and the help of a dictionary. But to whom does a dead language speak? To whom does the specter of language turn? Not to us, certainly, but not even to its addressees from another time, of whom it no longer has any recollection. And yet, precisely for this reason, it is as if only now, for the first time, that this language speaks, a language the philosopher refers to (though without realizing that he has thus bestowed it with spectral consistency) by saying that *it* speaks—not we.[136]

As dead as we can claim astrology to be, it does continue to speak to us, whether it is to narrate its past life, or to continue predicting the future for willing subjects. There is another way that the astrologer occupies the place of a ghost. Agamben comments on Foucault's idea that the author plays the role of dead person in the act of writing by indicating that while the author might not actually be dead, presenting oneself as the author "means occupying the place of a 'dead man.' An author-subject does exist, and yet he is attested to only through the traces of his absence."[137] The astrologer is an exemplary dead or absent author, precisely because he is not writing his text, but essentially reading for the first time what is (un)written on the stars themselves.

However, there is another aspect to this scenario if we consider Agamben's Averroistic vein. Precisely because the individual subjects enter into union with the possible or general intellect by means of the phantasms located in the individuals' memory and imaginative virtue, in the end the imagination becomes the privileged faculty and is thus located at the highest level of the individual soul. The imagination is thus situated between the corporeal and the incorporeal, the individual and the common, and it is the last thing human life abandons on the threshold leading to death.[138] In Agamben's mind this implies that the *auctor*, the subject of thought, is essentially "a being of imagination, whose consistency and persistence are purely phantasmatical," given that a thinker is essentially one who extends one's phantasms to reason. As a consequence of this, according to Agamben, "The subject of thought . . . exists, thus, only in the imagination and with it, after having exhausted it and delivered it to intellection, it [*the subject of thought*] perishes and dissolves."[139] In other terms, the thinker or writer experience a phase of becoming unconstituted once the work is abandoned or interrupted, and is left with the pure potentiality of thought and existence. This idea finds a correlative in the writings imprinted on the celestial bodies that appear as unwritten until the astrologer reads them over repeatedly. That is, to the

moment where the possible interpretations reach a point of saturation, leaving the potentialities of the readings to only appear as exhausted. This signals the disappearance of the astrologer as subject, as author of readings, into the (im)potentiality of the blank text on which he writes.

NOTES

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7. Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, 57.
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14. Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language*, 66.
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16. Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language*, 71.
17. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 50.
18. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 50.
19. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 50.
20. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 51.
21. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 52.
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23. For different perspectives on Agamben's reading of the figure of Bartleby, see Sergei Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 49–58; Watkin, *Agamben and Indifference,* 164–74; Zartaloudis, *Giorgio Agamben: Power, Law, and the Uses of Criticism,* 272–74.
24. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 269.
25. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 58.
26. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 270.
27. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 266.
28. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 266.
29. Manilius, *Astronomica*, trans. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1977), IV, 14, 223. Translation slightly altered.
30. *Corpus Hermeticum I.31,* 7.
31. Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. Karen E. Pinkus and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis-Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 65.
32. Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xv.

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38. Agamben, *Stanzas,* 137. For a useful commentary on this passage see Kevin Attell, *Giorgio Agamben: Beyond the Threshold of Deconstruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 35–37.
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42. As Auguste Bouché-Leclercq's *L'astrologie grecque* (1899) and Tester, *A History of Astrology*, 17–29, would attest.
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44. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, ed. and trans. F. E. Robbins (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1940), I, 11–12, p. 69.
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46. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 3.
47. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 3.
48. Agamben, *The End of the Poem,* 115.
49. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 3–4.
50. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 4.
51. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 4.
52. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 4.
53. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 4.
54. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 5.
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63. Cited in Thomas Moore, *The Planets Within: The Astrological Psychology of Marsilio Ficino* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1990), n.p.
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66. Agamben, *Language and Death*, 35.
67. Moore, *The Planets Within,* 100.
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69. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 138.
70. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz,* 138.
71. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, cited in Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz,* 143.
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80. Evdokimov, *Teologia della bellezza,* 174.
81. Evdokimov, *Teologia della bellezza,* 178.
82. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 115–16.
83. Cited in Charles Trinkaus, "The Astrological Cosmos and Rhetorical Culture of Giovanni Gioviano Pontano," *Renaissance Quarterly* 38 (1985), 446–72.
84. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen McKenna (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), 158.
85. In another part of the *Enneads*, Plotinus speaks about celestial letters that are in a state of constant flux as they need to attend to various duties. "We may think of the stars as letters perpetually being inscribed on the heavens or inscribed once for all and yet moving as they pursue the other tasks allotted to them: upon these main tasks will follow the quality of signifying, just as the one principle underlying any living unit enables us to reason from member to member, so that for example we may judge of character and even of perils and safeguards by indications in the eyes or in some other part of the body. If these parts of us are members of a whole, so are we: in different ways the one law applies." (Plotinus, *Enneads* II, 3, 7, 96).
86. Cf. Boll and Bezold, *Le stelle*, p. 84.
87. Boll and Bezold, *Le stelle,* 90.
88. Boll and Bezold, *Le stelle,* 91.
89. Boll and Bezold, *Le stelle,* 91.
90. Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos*, 2, 19; Manilius, *Astronomica*, II, 855–952.
91. Friedrich Schiller, *The Death of Wallenstein*, Act 1, Scene I in *The Piccolomini, The Death of Wallenstein, Wallenstein's Camp*, trans. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Nathan Haskell Doe (Boston: Francis A. Niccols and Company, 1902), 151–53.
92. Boll and Bezold, *Le stelle,* 104.
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108. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 247.
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137. Agamben, *Profanations*, 64.
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Chapter Four

Spheres of Potentiality

In the *Coelum Stellatum Christianum* (1627), Julius Schiller sought to radically alter the celestial nomenclature by eliminating the pagan constellations and substituting them with figures taken from the Sacred Scriptures. In the place of the zodiacal constellations we find the twelve apostles, in the northern sidereal regions there are New Testament figures, while the southern regions are occupied by figures from the Old Testament. The heavenly bodies themselves, as well, were replaced with figures from the Bible.[1] Schiller's effort was completely inconsequential as we see, for example, in the case of Vincenzo Maria Coronelli's *Epitome Cosmografica* (1693), where the author first lists, tongue in cheek, the pagan names with the celestial topography and the corresponding Christian ones and then concludes by observing that he will continue "describing the Constellations with their usual names."[2] Schiller's futile attempt to fully Christianize the heavens suggests that paganism had disappeared into Christianity to such an extent that the names of the ancient astral divinities were linguistic signatures that could move back and forth between a sacred and a profane domain without losing their existential relevance. In other words, as purely historical elements the celestial signatures activated data concerning human life that left a profound imprint on Western culture, and this data lays dormant and unnoticed in the history of ontology.

As an example of what we are dealing with, we find in Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* (Book IV, 10) an explanation of the "divisions of time" where each of the seven planets corresponds to an age or chronological period of human life, "beginning with the first age and the first sphere from us, that is the moon's, and ending with the last of the ages and the furthest of the planetary spheres, that of Saturn." Robbins and Tester,[3] among others, have noted that in Jacques's speech from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (II, vi) the planets are

the hidden subtext functioning as the transcendent entities that govern human existence. The moon rules during the period of infancy, at age four Mercury assumes the governing responsibility, while at age fourteen it passes on to Venus (since this is the age of the lover). This is followed by the period of ambition, under the sun, followed by Mars, when a man becomes conscious of his mortality, then Jupiter, who leads a man into old age, and, finally, there is Saturn who governs the time leading to one's demise.

The point is that any survey of works from classical antiquity on to the Renaissance that made reference to the relationship between life on earth and the celestial spheres, makes it abundantly clear that up until the advent of modern science astrology was considered vitally pertinent to questions dealing with the orientation and control of human life, and on being in general.[4] Yet, even with such an arsenal of textual evidence, this pertinence has been completely ignored by any modern attempt to think the question of being. Instead scholarship has focused on the purely historical significance, for better or for worse, of astrology. However, Agamben not only suggests that astrology is a major signature, but he also sheds light on the genetic ties linking the signature to ontology. In other terms, and as we saw with Benjamin, astrology, with its character of human experience, signs life at its level of pure being. With this in mind, the quadripartite structure of this chapter will gravitate on the issue of how it is possible to speak of astrology and ontology in the same breath. Of course, when dealing with Agamben, ontology is inexorably tied to bare life and biopower. Thus, after illustrating the astrological significance implied in Agamben's choice to translate the philosophical term *dispositif*, the connection between potentiality, being, biopower, and astrology will be explored.

DISPOSITOR

Disatisfied with the English "apparatus" as the translation of the French *dispositif* (Italian, *dispositivo*) appropriated from Foucault, Agamben selects instead "dispositor," a technical term from the astrological tradition, thus setting the stage for a potential juxtaposition of biopolitics and astrology:

> For reasons that will become clear in the course of my lecture, I am not satisfied with the current English translation of 'dispositif' as procedure or apparatus. And I would prefer to keep nearer to the French original. This is why I have proposed a probably monstrous translation as dispository [*sic*]. The term is in the English Oxford dictionary. It is an astrological term, the law of the sign and its relation to other planets. Thus the dispository being the lord of the astrological sign embodies all the forces and influences that the planet exerts on the individuals restraining them in all possible ways. This is perhaps a good translation for Foucault's dispositif. By the way, questions of terminology are important in philosophy.[5]

If matters of terminology are important to philosophical activity, then the psychosomatic content of "dispositor," which Agamben does not mention, merits a brief consideration. "Dispositor" signifies a planetary body that disposits, disposes of, or governs another celestial sphere, which is passing through one of its zones of dignity (that is, a configuration where the planet's power is enhanced). The location of the planets, along with the manner in which they mutually interact, achieves a level of importance in astrology which is superior to that of the houses, signs, and alignments of the immobile stellar bodies. A dispositor is a planetary governing system relative to the identity of the signs. As Nicholas de Vore explains this phenomenon, "The assumption is that when a planet is in a Sign that is ruled by another planet, it is supposed to be so influenced by the planet that rules the Sign in which it is placed, as in effect to alter its nature. Thus, if Saturn is in a Sign ruled by Jupiter, the Jupiterean influence is presumed so to permeate the Saturn influence as to render it more Jupiterean and less Saturnian."[6] More specifically, though, the dispositorial relationship produces effects that impinge significantly on the activities of human life. For example, if Mercury is the dispositor, Ptolemy writes,

> he makes his subjects scribes, men of business, calculators, teachers, merchants, bankers, soothsayers, astrologers, sacrificers, and in general those who perform their functions by means of documents, interpretation . . . and if Saturn testifies to him, they will be managers of the property of others, interpreters of dreams, or frequenters of temples for the purpose of prophecies and inspiration. If it is Jupiter that witnesses, they will be law-makers, orators, sophists, who enjoy familiarity with great persons.[7]

The governing planet acquires the power to control both the attendant planet, as well as those born in the moment of the specific planetary disposition. Moreover, and this is terrifying, the aspect of astrological ontology that Warburg speaks about, but which modern popular horoscopy intentionally overlooks, the dispositions could have negative or fatal effects on the human subjects.

In fact, the astrological turn in Agamben's translation of *dispositif* points to a philosophical anxiety that permeated the Western mind before the advent of modern science: astrology was for centuries perceived as the science through which the demonic astral forces exercised their devastating powers on their terrified human subjects. If we consider the astrologically charged "dispositor" with how Agamben characterizes *dispositif* in other passages, the astrological vein of the term becomes all the more evident. For example, Agamben writes that,

> 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, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings.[8]

One could replace the term used before Agamben chose dispositor, namely "apparatus," with "astrology" and it would be greatly evident just how the astrologically marked "dispositor" carries the high level of specificity that Agamben requires to explain his theory about the implications of Foucault's *dispositif*. The ability to read the meanings of the movements of the heavens was to condition in a decisive fashion the general, but also the more specific details of a person's daily life, as Foucault himself reminds us in his discussion on the way the heavens conditioned the government of the self in antiquity.[9] While it could be argued that astrology essentially reflected what was happening in the everyday life of the subject, it is also true that the act of reflecting contained in it the suggestion of an active power of the stars upon the human body. Moreover, it could be argued that one reason why Agamben's choice of "dispositor," with its deep-seated astrological archive, is appropriate is that astrology runs a parallel course to the another Foucauldian idea which is central to Agamben's thinking, namely "biopolitics"; which, as already intimated, refers to the manner in which political authority exercises its power on human bodies, actions, and so on. That is to say, biopolitics refers to governmental power when it conditions, orients, determines the life of human bodies following a trajectory that contains the same "action" elements we find in Agamben's definition of *dispositif*, and now the astrologically charged dispositor.

In the specific discussion about what constitutes an apparatus/dispositor Agamben lists a series of examples, but which is of course far from being exhaustive. We find in this list,

> prisons, madhouses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, juridical measures . . . the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular phones.[10]

These are among the elements that are at the basis of a microphysics of cultural communication and movement, in the general galaxy or constellation of human life. Agamben makes a distinction between three elements: 1) the living beings (or substances), 2) the "apparatuses," 3) the subjects, which refers to what comes about as a result of any interaction between living beings and "apparatuses."[11] Once humans in the past interacted with the specific dispositor that is astrology, what resulted was a calculation of astrology's power over humans and a reverence tinged with consuming terror. But how do we frame astrology so as to allow it to reveal itself to us as what it is, or rather, was? Keeping in mind that each age brings its own distortions to any reading (as physicists tell us, if there is no distortion there is no physics)

of an historical artifact, and that astrology is a survivor of chronological distortions, let us say that for our current purposes astrology reveals itself as an operational instrument that constitutes the archaeological debris relevant to understanding modern forms of power, communication, and ontology.

It should at this point be very evident that Agamben's use of the astrally tinged images from the Jewish Bible as overture and coda to *The Open* (along with Titian's painting, *Nymph and Shepherd*) is by no means an attempt to simply add iconological ornamentation to this work. As we have been arguing, Agamben is too imbibed with Warburghian thought to not want to exploit the profound episto-cognitive dimension of images, astrological or otherwise. That is to say, where works of art are not to be judged on the basis of whether or not they are beautiful, or how they express the spirit of an age, but rather on the basis of the extent to which and manner in which they contain and communicate signs transmitted from the past. Warburg's iconology treats images as a repository of signatures that come to life once they are acted upon by the signator, that is, the art historian who studies the images.[12] The images we find in *The Open* are integral to Agamben's theory making; however, the task is to locate the connection between astrology and bare life.

In the first instance, we could say that just as governmentality produces and controls bare life by means of biopolitics, the stars, as traditionally conceived, operate in a similar way by means of astrology. However, there is another point of entry to the space where the link between bare life and astrology emerges, namely in the domain of Agamben's theory of signatures. Precisely because what the astrologer reads in the stars is a potentially unrepeatable coming event for his client, he is reading something that writes itself as he moves from word to word of this currently non-existent text. But it is the signature that makes the unhiding of this unwritten text possible, and by making the coming existence intelligible to the astrologer's client we can say that signatures exist in order to provide a structure for existence. The transition from this direction of thinking to that of ontology is best articulated by Agamben when he suggests that, far from being a human science with well-defined limits, ontology is the "archaeology of every knowledge, which explores the signatures that pertain to beings by virtue of the fact of existing, thus predisposing them to the interpretation of specific knowledges."[13] In making this assertion Agamben has in mind seventeenth-century philosopher Edward Herbert, who sought to unveil the link connecting the theory of signatures to ontology. In dealing with the predicates (also known as *transcendentia* or *transcendentalia*) of the Scholastic tradition, namely *res*, *verum*, *bonum*, *aliquid*, *unum*, which belong to everyone through the act of existing, Herbert interpreted "the good" as a signature. The conclusion that Agamben reaches is that *bonum* constitutes a "passion of being," "which necessarily marks the thing and displays itself as much in its sensible appearance ("the pleasant," the "beautiful") as in intellectual knowledge (intellec-

tion as perception of the *ultima bonitatis signatura*)." Moreover, given that being is a vacant and unspecified concept, Agamben argues, if we were to claim that "being, through the very act of existing, of giving itself in an entity, receives or suffers marks or signatures that orient its comprehension toward a given sphere and a certain hermeneutics, then ontology is possible as the 'discourse' of being, that is, of 'the passions of being.'"[14]

Of course the main point is that being-in-the-world is "a transcendental dissemination in passions, that is in signatures."[15] Signatures, including astrology as a privileged space for the invention and communication and signatures, sign elements "at the level of their pure existence."[16] "Pure being" is the *proto-signator* as it inscribes its transcendental sign on beings. Agamben continues by indicating that "being is not 'the concept of something that could be added to the concept of a thing,' because in truth being is not a concept but a signature."[17] To this we could that add astrology is that domain of knowledge which anticipates the emergence of being-in-the-world by writing the never-before-read script of coming into existence. Astrology is witness to the signatures inscribed on the being-there of individuals, and thus its pertinence to bare life. Moreover, it assumes characteristics similar to governmentality as it becomes the space of mediation of the stars, constellations, and the subjects over which they exercise powers. In the same way that we today know and are conscious of the fact that governments subject citizens to their biopower, so too in the past people sincerely believed and were fully aware of the notion that the planets exerted powers over them. Or, to place things into our context, they were aware that the astrologer was endowed with the science necessary to read the pneumatological signatures which the heavenly bodies imprinted on them. These astrological signatures were the degree zero of ontology. So it is not at all inconsistent for Agamben to use, as he does in *The Open*, the astrologically laden image to continue the cultivation of his bare life theory. In fact, the astrological allows us to rediscover the dimension of ontological terror, which the astral deities inspired for their unwilling subjects. In the case of *The Open*, the terror assumes the guise of the separation within man of his humanity from his animality. This is a biopolitical division as well as the rationale for violence against what is inhuman or animal.

Why astrology can be considered a science of human existence, and thus its connection to bare life, is a central concern of this study. To anticipate another claim being proposed, what is absolutely singular is that the ontological spectrum of astrology includes (unlike classical ontology, the Heideggerian one, or the secularized version of theology) the human as well as the animal as it eliminates the space that separates the two. Of course, Agamben has not systematically constructed a sustained theory illustrating the pertinence of astrology to governmentality or cultural practices the way he has done with theology. Instead astrology comes to the fore in Agamben's

thought in the guise of elements, ruins, fragments that he encounters as he regressively follows the archaeological signs in their dispersion. The planets are receptacles containing archives of the full range of human existential states expressed over the centuries. The names of the mythological deities with which we designate the planets, and which we (in complete distraction from their psychosomatic content) continue to utter in our daily speech are the signatures of these existential archives. Consequently, astrology constitutes a body of traditional knowledge where the question of being-in-the-world is a fundamental concept, and the thrust of this idea is hidden, or better, repressed in the guise of terrifying anxiety below the surface of any image that belongs to the thematic constellation of astrology.

Up until the age of the Renaissance astrology exercised the sort of influence that could be termed "the signs and signatures that governed everyday life," irregardless of one's class status. The stars' influence on humans, what we could call "bio-astrology," is akin to the sort of power that Foucault and Agamben speak about when theorizing biopower. That is, as Foucault tells us, when states control and regulate their subjects by means of "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations."[18] In more detailed sense, by biopower Foucault intends

> a number of phenomena that seem to me to be quite significant, namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the 18th century, modern Western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species. This is what I have called biopower.[19]

Within the context of astrology, the power originates from the planetary bodies, but it is the astrologer who reads and interprets the unwritten celestial text of life in order to make it intelligible in human time. However, the question of the biopower of the celestial bodies is not simply a matter of a linear influx directed by the planets toward humans. The issue, instead, pivots on the potentialities possessed by both the sidereal bodies and humans. To paraphrase Warburg, the influence of the heavenly bodies is understood as a battle between the potentialities and free will of humans and the biopower believed to be possessed by the demonic *monstra*, namely, the planets. This is so since, as Thomas Aquinas reminds us, and as we will see, free will is itself a concept that establishes the latitudinal and longitudinal co-ordinates of man's (im)potentiality.

"LIBERUM ARBITRIUM EST POTENTIA"

For all of the efforts throughout the history of human culture to establish a "ground" that would serve as a model for our existence on the *terra firma* of our planet, we are haunted by being literally suspended in a purportedly infinite void. Theology, philosophy, and other disciplines have sought, to whatever degree of success, to reassure us that, somehow, there exists a solid, stable ground we can aspire to inhabit. Yet, the astrophysical fact is that as terrestrials we exist on a planetary mass, which is, albeit it follows a repetitive pattern of movement involving at once revolution and orbit, nonetheless suspended in a bottomless pit we know as the Universe. The most originary mode of thinking the suspension and potentiality of being is not metaphorical, but literal. The vital physical source of any philosophical formulation of (im)potentiality is the astrophysical fact of being suspended in the pure potentiality of the cosmic void. The question of our suspended presence in the cosmos constitutes the vital connection between astrology and potentiality.

While Agamben's use of Aristotle is primarily for the question of potentiality, on closer examination the matter of potentiality in the Greek philosopher, and his Christian interlocutor Thomas Aquinas, incorporates themes such as the heavens, astrology, and ontology in a manner such that they intersect with one another to create a constellation of epistemic variables. In discussing what "causes" the human, Aristotle suggests that man is an actuality that finds its potentiality in his father, but ultimately in the "sun and its oblique course, which are neither matter nor form nor privation of man nor of the same species, but moving causes" (*Metaphysics* 12.5, 1071a14-17).[20] The heavenly bodies are the potentialities in which ontology recognizes its originary movements. In the *Meteorologica* (I.2) Aristotle suggests that the earth has an inextricable link with the celestial bodies, and thus the power that one finds on earth is governed by what exists above. The notion of how the power is distributed on earth is further explained in *On Generation and Corruption* (II.10), where Aristotle argues that the regular diurnal movements of the fixed stars from east to west is what causes permanence and growth, while the movements of the planets from west to east at an irregular pace is what causes change. Moreover, Aristotle purported that there exist eternal celestial spheres, which undergo eternal sidereal revolutions as their natural motion, but which are immune to the sublunary processes of changes (*De caelo* 1.2, 269b2–12, and 1.3, 270b11–16 and b4–11). Moreover, the revolutions of the astral bodies belong to the natural movements of their particular traits. While the motion of the terrestrial elements is caused by the celestial bodies, the latter are instead moved by a different kind of external source since they are eternal and ungenerated. Precisely because the sidereal revolutions are in effect eternal motions, they contain potentiality that is

actualized in the movements. The potentiality necessitates an actuality that functions as the source of its motion, and which consists as well in the imprinting of the signatures of human life, and, ultimately, the structuring of being in the world.

In the premodern ages astrology was in consonance with Aristotelian science, as one can determine, for example, in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. In the *Summa Theologica* (*Second Part of the Second Part*, *Question 95, Article 5*), Aquinas neutralizes the communicative and epistemic value of divination, which, unlike prophecy, is knowledge acquired artificially and is not a gift received from God. In following Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, Aquinas contends that astrology is not to be understood or accepted as a divinatory art, but instead as a conjectural science. Astrology is a *scientia media* in that the astrologers extract their interpretative principles from the mathematical sciences, only to apply them to material data. Moreover, in being a *scientia media*, astrology cannot claim the status of an exact science as the more it depends on mutable matter, the more the knowledge it produces is uncertain. Aquinas thus locates the point of conjunction between astrology and Aristotle, which consists in the devaluation of astralism, or the worship of the stars, and Stoic fatalism.[21]

The Aristotelian tradition, as in the cases, for example, of Ptolemy and Alexander of Aphrodisia, maintained that the movements of the stars are eternal, while the sublunary elements are mutable. In other terms, on the one hand the celestial bodies activate the motions of terrestrial entities. On the other hand, however, the things on earth are marked, unlike the stars, with eventual demise and decay,[22] which are signatures of potentiality. We thus have two kinds of *heimarmene* (fate or destiny) that pivot on cause and effect: a first one that controls the eternity of the planets, which is one of necessity, where things cannot be other than what necessitates them. A second one, which involves the terrestrial world, is characterized by matter and realities that are in constant flux, but which operate under the sign of potentiality. With this in mind we should consider what Aristotle writes in *Metaphysics* (VI, 6, 1027b): "Everything, therefore, that will be, will be of necessity; e.g. it is necessary that he who lives shall one day die. . . . But whether he is to die by disease or by violence is not yet determined, but depends on the happening of something else."[23] Alexander of Aphrodisia would reformulate this notion and suggest that what is produced according to the laws of nature is not controlled by necessity; if it were, however, the production of things in the sublunary world would be impeded.[24] If one were to become ill, his or her health could be altered one way or another by means of a cure or other elements in nature. For this reason, things in the physical world are touched by necessity, but above all they operate according to the principles of the possible. In other words, the celestial bodies are pure potentialities by necessity, as servants of God. Humans, instead, have (im)potentiality as a

means to live in nature and as a mechanism to buffer the controlling potentiality of the stars.

According to the Christian Gnostic Bardaisan of Edessa, the work of nature is always similar to itself and it generates things such as birth and death. Fate, which relies on the heavenly bodies, is able to change nature by way of causing illness or bringing about good health. However, man is endowed with free will and has the capacity to alter destiny.[25] In other terms, the suspended destiny or end we read in Manilius faces a wider expanse of suspension as humans seek to manipulate the territory it occupies by way of neutralizing the charge of the planets' signature, which ultimately houses the unwritten text of human fate. Moreover, the unwritten text of life is the celestial sea of potentiality where humans decide whether or not they want to immerse themselves in the (im)potentiality of the actualizations provoked by life. An example of humans overcoming the yoke of astral power is found in the *Talmud*, where Abraham reads the constellations and tells God that according to his horoscope he is not destined to father a son. God responds by advising Abraham to exit from the horoscope, as Israel is immune to the powers of the stars (*Ein Mazal le Israel*).

Ptolemy deconstructs the link between necessity and destiny, when he argues that the Egyptian iatromathematicians would not have produced, within the context in which they were working, instruments and procedures for the purposes of healing if they believed that future events were inalterable (*Tetrabiblos*, I, 3, 18). What needs to be underlined is that in Ptolemy's mind, if a physician makes use of astrology to heal it is not because he is invoking a spiritual remedy to the matter. Rather, for Ptolemy this means that astral influence is not always a necessity as there exist different types of causes, which are consistent with the conjectural nature of astrological interpretations, and this creates the grounds for humans to make choices that are at least in part unencumbered by the weight of destiny.[26] If for Ptolemy astrology is a purely conjectural science, it is because it is impossible to predict the exact unfolding of the flow of life. The central motivation of this unpredictability is man's potentiality, the options of acting or of not acting, making or not making, and so on. Ptolemy's thinking is consistent with what Aristotle proposes about the relationship between man's capacity for potentiality and what occurs in the future. Aristotle writes that

> both deliberation and action are causative with regard to the future, and . . . in those things which are not continuously actual there is potentiality in either direction. Such things may or may not be; events also therefore may either take place or not take place. There are many obvious instances of this. It is possible that this coat may be cut in half, and yet it may not be cut in half, but wear out first. In the same way, it is possible that it should not be cut in half; unless this were so, it would not be possible that it should wear out first. So it is therefore with all other events which possess this kind of potentiality. It is therefore

> plain that it is not of necessity that everything is or takes place. (*On Interpretation*, IX, 19a, 7–18)[27]

In other terms, as Aristotle elaborates, in this type of situation the only necessity is that something either is or is not, or "should or should not take place" in the future (*On Interpretation* (IX, 19a, 34, 48).[28] It is exactly this philosophical mindset that Ptolemy employs to afford astrology scientific credibility. Aristotle sheds important light on the properties of the unwritten text of life, which the astrologer must read and decipher for others; we are able to see the future only dimly as potentiality undercuts the possibility of any existential continuum that would link the past, the present, and the future:

> Since propositions correspond with facts, it is evident that when in future events there is a real alternative, and a potentiality in contrary directions, the corresponding affirmation and denial have the same character. This is the case with regard to that which is not always existent or not always non-existent. One of the two propositions in such instances must be true and the other false, but we cannot say determinately that this or that is false, but must leave the alternative undecided. One may indeed be more likely to be true than the other, but it cannot be either actually true or actually false. It is therefore plain that it is not necessary that of an affirmation and a denial one should be true and the other false. For in the case of that which exists potentially, but not actually, the rule which applies to that which exists actually does not hold good. The case is rather as we have indicated. (*On Interpretation* (IX, 19a, 31–46)[29]

Potentiality has in common with free will the capacity to divert the course of being, of action, and of history. Astrology, as Ptolemey's theorizes about it, potentiates potentiality by means of unveiling the unwritten space that resides between celestial topologies and the yet-unknown episodes of coming human life.

As this quote unambiguously establishes, Ptolemy understood astrology as a means to formulate conjectures, that is, contemplate the (im)potentialities about the future, and not as a way to propose exact predictions or certitudes as to what was to take place:

> the movement of the heavenly bodies . . . is eternally performed in accordance with divine, unchangeable destiny, while the change of earthly things is subject to a natural and mutable fate, and in drawing its first causes from above it is governed by chance and natural sequence . . . some things happen to mankind through more general circumstances and not as the result of an individual's own natural propensities . . . for the lesser cause always yields to the greater and stronger; other occurrences, however, accord with the individual's own natural temperament through minor and fortuitous antipathies of the ambient . . . whatever events depend upon a first cause, which is irresistible and more powerful than anything that opposes it, must by all means take place; on

> the contrary, of events that are not of this character, those which are provided with resistant forces are easily averted, while those that do not follow the primary natural causes, to be sure, but this is due to ignorance and not to the necessity of almighty power. . . . One should therefore believe that physical philosophers predict what is to befall men with foreknowledge of this character and do not approach their task under false impressions; for certain things, because their effective causes are numerous and powerful, are inevitable, but others for the opposite reason may be averted.[30]

In other terms, Ptolemy's theorizations about astrology conjugate a quantitative mind set, with a qualitative one; the former is concerned with using mathematics and geometry in order to devise celestial topologies that pin point the exact position of the stars at any given moment, while the qualitative one focuses on articulating a hermeneutical deciphering of the unwritten texts of life that these celestial topologies conserve. What is also clear in Ptolemy's position on astrology is that, ultimately, human life operates under the sign of unpredictability precisely because man has potentiality. If for Ptolemy astrology is not an exact prophetic science, it is because necessity does not govern everything on earth. When Ptolemy tells us that some "occurrences . . . accord with the individual's own natural temperament through minor and fortuitous antipathies of the ambient," he is implying that potentiality, namely, the capacity to make or not make, to act or not act, and so on is the key to understanding the conjectural vocation of astrology. Ptolemy's thinking on the conjectural nature of the unfolding of events is consistent with Aristotle's according to which things in the future could, indifferently, be or could not be, as there is "potentiality in either direction."

The heavenly bodies are the potentiality of potentiality precisely because they do not become something other than what they have always been, what they are, and what they will be in eternity. Aquinas, like Aristotle, purported that the stars do not undergo deterioration in that their physical substance is of another ontological category when compared to sublunary material entities. Moreover, the two philosophers were of the conviction that the celestial bodies are eternal given that they unceasingly and uniformly orbit the Earth without any deviation in course. It was apparent to Aristotle and Aquinas that the planets gave no indication whatsoever of any future acceleration or deceleration. Consequently, the eternity of heavenly bodies is in relation to their movement. However, if the movement of the spheres is indeed eternal, they as well must be equally eternal; in other terms, as Aquinas indicates in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, the forms of these bodies constitute the potentiality of (im)potentiality, that is potentiality that cannot be acted upon by elemental bodies.[31] According to this avenue of thinking, all that which is contained on Earth is constituted by matter, which would permit a transformation into something different from the original form. The physical metamorphosis includes decay and deterioration, which is the end result of an

entity that has been transformed from what it originally was. The celestial bodies, instead, are not subject to decay, which implies that their physical substance cannot be transformed into what it originally was not. It is for this reason that the form and substance of the heavenly spheres are the potentialization of their potentiality; in other words, the continuity of their (im)potentiality is seen in the never taking place of an actualization (other than their orbital movement) into something other that their pure potentiality. Consequently, the planets were perceived as perfect physical entities, and while the terrestrial entities consisted of air, earth, fire and water, the celestial bodies were thought to be made of a different, hence "fifth essence," namely, the "quintessence."

In *Question 91* from the *Summa Theologica* (*Supplement to the Third Part*) entitled *On the Quality of the World After the Judgement,* Aquinas qualifies the function of potentiality in the heavenly bodies:

> In a heavenly body there is no potency that can be perfected by place, or that is made for this end which is to be in such and such a place. But potency to situation in a place is related to a heavenly body, as the craftsman's potency to construct various houses of one kind: for if he constructs one of these he is not said to have the potency uselessly, and in like manner in whatever situation a heavenly body be placed, its potency to be in a place will not remain incomplete or without a purpose.[32]

The heavenly bodies, like blank tablets, possess potentialities that emerge once they come into contact with the free will of human life. By observing the planets the astrologer seeks to read their unwritten potentiality, in the sense that human existence is contained in the perfect (im)potentiality of the perfect and eternal matter of what is visible to all to see. When the astrologer presents a reading of the future for a client, what is being presented is a condition, or a series of different conditions, of potentiality frozen in a future moment. The thawing out occurs when the future presents itself to the subject as a movement, or transgression, toward the actuality of being. The astrologer's reading and calculation of the stars takes place within the domain of pure potentiality, while the movement to actuality occurs when the client is conscious of acting according to the will of the stars. The potentiality revealed by the astrologer takes place before the ontological moment. It is for this reason, we could speculate, that, as Agamben has already suggested, astrology "is a privileged site of signatures"; that is, as a potentiality which never exhausts its impotentiality and, as a signature, it activates signification and structures only once it comes into contact with signs or subjects whose meanings it influences. Otherwise, the astrological signatures conserve the (im)potentiality, a state of pure emptiness when not in contact with an entity.

Any doctrine or theory that is predicated upon the planets causing humans to act or not act necessarily subverts the potentiality and free will in humans.

If anything, the stars contain the unwritten text of life; that is to say, they are the archives of all possible moments, episodes, events that have or have not, or which potentially could or could not take place on earth. This notion is present in Al-Kindi's *De radiis*: "He who is able to understand the entire condition of the celestial harmonies, would completely understand the world of elements with all that which is contained in all places in all times. . . . In this way, he who has reached knowledge of the entire condition of celestial harmony is able to know past, present and future."[33] If we apply Al-Kindi's insight to Ptolemy's Aristotelian astrology, we can say that the stars are the potentiality of potentiality as they constitute the texts of life which astrologers read to find not the cause of things, but rather their (im)potentiality on earth as they expose what has not yet happened, that is, unwritten life.[34] In a general sense, as this study has been underlining, the spheres of potentiality are present in any archaeology of modern politics that, like Agamben's, identifies theology as its source. Delving into said spheres allows for the emergence of new archaeological artefacts on the horizon of biopower, marked by the astrological signature, which ultimately influences and gives structure to being.

As a way to illustrate one aspect of this last point, we will pay attention to the manner in which Agamben makes use of Italian Renaissance philosopher Pico della Mirandola in *The Open*, with the view of demonstrating that the "humanist discovery of man is the discovery that he lacks himself."[35] Agamben is, as already intimated, at task at delineating the sources of the internal scission within man that brought about the biopolitical separation between humanity and animality. An important component of this issue has been the difficulty throughout history to formulate a credible and tenable definition or qualification of what constitutes a human. Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio de hominis dignitate* [Oration on the Dignity of Man] (1486) is considered a humanist manifesto that elevates man's ontological status from the passive, pious, and humble Medieval Christian to the aggressive dominator of the world inspired by the imperial mind set of ancient Rome. For Agamben, however, Pico's "new man" is an incomplete and unfinished entity, and he points to a series of major proclamations uttered by Pico in the oration to substantiate this thesis:

- man is the remainder of God's work as he was created when all of the materials of Creation were depleted
- man is bereft of an archetype, of a proper place and of a rank
- given man was created without the guide of an established model, he is not in possession of a face that belongs to him
- if anything, man must invent his own face and mould it, in accordance to his own will, to a bestial or divine guise[36]

The idea that Agamben cultivates in the context of Pico and other figures is that any definition of man escapes the grasps of a model of thought in which we can recognize an image that is consistent and in consonance with any metaphysical representation of man. Moreover, the notion of a man without a face belonging to him is consistent as well with the one purporting that man is without a predetermined task, in Agamben's reading of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (1098a 7) concerning man's *ergon*. In a recent interview Agamben reiterated the same idea: "The human is the animal that has no job: it has no given biological task, no clearly prescribed function. Only a powerful being has the capacity not to be powerful. Man can do everything but does not have to do anything."[37] (We need to remember, though, that Aristotle believed that man's *ergon* or work/task was an activity of the soul in accordance with the principle of reason [*Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a 7]). However, there is one detail in Pico's text that allows us to envision Agamben's critique of any definition of the human from a completely different optic. What remains unthought in the "unfinishedness" formulated by Pico, and which Agamben and his commentators have ignored are, 1) the element of potentiality, and, 2) man's task of thinking the heavenly bodies.

As for the first point, Agamben explains the indefinite nature of man by citing God's directive to Adam in Pico's oration: "as the free and extraordinary maker of yourself you may shape yourself into whatever form you prefer. You can degenerate into the lower things, which are brutes; you can regenerate, in accordance with your soul's decision, into the higher things, which are divine."[38] Moreover, in the sentences preceding the passage from Pico quoted by Agamben, Adam is reminded that the defined nature of the other created beings is constricted within the immutable laws forged by God ("Definita ceteris natura intra praescriptas a nobis leges coercetur"), while Adam is not confined by any restriction imposed by God/Nature, and will thus have the freedom to define his own nature in accordance to his free will ("Tu, nullis angustiis coercitus, pro tuo arbitrio, in cuius manu te posui, tibi illam praefinies"[39]). Pico is clearly speaking about the gift of free will, which Aquinas defines in terms similar to potentiality:

> Nothing but a power, seemingly, is the subject of a habit. But free-choice is the subject of grace, by the help of which it chooses what is good. Therefore free-will is a power (*Ergo liberum arbitrium est potentia*). (*Summa Theologica*, *First Part, Question 83, Art. 2*)[40]

Ultimately, the element that negates, or, at least, contradicts on a theological level the ability of the stars to actually condition or influence humans is "free will." What is noteworthy for our purposes, and as already intimated, is that in another section of the *Summa*, Aquinas contextualizes free will as a potentiality in relation to the influence of the stars:

> The majority of men follow their passions, which are movements of the sensitive appetite, in which movements of the heavenly bodies can co-operate: but few are wise enough to resist these passions. Consequently astrologers are able to foretell the truth in the majority of cases, especially in a general way. But not in particular cases, for nothing prevents a man from resisting his passions by his free choice. Hence, the astrologers themselves are wont to say that "the wise man is stronger than the stars," inasmuch as, namely, he conquers his passions. (*Summa Theologica, First Part, Question 115, art. 4*)[41]

Thus, stars can have a "general" effect on humans, but they cannot be the cause of their fate as they are endowed with free will, which is the (im)potentiality of their potentiality.

In a passage that echoes Pico's praise for what distinguishes humans from other entities, Agamben writes that "Other living beings are capable only of their specific potentiality; they cannot do this or that. But human beings are the animals who are capable of their own impotentiality. The greatness of human potentiality is measured by the abyss of human impotentiality."[42] There is more than merely a parallel path shared by free will and potentiality; in fact, Agamben locates the source of freedom in the "abyss of potentiality": "To be free is not simply to have the power to do this or that thing, nor is it simply to have the power to refuse to do this or that thing. To be free is, in the sense we have seen, to be capable of one's own impotentiality, to be in relation to one's own privation." The interconnectedness of potentiality and free will is reinforced by Agamben when he writes that "This is why freedom is freedom for both good and evil."[43]

This (un)willingness to act is figured by Pico as man's being ensconced in the "solitary darkness" of God ("unus cum Deo spiritus factus, in solitaria Patris caligine"[44]). That is to say, man's being operates within shadows and he is able to achieve whatever task with the guidance of his potentiality. As Pico describes the situation, man is afforded the limitless potentiality to do or not to do. Even if man does actualize a potentiality, the same potentiality conserves its (im)potentiality, the limitless option of not actualizing. Man's potentiality assumes the guise of "facelessness" (which is a figure for the impotentiality that is conserved) as he is suspended between humanity, animality, and divinity, given he possesses the potentiality to be or not be anyone of these possibilities.

In any event, and this brings us to the second point found in Pico's oration, the task which God reserved for man was to be the "contemplator of the universe" ("contemplator universi") who would admire its greatness ("magnitudinem admiraretur"[45]). Pico's definition of man's task is consistent with what we witness in *Corpus Hermeticum III* ("A Sacred discourse of Hermes") where we read about the emergence of the heavens: "The heavens appeared in seven circles, the gods became visible in the shapes of the stars and all their constellations, and the arrangement [this lighter substance],

corresponded to the gods contained in it."[46] The gods then proceeded to create humans whose hierarchy of tasks include as the highest priority that of contemplating heaven and "the course of the heavenly gods" along with that of knowing "divine power."[47] A new human consciousness emerged on the horizon following the discovery that the celestial bodies are the gods who revealed themselves, and that man's (im)potentiality is to think the heavenly bodies, which in turn imitate God's potentiality.[48] It is at this point that we can begin to envision the epistemic threads linking together potentiality, astrology, ontology, bare life, and biopolitics.

A tension we find in astrological thinking is the one between the existential influence of the heavenly bodies on humans and the attempts by humans to deactivate the astral power. The history of astrology involves concerns about both the nature of the devastating potentiality of the stars as well as how to render inoperative the same potentiality. In the same book I of the *Corpus Hermeticum* from which Agamben cites in *Language and Death* in order to substantiate the claim that "silence is simply the negative foundation of logos,"[49] there is a previously cited description of a regressive movement on the part of the human being in an attempt to suspend the signatures of potentiality imprinted by the planets:

> Thence the human being rushes up through the cosmic framework, at the first zone surrendering the energy of increase and decrease; at the second evil machination, a device now inactive; at the third the illusion of longing, now inactive; at the fourth the ruler's arrogance, now freed of excess; at the fifth unholy presumption and daring recklessness; at the sixth the evil impulses that come from wealth, now inactive; and at the seventh zone the deceit that lies in ambush. And then, stripped of the effects of the cosmic framework, the human . . . has his own proper power, and along with the blessed he hymns the father.[50]

The planets are evil because they have the potential to impose a fate that would be contrary to what free will seeks. This Gnostic perspective echoes the terror of the planets' imposition of fate that humans experienced in the early modern period about which Warburg wrote, as we will see. Nature itself contains an element that could have a maleficent effect, as we read in the *Chaldean Oracles*: "do not look at nature; its name is marked by destiny."[51] There exist two semiotic polarities: the potentiality of the heavens and the potentiality of humans, who must come to terms with this schizophrenic split in nature. The potentiality of being in the world conflicted with the potentiality of sidereal influence. The challenge was that of inventing a space between these two polarities that would give rise to a new configuration of potentialities; the human subject is suspended between his freewill and celestial influences. Astrology sheds light on this undifferentiated space of this zone of ontological suspension.

Faracovi's research deals with this issue, the tension implicit in man's desire to neutralize the stars' ability to impose fate on the sublunary world. She reminds us of rabbi Sherira (906–1006) and of his son Hayy ben Sherira (939–1038), according to whom man, through his wisdom and knowledge, is able to do things that are independent of the stars' influence. Moreover, man is able to alter what the celestial bodies had originally determined. What we have here is a mode of thinking that is consistent with gnostic and hermetic teachings, namely, the human soul is not subject to the destiny the stars impose. Faracovi, in fact, quotes from a letter by Maimonides—where we read that "things depend on the Lord of the world, may He be blessed, who created in man the faculty to modify that which his horoscope had determined"—to underline the fact that astrology is not inconsistent with faith. Astrology unveils what destiny has determined, but man has been given this "faculty" (which is ultimately free will and potentiality), allowing him thus to change, at least in part, the course of fate.[52] Maimonides's premise for limiting the powers of astrological influence is the fact that humans are endowed with potentiality, the capacity to "not do" in accordance to their own will: "if in fact man did not have the faculty to do nothing according to his own will, and if there were something else to forcefully lead him to be in one manner rather than in another, what would be the use of teaching or of study?"[53]

To be sure, a theme that was to develop was that far from being the source of existential paralysis, astrology—precisely because it pivots on the mathematical and topological data concerning the heavens, and how this data is related to the question of influence (whose Prime Mover is God)—allows man to free himself from the destiny that affects matter. In the *Principium sapientiae*,[54] Abraham Ibn Ezra maintained that while the celestial bodies obey the will of God, the astrologers are in a position to create a space of human potentiality by way of neutralizing, through their knowledge of the movement of the stars, the negative aspects of planetary influence. Astrology thus plays a role in inventing an existential territory where potentiality as a human trait is maximized. In the prescientific world, astrology was an instrument that allowed humans to achieve a sense, however limited, of existential autonomy, that was untied to the biopower of the stars. According to the anti-astrological tradition at least, astrology was perceived as a form of enslavement of reason. Even those who had a profound understanding of astrology, as in the case of Warburg, perceived it as a malignant force that dictated fate to human subjects, and which needed to be overcome.

The stars are seen as either the source of existential enslavement or as a means to discover and experience potentiality. The *Picatrix* speaks of the highest form of being in the world as that of the philosopher who is connected to and who knows his dominant planet. All of this allows the philosopher to understand the secrets of the world. More specifically, the philoso-

pher who knows the influential powers of each planet is able to fathom the network of connections throughout the universe. In other terms, the way to neutralize the biopowers of the constellations is to remove the idea of the totalizing effect of the stars' influence, which appeared to the prescientific eyes in the guise of a *monstrum*.

Dante, for example, is indeed sensitive to the delicate cosmic balance between the heavens' potential to influence human potentiality, and the role played by free will as the source of (im)potentiality in the structuring of a form-of-life. In an equilibrated consonance with Thomistic thought, Dante acknowledges that while stars have an effect on man, there still exists the potential to sin or not sin, to do or not do, and so on. There are two examples in the *Purgatorio* (among other ones in *The Divine Comedy*) that deal with this matter:

> Y[*ou*] who are living refer every cause upward to the heavens only, as though they moved all things with them of necessity. If this were so, free will would be destroyed in you, and there would be no justice in having joy for good, and grief for evil. The heavens initiate your movements, I do not say all of them; but, supposing that I said it, light for good and for evil is given to you, and free will, which though it endure fatigue in the first battles with the heavens, afterwards, if it be well nurtured, overcomes everything."(*Purgatory* XVI, vv. 67–78)[55]

> Every substantial form that is distinct from matter, or that is united with it, has a specific virtue collected in itself which is not perceived unless in operation, nor does it show itself save by its effect, as by green leaves the life in a plant. Therefore, man does not know whence the intelligence of the first cognition comes, nor whence the affection for the first objects of desire, which exist in you even as zeal in the bee for making honey; and this first will admits not desert of praise or blame. Now in order that to this every other may be gathered, the virtue that counsels is innate in you, and ought to hold the threshold of assent. This is the principle wherefrom the reckoning of desert in you is derived, according as it gathers in and winnows good and evil loves. (*Purgatorio* XVII, 49–66)

The innate "power that counsels" is, according to Dante's commentators, the human potential for reason, which allows man to decide on whether to sin or not. Human life conserves its impotentiality in every action it undertakes, precisely because every actualization does not eliminate the potentiality not to. For Dante, however, everything is in relation to a transcendent signified, namely God. The perfect text of all the constellations appears as "bound in a volume" (*Paradiso* 33, v. 86), from which there emerges an anagogic vision of the Holy Trinity. This text, however, remains unwritten until the advent of the end of history. The theologian, much like the astrologer, is presented with reading this unwritten text for the first time after each reading, precisely

because Christianity purports the unrepeatability of each moment of being. In doing so it broke the chains of the pagan "eternal return of the same," which instead became a metaphor for Hell.

THE USE OF THE HEAVENS

The heavens were thus perceived to play a decisive role in lived existence; what remained a matter of debate was the extent of any influence, and whether or not there were ways beyond astrology to formulate more effective prognoses. Gerolamo Cardano (1501–1576) is an example of how one went about articulating conjectures on what had not yet occurred, on the basis of reading the text of the stars.[56] The function of the heavens was to make God's potentialities visible to humans in the guise of possibilities that could be actualized. In the *Aphorismorum astronomicorum segmenta septem* Cardano writes that "The heavens are the instrument of God the Highest with which He determines, moves and governs all that which rests below Him."[57] What we need to keep in mind is that while we can speak about how ancient theological practices eventually gave way to a secular theology without needing to adhere to the dogma and doctrines preached by Christian theology, it is ethically possible to do the same for astrology. That is, to investigate how it historically exercised power on humans, an astro-biopower that is conserved in the guise of engrams in the iconological depictions and textual accounts of astrology. The astrologically themed and theriomorphic images from the Jewish Bible that Agamben makes use of in *The Open* contain in them an intellectual charge that opens a new dimension on the question of bare life, the human/animal, and the end of history. Latent in the astrological tradition (as in the case, for example, of Giordano Bruno and Giovan Battista Della Porta) is the uninterrupted non-hierarchical ontological continuum that connects humans to animals. This model reflects Agamben's theorization of the coming deactivation of the scission between human and animal.

As late as the Renaissance, astrology was perceived to be the nucleus of medical doctrine and practice, as in the case of Ficino and Parcelsus. Moreover, there were thinkers such as Pietro Pomponazzi, who in his *De naturalium effectum causis sive de Incantationibus* (Basel 1567) purported that astrology was the causal explanation for all events that occurred in the universe, in the same way, for example, as the effects of prayers. As has been underlined throughout this study, there was up until the advent of modern science, notwithstanding the critiques of figures such as Pico della Mirandola, a generally accepted belief that the stars condition our states of being, and, for that matter, being itself. What is truly singular is that we have a version of ontology that is shaped by the belief in the powers of the heavenly bodies. As well known as this phenomenon is, it appears to have escaped the general

focus of contemporary theory making. For the moment let us examine in more detail the reason why we can speak of astrology as also being a science of human existence. It is in Cardano's *Aphorismorum astronomicorum segmenta septem* that we see the manner in which astrology is concerned with transcribing, documenting, and archiving the microphysical details of the full gamut of human experience. We see in Cardano's work that every possible human emotion, state of mind, condition, and so on is accounted for. But they are presented as "stock" experiences, in the same way that a *commedia dell'arte* mask represents a stock character. In Cardano they are articulated as an encyclopedia of human existence, with the actual experiences presented as structured examples. It is this tension between the example of being and the "coming" being the astrologers write about that sets the stage for an astrological account of ontology. Moreover, we need to continuously keep in mind that, as Benjamin purported, the imitation of the shared examples of lived experience is what attributes to astrology the property of experience.

In the first *Segmentum* of the book Cardano begins his justification of astrology's *raison d'être* by reminding the reader that "Experience does not derive from our free will, judgement is difficult" one must "carefully examine writings, discover the natural causes of phenomena that we experience, possess the exact position of the stars, their true movements."[58] Contrary to Ptolemy and Aquinas, we are informed here that our lived experience is not the expression of our free will, but rather the result of our ability to understand the various aspects of the heavenly bodies. The conclusion one would be tempted to make is that the truth here resides in the stars. Yet, that is not so much what is at issue; the point is that one's capacity to understand the heavens in their combined irrational and ratio-logical interpretations allow one to find the truth on Earth. A truth, in other words, that is the result of anticipating the general contours of lived experience and then living it. In a more general sense, life is ultimately the nucleus of any astrological hermeneutics, and to this end Cardano indicates that there are three principles that govern astrology: "calculation, observation, experience."[59] The elements required to practice these three principles are the planets, the degrees of the heavens, the fixed stars, and the places. Cardano fuses logico-mathematical calculation and celestial observation with the core existential element of experience. Experience here is to be understood not only as that of an astrologer as he charts the future of various clients, but, foremostly, as the being of the sublunary subjects of the celestial bodies in an unwritten historical time. Even if astrological experience involves sharing the past experiences of others, the linear projection of temporality ensures the unrepeatability of aspects of life, which is at the basis of the "unwrittenness" of a text that is always been read for the first time.

This idea, and one without doubt influenced by the straight linearity of Christian chronology, that the events of lived experience are unique and

unrepeatable is mirrored in the manner in which Cardano describes planetary movement: "Unlike the Sun, no planet, as far as our senses are concerned, will ever return to its original position, nor to, after great periods of time, to the preceding one."[60] The unrepeatable actions of everyday life are announced by the celestial bodies that are never in the same position when it concerns the ability of our senses to perceive them. This perspective is of significance precisely because the office of the astrologer rests on a "meticulous scientific understanding of the movements and of natural philosophy."[61] The notion that is repeated throughout Cardano's book is the centrality of human experience. For example, the central characteristic of any astrological reading of the stars is human experience,[62] but the fact remains that human life is thoroughly conditioned by the movement of the planets, precisely because they belong to the same ontological network as the stars.[63] The influence is manifested particularly by the force of the signatures that Agamben describes, and which provide an ontological content for the subject: "The principle of that which occurs through cause resides in the soul of the new born, which forces him to sustain that cause, but the soul is moved by the heavens in accordance to the movement of the Moon and it thus does not consist in those things that derive from nature."[64] The signature of human life is impressed internally on the subject, thus filling what would otherwise be an existential void. It is at this point that we can envision a potential conflict with the Christian idea espoused by Thomas Aquinas, which purports that it is God and only God who fills humans with being. And indeed this reflects the struggle between theology and astrology as it concerns the power over human existence. Although Cardano acknowledges that the heavens are the administrators of terrestrial life, he continually refers to what we could term their "biopowers," without the need to ever incessantly repeat the name of God: "The events which are decreed as inevitable at birth, death for example, are produced by the significator planets."[65] Death, or the fossilization of (im)potentiality, remains suspended in human life during its existence through the instrument of a planet's signature.

The tendency to downplay the Christian framework of astrology is not unique. For example, Saxl writes about a fourteenth-century manuscript held at the British Library in London (ms. Sloane 282, fol. 18r), with an image illustrating the influence of the elements and of the stars on humans. Saxl underlines the point that we have here the representation of a pagan astrological cosmology that is no longer subordinated to Christian theology.[66] The two most important castigators of astrology, namely theology and modern science, have essentially caused astrology to be radically dislocated, much more so than allowing it to irretrievably disappear in oblivion. The existential signatures of astrology are misplaced in, for example, the aforementioned theriomorphic images of the Jewish Bible, in the sense that they serve a purpose in the guise of an unexpected, or, for that matter, uninvited guest.

The astrological signatures point to a fossilized idea of a human/animal union in a celestial context.

In the remainder of the *Aphorismorum astronomicorum segmenta septem* Cardano presents the celestial signs, conditions, and movements that have a concrete bearing on lived experience. For example, in the second *Segmentum* Cardano deals with the astronomical conditions of the heavenly bodies that pertain to those who are marked with a violent death, while in the other *Segmenta* he speaks about illness, joy, fortune, misfortune and so on. Cardano's objective is to document every known human existential situation or condition, and in the eyes of the modern reader his work presents itself as a deformation of a work such as Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Or, from a different optic, *Being and Time* is an *Aphorismorum astronomicorum* brought completely down to earth, totally bereft of the metaphysics expressed though astrological calculation and interpretation. And notwithstanding Cardano's acknowledgement of the good graces of God, what the two works do instead share is the anxiety of being-in-the-world, and this common feature is a basic element of bare life. As we will see, there emerges an expression of this overlapping of astrology and ontology in Agamben's second book.

SATURN AND BARE LIFE

There is a passage in Propertius' *Elegies* where the poet synthesizes in a handful of words how the classical world experienced the psychosomatic charge of the planetary god Saturn: "and heavy Saturn a weight on every head" (Propertius, *Elegiarum* IV, 1, 86). Saturn was understood as an oppressive force that had profound implications for and effects on human life. In the ancient astronomical sytemic Saturn was the last planet, after which there was nothing, only a profound void. Peuckert reminds us that Saturn was called the "guardian of the threshold," that is, "of the threshold between space and non-space, being and non-being."[67] As we will see, Agamben's *Stanzas* presents us with the possibility of envisioning a conjunction between Saturnine influence and ontology. In fact, it is in *Stanzas* that the reader is able to detect an astrological substratum to discussions that are in many ways distant preludes to the multifaceted cultivation of the bare life theory. Specifically, in the first chapter of *Stanzas* Agamben proposes an uncanny parallel between the patristic doctrine on the *filiae acediae* (the daughters of sloth) and Heidegger's ontological analytic concerning the banality of everyday life. What is significant for our present inquiry is that the entire discussion is premised on celestial cartography, namely, the position of the sun at noon. Most importantly, though, is the fact that the sun, once it reaches its diurnal

apex, imprints, under Saturn's power, a signature on human souls that activates a profound existential malaise.

At the very moment the sun "reached its highest point," Agamben narrates on behalf of his patristic interlocutors, thus projecting toward Earth the signature of the noonday demon: "During the whole of the Middle Ages, a scourge worse than the plague that infested the castles, villas, and palaces of the cities of the world fell on the dwellings of spiritual life, penetrated the cells and cloisters of monasteries, the Thebaid of the hermits, the convents of the recluses."[68] The Church Fathers located the biblical authority concerning the nature and significance of the noonday demon in *Psalms* 90:5–6: "His truth shall compass thee with a shield: thou shalt not be afraid of the terror of the night, of the arrow that flieth in the day, of the business that walketh about in the dark: of invasion, or of the noonday devil [*daemon meridianus*]" (*Psalms* 90:5–6, Douay-Rheims Bible). The signature, which the noonday star inscribes on the soul of the faithful, is *acedia* (sloth) and its offspring (*filiae acediae*). In *The Praktikos* Evagrius of Pontus tells us that the *daemon meridianus* "makes it appear that the sun moves slowly or not at all, and that the day seems to be fifty hours long. Then he compels the monk to look constantly towards windows, to jump out of the cell, to watch the sun how far it is from the ninth hour [3:00], to look this way and that."[69] The temporary immobility of the sun appears in this case as an emptying out and effacing of the eternal immobility of the entire universe at the end of time and following resurrection day: the immobile planets at the end of time imitate the eternal rest or *shabat* of God in the plenitude of Glory. All of this occurs in an anagogical domain of pure spirituality where the souls rest in eternal unmarkedness, and where signatures are bereft of any relevance or pertinence. However, in the domain of terrestrial time the noonday sun's apparent immobility is the signifying correlative of the soul bearing the astral mark of *acedia*. In another work, *On the Eight Thoughts*, Evagrius offers a profile of the malady provoked by the noonday sun: "The monk afflicted with acedia is lazy in prayer and will not even say the words of a prayer. As a sick person cannot carry about a heavy burden, so the person afflicted by acedia will not perform a work of God with diligence. The former has lost the strength of his body and the latter has dissipated the exertions of his soul."[70]

Agamben observes that Heidegger appropriates the categories employed in the analysis of everyday life almost directly from the patristic writings dealing with the *filiae acediae*. According to the paleo-Christian tradition, *acedia* is one of the capital sins, but in fusing *tristitia* (sorrow) with *acedia*, St. Gregory gave rise to the tradition of the seven deadly sins. For St. Gregory *acedia* has six *filiae*: *malitia, rancor, pussillanimitas, desperatio, torpor circa praecepta* and *evagatio mentis* (malice, rancor, pusillanimity, desperation, torpor with regard to rules and precepts, and wandering of mind). Agamben establishes a connection between Heidegger's categories of every-

day being and the patristic categories that can be subsumed under the category pertaining to the wandering of the mind toward unlawful things. In fact, *evagatio mentis* corresponds to the distraction from the potentialities of Dasein, while *verbositas* is a correlative of the idle chatter that hides what it should instead be disclosing. *Curiositas* is the same as the curiosity that is only interested in moving from novelty to novelty, and is unable to focus on what requires sustained attention, which leads to consistent submission to distraction, that is, *instabilitas*.[71] In following the dispersion of theological signs in Heidegger`s ontics, Agamben brings to light a patristic substratum which, in turn, pivots on the *conditio* that the astrological signatures (particularly the weight of Saturn's debilitation of the human psyche) emanating from the sun inflict on the soul at noon time. While in Heidegger`s writings being is supposedly protected by a firewall that completely disconnects it from any metaphysical transcendence, a regressive archaeology untombs the spectres of the purportedly dead transcendence. In the present case, the repressed phantasms are represented by the domains of theology and astrology. In other words, the pouring of being into humans is an effort that God shares with stars and constellations.

Agamben proposes a similar line of reasoning, namely, the role played by the planets in activating whatever aspect of bare life. In *Stanzas* he frames his discussion on melancholy, in both its Medieval, Renaissance, and modern manifestations under the astrological dialectic of Saturn. Ultimately, the planets constitute the structuring dispositor of lived existence and the astrologer is the hermeneut entrusted with reading the untimely signs that, in this case, Saturn activates. Under his governership in a specific dispositorial arrangement, Saturn, Ptolemy informs us,

> dominates Mercury and the moon, if he has a dignified position with reference to the universe and the angles, he makes his subjects lovers of the body, strong minded, deep thinkers, austere, of a single purpose, laborious, dictatorial, ready to punish . . . but if his position is the opposite and without dignity, he makes them sordid, petty, mean-spirited . . . solitary, tearful . . . gloomy, taking no care of the body.[72]

In his commentary to this passage F. E. Robbins speculates that the very long list of characters and qualities pertinent to the planets, which Ptolemy relates in his work (and of which Cumont made continuous use in *L'Égypte des Astrologues*, 1937, for purposes of historical reconstruction), are highly indicative of what life might have been like in Roman Egypt.[73] In a more general sense, Barton claims that as far as Classical Antiquity is concerned, "more attention is paid to the lower ranks of society in astrological treatises than in the literary sources, and these writings offer a different window on their lives from that available from official sources, such as administrative records."[74] Barton also suggests that the readings of the celestial texts offered

by the astrologers were perceived by their contemporaries as being archives of what appeared to be possible, or, as pure potentialities that could or could not be actualized. Astrological experience was not perceived as a fringe element, as is the case today, but as a vital axis of human life, which served to unceasingly orient existence. Even if we consider the fact that the ancients were torn over whether or not the stars caused things to happen or were instead limited to being an advance notice of what was to occur, the point remains that the human subjects on Earth took direction for the unfolding of their daily existence from the stellar constellations above. Agamben echoes the tradition of astrological exegesis when he reminds us that Saturn's signature caused the subject afflicted by melancholy to collapse into an interior world characterized by contemplative knowledge.[75] We are not only dealing with Saturn's profound influence on the condition of melancholy; the question at hand also pertains to the matter of one's closure to the world. If Saturn, through melancholy, imprints an internal opening to contemplative practices, the planetary deity at the same time brings about the hiding of one's being from the world. Melancholy is a pure state of the (im)potentiality of potentiality.

In *The Book of Life* Ficino provides an astrological explanation of the relationship between the stellar constellations and our daily existence. This work is also a testament to the fact that in the Italian tradition the question of biopower contains as witnesses not only figures such as Machiavelli and Guicciardini, but also names such as Ficino, Bruno, Della Porta, and others, who paid careful attention to relationships and connections between the astral entities and the sublunary subjects. Saturn inspires or announces a scission from the world, and the qualities it signifies are relevant to "the man who is separated from others, either divinely or brutishly, blessed or pressed by extreme misery."[76] Immediately after this Ficino proceeds to indicate that, on the other hand, Mars, the Moon, and Venus "share the feelings and acts of man equally with the other animals." Even if Ficino accepted the ontological hierarchy based on the separations that Pico elaborated in the *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, with intuitions such as this one by Ficino it begins to become evident why it could be argued that the biblical iconology in *The Open* signifies the overcoming of the scission between man and animal: in the sense that the theriomorphic figures (much like celestial entities of the astrological tradition) subsume in their characteriological repertoire traits of both humans and animals.

Ficino describes the "saturnine" figure as someone whose life is engulfed by the quest for knowledge. The signature that Saturn imprints on its subjects is one that activates desire for study "that will take them until the end of time, especially those who are oblivious of daily life."[77] As much as Saturn is the planetary deity that favors profound contemplative introspection, it is also, with Mars and the Moon, the signature bearer for non-knowing. Ficino writes

that "The healthy spirit does not have much in it of Saturn, Mars or the Moon, or it would be stupid (Saturn), furious (Mars), and obtuse (Moon)."[78] At the conclusion of *The Open* we will see the crucial role that non-knowing recites at the end of history. Specifically, Agamben speaks about articulating a "zone of non-knowledge," which means to "leave something outside of being, to render it unsaveable."[79] Moreover, as far as the eternal Sabbath following the end of time (and figured in a number of Agamben's writings such as *The Open*, *The Coming Community*, *The Kingdom and the Glory*) is concerned, we find Ficino suggesting care "not to carve or express the figure of Saturn on the Sabbath day."[80] Saturn is alien to God's *Shabat* because of its inability to generate new life, as it privileges pure (im)potentiality at the expense of any actualization. On the Sabbath, Ficino writes, "God, the creator of the world, is said to have rested from work, which he had begun on the ideal day, the day of the Sun. As much as the Sun is fitted for generation, Saturn is to that extent inept."[81] While Saturn's ability to generate might be in question here, what is not is its role in the domain of arts and letters. For example, as far as music is concerned, in the domain of music Saturn holds the seventh step, which "is for more secret and simpler intelligences, almost separated now from movement, joined to divine things, and devoted to Saturn."[82]

The unsettling power of saturnine melancholy is such that it brings about a neuro-physiological clash between the willingness to move beyond the space of one's closure to the world and the object of the melancholic's desire, be it erotic or otherwise. The existential immobility gives rise to a stasis of intellection, with the melancholic's inability to conceptualize the incorporeal, and the absence of the will to constitute it as an "object of embrace."[83] The melancholic's paralysis of the will to move finds it correlative in the mind's inability to create incorporeal phantasms.

Hovering over the semantic constellation of "paralysis," "inability," and a misguided "contemplation," terms Agamben uses to describe saturnine melancholy, is the epistemological terrain of potentiality. Saturnine melancholy, under the aegis of a planet that imprints pathological signatures on its terrified subjects, provokes a radical emptying of the imagination to the point that the imaginative faculty is transformed into a blank slate. In a very uncanny manner, melancholy as here described by Agamben provokes a regressive movement, from the actuality of being able to "create incorporeal phantasms," to the state of pure potentiality in the guise of epistemological and psychological immobility. We thus have a link between pathology and potentiality, a connection that recalls the creative love sickness, *aegritudo amoris*, of Medieval literature and the heroic furor that tormented and delighted the Renaissance poets. With potentiality we are dealing with a form of being in the world that negates itself, and in this negation discovers its vocation to communicate by not communicating: "Potentiality, which turns back on it-

self, is an absolute writing that no one writes: a potential to be written, which is written by its own potential not to be written, a *tabula rasa* that suffers its own receptivity and can therefore not write itself."[84] Saturn thus inflicts the (im)potentiality of (im)potentiality as a condition on the helpless subject and sets the stage for mental operations that have been influenced by celestial bodies.

As an example of this last notion, we return to Benjamin's discussion on saturnine melancholy in the *Trauerspiel* study, where we read that "The melancholic posed the question of how it might be possible to discover for oneself the powers of Saturn and yet escape madness."[85] A possible commentary on the possibility of using Saturn's potentialities without losing oneself in the labyrinthine world of mental pathology is a lecture given by the Junghian James Hillman and related by Thomas Moore in the context of a discussion dealing with Saturnine depression. Hillman informed his audience, Moore writes,

> that depression is an answer to a widespread manic activism and is a dying to the wild world of literalism. Feeling low and heavy we are forced to move inward, turning to fantasy rather than the literal action of the ego. And that turn inward is necessary for the soul, for it creates psychic space, a container for deeper reflection where soul increases and the surface of events becomes less important. . . . Saturn pushes us to the edge where our imagery becomes primordial, refined, and removed from our ususal patterns of reflection, our accustomed imagery, and personal reference.[86]

Capturing and knowing the genius of Saturn (which pushes "us to the edge" of ourselves) without being paralyzed by its debilitating influence involves discovering the subtle balance, which is the midway point between the polarities of rationality and irrationality. The balance point exists somewhere in the barrier separating the human subject from itself. In fact, this barrier is similar to the one that keeps the necessary distance between one's self and one's own Genius, which, as Agamben reminds us, can never be the same thing. Thus, it is in this existential interval that one finds protection, however provisionally, from a complete identification with Saturn, which is synonymous with being overcome by its destructive force. This existential interval is the suspension of influence and the conservation of (im)potentiality, which is not lost in any thinking that occurs there. By pushing us to the edge of ourselves, the genius of Saturn illuminates the space where the existential interval keeps us from our own madness, which was believed to be where one identified with the stars and was dominated by "unreason," where there was no separation. Overcoming the undifferentiated identification with the planets became possible with the disactivation of their influence through science. In the same moment that this freedom was found under the aegis of a thinker such as Bruno, a new ontological union connecting human, animal,

and divine emerged, however obscurely, on the horizon. A version of this, incorporating elements such as the search for resemblances and the sharing of past experiences, was to become Benjamin's rational astrology "from which the doctrine of magical 'influences,' of 'radiant energies,' and so on has been excluded."[87]

An archaeology of the signature of astrology entails, among other elements, describing the mechanisms of visualizing the sidereal bodies, as they influence or interact with humans. As it concerns *acedia* and saturnine influence, we are naturally dealing with the effects of the *daemon meridianus* (whose arrival is figured by the apex reached by the Sun) in "conjunction" with the paralyzing condition of melancholy transmitted by the planet Saturn. The melancholic, as Evagrius of Pontus indicated, has his observational gaze fixed on the sun, the same way that an astrologer studies the motions of the planets. Both the melancholic and the astrologer are gazing at the potentiality of celestial bodies. The fact is that, in the very first instance, the work of the astrologer is optical in nature, that is, in directly observing the configurations of the celestial bodies, and recording the pertinent data; the writing of the text of someone's coming life is the result of watching and mapping the patterns of the stars. The melancholic monk, instead, is tormented by the fact that the sun does not appear to be moving, and the day seems to be "fifty hours long." In other terms, the noonday demon causes the sun to be seen as a body frozen in time, as a demonic dialectical image. Yet, each day is for the melancholic monk a new and different day, and so when the noonday sun appears it is always for the first time. For the medieval monk, melancholy is experienced within the economy of linear lived existence, which in turn is part of sacred history that pivots on the unfolding of God's plan. In this history all moments are unrepeatable linear elements that point to a future culmination that will dissolve all history, without the possibility of the eternal recurrence of the same. Thus, the melancholic is always reading with a fixated stare the blank text of the sun for the first time, in the same way that the astrologer is always reading the celestial script for the first time.

However, precisely because they are always observing the sun and the planets for the first time, each single observation of the heavens entails the experience of what Paul Virilio calls "a lacerating vision of our figurative conceptions."[88] This notion coincides, in certain respects, with the purely eidetic file of Benjamin's dialectical image, where what is seen is arrested in time, and ultimately entails the revisioning of the moment preceding its emergence. As we have already intimated, there exists a conceptual-genetic link between the dialectical image and the astrologer's observation of the precise moment a sidereal event occurs. In observing the specific characteristics of the planetary motions, the astrologer is envisioning the source of the purported biopolitical influence (just as the melancholic monk's solar gaze is an observation of what caused his medical and existential malady). The

manner in which one understands the stars' relation to events as they occur is central to establishing how they are perceived to be able to exert influence. Pertinent to this issue is Virilio's idea that a momentary lapse of consciousness, a "picnoleptic interruption," is the "existential prerequisite for time, and for the identity of time as lived by individuals."[89] To be sure, for our purposes the matter at hand is the relationship between the flow of time or motion and the interruptions that suspend the flow. Virilio claims that the picnoleptic suspensions are a dimension of temporality "that no longer concerns itself with the indispensable accounting of the effects of observation on the observed process,"[90] thus revitalizing the experience of space and time. The melancholic's optical fixation with the noonday sun, the dialectical image and the astrologer's observations of arrested celestial phenomena (such as the configuration of the stars at the exact moment of an individual's birth) are picnoleptic suspensions, an arresting of consciousness only to enhance it. Along similar lines, Virilio argues that the picnoleptic interruption activates a "state of rapid wakefulness" that is in a relation of inverse proportion with the sleep, which gives rise to dream images. All of this, Virilio suggests, "confirms our sense that acceleration and deceleration, or the movement of movement, are the only true dimensions of space, of speed space, of dromospheric space"[91] ("dromosphere" refers to the rapid acceleration of reality brought about by technology).

The melancholic monk is, instead, fixed on the seeming immobility of the sun, and for the astrologer observing the planets orbital speed is hidden to consciousness. In any event, the speed of the celestial bodies emerge in the pure unconsciousness (thus, unobservabilty) of picnoleptic suspension, which is where the *daemon meridianus* arises, where the influence of the signature of Saturn and other planetary bodies flashes on humans. In the end, is not the dimension of speed brought about by technology an instrumental imitation of the speed that characterizes the superhuman (thus divine) velocity of sidereal motion? The intensity of what is being observed and experienced is quantified by alterations of speed, a change that causes a modification of representation and of light. The consequence, Virilio continues, is that "instead of a solar or otherwise illuminated day, we have a subliminary and paraoptic day that has no relationship whatsoever to direct observation, and in which representations and configurations arise less from the separation of points, lines, and planes of visual experience, or image resolution, than from the interruption of projection sequences."[92] The interruption, as a picnoleptic element, of the flow or projection of images parading before our eyes becomes the source of our understanding of what is being represented. Moreover, what occurs in this situation is that "the action is no longer separated from its representation."[93] That is, the picnoleptic interval is not only a moment in the lapse in consciousness, but the content of the same moment constitutes our perception of what occurred before and after it. In other

words, what determines understanding is an unconscious content, an unobservability that shapes conscious perception. The unconscious speed of the revolutions of the Sun in the Ptolemaic system constitutes moments of picnolepsis that cultivate the (im)potentiality of *acedia* in which the melancholic's psyche is lost. As far as the significance of the astrologer's text is concerned, this same phenomenon implies that the rapid and fleeting observation of the arrested stellar configuration is actually the optical capture of a picnoleptic moment, which can only be experienced unconsciously as the potential form and substance of the text that represents life, which is always being read for the first time.

NOTES

1. Julius Schiller, *Coelum Stellatum Christianum* (Augustae Vindelicorum: Praelo Andreae Apergeri, 1627).
2. Vincenzo Maria Coronelli, *Epitome Cosmografica* (Cologne [Venice]: Andrea Poletti, 1693), 43.
3. Robbins in Ptolemy*, Tetrabiblos*, 441; Tester*, A History of Astrology,* 86.
4. Studies that offer a wealth of information on this matter include Benson Bobbrick, *The Fated Sky: Astrology in History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), and Nicholas Campion, *History of Western Astrology*, *Volume II, The Medieval and Modern Worlds* (London and New York: Continuum Books, 2009). Moreover, Tester (*A History of Astrology*) and Barton (*Ancient Astrology*, 160–85), provide detailed surveys on how astrology was understood as having a causative effect in everyday life in antiquity as it concerned occupations, sexual practices, health care, and other areas.
5. Giorgio Agamben, "What is a Dispositif?" http://www.egs.edu/faculty/giorgio-agamben/articles/what-is-a-dispositif/part-1/. Last consulted on May 31, 2015.
6. Nicholas de Vore, *Encyclopedia of Astrology* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1976), 126.
7. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, IV, 4, 383–85.
8. Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?,* 14.
9. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 110–24.
10. Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?,* 14.
11. Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?*, 14.
12. See, for example, Peter Schmidt, *Aby M. Warburg und die Ikonologie* (Wiesenbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993); Matthew Rampley, "From Symbol to Allegory: Aby Warburg's Theory of Art," *Art Bulletin* 79.1 (1997), 41–55, and *The Remembrance of Things Past: On Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin* (Wiesenbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000).
13. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 66.
14. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 66.
15. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 66.
16. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 66.
17. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, 66.
18. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage/Random House, 1990), 140.
19. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2007), 1.
20. Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, 876.
21. On this see Faracovi, *Scritto negli astri,* 192.
22. Faracovi, *Scritto negli astri,* 120.
23. Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, 782.

24. Alexander of Aphrodisia, *Traité du destin,* ed. P. Thillet (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984), vi, 9, 12; vi, 10, 10, 7; ix, 17, 9.
25. See Tim Hegedus, "Necessity and Free Will in the Thought of Bardaisan of Edessa," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, V. 59 (2), 12/2003, 333–44; Ute Possekel, "Bardaisan of Edessa: Philosopher or Theologian?" *Zeitschrift Für Antikes Christentum,* V. 10 (3), 01/2007, 42–461.
26. Faracovi, *Scritto negli astri,* 126.
27. Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, 47–8.
28. Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, 48.
29. Aristotle, *The Basic Works*, 48.
30. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I, 3, 23–27.
31. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton G. Pegis et al. (New York: Hanover House, 1955–1957); see, for example, Book Two, Chapter 33, Articles 2, 3, and Chapter 56, Article 8.
32. Saint Thomas Aquinas*, The Summa Theologica: Volume II*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, rev. Daniel J. Sullivan (Chicago-London-New York: William Benton/ Encylopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), 1019.
33. Al-Kindi, *De radiis*. M.Th. d'Alverny and F. Hudry in *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littérarire du Moyen Âge*, XLI, 1974, 233.
34. Jaakko Hintikka has argued in favor of a notion that is far from being settled, namely, that Aristotle accepted the Principle of Plenitude, according to which "no unqualified possibility remains unactualized through an infinity of time" [Jaakko Hintikka, *Time and Necessity: Studies in Aristotle's Theory of Modality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 96]. If this were the case, then any potentiality must be actualized at some moment in history, and so the unwritten text of life contains potentialities that will necessarily produce actions or meanings. A consequence of this line of thinking is that there would be no (im)potentialities that would not be actualized in history.
35. Agamben, *The Open*, 30.
36. Agamben, *The Open*, 29.
37. "Thought is the courage of hopelessness: an interview with philosopher Giorgio Agamben," by Jordan Skinner, 17 June 2014 (http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1612-thought-is-the-courage-of-hopelessness-an-interview-with-philosopher-giorgio-agamben).
38. Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, cited in Giorgio Agamben, *The Open*, 30–31.
39. Pico della Mirandola, *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, a cura di Eugenio Garin (Pordenone: Edizioni Studio Tesi, 1994), 6.
40. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Basic Writings*, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1945), 788.
41. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Basic Writings*, 1063.
42. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 182.
43. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 183.
44. Pico della Mirandola, *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, 8.
45. Pico della Mirandola, *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, 4.
46. *Hermetica*, 13.
47. *Hermetica*, 13.
48. *Hermetica*, 25
49. Agamben, *Language and Death,* 65. Agamben cites the *Corpus Hermeticum I.31* on p. 7.
50. *Hermetica*, 6.
51. *Oracles Chaldaïques. Avec un choix de comentaires anciens*, ed. E. des Places (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1971), Fr. 102, 91.
52. Faracovi, *Scritto negli astri,* 177.
53. Cited in Faracovi, *Scritto negli astri*, 185.
54. *The Beginning of Wisdom: An Astrological Treatise by Abraham Ibn Ezra*, ed. and trans. Raphael Levy, F. Cantera (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1939).

55. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Charles Eliot Norton (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920).
56. For an excellent study on Cardano's astrological practices see Grafton, *Cardano's Cosmos*.
57. Gerolamo Cardano, *Aforismi astrologici*, a cura di Giuseppe Bezza (Milano: Xenia edizioni, 1998), 24.
58. Cardano, *Aforismi astrologici*, 15.
59. Cardano, *Aforismi astrologici*, 17.
60. Cardano, *Aforismi astrologici*, 18.
61. Cardano, *Aforismi astrologici*, 20.
62. Cardano, *Aforismi astrologici*, 23.
63. Cardano, *Aforismi astrologici*, 23.
64. Cardano, *Aforismi astrologici*, 27.
65. Cardano, *Aforismi astrologici*, 27. In the conclusion of the work, however, Cardano does repeat the idea that, like theology, astrology is at the service of God.
66. Fritz Saxl, *La fede negli astri*, 56.
67. Peuckert, *L'astrologie*, 75.
68. Agamben, *Stanzas,* 3.
69. Evagrius of Pontus, *The Praktikos*, in *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 99.
70. Evagrius of Pontus, *On the Eight Thoughts,* in *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, 84.
71. Agamben, *Stanzas,* 5.
72. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 339–41.
73. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, note 2, 341.
74. Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, 160.
75. Agamben, *Stanzas,* 12.
76. Marsilio Ficino, *Book of Life*, trans. Charles Boer (Woodstock, Connecticut: Spring Publications, 1994), 92.
77. Ficino, *Book of Life*, 173.
78. Ficino, *Book of Life*, 118.
79. Agamben, *The Open*, 91.
80. Ficino, *Book of Life*, 152.
81. Ficino, *Book of Life*, 152.
82. Ficino, *Book of Life*, 159.
83. Agamben, *Stanzas*, 18.
84. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 216.
85. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne, intro. George Steiner (London-New York: Verso, 1985), 151.
86. Moore, *The Planets Within,* 171.
87. Benjamin, *Selected Writings*. *1931–1934*, Volume 2, Part 2, 684.
88. Paul Virilio, *Lost Dimension*, trans. Daniel Moshenberg (New York: Semiotexte, 1991), 116.
89. Virilio, *Lost Dimension*, 101.
90. Virilio, *Lost Dimension*, 102.
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Chapter Five

Warburg's Gesture

Among the many elements of the *Mnemosyme* project that caught Agamben's attention is Warburg's programmatic declaration "to illustrate," as we have already noted, "the distance that runs between impulse and action,"[1] in other words, the terrain of suspension lodged between potentiality and actuality. Related to this intent is Warburg's interest in the Renaissance's strategy to "reawaken" the figures of ancient Greek astrological practice from their "inscrutablility as deformed hieroglyphs of destiny" to "human credibility."[2] The process of reawakening involves a deactivation of the irrational fear, which the "deformed" demonic *monstra* imposed on humans. The "human credibility" ultimately signals the unchaining of the imagination, which deconstructs the imposing limits of the planetary deities, thus opening up a path that leads to the potentiality of thinking the infinite universe. What has never before been acknowledged is that Warburg's assessment of the struggle to overcome the biopower of the planets constitutes a commentary on an unthought dimension of the archaeology of biopolitics undertaken by Agamben.

This becomes evident when we observe the parallel between Agamben's rethinking of the anthropogenetic act (when man becomes human by an inner scission of humanity from animality), and Warburg's revisualization of the moment when man became human by separating himself from the powers of the celestial *monstra*. More specifically, in *L'uso dei corpi* Agamben comments on the insights formulated in *The Open*, thus reminding us that the anthropogenetic moment occurs simultaneously with the rupture separating life from language, the living being from the speaking being. Moreover, it is for this reason that "the becoming human of man implies the unceasing experience of this division and, together with this, the equally unceasing new historical rearticulation of that which had been thus divided."[3] Agamben then

makes a claim concerning the role of human cultural practices in this discussion that aligns Warburg's work with the project of continually revisiting the anthropogenetic event. That is, Agamben states that if philosophy, poetry, and the figurative arts are relevant and remain of interest to us today, it is because they have the potential to archaeologically suspend "the machine and the works of life, of language, of economics and of society and bring them back to the anthropogenetic event, so that in them the becoming human of man is never accomplished once and for all, never ceases to be forthcoming."[4] In other words, the function of philosophy, poetry, and the arts, given the (non)signifying constitution of their (im)potentialities, is to serve as the context in which we are able to rethink and experience the moment in which the inner scission of humanity from animality occurred, as something that is always ongoing. With philosophy, poetry, and the figurative arts we have a disactivation of thought, of language, and a general suspension of meaning. It is an archaeological movement within this suspension, as Agamben would have it, that allows us to experience the anthropogenetic event.

Warburg, instead, sought to visualize the moment in which there occurred within living beings the separation between the human terrified by the demonic powers of the stars and the human able to deconstruct these powers through mathematics and science. In a notebook consisting of observations on Bruno we are able to get a clear, and charmingly rhapsodic, sense of what Warburg's anthropogenetic gesture entails. In an entry dated December 2, 1928, Warburg writes "Giordano Bruno" at the top of the page and then makes the following comment: "on the individual human foundation through a dynamic emulsion the reform of human figurative causality."[5] The reform generally consists of the ability to overcome the "unreason" that was at the basis of human terror before the stars. There is a reference to Bruno's *Heroic Furors* found in an entry dated May 8, 1929: "In the Heroic Furors at the point where Acteon the predator becomes prey to the solitude of thought."[6] This can be glossed with an entry from May 12, 1929, where there is a further reference, "The transformation of Actaeon as intuitive act and total dedication to contemplation," and a note from May 9, 1929, commenting on the same subject matter, "magical monstrous concretion reinterpreted in an intuitive-spiritual abstraction."[7] The moment that Warburg is seeking to envision, almost as if it were a inner spiritual quest, is when the unreason was deactivated so as to give way to the new potentialities of thought and a new use of the heavens. It is exactly in Bruno that Warburg visualizes "The act of the heroic-erotic dedication to chaos and Hyle / the originary creator of the separation that produces the space of thought" (May 18, 1929).[8] If "anthropogenesis" (a term, it should be noted, Warburg never uses when discussing Bruno) means "making human," then Bruno's thought became a philosophical and artistic source for envisioning the invention of a new *ergon*, or task for the human during the period of the Renaissance.

In the pages that follow Warburg's ideas on the overcoming of the sidereal *monstra* will be expounded, within the context of Bruno, a figure the art historian believed, again, had represented in an eidetic philosophy the dissolution of planetary deities. Bruno's idea of displacing the despotism of the sidereal constellations hinged on a natural philosophy that understood the human, the animal, and the divine as being ontologically unseparated. This discussion will finally lead to issues of the relationship between man and animal, and the Last Day represented in *The Open*.

THE DEACTIVATION OF BIO-ASTROLOGICAL POWER

According to Warburg, the important challenge that is implicit in any astrological reading is the conflict with the *monstrum,* the image which inspires fear and terror. In the *Per Monstra ad Sphaeram*, Warburg clearly suggests that the battle with the *monstrum*, the tyrannical image which imposes a destiny on the subject, takes place "by means of brute force and contemplation."[9] In Warburg's mind, the final objective was to seek to understand "destiny as a function between the biomorphically graspable element and a harmonically articulated spatial and temporal regularity."[10] The intention was to neutralize the despotic effect of the stars through the creation of a divide, a scission between the terrestrial body and the celestial world. This occurred as a result of contemplation and the invention of science, which freed the terrestrial subject from the violent and volitional chains of the heavenly bodies, who sought to influence the destiny of all the subjects in the sublunary world. In the fifteenth century, Warburg continues, there emerged a radically new way to think of astrology and to understand the stars: "In the Renaissance there begins a new mode of orienting oneself in that we see the emerging of models of energy, whether it be action . . . mnemonic images of heroes, with elective affinities or wilfully determined, but not tyrannically superior."[11] Warburg cites the Salone Schifanoia in Ferrara, where we find depictions of elements that are connected to the tradition of astrological iconography, and concludes that "we are here dealing with a transition from astral demons to Olympic divinities in their own space, who exercise their influence as ideas, and not as cosmic demons that are definable and which can be understood in space and time."[12] The planets are demons that paralyze humans, and the Renaissance witnessed the gradual liberation from them. The expression "*per monstra ad sphaeram"*(reach or achieve the stars after having battled with the demonic astral deities), which inspires Warburg in his attempt to achieve a greater understanding of the relationship between humans and the stars as it evolves through time, thus has the meaning of overcoming the terror of the astrological image which controls each single instant of human existence. We have here the structures of a microphysics of

astral biopower that is essentially entombed within the signature of theology. In fact, it is hidden as a deactivated artifact in another signature that is highly relevant to Agamben's thought, namely angelology.

In place of the tyrannical power of the stars we find contemplation (that is, unfettered [im]potentiality), or rather, the imitation of the quintessential celestial sphere that offers the human subject the ability to manipulate its own destiny. This involves different stages: first, internalizing the celestial world, and second, operating a radical scission between human potentiality and the potentiality of the heavens. An important dimension of this discovery is that the human body is no longer tied to and confined by the cosmos or to other bodies in that each body, each bodily organ is a separate and autonomous entity. The network that harmoniously linked everything in the universe is dissolved, and this fact signals the end of the despotism of the stars. Overcoming the confinement of the planets means that they no longer contain things that cannot be understood with the assistance of mathematical calculation. Given all of this, then, imitating the stars means exercising influence on things through reason. The scientific discoveries, Warburg reminds us, showed that the celestial world need not be commensurable with the terrestrial world; planets are no longer anthropomorphic entities that confined the physiology and psychology of the sublunar subjects.

With Benjamin's fragment on astrology in mind, we see that his formula of "imitating the celestial bodies" implies the idea that humans no longer need to be in awe or fearful of the stars in that they, with the assistance of scientific contemplation, now find themselves to be in possession of the same potentialities (which manifests itself in the search for similarities) to know and to be able to influence both the world they live in and the events of history. On the one hand, Bruno had speculated about an interconnected and non-hierarchical cosmos. However, on the other hand and in a much more general sense, the deactivation of the magical network of influence at the root of astral biopower was to signal the eventual decay of the sense of shared experience Benjamin attributed to the ancients. By creating a metaphoric distance between humans and the stars, the psycho-biological sympathies are replaced with a purely optical relationship based on scientific observation and experimentation. In any event, Agamben is interested in what occurs once history has been deactivated, and so his *iconologia philosophica* could be read in the context of pushing rational astrology to its most extreme point. In other terms, in *The Open* what remains on the last day are the celestial bodies that are conjugated together with the theriomorphic figures sitting at the messianic banquet. The entire eidetic tableau constitutes a representation of the experiences of the declensions of potentiality outside of being. In what follows, Agamben's thinking on the separation between the human, the animal, and the Transcendent will be placed alongside Bruno's idea of the material continuum that connects all forms in the universe to constitute an

ontological *unum*. The ontological models formulated by both Agamben and Bruno emerge within the context where astrology assumes a defining presence.

THE GHOST OF GIORDANO BRUNO

When Warburg intimated that Bruno played an important role in deactivating any astro-biological power that the stars were thought to have exercised on humans, he specifically had the *Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* (1584) [*Spaccio della bestia trionfante*] in mind. In this work Bruno proceeds to remove the various demonic divinities (as Warburg would call them) from their place in the heavens. In a letter addressed to Saxl and dated May 21, 1929, Warburg writes that "the fear felt before the adversarial and demonic character of the ancient denominations are perceivable in every word of the *Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, which is and remains a catechism for those who revolt against the regime of the *monstra* in the heavens."[13] Warburg's fascination with Bruno did not escape Agamben, who points to the potential similarities in intellectual vocation shared by Warburg and Bruno. Specifically, Agamben has before him a letter concerning the *Mnemosyne* project that Warburg addressed to Karl Vossler and which contains a reference to the important relevance of Bruno to Warburg's theory of the function of human memory through images. Agamben comments on this by indicating that,

> The Giordano Bruno to whom Warburg is referring can be none other than the Bruno of the magico-mnemotechnical treatises, such as *De umbris idearum*. It is interesting that Frances Yates in *The Art of Memory* (1966) did not realize that the seals Bruno inserted in that text are shaped like natal horoscopes. This resemblance to one of his main objects of research could not have gone unnoticed by Warburg who, in his study on divination in the age of Luther, reproduces almost identical horoscopes. The lesson Warburg draws from Bruno is that the art of mastering memory (in his case, more precisely, the attempt to comprehend the role of the human *Bildgedächtnis* through the *Atlas*) has to do with images expressing human subjection to destiny.[14]

For Warburg, the *Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* is a work of dramatic importance; what struck him the most was that the images of classical origin and which are based on the influence of the stars on human life are characterized as being vices and eliminated from the celestial abode. The expunging of these classical divinities cleared the path for Bruno's idea of infinity, which is an idea that frees bare life from the demonic subjugation of the planets. Bruno speaks about, for example, the dream of expelling from the heavens "ghosts, statues, figures, images, portraits, recitations, and histories of our avarice, lusts, thefts, disdains, spites and shames" of emptying

"the heaven of our mind [*of*] the Bear of Deformity, the Arrow of Detraction, the Foal of Levity, the Canis Major of Murmuring, the Canis Minor of Adulation."[15] For Bruno, the ultimate goal of removing these planetary deities from both the physical heavens as well as the "heavens of the mind" is a reformation of the surface of the earth and of its customs. Bruno seeks to deactivate the astral source of human anxiety, and effects a deconstruction of the old metaphysics of being, pivoting on the control of human subjects by the planets, and replacing it with the new potential of the human imagination.[16]

How does Bruno's radical ontological model allow us access to the present moment of Agamben's interrogation of man's relation to his animality? And how does the question shed light on the astrological debris we have been discussing so far? In *The Open* Agamben illustrates how philosophers were more concerned than taxonomists about underlining a purported abyss of difference separating humans from animals, and consequently the focus of philosophy was to understand what distinguishes man from animal. For example, Agamben reminds us how Descartes considered animals to be in possession of absolutely negligible mental faculties and termed them *automata mechanica*. Linnaeus's countered such a position by suggesting that "surely Descartes never saw an ape."[17] The final effort to sound the scission separating man from animal was Heidegger's. The German philosopher believed that while animals existed in a stimulus-rich environment, their faculties did allow to them to perceive, understand, and create world. Agamben comments on this by suggesting that for Heidegger the ontological status of the animal can be characterized as being open but not unconcealed: "For the animal, beings are open but not accessible; that is to say, they are open in an accessibility and an opacity—that is, in some way, in a nonrelation. The openness without concealment distinguishes the animal's poverty in world from the world-forming which characterizes man. The animal is simply not without world, for insofar as it is open in captivation, it—must unlike the stone, which is worldless—do without world, lack it (*entbehren*); it can, that is, be defined in its being by a poverty and a lack."[18]

Bruno perceives animals as being distinguished from humans solely as a result of difference in aptitude, while for everything else there are no grounds for justifying an ontological separation of man from animal. Heidegger instead reinforces a tradition of ontological separateness which he pivots on the question of the "open," whose disconcealment is beyond the cognitive ability of animals. De la Durantaye describes the idea of the "open" as "the space revealed to us in the moment when the world we live in . . . opens out onto something larger . . . The 'open' is what we find ourselves in when the bustle and haste of our environment recedes and we see the environment in all its strangeness and immensity, as a 'world'—one that is greater and less graspable than our representations of it."[19] Heidegger believes that while the expe-

rience of the unconcealment of the open is central to humans, the impossibility of the same experience for animals is what characterizes the ontological separateness. Bruno, on the other hand, while acknowledging the differences between man, animal, and other components of the natural world, is convinced that what ultimately creates bonds (*vinculi*) that connect everything is the spirit, or signature impressed on all of the physical manifestations of nature; whether it be man, fauna, flora, or other terrestrial elements.

Heidegger, similar to his predecessors, constructs an ontology based on primarily the superior cognitive ability of human over animals. That is, the ontological difference of humans is the ability to think and know. Bruno on the other hand formulates an ontology that instead pivots on being physically and materially present in the world, above and beyond any cognitive prerequisite or requirement to be able to actualize being and thinking. In other terms, Bruno's heterodox ontology is rooted in a radical immediacy to potentiality that lives its impotentiality and unknowing, thus never exhausting potentiality. A major claim the present study is making is that Bruno is an unthought genealogical source for how Agamben deals with Heidegger's separation of man from animal. Actually, a scenario Agamben proposes is specifically in relation to the demise of all historical and philosophical tasks: "man, the shepherd of being, appropriates his own concealedness, his own animality, which neither remains hidden nor is made an object of mastery, but is thought as such, as pure abandonment."[20] What we are dealing with here is an openness toward deactivation *vis à vis* both the environment and the world, existing in a domain of pure potentiality. Deactivation is not to be understood as a form of sloth or inability to act, rather "it is the open space where formless life and lifeless form meet in a distinct life-form and form of living that are rich with their own singular potentiality."[21] It is precisely this genera of scenario, upon which Agamben has expended much critical energy, that Bruno's radical ontology and Renaissance version of rational astrology allows us to access in the present.

Bruno scholars have underscored the fact that Bruno's philosophy of images is a science that seeks to penetrate the scientific *ratio* of the universe. In fact, once Bruno exhausted his knowledge of mathematics, he turned to the manipulation of images within the context of the art of memory as a way of investigating the universe in a way he had hoped to do with mathematics.[22] However, what cannot be overlooked is the fact that for Bruno the images employed in any theory making were indeed living images, and not static iconic representations of the objects of the external world, or of elements from the hypostatic domain of ideas and abstractions. It is at this point that Agamben's idea, under the influence of Warburg, of "the life of images" discussed in *Nymphs* and Bruno's art of memory intersect: but while for Agamben the idea of a biology of the image is part of an inquiry into the

genealogy of contemporary philosophical and visual culture, for Bruno it is part of a science that seeks to unravel the secrets of matter and of the cosmos.

Bruno deconstructs the irrational and superstitious aura of astrology and praises instead its more materialist scientific relevance and potential. As we have already seen, the causative function attributed to astrology was critiqued, in that astral influence is felt by those terrestrial entities that are bereft of a soul, humans, instead, are not affected by the influence of the stars as they possess a soul that allows them to think and to ascend toward the transcendent *Uno*. What is radically new in Bruno, according to Michele Ciliberto, consists in his discarding of Ficino and Agrippa as sources and of elaborating any idea of magic that is thoroughly materialistic, which dissolves the supernatural and irrational elements, but which is fully a part of the "Life-Infinite Matter Ontology" axis.[23] What is truly unique in a work such as Bruno's *Lampas triginta statuarum* is that it brings the hermetic tradition to its furthest extreme, the one that borders with modern science. Bruno seeks to offer a materialist understanding of magic, and undertakes something that is truly daring: explaining the transformation of matter in historical time by placing emphasis not on the incorruptibility of the hypostatic One, but rather on the multiplicity of changes that affect corruptible matter. We find in Bruno's *Lampas triginta statuarum* a strong emphasis on matter and its insatiable will, as well as a deconstruction of the hierarchical structure of the universe, typical of the Neoplatonic ontology espoused by Ficino. Moreover, understanding nature cannot be done exclusively from the point of view of unity, as Bruno heeds attention to difference and multiplicity.[24] All of this implies understanding the multiplicity of relations that connect all beings within the oneness of nature. Such a hermeneutic operation at once undoes both Aristotelian ontology as well as the hermetic-Neoplatonic hierarchy of being. In essence, Bruno is at task at uncovering a human space where we find freedom and responsibility. In fact, Bruno does away with determinism as far as humans and nature are concerned, as he discards the hierarchical structures that define, determine, and limit the roles and functions of all things created. Bruno's radical innovation, as far as Ciliberto is concerned, is the fact that he refutes the notion we find in Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, where humans are placed on a higher point of the ontological scale than are animals.[25]

The work which sheds the most light on Bruno's view concerning astrology is the *De rerum principiis*, whose theoretical underpinnings rest on the correspondences linking celestial bodies, the earthly domain and the cosmological spirit that directs the astral influence on the matter in human time. The most notable fact in this work is that while Bruno accepts the notion that celestial influence is able to impinge on quotidian experience, he refutes what he terms "superstitious manipulations" of astrological techniques. Bruno's main point about astrology is that "the stars themselves are neither the

cause nor the signs of any event, while the planets about which we are speaking have nothing in common with them, save their name; nonetheless, it is precisely this common element, this homonymy which has been the cause for science having been subverted and there has been a resorting to all of those doctrines full of fictions."[26] While Bruno discards the causative function of astral influence, he accepts it denotative potential.

The verbal, iconic, and pictorial signs deposited by Bruno and which deal with astrology are the witnesses to a mode of understanding the universe, human experience, and knowledge that could, and has been, figured as the degradation of human consciousness. The challenge put to us is that of understanding the profound and genuine concern and anxiety about human destiny that was forged and imprinted upon the astrological signs that we find in the works of figures such as Bruno. As we have contended throughout the present study, the art and science of astrology is an enormous archive containing the files of the desires, fears, and anxieties human projected onto the future. To a definite extent, a function of astrology is to safeguard human frailty. Humans, fully conscious of the fragility of their existence, looked to astrology as a discipline and instrument to collect and organize the images and the sensorial aspects of the cosmos and of the vicissitudes of experience. This was undertaken in such a way that this phenomena would not only conform to the *Uno*, but, as Bruno hoped, also be recognizable and acceptable to humans, who are unyieldingly challenged by the same phenomena. However, what ultimately occurs is that the celestial constellations become, as we have already seen, "the original text in which imagination reads what was never written."[27] Thus, if the celestial bodies reflect our being, then bare life is the text that we are always reading for the first time.

There is, however, an aspect of Bruno's thought that sheds light on the issue of the ontological division separating man from animal, all of which is interconnected to the singular characteristic of an astrological ontology that had overcome such a division. The point of departure for understanding Bruno's unique ontology is the way in which he understood God. At one of his Inquisitorial proceedings Bruno acknowledged that he "had doubts about the name 'person' as applied to the Son and the Holy Spirit; not conceiving these two persons to be distinct from the Father."[28] Bruno at once denies the doctrine of the Trinity and the Incarnation, and presents an extreme position whose implications still need to be understood within the context of modern thought. Roberto Esposito explains the consequences of Bruno's heterodox position in the following manner:

> His refusal to sanction the category of the person not only implied a negation of the mediatory role of Christ between the finite and the infinite, but also the very notion of a personal God; which is to say, a deity characterized essentially by the attribute of the will. The consequences of this position—on the theolog-

> ical plane and transferred from there to the cosmological and anthropological planes—is truly astonishing. Bruno argues that if God, somehow separating himself from himself, had decided to create a world external to him . . . then the world that was created would be the only one; just as its inhabitants would be the only ones to claim the title of creatures made in the image and likeness of the Creator. But it is just this—the uniqueness of the world and the personal identity of the human—that Bruno disputed even before he came into contact with Copernican theory.[29]

As Esposito carefully points out, Bruno's theological deviation came before the cosmological one and the latter further confirmed the former. Esposito also observes that at the root of Bruno's theological swerve we find an interplay between potentiality and actuality. In other terms, "if the power to create implies the power to be created," as Bruno writes in *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds*, it would follow that that which "is" does not constitute the arbitrary creation of a sole will, but the finished whole of that which could hypothetically take place. However, Bruno proceeds one step further and, as we have already intimated, deconstructs any hierarchical system that pivots on the separation of, say, high from low and inside from outside. We have, in other terms, the dissolution of a fixed center that operates a process of scission and separation between that which is contained in the entire cosmos. What is truly revolutionary about Bruno's view, according to Esposito, is that it obliterates the Copernican topology in that "there is no real distinction between what can be called soul and an equally infinite matter that is pervaded with soul in its simultaneously corporeal body. The name Bruno reserves for this—with such frequency and intensity that, more than a simple category it becomes the foundational cornerstone of this thought—is Life. Life as a whole, inseparable into form and content, soul and matter, or spirit and nature."[30]

In the *De immenso* Bruno purports that life exists everywhere in the universe, and there are no spatial topographies that are bereft of life. What is of particular interest in all of this is that this line of thinking moves Bruno to undo the differences between immanence and transcendence, subject and object, and, in a very singular manner, potentiality and actuality. What occurs in Bruno is that the movement that causes a scission between potentiality and actuality is replaced by a very particular understanding of "death," which is perceived as an act vital to life. In *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds* (fourth dialogue) Bruno writes: "We shall discover that neither we ourselves nor any substance doth suffer death; for nothing is in fact diminished in its substance, but all things wandering through infinite space undergo change of aspect." The implication here is that Bruno has dissolved the scission between life and death; to be sure, there is no life/dichotomy but rather an unyielding flux of life which integrates death into its existential fabric: "Life is not a scarce resource that must be defended and preserved at

all costs, but a power [*potenza*] so abundant that not even death can consume it definitively, transmuting it instead into another form of the same living substance."[31] Life is a potentiality that through death is always able to conserve its impotentiality, which is no longer susceptible to the biopower of astrological signatures.

Astrology is for Bruno that dispositor which allows humans to savor the seamless body of the universe, in a way similar to Benjamin's idea of a rational astrology. However there are elements of Bruno's thought that shed light on the ontological radicalness implicit in Agamben's use of astrological iconology in *The Open.* As Ciliberto explains it, Bruno deconstructs any ontology which affords primacy to the human, but instead opts for one where animals are not inferior to humans, and where the two share, albeit in different guises, sense and intellect. In this context, for Bruno humans are not distinguished from animals, and this indistinction or unseparatedness is also the case from "a gnoseological point of view, as many animals are able to reason with similar acuity and penetration."[32] What needs to be underlined, however, is that this deconstruction of classical ontology by Bruno is part of an epistemological framework that necessarily includes a particular understanding of the celestial bodies. Just as Bruno dissolves any ontological scission separating humans from animals, he undertakes a similar procedure as far as the planets are concerned. In Bruno's mind, as we saw, life is everywhere including in the stars, and the particular life they contain assumes the form of "qualities" and "virtues."[33] The planets conserve in their material body the same existential characteristics we find in humans.[34] In other words, Bruno, in a way that echoes Benjamin's rational astrology, perceives the planets as being not only a mirror reflection of the potentialities of human behavior, but as provisional parts of the human body when the traits and characteristics are shared at any given existential moment. As we have already indicated, if Bruno does not believe in the causative properties of the stars, he is convinced of their denotative potential, that is, to essentially expose a semiotic phenomenon without attributing a meaning to it. Bruno suggests that whomever wishes to interpret the zodiacal signs and images in relation to the movement of the stars must read the heavens as a text replete with signs that have the potential to furnish information useful for the conduct of lived experience.[35] In any event, it is a text that is being read for the first time precisely because the topological-geometrical coordinates and configuration of the celestial elements are without precedents.

The interpreter of the signs exposed on the stars is not in a position to predict how they will influence the sublunary subjects. The astrologer would, in Bruno's scenario, only be able to read things as they actually are, not as they will be, and so the emphasis would be on potentiality over actuality. The signs inscribed on the planets are a gloss or commentary on the elements that have shaped whatever aspect of human existence. The stars do not forecast

existence, for Bruno, rather they function the way statistics do for us in today's world; that is, they contain the hidden signs and data (which not everyone is able to see and understand) that are connected to what has occurred in life.[36] Moreover, Bruno is convinced that understanding the movement of the stars and planets is essential for penetrating the secrets of historical events, which serve as lessons for the future. "The diachronic reading of the celestial map," writes Ciliberto about Bruno's astrological exegesis, "is thus destined to interweave with the synchronic reading of the characters, which, through a machination of occult and deep connections, constitute a privileged access to the deciphering of the hidden logic of things."[37] In the post-Renaissance age in which Benjamin lived, rational astrology defines this "hidden logic" as nonsensuous forms of communication.

Bruno's approach to reading the constellations is marked by his model of ontology, which weakens the thrust that any form of separation or hierarchical structure that tradition has imposed on the way humans exist in the world. Just as humans can find aspects or traits of themselves housed in the bodies of the stars, they can do the same with animals. Humans, the planets, and animals are interconnected precisely because of the biomorphological continuum that links absolutely everything in the universe. Bruno undoes the separation of human, animal, and divine executed by Christianity. If anything, what differentiates humans from animals arises not from a difference of essence, but of potentiality, as Esposito suggests, thus ". . . rendering the human a different animal from the others in terms of aptitude and skills, but without signalling the ontological primacy of the human."[38] In a very specific sense, it would appear that Bruno totally disavows the biopolitical act of the internal scission of human from animal, as Agamben writes about in *The Open*. According to Bruno's *nova philosophia*, such a scission is without foundation. We read, for example, in *The Cabala of Pegasus* that "Fate not only fails to differentiate between the human body from the (*body*) of the ass, and the body of the animals from the body of things thought to be without soul, but even in the genus of spiritual matter Fate treats the asinine soul no differently than the human, and the spirit that constitutes those so-called animals than what is found in all things."[39] As Esposito observes, Bruno allows for the intersectioning of the various biological species, but he then "brings them all back to a single substance out of which all things, even inanimate ones, arise. . . . The animal is not only homologous with the human, it forms a part of it; just as the human in turn is part of the animal world."[40] Esposito, like Ciliberto, is clearly implying that Bruno rendered inoperative the ontology introduced by Christianity, which pivots on the tearing asunder of man, animal, and divine. Pico's oration on the dignity of man was to reinforce the ontological hierarchy of God-Angels-Man-Fauna/Flora-Unformed Matter. Bruno, instead, captured the effaced pagan impulse that perceived the human, the animal, and the divine as an unseparated *unum*.

Of course, Bruno envisioned a similar continuum linking human bodies to the planets as well, and we, thus, have before us an image that depicts the "substantive" union bringing the human, the animal, and the celestial in the closest proximity possible. In other words, when humans gaze at the stars in order to discover the hidden secrets pertaining to their own existence, the animality engrained in their signatorial constitution (Leo, Cancer, Scorpio, and so on), and latent as occult traits in the planets themselves, is equally present: we have here the Renaissance model or precursor of Benjamin's rational astrology. Most importantly, reading the stars in relation to human existence is not a hermeneutics that finds its epistemological support and foundation in the authority of books, rather it is an interpretative strategy that finds its truth in the lived experiences of everyday life. For Bruno, we read the constellations "without the need to turn to other books, but solely thanks to continuous and inexhaustible experience."[41] This is so precisely because the sidereal texts speak not of actualities, but of potentialities, of experience that has not yet occurred, and they thus emerge as unwritten texts. Of equal importance and relevance is Bruno's suggestion that the object of attentive philosophical scrutiny, as it pertains to our relation with the celestial bodies, must include even the less significant elements and debris of the world.[42] This is a notion that is consistent at once with modern scientific inquiry and with Benjamin's and Agamben's ideas of using the detritus of history and culture as epistemological instruments.[43]

Claiming Bruno represents an alternative for the present, given the way he articulates a new ontology, confirms Habermas's suspicion about the manner in which modernity warps its projection toward the future "so far back around the axis of the new-time that it gets transposed into a yet more radical orientation toward the past. The anticipation of what is new in the future is realized only through remembering a past that has been suppressed."[44] To be sure, disturbing what has been supressed is a strategy that is pertinent to philosophical archaeology. In reading Agamben's account of the man/animal relationship in the light of Bruno's heterodox ontology, one gets the sensation that the ideas of the heretical philosopher constitute a spectre with which contemporary thought has been unwilling to engage, above and beyond their purely historiographical relevance. Agamben does not include Bruno in his own personal pantheon of thinkers, yet the Nolan is suspended like a phantasm over the entire discussion in *The Open* dealing with the human and the animal, and the constellational depiction of the unseparation of man from his animality.

THE INVISIBLE EARTH

How does our conceptual transhumance, under the aegis of Warburg's gesture, throughout Bruno's thought allow us to achieve an expanded understanding of the significance of Agamben's use of the theriomorphic images so as to represent a new relationship between humanity and its animality at the end of time? One potential answer lies in the manner in which Rainer Maria Rilke characterizes animals in relation to humans, which runs a course that is parallel to Bruno's. To be sure, by iconologically speculating a new human/animal scenario outside of being in post-history, Agamben's view, although not identical to Rilke's, is much closer to the poet's than it is to Heidegger's.[45]

The philosophical/thematic thrust of *The Open* originates in the different ways in which Rilke and Heidegger understand the idea of the "open," especially as it concerns the ontological relationship between humans and animals. In the "Eight Elegy" of the *Duino Elegies*, Rilke unveils a portrait of animality that posits an aptitudinal distinction from humans: "With its whole gaze / a creature / looks out at the open. / But our eyes / are as though turned in / and they seem to set traps / all around it / as if to prevent / its going free."[46] Precisely because animals exist outside of the paralysing influence of ratiological reflection, they are able to experience what they see as a terrestrial plenitude, which otherwise escapes humans mired in the fossilization of thought. Heidegger, however, vehemently disagrees with Rilke's view of how animals perceive the open, claiming that the poet is oblivious to the question of being and to the meaning of the ontological difference. As a non-indifferent aside, one could intimate that the way Rilke privileges the manner in which animals experience the open shares potential analogies with how the ancients represented the ability of zodiacal animals to see an openness that surpassed the abilities of mortal men. In describing the role of some signs within the economy of astrological management, Manilius writes, "The signs of the Archer and the fierce Lion, he who looks around on the golden fleece of his back [*Aries*], then the Fishes and Crab and the Scorpion of stinging lash, signs either adjacent or spaced at equal intervals, are all under like estate termed diurnal."[47] The particular from which the modern reader would be distracted consists in the fact that what is being represented here is not only a quality or characteristic, but also the notion that an animal operating as a zodiacal sign is able to project a gaze throughout the deepest recesses of space and time.

However, placing aside this potential analogy for now, the fact remains that Heidegger critiqued Rilke's position by arguing that what animals actually experience is a barrier beyond which they are not able to access.[48] Agamben articulates Heidegger's position in the following manner: "Only man, indeed only the essential gaze of authentic thought, can see the open

which names the unconcealedness of beings."[49] In *The Open* Agamben is concerned with the point where Rilke's and Heidegger's perspectives converge, that is, the space where the animal's unbridled openness or reaction to elements in its ecology, and the human's openness to the world in its fleeting magnitude, meet. Agamben, diverging from Rilke and Heidegger, proposes a *tertium quid* which consists in conceiving an openness characterized by the suspension of activity, of disactivating one's operativity in one's environment, and ultimately, existing outside of being. However, while Agamben offers a detailed discussion on Heidegger's idea of the open and on the ontological difference, Rilke is only mentioned in passing. Yet the outcome of Agamben's reflection on the question of the human/animal matter is much closer to Rilke's, who, as we will see, exposes a worldview that is not indifferent to the one espoused by Bruno.

In *The Open*, which, as we saw, pivots on a inquiry into why humans at the end of history possess heads of animals, Agamben posits that "the humanist discovery of man is the discovery that he lacks himself."[50] As a result, humans have had to invent their own form/physiognomy and this invention pivots on a relationship of inclusion/exclusion with animals who were instead given a form. Agamben offers his account of how all of this evolved, and a decisive element in this account is how the idea of "life" is to be understood. Agamben takes a passage from Aristotle's *De anima* where the Greek philosopher provides a definition of "life" that was to influence future conceptualizations of the term in a decisive way. In commenting the passage in question, Agamben observes that Aristotle does not actually define life the way one might expect him to. Instead, Aristotle "limits himself to breaking it down, by isolating the nutritive function, in order to rearticulate it in a series of distinct and correlated faculties or potentialities (nutrition, sensation, thought."[51] This principle of separation is very important since it will be the key instrument in imagining and finally deciding what is human and what is animal. In a more precise sense, the isolation of nutritive life was to become a foundational strategy in the history of science. Agamben calls upon the testimony of Xavier Bichat, who makes a distinction between "animal life," "which is defined by its relation to an external world, and 'organic life,' which is nothing other than a repetitive process of digestion and excretion; it is as if, 'two animals' lived together in every higher organism."[52]

This being the case, the various divisions of life, such as animal and human, occur within man, and without this separation it would not be possible to establish what is human and what is not.[53] The important conclusion that Agamben draws is that if this is indeed the case, "the very question of man—and of 'humanism'—must be posed in a new way. In our culture, man has always been thought of as the articulation of a body and a soul, of a living thing and a *logos*, of a natural (or animal) element and a supernatural or social or divine element." Rather, and this is key to our discussion, Agam-

ben's thesis is that "We must learn instead to think of man as what results from the incongruity of these two elements, and investigate not the mystery of conjunction, but rather the practical and political mystery of separation." This is of major significance for Agamben—that is asking why within man, "man has been separated from non-man, and the animal from the human."[54]

The term that Agamben uses to describe this situation is the "anthropological machine," which continuously decides what is human and what is not human on the never proven (according to Agamben) separability of what is human from what is not human. Agamben also refers to "anthropogenesis," which, again, refers to the separation between the animal and the human within man. It is exactly within the purview of ontology that anthropogenesis, the becoming human of the being is accomplished.[55] Anthropogenesis is the making of history based on the conflict between the animality and humanity in man, and the turn that has taken place involves the "animalization" of man. Heidegger, as we saw, was the last to believe that the anthropological machine was still capable of realizing history and destiny for human subjects;[56] however, Agamben firmly believes that this is no longer the case as any historical vocation or *ergon* is longer possible. Instead, what humans are left with is a taking care of their bodies, which involves a movement back to animality such that "the taking on of biological life itself [*becomes*] the supreme (or rather impolitical) task." There are two results of this situation as depicted by Agamben. First, there is inactivity, which implies loss of any essence or identity, and this leads to a second result, namely, the care of ourself, of our health, which is care for our animality, our natural life, which emerges as "humanity's last historical task—if indeed it makes sense here to speak of a 'task.'"[57]

The animalization of man (that is, the decline of the anthropological machine which severs the animal from the human within man), and the eclipse of historical tasks that are fulfilled in the realization of a destiny, are elements that accompany each other. But there is another equally important element, which occurs at the same time: namely, the collapse of transcendence and the disappearance of those divine and spiritual entities, which leave matter and natural life abandoned to themselves. To explain this Agamben cites a passage from the second century CE Gnostic Basilides, where the question of what happens to life and matter on earth, once all that which is divine and spiritual returns to the transcendent place of origin, is raised in a commentary on the Letter to the Romans where St. Paul "speaks of the nature that groans and suffers birth pangs while awaiting redemption":

> When the whole filial line thus arrives above and is beyond the boundary of the spirit, then the whole creation will receive compassion. For up to the present it groans and is tormented and awaits for the revelation of the sons of God, so that all the men of the filial line may go up from here. When that has

> happened, God will bring on the whole world the great ignorance . . . so that every creature may remain in its natural condition . . . and none desire anything contrary to its nature. Thus, all the souls who find themselves in this expanse, whose nature it is to remain immortal in this place alone, will stay here below, knowing nothing other than or better that this expanse: in the regions below there will be no news and no knowledge of the realities above, so that the souls below may not be tormented by desiring impossible things, like fish striving to graze on the hills with the sheep—for such a desire would be their destruction.[58]

Gnosticism, we should recall, cultivated a radically different relationship with the celestial world, in that the cosmos was perceived as separated from and alien to the supreme God and humans on earth. In fact, God's domain begins where the known planetary system ends, namely, after Saturn and the fixed stars. Gnosticism is acosmic, Hans Jonas tells us, precisely because man, who does not belong to the cosmos, is removed "from all the sameness with the world, which is now nothing but bare 'world,' and confronts him with its totality as the absolute different . . . God must be acosmic because the cosmos has become the realm of that which is alien to the self."[59] Cosmic alienation is countered with acosmic salvation, which is only possible in the inner self. Consequently, Agamben transposes the cosmic alienation and the inner acosmic selfhood of Gnosticism to his philosophical lexicon; that is, to represent the external disactivation of being in the world. As far as Agamben is concerned, Basilides has here described a situation where, at the end of history, man is reconciled with his animality. We have a figure that is saved by the fact that salvation is impossible. For Agamben this "life remains serenely in relation with its own proper nature . . . as a zone of non-knowledge," which "means to leave something outside of being, to render it unsaveable."[60] We thus come full circle as far as the theriomorphic images are concerned, when Agamben observes that "The righteous with animal heads in the miniatures do not represent a new declension of the man-animal relation so much as a figure of the 'great ignorance' which lets both of them be outside of being, saved precisely in their being unsaveable."[61] "Ignorance" derives its etymology from the Latin *ignorantia*, "not to know, to be unacquainted; mistake, misunderstand; take no notice of, pay no attention to."[62] The "great ignorance" is the domain of (im)potentiality, in the sense of an "un-knowing," which contemplates its (im)potential to not know, and the astrologically charged image together with the image of theriocephalus righteousness from the Jewish Bible constitute a dialectical image that serves to represent this state. That is, a state that is not presently possible, but one which will emerge on the horizon once history and the old ontology are finally deactivated.

At this point a degree of closer attention should be heeded to what Rilke has to say in the *Duino Elegies*. While Heidegger insists on an ontological

difference separating humans from animals, Rilke posits not an ontological distinction but one based on aptitude, as did Bruno. If at the conclusion of *The Open* Agamben presents the notion of man overcoming, "outside of being," the internal scission separating the human and the animal, he is clearly closer to Rilke's vision. Moreover, Rilke manifests a poetological-philosophical sensibility that echoes Benjamin's cosmic nonsensuous similarities.

There is no hierarchical distinction between the being of humans and the existence of animals, precisely because they both exist in the same variegated plateaus of experience. In fact, in the "Eighth Elegy" Rilke writes about a sort of interaction that establishes the grounds for the aptitudinal difference: "We can only know / what is out there / from an animal's features / for we make even infants / turn and look back / at the way things are shaped / not toward the open / that lies so deep / in an animal's face."[63] The animal orients man's search for similarities in the open, yet man is not willing to privilege the real open, which is not external but internal, as the animal's face suggests, to one's being. As a result of this difference, Rilke continues in the same elegy, humans and animals do not experience death in the same manner: "Free from death. / Because we're the ones / who see death. / The animal that's free / always has / its destruction behind it / and God ahead of it / and when it moves / it moves forward / forever and ever / like a flowing spring."[64] Heidegger, as Agamben reminds us in *Language and Death*, had underscored that the fact that humans have language and experience death remained unthought. As Rilke illustrates the situation, humans "see death" because they have the aptitude to think being, which involves, among other things, a gaze, similar to that of the melancholic's, fixed on the lost and forever unretrievable past. Animals do not experience the being of the past, or the traumatic rupture between the now and the before, and instead live in a temporal projection that only knows a forward movement.

Yet, as humans approach the experience of death there exists a potential transformation on how it is perceived, as Rilke continues in the eighth elegy: "For when you get close to death / you don't see death anymore / you look out past it / and maybe then / with an animal's wide gaze."[65] Death, along with the unbearable weight of rational thinking, is what impedes man's ability to see the open, the future. Thus, what is implied in the elegy is that man must "imitate" the animal's aptitude to see the world, which involves, when applied to man, a search for resemblances: "That's what fate means: / to be facing each other / and nothing but each other / and to be doing it forever."[66] However, this search for similarities in others implies the sharing of their experiences, as in the case of rational astrology.

Imitating the "animal's wide gaze" implies not knowing one's being, as the animal's "being / is infinite to him / incomprehensible, and without / a sense of his condition / pure as his gaze."[67] The animal has being, which it

exists outside of, as it experiences life in a zone of non-knowledge of its being. As a consequence of existing outside of being, the animal "sees everything / and himself in everything / healed and whole / forever."[68] For humans, however, animals are bearers of signs that recall the experience of a radically closer proximity with the animal and the world, but which has now disappeared: "For there clings to him [*the animal*] / something that often / overwhelms us / —memory / a recollection that / whatever we're striving for now / was once closer and truer / and that its union with us / was incredibly tender."[69] Instead humans are left with the "posture of someone who is leaving . . . that's how we live / always / saying goodbye."[70] We are continuously taking leave of ourselves because we are rationally and traumatically aware of the fracture within ourselves (the same "fracture of presence" Agamben speaks about in *Stanzas*), but also of the barrier that separates our internal self from the external world, having become oblivious to the "tender union."

What remains for humans to accomplish, we read in the "Seventh Elegy," is acknowledging that the world can only exist within us, because outside of us it is disappearing: "There's nowhere, my love / the world can exist / except within. / Our lives are used up / in transformations / and what's outside us / always diminishing / vanishes."[71] In fact, the only place where our planet can redeem itself, we are told in the ninth elegy, is inside us: "Earth, isn't this / what you want: / rising up / inside us invisibly / once more? Isn't it your dream / to be invisible someday? / Earth! Invisible!"[72] Of course, this reference to the human as that entity, which holds the world inside it, is consistent with the ancient belief that our bodies house a microcosm of the celestial world.

Rilke presents the animal as an entity that is different from humans who experience the possibility of knowing through rational thought. The animal, instead, does not exist in the potential of thought but instead feels and experiences nonsensuous similarities, which it cannot name through the reason of words (this would involve taking leave of one's being to look at the past, which is what humans do in order to cultivate thought). However, animals never leave being because they are always outside of it. It is the experience of existing outside of being that, according to Rilke, humans must imitate. This is achieved by way of imprinting within us what we could call, with Agamben, the signature of the earth, as Rilke suggests in a letter addressed to Witold von Hulewicz: "our task is so deeply and so passionately to impress upon ourselves this provisional and perishable earth, that its essential being will arise again 'invisibly' in us. *We are the bees of the invisible. We frantically plunder the visible of its honey, to accumulate it in the great hive of the invisible*."[73] The issue here is not only that human and non-human forms, in this case the bee, are brought together at a metaphorical level, but that the invisible is an aspired dimension. What else could this invisibility refer to?

Potentially, it is the disappearance of any difference, the undoing of any separation. The invisible is also the domain of the text of anagogy, which is unwritten, and yet it contains glimpses of what is yet to come.

Rilke presents a poeticological philosophy that shares with Bruno a sense of love for all that which the natural world is able to let emerge as unseparated from all else that is part of it. This includes an ontological continuum that binds everything, man, fauna, and flora, and which is best figured in Rilke in the guise of the earth that exists within the human, as the only way to redeem it. Just as Bruno deconstructs the trauma of death to expose a necessary phase for the vital life-force ontology as it projects itself toward the future, in the seventh elegy Rilke depicts death as the moment when the infinity of the stars emerge on the horizon of unforgettableness: "but the stars / stars of the earth. / Oh to be dead / one of these days / and to know that they / are infinite / all of the stars / for how / how to forget them!"[74] However, while Bruno experiences this cosmological philosophy as a given in his time, Rilke articulates, instead, a nostalgia for the potential of this world, which has disappeared only to reveal itself inside of us.

By formulating a vision of the impossibility of any new iteration of the original union of man and animal through the instrument of the images from the Jewish Bible that, instead, attests to its possibility, Agamben offers a dialectical image that emerges from the clash of two different polarities. The image of the Righteous is invested, in this case, with two opposed meanings that can be configured as the (im)possibility of a "new declension of the man-animal relation." Thus, just as the illustration contains the potentiality of a hoped-for actualization, it contains a conviction of its impotentiality as well. Moreover, both the original intention of the illustration and Agamben's reading of it place the theomorphic figures outside of being. While Agamben is ultimately focused on "the practico-political mystery of separation of man from his animality,"[75] Rilke mourns for what has not yet come. That is, a potentiality of the uninterrupted ontological axis that brings man close to animal, that existed in the past, and where there is a desire to share it as an experience. The analogies linking Agamben to Rilke pivot on the idea, to use Sergei Prozorov's terms as he comments on *The Open*, that "Contrary to Heidegger, it is indeed possible to be with the animal," provided it occurs outside of being. The moment in which the anthropological machine is deactivated and the animal is let be, "the zone outside of being is opened as the formerly unthinkable site of the coexistence of humanity and animality that involves neither humanisation nor animalisation."[76] By living outside of being humans are no longer participants in the schizophrenic dynamic of "becoming" something, but, instead inhabit the space where humanity and animality remain close to each other, there being no scission that would otherwise separate them. In lieu of articulating another declension of becoming, Agamben is interested in the potentialities of a *being-with* that is nurtured

solely in *being-thus*. That is to say, "a being together of man and animal in which one does not become the other but both are let be outside of being."[77]

If this is indeed the case, then the eidetic elements are an intensification of the rational astrology that Benjamin, however fragmentarily, articulated. With the use of the images from the Jewish Bible, as well as Titian's *Nymph and Shepherd* (1570-75, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), we can make the following critical assessment: *Agamben is isolating and identifying existence outside of being by way of a search for nonsensuous similarities and the sharing, but not the violent imposition or theft, of experiences. Precisely because these experiences are shared, they emerge from an (un)written text that is always read for the first time.*

ANOTHER LAST DAY

In all of this discussion astrology has been present in the guise of a "dialectics that has come to a standstill" through the medium of the images from the Jewish Bible, that is, when our critical gaze captures the conjunction of entities (a conjunction being a "making similar," "making things resemble") that differ in the respects that are determining for them. To be more precise, in announcing the demise of the anthropological machine that once severed humanity from animality, Agamben wants us to imagine a new conjunction of humanity and animality, which creates something which is neither, but which finds itself located in the potentialities of the coming community. Agamben speaks about a situation where fate and destiny no longer respond to a transcendent signifying system. The righteous with animal heads are a figure for the "great ignorance" that place humans and animals outside of being, in a state of redemptive non-redemption. Humans are bereft of any historical task and have abandoned the anthropological machine. Just as time has redeemed itself by no longer having a task or a function, so too the stars have no longer anything to say. All that remains for humans, in this case, is to gaze at the celestial bodies and read their outward signs as expressions of a rational astrology of physiognomies, which are shared throughout the universe by animals, humans, stars, and plants. In a post-historical setting astrology no longer has the function of redeeming man's schizophrenic relationship with fate. If anything, the role of the celestial bodies is to be inactive. Astrology is rendered inoperative not because it is no longer able to formulate predictive statements; the fact is that predictive statements of any kind (and which belonged to the old, deactivated ontology) no longer make sense since there are no longer any historical tasks to accomplish for man and animal living with each other outside of being. However, living outside of being (which would imply a radical potentiality, or the *zoē*, that is, a prelinguistic state that would allow humans to experience pure unsayability)

entails an "ignorance" of what exists above humans. That is to say, an unknowing that frees humans not only from historical tasks, but from the influence and bondage from those transcendental elements which in the past controlled the life and fate of humans. The biopolitical liberation of humans, theorized here by Agamben, mirrors the gradual liberation of humans from the biopower of the stars, as imagined by both Warburg and Bruno.

The end of history scenario that *The Open* posits through the figures of the Jewish Bible has as an important subtext a thematic constellation around which orbit the ideas of deactivation and the Last Day. As for the eternal immobility of the planets that occurs at the end of time, the concern is both astrological and theological. Agamben reminds us in *The Kingdom and The Glory* that the eternal Sabbath of God is meant to be imitated by humans through being rendered inoperative, but it discovers its timing, we might add, through an astrological event, that is to say, the eternal freezing of the planets. Previously, only the trained eye of the astrologer was able to grasp the single significant snapshot moment of planets, but after the end of time all are able to perceive the perfect immobility of the stars. Just as theology becomes deactivated, so too does astrology. But what exactly happens on the Last Day? In a passage from *The Coming Community* Agamben proposes an exegesis of the previously cited *Question 91* found in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* (*Supplement to the Third Part*) entitled *On the Quality of the World After the Judgement*. The passage deals with the fate of the natural world following the Last Judgement: will the celestial bodies still move? what will happen to the flora and fauna of the earth? Agamben's response is that following the judgement, everything in the terrestrial world, having realized the theological destiny, "would then enjoy an incorruptible fallenness—above them floats something like a profane halo."[78]

The key image in the passage from Aquinas that Agamben uses to represent the idea of the Last Day and, ultimately, of deactivation, is that of the heavenly bodies. To be sure, in order for history and time to come to a complete halt, the planets must become immobile. It is the movement of the celestial bodies that marks the passage of time and thus the birth, growth, and decay of all things on Earth. It is the planets that allow humans to exist in a being that is marked by temporality. Being in time is the structure of the ontology with which we are familiar, and it is a structure whose life-line is the stable movements of the planets. Once all of the heavenly bodies cease to move, as Aquinas prescribes, at that point the governing rule of birth, growth, and decay will be suspended and put to another use. (For that matter, the classical model of ontology, as well as the ones posited by Heidegger and Foucault, will have expired, and on the horizon are alternatives to replace these ontologies, namely, the heterodox one proposed by Bruno and the one contemplated by Rilke.) If this is indeed the case, then we need to again acknowledge that the ruined theological structures that constitute the substra-

tum of Agamben's thinking on the general question of biopolitics are complemented by the equally ruinous elements of the astrological tradition.

Following the Day of the Last Judgement, Agamben suggests, necessity and contingency will have disappeared from the horizon of the Earth. The reason for this is that man's eschatological destiny will have been exhaustively realized and the supernatural destination will have been reached. There is nothing left for whomever and whatever remains on Earth to accomplish, save to be what it is and nothing else. Once necessity and contingency have disappeared, we are left with the Irreparable, which refers to the notion that things find their redemption in the fact that they continue to exist beyond the final event of salvation. The Irreparable, Agamben writes, "is that things are just as they are, in this or that mode, consigned without remedy to their way of being. . . . How you are, how the world is—this is the Irreparable."[79]

In Benjamin's mind, the Last Judgement is indistinguishable from all other days, precisely because each single moment "is a moment of judgment concerning certain moments that preceded it."[80] Agamben is interested in "capturing" or "seizing" these moments of unredeemable redemption, and proposes, as already indicated, the photographic picture as one way of achieving this possibility. The photographic image, as unwritten text of life, which one always views for the first time, has the ability of capturing the essence of not so much a person, but of a moment, however banal, in which the person emerges on the horizon of everyday life. That is, not in the act of becoming, but of a forever non-becoming. For Agamben, the singular aspect of the photographic image is that it is the place of sublime difference between the sensorial and the intelligible, the imitation and the original, memory and hope. Photography is the anagogical instrument of everyday life, precisely because it contains, in its eternal immobility, the not immediately visible signs of what is yet to come; it has the ability to grasp an image, sever it from historical time, and transmit to a posterity that awaits. In other words, the photographic image redeems what it has recorded precisely because it has projected it to the moment when the possibility for redemption will have expired, thus producing an unsaveable salvation.

Commenting on Agamben's figuration of the Last Day through the instrument of photography, Dickinson observes that "the frozen image, forever transfixed in time, becomes the ever-present judgment looking at us from its singular distance."[81] The immobility of the image contained in the photograph finds it astral correlative in the equally transfixed planets at the end of time. The astrologer would no longer be able to read and transcribe the unwritten signs on the stars with the intent of encouraging a movement to actuality on the part of the client. Given the expiration of being in temporality, the reader of the heavens is engulfed in the potentiality arising from the depotentiation of the planets submerged in a standstill. Immobility here

stands for "inoperativity" or deactivation, which has an essential link with the idea of the Last Day.

In *The Open* Agamben suggests that at the end of history we find ourselves in a situation where man has acquired a new relationship with his animality, and there appears a figure that is redeemed precisely because it is inactive, unsaveable, and lives outside of being. In the post–Judgment Day scenario hypothesized by Agamben, life on the unredeemed Earth is without precedent because the Transcendent Being has definitively abandoned the terrestrial world, leaving it without any knowledge or awareness of a supernatural power or realm. We turn again to Aquinas's *Summa* for the theoretical context that allows us to grasp the significance of the immobility of the celestial bodies. In Article 2 of *Question 91* (*Of the Quality of the World After the Judgement*), the question explored deals with the issue of whether or not the heavenly bodies will continue to move after the Last Judgment. Since humans will have reached their supernatural destination and nature its final cause, the heavens, as a result, will cease in a definite sense to move. Once man has achieved Glory, the celestial bodies will no longer need to move but will instead rest in eternity, in imitation of God:

> It is stated (Apoc.10:6) that the angel who appeared, *swore by him that liveth for ever and ever . . . that time shall be no longer*, namely after the seventh angel shall have sounded the trumpet, at the sound of which *the dead shall rise again* (1 Cor.15:52). Now if time be not, there is no movement of the heaven. Therefore the movement of the heaven will cease at length. . . . Rest is more noble than movement, because things are more likened to God, Who is supremely immovable, by being themselves unmoved. Now the movement of lower bodies terminates naturally in rest. Therefore since the heavenly bodies are far nobler, their movement terminates naturally in rest.[82]

We are not dealing with a temporary stasis, but the eternal immobility of the heavens, and it is under this immobility that Agamben theorizes about the limbo-like suspension in which man finds himself after the Last Day. In *The Coming Community* Agamben speaks about the condition of those who, at the end of time, find themselves in Limbo and notes that, similar to the bodies of the blessed, their bodies are impassive: "Irremediably lost, they persist without pain in divine abandon. God has not forgotten them, but rather they have always already forgotten God; and in the face of their forgetfulness, God's forgetting is impotent. Like letters with no addressee, these uprisen beings remain without a destination."[83] Agamben reverses the limbo-like nature in its complete theological sense into "natural happiness" ("naturale letizia") and observes that those who are in a state of limbo have abandoned the world characterized by guilt and judgement. Instead they bathe in the "irreparable light of the dawn following the *novissima dies* of judgment. But the life that begins on earth after the last day is simply human

life."[84] This is so because every day is always a last day that is being experienced, judged, read, and written for the first time.

The idea of the immobility of celestial bodies at the end of time as depicted in the *Summa Theologica* echoes, in a certain way, the perceptive skill of the astrologer: namely, the ability to grasp the fleeting moment of the conjunction of planets as an isolated, arrested, and quasi-photographic fragment. The art of the astrologer rests in the capacity to see and interpret the moment of apparent stasis of the planets, oscillating between consciousness and unconsciousness. The interpretative challenge is to conceive the heavens as an impression left by the telling of a story, or, in other terms, as an immobilized image that transmits the enigmatic traces of its signs to posterity. However, the vision of the immobile celestial bodies Aquinas depicts is the irreversible actualization of the potentialities of the Sacred Scriptures; yet, the actualization gives way to the disappearance of all texts, as what is left is the pure invisibility of anagogy, where writing and the markers of signification have been rendered inoperative.

At the end of time we have the heavens that no longer move, and unredeemed man left on Earth. The logic of this situation appears quite strained: how does man live an earthly life if all of the stars and planets, including the Earth, are no longer moving? How do we go about imagining an immobile universe? The point to a definite extent is not whether or not there will be a Last Day, or Judgment Day. Rather what Agamben, following Benjamin, has in mind is that our energies should address the *hic et nunc* of our existence instead of passing our time in anticipation of a theologically pre-announced epiphany, or a coming historical synthesis of all that has occurred in human time. De la Durantaye comments on the scenario proposed by Agamben by suggesting that "The 'end of history' is thus best understood as the end of a certain type of history, one that views human history as on a set dialectical course. . . . This does not mean that human history will end without generation, but it does mean that a hitherto dominant mode of conceiving that history might end."[85] Humans have an indelible signature imprinted on their neuro-biological constitution that allows them to experience, regardless of the historical contingency or context, the possibility of possibilities. In *The Coming Community* we read that that humans have something that is neither "an essence nor property," but "the simple fact of one's own existence as possibility or potentiality."[86] However, the element that remains once the image of the human as invented by the anthropological machine becomes deactivated is gesture. Consequently, bare life survives as gesture, as Agamben writes, similar to living beings overwhelmed by the lucence of the Last Day, "surviving the ruin of their formal garment and their conceptual meaning."[87]

There is a pagan correlative, from the point of view of Christianity, of the demise of the old and no longer relevant or useful history. Christianity sought

to banish "pagan" astrology to the museum of deactivated forms of power, replacing it with the new servants of the Christian God, as we see in Lepsius's description of the suspension of planetary influence on humans: "Jesus, the Son of God, is raised to the throne of the Cosmos, the planet-gods who were worshipped by all the world are in his hands, the spirits of the stars have become his servants and lost their right of sovereignty over the earth."[88] The power of the pagan divinities came to a definitive halt, as they no longer had the potentiality to impose biopower on humans. The loss of "sovereignty over the earth" corresponds, *de facto*, to the immobilization of the astral divinities, who no longer served a purpose or function. Aquinas speaks of the immobilization of the planets at the end of time, that is, of their no longer serving the function they once did. The last day for the pagan divinities was not a single unique moment, but a sequential series of last days that lasted for several centuries. Christianity froze, or deactivated the pagan valence of the planets, but then resurrected their orbital movement as subjects and instruments of God.

Agamben presents us with man who lives after the Last Day as an image, a photograph, a painting. The central point of this study is that the images of the Ambrosiana (the first one being a figure of stars with administrative, political functions, and the third one signifying the deactivation of the anthropological machine) become within the iconological economy of *The Open* figurations of the immobile heavenly bodies after the Last Day, and assume the guise of dialectical images. After the Last Day both the stars and man left on Earth remain in a state of suspension. As Agamben notes in *Nymphs*, "The dialectical image is, in other words, an unresolved oscillation between estrangement and a new event of meaning. Similar to the emblematic intention, the dialectical image holds its subject suspended in a semantic void."[89] To be sure, Agamben uses the dialectical image to illustrate what he means by the deactivation of the anthropological machine. In commenting on a passage from *One-way Street* where Benjamin compares modern man's relationship with nature with the one that ancient man shared with the universe, Agamben suggests that the problem which is being raised must be thought of in terms of a "dialectics at a standstill" that is to say, when what is at stake is prepositional in nature, where the "between" severs "nature from humanity."[90] Agamben establishes the relationship between humanity and animality in an eidetic frame, where the two severed components appear as immobile images similar to a painting or drawing. The anthropological machine has been deactivated to the point that it is no longer able to separate nature and man with the intention of giving birth to the human through the capture of the inhuman. The machine is mired in a standstill, but this deactivation allows for something new to emerge, that is nameless and is not man or animal, positing itself somewhere "in between nature and humanity and holds itself in the mastered relation, in the saved night."[91]

The "saved night" to which Agamben refers is nature separated from redemption, that is, man is saved precisely because he is unsaveable, according to Agamben's reading of this passage from Benjamin's "Theological-Political Fragment": "To the spiritual *restitutio in integrum*, which introduces immortality, corresponds a worldly restitution that leads to the eternity of a downfall, and the rhythm of this worldly existence which eternally passes away—passes away in its totality, in its spatial but also in its temporal totality—the rhythm of messianic nature, is happiness."[92] In a way similar to Benjamin, Agamben compares nature separated from redemption to sexual fulfilment, which rescinds the link that binds man to life. Even in this case, Agamben makes use of an iconographic approach to illustrate his theoretical intention; that is, an interpretation of Titian's *Nymph and Shepherd*. The painting depicts a shepherd and a nymph after having consumed an erotic relationship, and therefore, following the sexual gratification the couple, according to Agamben, has consumed what the tree of knowledge offers, and is about to be exiled from Eden. Now that the mystery has dissipated, the lovers "contemplate a human nature that has become perfectly inactive—the inactivity and the tedium/lethargy of man and animal thus become the supreme and unsaveable figure of life."[93] As an iconological object (and similar to the illustrations form the Jewish Bible) Titian's painting constitutes a dialectical image, an image in the state of arrest of (in this case) saved night, of finding one's self alienated from being, redeemed in being unredeemable. Finally, the images Agamben includes and comments on in *The Open* are a portal to a world where pure (im)potentiality remains unredeemable, that is, untouched by anything that is outside of this world.

There is a passage from Warburg where he comments on what Bruno achieved in *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*: "The liberation of the cosmos from the limits of the shell / and from the corps of the monstrous guardians of the boundaries / which [*the liberation*] finds a civil placement on Earth again."[94] In other words, through the deactivation of the oppressive and confining powers of the planets, liberation or non-confinement is now reconciled again with those who remain on the surface of the Earth. Although Agamben never quotes this passage from Warburg, we could claim that this insight by the art historian from Hamburg is consistent with Agamben's idea of the deactivation of history and humanity living with animality outside of being. Moreover, as Bruno would have surmised, since we are no longer confined by the stars, we are thus not connected to them as in the traditional Neoplatonic hierarchical cosmic network, but instead in a horizontal magmatic continuum. As a result of this biomorphic undoing, where humans are no longer influenced by the celestial bodies, we have a new relation between the thinking subject and the newly depotentiated cosmic object of thought, well before the advent of Cartesian dualism (although the two phenomena are formulated and articulated in a different manner). Humans must now,

through intuition, imagine possible universes, or more precisely, they must intensify their observation of the heavens, which they are now able to "freeze" in time with their new science. The eye of the philosopher, like that of the poet and the artist, must therefore emulate that of the astrologer, who is able to perceive the conjunction of two planets in the very moment it occurs; and this same moment corresponds to the petrifaction of the perceived image.

The problem in representing the context of time in this moment, that of the dialectical image, finds a response in Agamben's thinking on the need to formulate new conceptions of time and history. In his *Infancy and History* had Agamben had singled out the idea of *kairos*, namely, "the abrupt and sudden conjunction where decision grasps opportunity and life is fulfilled in the moment."[95] Unlike *chronos*, *kairos* refers to the spontaneous and fleeting instant that must be grasped, lest it disappear forever. The notion of *kairos*, given that it constitutes the interval whose interjection temporarily suspends *chronos*, is an important dimension of Agamben's discussion on messianism we find in *The Time That Remains*. Agamben differentiates between, on the one hand, prophetic time (that only refers to the future coming of the Messiah) and eschatological time (which deals with the arrival of the end of time), and, on the other hand, Paul's notion of the "time of the now" (*ho nyn kairos*). Agamben thus formulates an idea of messianic time that does not pivot on the conceptual coordinates of what is to come or the end of time, but rather one where "time contracts itself and begins to end . . . time that remains between time and its end."[96] A linguistic correlative of this is offered to Agamben by Gustave Guillaume's idea of "operational time," which refers to the strategy of singling out the time that is required by the mind to constitute an image of time, which becomes the point of reference for the image that arises. In this way, time is perceived as a "pure state of potentiality . . . in the state of having been constructed."[97] Along with the element of potentiality, what is also of particular interest is the idea of the "contraction" of time ("*kairos* is not another time, but a contracted and abridged *chronos*"[98]), precisely because they both serve to identify the central characteristics of the dialectical image. Moreover, what the astrologer sees when observing the configuration of the heavens during the exact time of someone's birth is a kariological moment; that is, where time is suspended, and the notes and mappings made by the astrologer are a contraction of the past, present, and future of *chronos.* This mode of perceiving what is suspended or deactivated in the contraction of time is figured in the celestial and theriomorphic illustrations of the Jewish Bible, which are the images in a state of immobility of finding one's self outside of being, and therefore redeemed in being unredeemable. These images are at the same time the iconological figuration of the celestial bodies that have become immobile and thus deactivated, once bare life has survived another Last Day, whose text, in turn, is always lived and read for the first time.

NOTES

1. Warburg, *Mnemosyne,* 3.
2. Warburg, *Mnemosyne,* 5.
3. Agamben, *L'uso dei corpi*, 265.
4. Agamben, *L'uso dei corpi*, 266.
5. Aby Warburg, *Opere II. La rinascita del paganesimo antico e altri scritti [1917–1929]* (Torino: Nino Aragno Editore, 2008), 957.
6. Warburg, *Opere II*, 975.
7. Warburg, *Opere II*, 976.
8. Warburg, *Opere II*, 979.
9. Aby Warburg, "Le forze del destino riflesse nel simbolismo all'antica," in *Per monstra ad sphaeram*, ed. Davide Stimilli and Claudia Wedepohl (Abscondita: Milan, 2009), 23.
10. Warburg, "Le forze del destino riflesse nel simbolismo all'antica," 23–24.
11. Warburg, "Le forze del destino riflesse nel simbolismo all'antica," 26.
12. Warburg, "Le forze del destino riflesse nel simbolismo all'antica," 28.
13. Cited in Warburg, *Opere II*, xvi.
14. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 59–60.
15. Giordano Bruno, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, trans. and intro. Arthur D. Imerti (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 114–15.
16. For a much more general perspective on Bruno and his attitude toward astrology, see Leen Spruit, "Giordano Bruno and Astrology," in *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher of the Renaissance*, ed. Hillary Gatti (Aldershott: Ashgate, 2002), 229–49.
17. Agamben, *The Open*, 23.
18. Agamben, *The Open*, 55.
19. De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 327.
20. Agamben, *The Open*, 80.
21. De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 331.
22. Hilary Gatti, *Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 177.
23. Giordano Bruno, *Opere magiche*, ed. Michele Ciliberto, Simonetta Bassi, Elisabetta Scarpone, Nicoletta Tirinnanzi, intro. Michele Ciliberto (Milano: Adelphi, 2000), xxv.
24. Bruno, *Opere magiche*, xxvii.
25. Ciliberto in Bruno, *Opere magiche*, xxix.
26. Bruno, *Opere magiche*, 664.
27. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 58.
28. Luigi Firpo, *Il processo di Giordano Bruno*, ed. Diego Quaglioni (Rome: Salerno, 1993), 170.
29. Roberto Esposito, *Living Thought*, 59.
30. Esposito, *Living Thought,* 60–61.
31. Esposito, *Living Thought,* 62.
32. Ciliberto, "Introduzione" in Bruno, *Opere magiche*, xxviii.
33. Bruno, *De rerum principiis* in *Opere magiche*, 655.
34. Bruno, *De rerum principiis* in *Opere magiche*, 661.
35. Bruno, *De rerum principiis* in *Opere magiche*, 663.
36. Bruno, *De rerum principiis* in *Opere magiche*, 673.
37. Bruno, *De rerum principiis* in *Opere magiche*, 737.
38. Esposito, *Living Thought,* 69.
39. Giordano Bruno, *The Cabala of Pegasus*, trans. Sidney L. Sondergard and Madison U. Sowell (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 54.
40. Esposito, *Living Thought,* 69.
41. Bruno, *De rerum principiis* in *Opere magiche*, 675.
42. Bruno, *De rerum principiis* in *Opere magiche*, 683.
43. Esposito is not overstating the fact when he claims that Bruno represents a milestone in the history of Western thought: "Rarely in the corpus of ancient and modern philosophy has an author pushed so far ahead in the identification of the principle of human life that the very

lineaments of the human are dissolved in it, together with all the prejudices and claims of primacy of one civilization over another." Esposito, *Living Thought*, 70.

44. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 12.

45. On Heidegger's reading of Rilke as it concerns the question of the animal see, for example, Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), chapter 1.

46. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, trans. David Young (New York – London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), 71.

47. Manilius, *Astronomica*, II, 211–15, 99.

48. Which is an almost ironic twist on Warburg's idea that what prescientific humans saw when gazing up at the planets was the limit beyond which their imagination could not travel.

49. Agamben, *The Open*, 58.

50. Agamben, *The Open*, 30.

51. Agamben, *The Open*, 14.

52. Agamben, *The Open*, 14.

53. Agamben, *The Open*, 15.

54. Agamben, *The Open*, 16.

55. Agamben, *The Open*, 79.

56. Agamben, *The Open*, 75.

57. Agamben, *The Open*, 76.

58. Werner Foerster, ed., *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts,* vol. 1*, Patristic Evidence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 72, cited in Agamben, *The Open*, 89, 90.

59. Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 263.

60. Agamben, *The Open*, 91.

61. Agamben, *The Open*, 92.

62. http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=ignorant.

63. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 71.

64. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 71–72.

65. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 72–73.

66. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 73.

67. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 74.

68. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 74.

69. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 74.

70. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 76.

71. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 65.

72. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 83.

73. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 99.

74. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 63.

75. Agamben, *The Open*, 92.

76. Sergei Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 170. Although Calarco approaches the same ontological question, but from a different optic, he outlines the implications of Agamben calling for the dismantling of the ontological distinction between man and animal.

77. Prozorov, *Agamben and Politics,* 172.

78. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 40.

79. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 90.

80. Benjamin, "Paralipomena to On the Concept of History," in *Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940*, 407.

81. Dickinson, *Agamben and Theology*, 113.

82. Saint Thomas Aquinas*, The Summa Theologica. Volume II*, 1018.

83. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 6.

84. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 7.

85. De la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben*, 388–89.

86. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 43. On this matter see Dickinson, *Agamben and Theology*, 114.

87. Agamben, *Potentialities*, 80.
88. Cited in Chevalier, *A Postmodern Revelation,* 185.
89. Agamben, *Nymphs*, 29–30.
90. Agamben, *The Open*, 85.
91. Agamben, *The Open*, 85.
92. Walter Benjamin, "Theological-Political Fragment," in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1986), 313, cited in Agamben, *The Open*, 82.
93. Agamben, *The Open*, 87. Translation slightly altered.
94. Cited in Aby Warburg, *Opere II,* 981.
95. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 101.
96. Agamben, *The Time That Remains,* 62.
97. Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language*, 66.
98. Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language*, 69.

Coda

Whither astrology?

The acceptable "horoscopic" instruments, so to speak, today are the ones employed by i) medical scientists, who inform us on how to take care of our bodies and which illnesses are on our horizon; ii) actuarians, who prognosticate on life expectancy; iii) psychiatrists and other mental health practitioners, who speak to our temperament and behavior; iv) economic forecasters and financial consultants, who can address the question of monetary wealth. The list could be much longer, but in any event the areas of life covered in the twelve houses of the geniture discussed in chapter 3 all have a corresponding professional expert, who is obliged to provide good as well as tragic news, unlike popular horoscopy, which only offers what the reader seeks to hear and feel.

Once humans deconstructed and rendered inoperative the purported psycho-existential weight of sidereal influence through quantitative/experimental science, astrology lost its right to offer prognoses about the future. In fact, it was not only a case of deactivating the influence of the stars; it was as well a question of humans being able to "imitate," or download into their consciousness, the power of the planets. According to Jonas, the movement of the celestial bodies is in accordance to the law, which is synonymous with reason,

> for the intelligibility of their law implies intelligence in their activation. The degree of intelligibility, considered to rest in intrinsic rationality, the measure of the grade of being; and by the inference just mentioned, it is also the measure of intelligence residing in the object itself. (According to the modern view, it is a measure of intelligence of the cognizing subject merely.) The apprehending of the rationality of stellar motions by mathematical reason,

> therefore, is nothing less than the communion of human intelligence with divine intelligence.[1]

The approximation of human intellection with that of the divine implies, as it did for Ficino during the Renaissance, man's ability to create virtual worlds in imitation of God. By capturing the intelligence of the heavenly bodies through mathematics, the human was now able to interrogate the future without their guidance. The celestial spheres Nature created for man to understand, and thus seize, the flow of time, were replaced by man-made instruments such as statistics, computation, and other techno-scientific possibilities.

There was, however, an even more severe consequence for astrology. Once man became divine-like and captured the motion of the stars, they no longer moved for the astrologer who needed to grasp, say, the difference between one conjunction and another, or the significance of a certain orbital pattern. That is, science had depleted the sidereal bodies of their magical pneumatological influence on humans, which meant that there was nothing else to see, save the astro-physical and purely optical account of how stars and planets move. The horoscopy of popular culture pivots on a tableau of deactivated and expended astral energies that no longer move humans. The heavens of ancient astrology were frozen with the advent of modern science, which did not allow for the transmission of astral influence on humans. In a very similar way, as we saw, Aquinas argued that after Judgement Day the heavenly bodies will cease to move because there is no need for them to do so, since man has achieved his theological end. The stars no longer moved for the astrologer because their movements were now fossilized in the language of science. In this way, the constellations became a series of permanent eidetic phenomena, which do not offer insight into the future but which became the dialectical image of the dialectical image.

Given all of this, if astrology is encouraged to escape from the crypt built for it by theology and science, it would assume a completely different role: not as a horoscopic science or as a baseless behavioral psychology, but as a signature for the unactualized potentialities that reside in the unconscious of thought. Its vocation would be to activate, to use a previously cited expression, "a lacerating revision of our figurative conceptions." This would imply recalibrating the relationship between the unconscious and consciousness, since astrology's gift to the present age is the psychosomatic archive it contains as a remainder of human life that modern science banished from the field of knowledge. Astrology displays to the conscious world the elements of profound dread and fear, of the rational and the irrational that collapsed into the abyss of historical time. As an archive of this sort, astrology becomes the exposed unconscious of the West, precisely because the archaic mnemonic ruins that constitute this archive are hidden in the timelessness of the

unconscious of culture. As we saw with Ficino, Cardano, Warburg, and others, the astrologers recorded both the predictions or prognoses that proved to be reliable, as well as those that never were. Thus, the mnemonic ruins located in the unconscious contain both actualized possibilities as well as the unactualized ones.

By referring to the polarities of the written and the unwritten celestial texts, Agamben makes use of astrology to expand the interpretative expanse of his doctrine of (im)potentiality. Moreover, and as we have argued, the unconscious plays a central role in this issue, and so when Agamben speaks about Warburg's use of astrology it is to theorize about the potentialities of the living image beyond the horizon of conscious historical thought. An intersectioning of the astrological tradition with Agamben's thought leads to a different way of understanding the rational/irrational polarities of astrology, and the idea that underpins this approach is the unconscious. Throughout this study we approached the remains of the astrological tradition in Agamben by conjecturing about how the central themes of his thought intersect with the manner in which the astrologer reads the (un)written celestial texts. Even if a central hypothesis has been that astrology appears on the horizon of an archaeology of biopower, the matter of interest is not whether or not reading the heavens today can help us predict the future, but, instead, how the way the astrologer reads, the process of observation, provides us access to the logic of the unconscious. The issue, however, becomes that of explaining how one captures in temporality the atemporality of the unconscious. Virilio phrases the matter interrogatively: if, as Henri Poincaré suggested, physical dimensions constitute slices along a continuum—understood as essential and absolute, just as in all substances—would it not be reasonable to characterize the "absence of consciousness . . . as a dimension of time, a dimension of that 'depth of time' that no longer concerns itself with the indispensable accounting of the effects of the observation on the observed process, thereby contributing to the renewal of the experience of space and duration?"[2]

The unconscious, understood in this manner, is a moment that partakes in the same physical continuum as does consciousness. In fact, as Virilio suggests, the unconscious locates itself in a "depth of time" that suspends the relationship between, on the one hand, the effects of the observation itself and, on the other, how it was observed. We could add that it is an illustration of the potentiality (the unconscious and the "the depth of time") that conserves its impotentiality ("no longer concerned with the indispensable accounting") after it has been actualized ("the effects of the observation"). The unconscious is in this way a physical dimension that occupies the same topology as does consciousness, but it is that which safeguards (im)potentiality. The (un)written text of the celestial configurations, which is always being read for the first time, is the same entity as the "absence of

consciousness" Virilio speaks about, and which Agamben resurrects as a signature of (im)potentiality.

In a letter to L. Oswald dated December 8, 1928, Jung wrote that "Astrology has actually nothing to do with the stars but is the 5000-year-old psychology of antiquity and the Middle Ages."[3] Let us transpose this idea to our context and suggest that astrology has nothing to do with a horoscopal scrutiny of the stars, and is instead a way of penetrating the shadows of the present moment. In this way, that is, by displacing its signifying properties from the corpse of horoscopy to the (im)potential unwritten cartographies of the present moment, the signature of astrology becomes a mode of philosophical archaeology that allows the critical imagination to sound the depths of the unconscious with the view of identifying the emergence, on the horizon of intelligibility, of potentialities that remain unactualized.

NOTES

1. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 258–59.
2. Virilio, *The Lost Dimension*, 102.
3. Carl G. Jung, *Letters*, ed. Gerhard Adler with Aniela Jaffé, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), Volume I, 56.

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