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Medieval Cultures and Modern Crises: Agamben's Troubadours, Angels and Monks

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Giorgio Agamben stands accused of political idleness;¹ for Antonio Negri, he offers only “passive marginal resistance.”² Indeed Agamben’s focus on non-confrontational resistance is unusual in contemporary theoretical work, lying in stark contrast to Negri’s work with Michael Hardt, which casts the revolutionary as the full actualization of life.³ Agamben holds that typical revolutionary moves, which blur the boundaries between legal and illegal violence because they wield “constitutive” power (that is, the potential to found a new social order), prove ineffective as sovereign power structures have already incorporated such modes of resistance in the form of an exception within the system. Instead, Agamben has developed a model of “destitutive power,” which seeks to deactivate the machine of power through rendering inoperative its oppositions between subject and object, inside and outside, active and passive, or useful and useless life. Agamben associates destitutive power with supine verbs and the middle voice. It would make the linguistic, biological, political, material and social oppositions of power impossible, freeing individuals and potentials (including language) from productive uses and recuperating other dimensions of human life. I understand Agamben as arguing that, if the capitalist world order seeks to create productive subjects, then there lies a radical form of resistance in being inactive and unproductive, in study, play and profanity.

The resources for developing such a model lie scattered across history. Part of Agamben's originality lies in his contention that the potential of texts from many centuries ago has not been exhausted, and that we need to go back far to find ways out of contemporary crises of democracy and capitalism. There is revolutionary power in the recuperation of cultures that have been forgotten, repressed or pushed to the margins. Agamben, I think, hopes that philological scrutiny of cultural objects from the past will pay off by providing new paths to resistance and thus to new ontologies, new modes of subjectivity and community. Across his work, Agamben suggests that misunderstandings of concepts often come from insufficiently deep historicization. He extends Michel Foucault's work to reveal longer genealogies of power, but he also has utopian tendencies, seeing in the past dynamic possibilities that inhere, unbeknownst to us, in our present. The potentiality of texts, in particular, can never be fully realized in any one interpretation, meaning that texts are not equally readable at all moments of history. Perspectives are opened and closed by historical change. For example, Agamben speaks of the "secret meeting" between Saint Paul and Walter Benjamin that brings the former to its "now of knowability" or "legibility,"⁴ that is, the lucky encounter of text and context that uncovers something long occluded. He draws here on Benjamin's own idea of the "dialectical image": whereas fascism keeps its subjects in a mythical dream state supporting the illusion of continuity and progress, the dialectical image provides a sudden explosion or flash awakening historical memory and consciousness, short-circuiting time, and providing a path to revolution.⁵ Hence the practice of the montage, which creates new constellations of decontextualized materials, can provoke a radical crisis of the present. Agamben's own work might usefully be seen as a montage: though he sees historical works as reactions to contemporaneous problems, he also tends to decontextualize them. His books have non-linear structures, creating links between otherwise distant materials such that they might be read afresh, and bringing out their continuing philosophical power. A detractor

might see Agamben as constructing quaint little museums of rarified cultural artefacts, but his project amounts to an attempt to gather the lost potentialities of the past – hidden in its “folds and shadows,”⁶ in overlooked ideas, texts or modes of thought, or else in neglected elements of famous works – to power new philosophical concepts.

I will argue here for the crucial role that medieval materials play in this project. Agamben devotes varied and detailed attention to the Middle Ages, possibly more so than any other modern philosopher, an engagement which goes beyond the reading of *Bisclavret* in *Homo Sacer*, Agamben’s best-known work but just one of a now complete series of books, and only one element of Agamben’s broader philosophical system. A continuous dialogue with medieval culture takes place across his three successive main foci: language, law and life.⁷ In his close readings, Agamben takes methodological inspiration from the medieval commentary, and from the erudite notes of nineteenth-century philologists who glossed key terms.⁸ Most notably, in the *End of the Poem* (1996 in Italian; not part of the *Homo Sacer* series), Agamben’s philological intervention brings out the metapoetic dimension of troubadour metrical experimentation, allowing him to cast poetry as a confrontation with ineffable language itself, beyond the binary of sound and sense. Such a troubling of binary oppositions opens the path to a liberating experience of inoperativity – the unproductive use of language – and of the messianic “time of the end,” when earthly identities and possessions will be renounced. In the *Kingdom and the Glory* (*Homo Sacer* II.ii; 2007), Agamben’s philological work bears on the term “economy.” Medieval thought about angels provides ways of thinking the aporia of contemporary democracy through a genealogy of the tandem of “reigning” and “governing.” The angels again inscribe an inoperative, messianic dimension: when all earthly activity has ceased, they will continue the “useless” activity of praising God, in an unnecessary supplement to his already-complete glory. Finally, the

Highest Poverty (*Homo Sacer* IV.i; 2011) focuses on the monastic movements, especially the Franciscan monks and their renunciation of ownership via a reinvention of the idea of “use.” The Franciscan movement was oppressed, but it retains for Agamben power as a model for alternative communities, and for the emancipatory possibilities of new “forms-of-life.” Medieval monks thus provide an exit from entire edifice of the *Homo Sacer* series, which otherwise analysed oppression much more than resistance. I will argue that Agamben’s work on troubadour poetry prepared a methodology – combining the close reading of medieval texts with the techniques of medievalism – that pays off in the new ontological models of his more political works. Conversely, when read in the backwards light cast by the later volumes, the analysis of troubadour poetry reveals early elements of a politics of resistance. All this, I contend, allows Agamben to bring medieval troubadours, angels and monks to their now of legibility, and to unleash their revolutionary potential.

Poetry, Parody and Inoperativity: The Troubadours

Agamben has a highly original view of poetry: he sees its principal concern as language itself, construing it as a conduit to experiences of time outside time.⁹ The troubadours best exemplify this, for Agamben, since they sing to a lady who is just a cipher for language. In Agamben’s words, the troubadours tried to grasp “the pure existence of language,”¹⁰ or “to experience the *topos* of all *topoi*, that is, the very taking place of language as originary argument.”¹¹ The latter quotation comes from Agamben’s work on negativity, where he avoids the most famous troubadour poem about negativity – Guilhem IX’s “Farai un vers de dreyt nien” – instead reading a *tenso* (debate poem) about nothingness opposing Aimeric de Peguilhan and Albertet de Sisberon (“Amics Albertz, tenzos soven”). Agamben concludes that the poets “experience the event of language as if they were called to speak from nothing and to respond to nothing.”¹² In his eyes, the troubadour project represents a key stage in the

development of western subjectivity – crucial to the history of melancholy¹³ – and a unique moment of metrical experimentation and thematic play, as boundaries between the scatological and the spiritual were crossed. But, as Agamben also contends of other historical textual traditions, such poetry retains potential today. I see the troubadours as central to Agamben's broader attempt to reconcile philosophy and poetry, to seek the thinking essence of poetry and the poetic essence of thought, and to transform the link between language and metaphysics. The reading of Arnaut Daniel in *The End of the Poem* represents Agamben's most developed interest in the troubadours, displaying how seriously he takes them as virtuoso stylists (I shall also refer to *Profanations* and *The Time That Remains*). Like a good medievalist, Agamben is aware of manuscript variation, offering a sustained philological intervention. This move, I want to show, encapsulates something fundamental to his method: mapping the forgotten etymologies of terms, and thus reopening their semantic range, paves the way for new philosophical readings of texts, lifting the deadweight of canonical interpretations to reveal lost potentials.

The *End of the Poem* argues that twin movements towards sense and sound traverse poems: these movements cannot be separated, nor can they ever coincide. The poem, for Agamben, is this tension, perpetuated through rhythms and patterns, and as a formal structure it thus seems unable to finish. Closure, when it comes, is always abrupt and forced.¹⁴ Here lies Agamben's interest: the end of the poem. Agamben draws on medieval treatises by Nicolò Tobino and Dante that define verse in terms of disjunctions between units of sense and units of sound, enjambment being the key one, though caesura and rhyme also figure. In poetry, a metrical limit can be opposed to a syntactical one, whereas in prose no such opposition is possible (*EP*, 34). The final verse, which cuts off these possibilities, is therefore not really a verse, but the moment when the poem transforms into prose. This is a potential crisis – sound might fall

into the “abyss” of sense (*EP*, 113) – but instead, Agamben claims, as the poem collapses into silence, language itself is transmitted. Agamben’s formulation here is quite mystical: the designation of an ill-defined third space beyond binaries is a frequent move of his, and he leaves it as an opening of thought, rather than filling the gap with a new concept. In his later political works, the same move will allow for the undoing of power, which Agamben insists, works via binaries.

It is worth following closely Agamben’s path from the reglossing of apparently insignificant terms to broad contentions about poetry and language. “Corn” (*EP*, 23–42), which examines Arnaut Daniel’s poetry, is divided into sections named after a fivefold version of the levels of medieval exegesis: “historia” (the literal level of facts and words), “allegory” (typological connections), “tropology” (morals), “anagogy” (prophecy) and “seu sensus mysticus” (mystical meaning). An exegetical model thus allows Agamben to move from the manuscripts of Arnaut Daniel’s poem to allegorical connections between the lady’s body and the poem, next to the moral (poetry should be thought of as essentially graphic), then to the timeless truth that poems are tensions between sound and sense, and finally to Dante’s beatific vision of the ineffable nature of language. To begin, Agamben quotes the *razo* (gloss) explaining the composition of “Pus Raimons e Truc Malecx,” the *sirventes* where Arnaut intervenes in a debate between Raimon de Durfort and a jester, concerning whether a knight called Bernat should oblige a lady – Ayna – asking for a peculiar sexual act. The last lines of the poem read:

Bernatz de Cornes no s’estrilh
 al corn cornar ses gran dozilh
 ab que·l trauc tap el penchenilh:
 pueis poira cornar ses perilh.¹⁵

[Bernat of Cornes should not strive to horn the horn without a big cork with which to plug the hole in the groin: then, he will be able to horn without danger.]

Agamben quotes a whole series of editorial glosses on *corn*: scholars noted the regular meanings of “horn” or “trumpet,” but argued about whether it here means “anus” or “clitoris,” making the action “cornar” difficult to determine (*EP*, 24–26). Agamben, however, takes inspiration from Maria Careri’s leftfield suggestion that *corn* carries the meaning of “a special kind of verse” (*EP*, 28), thus completely recasting the poem as about poetic technique as well as obscene acts. Agamben notes that *corn* lies close to “bec” (“beak,” connoting “bad language”), tying the oral and anal to poetic production:

Ben l’agr’ops que fos becutz
e·l becx fos loncx e agutz,
que·l corns es fers, laitz e pelutz

[He should definitely have a beak and the beak should be long and sharp, since the horn is horrible, ugly and hairy]

Key for Agamben are *corn*’s meanings of “tip” or “extremity” (*EP*, 30) and its position at the poem’s end, where strands of meaning gather and clash. He claims that Arnaut – famous amongst troubadours as the master of the perfect construction – takes part in this lewd debate because “corn” as bodily orifice symbolizes “corn” as the poetic rupture of the “unrelated rhyme,” that is, the rhyme word whose partner lies in a different stanza (*EP*, 30). Agamben cites the example of Arnaut’s “Si·m fos Amors de joi donar tan larga,” where successive lines do not rhyme: the first lines of the stanzas rhyme with each other, the second with the second, and so on. Compositional unity is thus maintained across, not within, stanzas. The *tornada* (the final, shorter stanza, the “twist” in the tail) repeats the last two rhyme words: “Arnautz a fag e fara loncs atens | qu’atenden fai pros hom richa conquest” [Arnaut has waited, and will wait, because by waiting, a wise men makes a fine conquest]. Waiting, it can be argued, thus symbolizes the poem’s structure, its delaying of the end.

Agamben determinedly rereads Arnaut's poems as metapoetic reflections. Following certain of the poem's manuscripts, he suggests changing the rendering of a crucial line in Arnaut's "Canso do-ill mot son plan e prim": from "per que mos jois capduelha" [for that my joy is at its peak] to "per que mos cors..." [for that my poem...]. the word "capduelha" is repeated in the *tornada*, stressing that poetry has peaked (*EP*, 29). "Cors" would normally be read as "body" or "heart" – homophonic play between the two figures in many troubadour poems – but by adding the third term of *corn* in his reading of "En breu brizara-l temps braus" and "L'aura'amara," Agamben again incorporates a metapoetic dimension. Most importantly, however, Agamben reinterprets Arnaut's celebrated *sestina* (sextain) "Lo ferm voler qu'el cor intra." Six stanzas of six verses are followed by a *tornada* of three verses. In such poems, the patterning of the six rhyme words is fundamental: the last rhyming word of a stanza becomes the first rhyme of the next, the first line's end word takes second place in the next stanza, the next to last moves into third, and the second to fourth, and so on. In a brilliant reading, Agamben contends that this process does not unfurl in a way homologous to chronological time, but rather through what he calls "cruciform retrogradation," an alternation between progression and inversion that creates "rhythmic constellations themselves in movement" (*TR*, 81–82). The *tornada* then returns to certain rhyme words, in a different sequence, "simultaneously exposing their singularity along with their secret connectedness," making the poem "a soteriological device" (*TR*, 82). The announcement and retrieval of end words creates a model of messianic time, that is, neither chronological time or eternity, but the transformation that time goes through when it becomes a remnant, "the time of the end, the *time that the poem takes to come to an end*" (*TR*, 83, his italics). As Agamben says:

the poem is...an organism or a temporal machine that, from the start, strains towards its end. A kind of eschatology occurs within the poem itself. But for the more or less brief time that the poem lasts, it has a specific and unmistakable

temporality, it has its own *time*. This is where time, which in the *sestina* consists in repeated and often rhyming end words, comes into play (*TR*, 79, his italics)

Agamben notes the symbolic importance of the number six – six days of creation, six ages of man – suggesting that the *tornada* represents the seventh day, the messianic fulfilment of time. It remains unclear how far these arguments can be extended. Does the end of the all poems have the potential to move us towards the final messianic state, or is this a specific property of this *sestina*? Certainly poetry, as an encounter with language beyond any communicative use, might afford us a liberating experience of inoperativity. Agamben does not make the connection here, but I think he can be read as hinting at poetry's potential for resistance.

The parodic and obscene dimensions of poetry might also be seen to contain this potential. Agamben contends that the rhyme-word is “first of all a paradoxical point of undecidability between an eminently asemantic element (consonance) and an essentially semantic element (the word)” (*EP*, 36). Indeed the *sestina*'s rhyme words invite an obscene reading: “intra” connotes penetration; “ongla” (“nail”) here suggests closeness and penetration; “cambra” can mean “vagina” and “verga” “penis”; “oncle” connotes illegitimate offspring; and “arma” could be “weapon” (as well as “soul”).¹⁶ The rhyme words are thus key sites of play, profanity and liberation. But Agamben also incorporates troubadour poetry into an argument about “parody”: in Greek music, melody was meant to correspond to the rhythms of speech; parody represented the breaking of this link, the separation of song from speech and the opening of *para*, a space beside, for prose.¹⁷ Moving quickly from context to context, as is his wont, Agamben derives from this a broader definition, where parody means the renunciation of direct representation. In troubadour poetry, love is parodic because the love object, unobtainable and unnarratable, cannot be portrayed. *Trobar clus* (complex, obscure poetry)

and metrical preciousness represent parody because they “establish differences of level and polarities in language that transform signification into a field of unresolved tensions” (*PR*, 46). Agamben cites Arnaut’s obscene *sirventes*, where spiritual longing sits alongside burlesque, cynical and sexual subtexts. In the erudite complexities of troubadour poetry, he thus finds assertions of freedom from quotidian, productive uses of language.

In the *sestina*, the rhyme words contain precisely these polarities, but it is with the term *corn* that the most original dimension of Agamben’s reading emerges. “Cor” appears in the first line – “Lo ferm voler qu’el cor m’intra” [the firm desire that enters my heart] – but Agamben reglosses it as *corn*: thus desire enters the poem in Agamben’s reading, again making the poem metapoetic. To follow Agamben, Arnaut treats all strophes as *corns* – that is, as requiring completion in other parts of the poem – in a dialectical move that transforms the unrelated rhyme into the principle of a higher relation (*EP*, 31). Apparent imperfection becomes a new kind of perfection. Agamben is here, I think, praising Arnaut’s ability to integrate an element inimical to structure into a structure; Arnaut’s *sestina* is thus read as a brilliantly-realized example of a poetic technique of non-correspondence, encapsulating poetry’s ability to shape an encounter with contradiction. The tension between sound and sense has its apex in the *corn*: “the unrelated verse, binding itself to its counterpart in the following strophe, plays out a superior and, so to speak, silent score” (*EP*, 33). The linking of rhymes into a whole moves the focus from one part of anatomy to a higher, harmonic relationship, simultaneously causing a fracture between melodic and strophic, metrical and syntactical structures. This sounds very much like dialectical transcendence, a moment when we are liberated from tensions and move into an uncertain space. For Agamben, then, Arnaut makes the first move in a game leading to Mallarmé, whereby the poem is freed from orality, from the linkage of rhymes to the troubadour’s singing voice, becoming essentially graphic:

“the new technique inaugurated by Arnaut, which elevates this fracture to the status of supreme compositional principle, will then signify such a radical metamorphosis of the body of the poem as to justify the tempestuous alchemical fermentation that seems to take place in the body of Ayna” (*EP*, 33). In the smallest details revealed by close reading, Agamben locates a transformational moment.

Once he has arrived at an argument, Agamben seems to find evidence for it everywhere, and he now turns to Dante and Aquinas for further support of the paradigm whereby language is traversed by two forces that move towards one another without ever fully corresponding, leaving a remainder. For Aquinas, language exceeds the intellect, which however transcends language, whereas for Dante, this chiasmus shapes poetry, as language and intellect communicate to each other despite their limitations: a double, synchronous movement traverses poetry’s ineffable meanings (*EP*, 38). Agamben returns to Arnaut’s *sirventes* in the chapter’s epilogue to discuss the mysterious lady, “Ayna.” After another, somewhat fanciful, philological investigation, Agamben argues that it means “Aina,” “intelligence.” Her identity is found in the *corn*, the remainder or third space, where comprehension becomes opaque in speech and speech is muted in comprehension: “insofar as it bears the *corn*’s coat of arms, her oneiric body is the place offered by the poet to unrelated relation and, almost, to the reciprocal catastrophe of sound and sense that defines poetic experience” (*EP*, 42). Ayna is the ultimate *senhal* (code name for the lady) of the troubadour project, found also in Raimbaut d’Aurenga’s “Escotatz, mas no say que s’es,” where the last line of each stanza is longer and in prose. Hence Raimbaut’s declaration that he does not know what the poem is: it is not a “vers” (poem), “estribot” (a rare verse form) or a “sirventes” (a satirical poem).¹⁸ Agamben decides that Raimbaut’s poem concerns the undecidable relationship between poetry and prose (*EP*, 42), preparing for the final, title essay of the volume, when Agamben

argues again that all poetry is an encounter with limits. The end of the poem is “the ultimate formal structure perceptible in a poetic text” (*EP*, 112). Raimbaut’s poem encapsulates the irruption of prose at the poem’s end, whereas *tornadas*, the unnecessary supplement marking the end, show poets’ awareness of a crisis “as if for poetry the end implied a catastrophe and a loss of identity so irreparable as to demand the deployment of very special metrical and semantic means” (*EP*, 112). There is no final reconciliation of the binary of sound and sense, merely a remainder of silence. Where the poem ends we do not find the unsayable, but rather the true goal of poetry “to let language finally communicate itself, without remaining unsaid in what is said” (*EP*, 115).

Through careful rereading and ambitious reglossing, Agamben casts the troubadours as a foundational moment of poetic experimentation, of parody, obscenity and play, all of which, by his lights, reveals a potential still inherent in language. His faith in the power of poetry to recreate resistance through metrical play is convincing and refreshing, and the rethinking of time in relation to troubadour poetry also provides a model for unleashing the potentiality of distant texts. Because time is non-linear, the medieval past is never past. The *End of the Poem* represents Agamben’s most highly developed philological work, and the careful tracking of the accretion of layers of meaning of key terms will be a crucial method in his later works, as will the ability to move from the tiniest detail about vocabulary to the largest philosophical contentions, following the system of medieval allegory. Most crucially, the ontology of two forces working in tension and in concert, and the need to seek a third inoperative space, beyond, will furnish models for denouncing the workings of political systems, and for resistance.

Bureaucratic Economies: From the Angels to Modern Corporations

In *The Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben continues Foucault's genealogy of governance, but he rejects Foucault's model, according to which there was a historical shift from the premodern era of sovereignty as power over life and death to modern government as biopower, the management of life.¹⁹ Arguing instead that the two have always worked in tandem, Agamben rewrites the entire history of Christian thought, using theology to explore the contradictions of democracy. Carl Schmitt and Ernst Kantorowicz's arguments about the link between dictatorships and Christian acclamations provided key props to Agamben's contentions in *Homo Sacer*, and in the *Kingdom*, Agamben now shows that acclaim does not die with the decline of fascism, rather changing form. Modern democracy works by glorification: in the society of the spectacle, the media shape public opinion and create consent, constantly reconstituting a "people" with a "national interest." The Christian idea of providence also remains, though it too has mutated. Modern nations are obsessed with GDP, portraying economic growth as the ultimate good that will provide for all. But whereas Agamben's previous work looked at the top (the sovereigns) and the bottom (*homines sacri*, refugees and other forms of bare life created by sovereignty), his focus here on medieval thought about angels – the ultimate intermediaries – allows for a new perspective on the mechanisms in the middle. He shows how from the Trinity, two paradigms are derived: monotheistic political theology (God's being, which bequeaths to political philosophy the notion of transcendent sovereignty) and divine *oikonomia* (God's *praxis*, which gives us biopolitics, the tasks of management and government of life) (*KG*, 1). The theological-political paradigm shapes absolutism, whereas democratic government works via the economic, but both have both elements: thus there is law and its execution, sovereign power and state apparatus, and an invisible hand that guides free individual economic actors. This leads to the convincing conclusion that western political thought – including, one might add,

Agamben's own *Homo Sacer* – errs in reducing government to transcendent, executive power: “what our investigation has shown is that the real problem, the central mystery of politics is not sovereignty, but government; it is not God, but the angel; it is not the king, but ministry; it is not the law, but the police – that is to say, the governmental machine that they form and support” (*KG*, 276, in italics in original). Agamben can be seen as arguing that modern concepts of government and management have a long (and theological) heritage, and thus, we might say, studying the Middle Ages allows for better diagnosis of modern crises. Agamben rereads patristic writings, medieval angelology and medieval ideas about “useless kings” as anticipations of the ossification of modern democracies and corporate structures, with their endless ranks of middle managers, powerful only insofar as they communicate downwards the decisions of superiors. He thus, I want to argue, accounts for the sense of the futility of politics that shapes the current historical moment, when power seems unlocatable, making targets for acts of resistance impossible to find.

The *Kingdom* lays the groundwork for these contentions via tracking the accretion of strata of signification of the term *oikonomia* over the centuries. *Oikonomia* derives from Aristotle's work on the household, a complex unit gathering beasts, free men and slaves. Diverse in its composition, the household nonetheless runs according to a unitary ordering principle, providing a microcosm for thinking the organization of the natural world and the single *arche* of the cosmos. The army provides another metaphor: the arrangement of the ranks must be in concert with the broader military strategy. Crucially, Agamben notes that, for Aristotle, the immanence of the good implies *taxis* (order), but that the good also lies in command; order exists because of the commander (*KG*, 82–84). In rhetoric, the term corresponds to ordering of spoken and written elements, whereas in politics, it supports the idea of monarchy as unifying principle. In each case, economy denotes coordination, management and

organization, yet remains bipolar, both transcendent to and immanent in order. Economy thus provides the model for Agamben's keystone opposition between "reigning" – glory as the transcendent form of power, the ceremonial regality and liturgy that incarnate unity – and "governing" – the actions taken to stave off the threat of disunity, the corrective interventions that maintain order. Agamben thus adds the mystical "supplement" of glory and sovereignty to Foucault's account of social control and the arts of government. But why does power need glory?

Agamben's answer involves tracing economy's extension into theology. In Paul, the Christian community is the house of God, primarily an economy rather than a polity (*KG*, 25). The patristic thinkers of the second and third centuries AD then reworked the Aristotelian concept to defend the Trinity against heresy. As Agamben has it, Trinitarian theology reconciled the three hypostases with the unity of divine substance whilst avoiding the introduction of a "political fracture in God" (*KG*, 13). Arguing against Gnosticism, Irenaeus contends that there is a single world, created, contained within, and providentially governed, by one God; "economy" describes a divine practice leading to the incarnation of Jesus and to human salvation (Eusebius, in turn, sees the distinction between theology and economy as corresponding to that between the divinity and the humanity of Jesus). The idea of economy wards off the spectres of fragmentation and contradiction by allowing for a God that is both transcendent and immanent. Tertullian, refuting the claims of Monarchianism, says that monarchy can be administered by legions without ceasing to be monarchy. He thus uses a political idea to explain the unity of God: God is one in being, but three in economy (*KG*, 53). The development of *oikonomia* in Origen and Clement of Alexandria relates it to providence, the harmonizing of the contingent actions of individual beings into some overarching order, opposed to pagan anarchy. Matters of revelation and history are brought

into a “mystery of the economy,” whereas in Paul, there was an “economy of the mystery,” the activity of spreading the word about the mysteries of God (*KG*, 35). *Oikonomia* took on the meaning of exception in the sixth- and seventh-century Byzantine church, where the idea of the mystery of God’s action, undertaken to ensure salvation, became the model for exceptions from the rigid application of canon law (*KG*, 49).

What is crucial is that Agamben takes these thinkers seriously as doing philosophical work. He does not decontextualize theology – instead showing how successive thinkers brought different responses to the same central problems – but rather demonstrates how it has repercussions beyond its immediate context, how it remains vital. By showing how Trinitarian theology turned to economy to interrelate divine monarchy with divine government and arrangement of the world, Agamben can explain how key asymmetries and conflicts – the conceptual problems of order and disorder, transcendence and immanence, unity and multiplicity, inherited from Aristotle and embedded in the term “economy” when it was used to fight heresy – are resolved in Aquinas (*KG*, 85), who rethought the relationship the division between being and *praxis* in a way that became crucial to western political thought. Aristotle had given to the West the model of a transcendent *arche* separate from immanent actions and second causes, which led the Gnostics to posit both a lazy God with no involvement in the world and one who intervenes actively. Aquinas rejects both poles, shunning the idea of an inoperative God but without making God a puppet master, who governs everything, to argue instead that, in nature, things nearly always happen for the best,²⁰ because providence directs nature towards the good as an end. For Aquinas, government consists of two things: the design of government, where God governs all things immediately, and its execution, where God governs things by means of others. Singular in substance but multiple in his activity, God is a master, who not only imparts knowledge to his

pupils, but also gives them the faculty of teaching others. Aquinas thus distinguishes primary causes from secondary causes. Secondary causes depend on the primary cause, which founds, legitimates, and renders possible the second, whereas the second realizes the first concretely in the chain of causes and effects (*KG*, 141). God created all things immediately, but established an order among things, where some depend on others (*ST* 1, q. 104). For Agamben, Aquinas's "order" is a "signature" that moves concepts to a new field (*KG*, 87), shifting ontology from the category of substance to that of relationships. Order is both the relationship between creatures and God, and between creatures amongst themselves. Medieval ontology is circular because the order of the world is founded in the transcendent unity of God, which is also expressed in the immanent order of creatures (*KG*, 85–87). As Agamben articulates, "order" thus explains and inter-relates things that would otherwise seem contradictory; they are unitary but split onto two levels, in a harmonious correlation of general laws and specific cases.

Aquinas's complex, integrative thinking provides Agamben with the resources to argue for that government remains unitary, even as it is split across levels. As Agamben convincingly shows, the politicization of theological and cosmological questions allowed earthly power to draw on this duality: reigning and governing provided models for creation and conservation, for constitutive and constituted power. To think this duality, Agamben cites the "useless king" (the *rex inutilis*), exemplified by the wounded Fisher King of Arthurian romance, who reigns idly whilst others govern for him. Agamben sees this split as one between the mystical, ceremonial character of kings and their more managerial function. The wounded king prefigures the modern sovereign who reigns, but has little governmental power. Agamben argues that the opposition between reigning and governing gets its first technical, juridical

formulation in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century canon law debates about the *rex inutilis* and the papacy's right to depose earthly sovereigns. For Agamben,

the sovereign is structurally *mehaignié* [the term Chrétien de Troyes uses to describe the wounded king in the *Conte du Graal*], in the sense that his dignity is measured against the possibility of its uselessness and inefficacy, in a correlation in which the *rex inutilis* legitimates the actual administration that he has always already cut off from himself and that, however, formally continues to belong to him (*KG*, 99)

The useless king is a paradigm that also corresponds to a Christian conception of time: at the beginning and end lies a figure of idleness, God being inactive before the creation of the world and after its termination. The bifurcation of power leads Agamben to the two swords described in Luke (22:38), central to medieval debates about papal plenitude of power and imperial power (*KG*, 100–3). Again Agamben brings a new angle to tired debates: he thinks that scholars, by limiting themselves to reconstructing the papal-imperial dispute, missed the more important question of power's originary division. The two swords symbolize spiritual and earthly power. Though they are discrete, the earthly sword is contained within the spiritual one; conversely, the spiritual sword is perfect but still lacking since its nobility makes it unable to enact physical violence. Again, as in the distinction between the useless and the effective king, it is the separation of powers that allows for the possibility of governing men. There is a slothful, transcendent power, superior to a more active power which governs, allowing a middle road between two extremes: that God directly acts in everything (making his original act of creation useless) and that God does not directly act in anything. Though there is a divine plan, contingencies are allowed for by miracles and acts of grace, which constitute God's actions of government. The distinction between primary and secondary causes, between constitutive and constituted power, or between providence and fate, makes government a vicarious economy of secondary causes administered by Christ, and then by earthly rulers. Agamben, uniquely, sees these concepts as the forgotten history of

the modern state, which works on the levels of providence and fate, too, offering a vision of the country and a transcendent justification of its political organization, as well as quotidian, responsive decision-making.

Central to this vicarious economy are angels, God's middle managers. In a highly original reading, Agamben construes scholastic discussions of angels as elaborate theories of hierarchy and bureaucracy. For Aquinas, sacred power is called hierarchy: other hierarchies imitate the angelic and appropriate its vocabulary (of offices, ministries, and so on) but also provide a model for thinking it. The orders of ecclesiastical functionaries, like angels, are distinguished by three tasks: purging, illuminating and perfecting (*ST*, q. 108). The city too is divided into orders charged with the same tasks (*KG*, 157). The ecclesiastical hierarchy is thus sacralised but so, to a lesser extent, are all political hierarchies. There are three angelic hierarchies, each with three orders: Seraphims, Cherubims and Thrones, the highest orders, participate most actively in God's glory; the middle orders – Dominations, Virtues, Powers – fight transcendental battles; and the lower orders – Principalities, Archangels, Angels – intervene on earth. Archangels only intervene at key times in history, whereas the lowest-ranking angels are humble messengers. Thus the angelic hierarchies contain administrative aides but also assistants in God's contemplative power, winged functionaries who sing the liturgy in ecstatic choirs. Glory represents the coincidence of the levels. The complexity of this hierarchy testifies to God's power. As Aquinas says: "that an earthly king should have ministers to execute his laws is a sign not only of his being imperfect, but also of his dignity; because by the ordering of ministers the kingly power is brought into greater evidence" (*ST* 1, q. 103). Agamben sees Aquinas as obsessed with hierarchy, (*KG*, 150), and if he is right that Aquinas left a decisive legacy for the thinking of power in the West, then it is perhaps this

valorization of hierarchy as a good in itself that now makes resistance difficult to justify, or even to imagine.

Even the demons are bureaucratically organized, as God's power manifest in their order. As Agamben argues, the devil does what God wants, but not in the way God wants it,²¹ or, in the terms of *Kingdom*, God allows the devil to reign in hell but does not determine how he governs. For Aquinas, ministers too are "instruments" (*ST* 1, q. 112) of God. The vicarious ontology of government developed in *Kingdom* can be better understood by reference to two other works by Agamben: in the *Use of Bodies*, he considers the ethical implications of living beings acting as the tools of others,²² and in *Opus Dei*, he construes the liturgy as a paradigm of human activity that does not depend on the subject performing it. The liturgy is performed through (not by) the priest, and thus the corrupt priest does not cover his whole flock with sin, because they still participate in the liturgy's effects. *Opus Dei* contends that Christian liturgy opens the path for the modern, nihilistic suspension of ethics by the functionary who unthinkingly performs his "duty." Agamben, I want to suggest, is diagnosing an impasse in modern politics: power which is not coercive proves impossible to locate and resist. You can discredit a leader politically but another will soon take his or her office. Regardless of which party rules, the economic structure of government, with its hierarchy of technocrats, remains. Dictatorships have already shown us that a return to transcendent sovereignty does not solve the problems of immanent government. In Agamben's reading, then, Aquinas's perfect heavenly hierarchy thus anticipates the later corruption of all earthly ones.

These are pessimistic results largely. But genealogy should provide more than a map of where we are, rather asking what is at stake in conceiving of something in a particular way (*OD*, 91), to order to allow for new conceptions. Although the critique of capitalism is

downplayed in *Kingdom*, I think that there remains some optimism about the possibility of recovering the lost meanings of terms such as “economy,” some hope that we might be rescued from the contemporary impasse. Agamben seeks the prospect of resistance within the Christian model, at the limits of its frame of temporal governance. At the end of the world, governing will cease, because humanity can no longer be saved. The action of government will continue only in hell, with the demons that punish sinners, and the angels will have nothing to do but provide glory, the inoperative state after the last judgment. For Agamben, “glory” captured within the economic-governmental machine the inoperativity of divine life – associated with the idle final state – and thus allowed for operativity, the human productivity that dominates modern political discourse. Seizing back inoperativity therefore provides a template for resistance. Crucially, it is poetry, again, that provides the symbol of inoperativity, as Agamben returns to Arnaut Daniel’s *sestina*, casting it as the contemplation of the Occitan language, that is, language beyond any use or purpose (*KG*, 252). The inoperative life would entail the rejection of every *bios* – of every politically-determined life – to seek instead a state of contemplation where *bios* coincides with *zoe*. The transformative potential of inoperativity is only hinted at in *Kingdom*, and developed partially in the *The Coming Community*, where Agamben outlines a model community without identity, but not without economy.²³ In the *Highest Poverty*, however, Agamben fully sketches an inoperative community.

Community beyond Economy: The “Form-of-Life”

Much of Agamben’s writing refers to the idea of a “form-of-life”²⁴ – a life that cannot be separated from its form – but only in *The Highest Poverty* does Agamben depict one.

The originality of the concept lies in the fact that a “form-of-life” is not life as survival and vitality, nor does it entail making life aesthetic. Agamben also shuns the false ideal of

“happiness” – whose formulation by medieval political theorist Marsilius of Padua he cites – because it immediately makes life political.²⁵ One inspiration is Guy Debord’s critique of the marketing of the “lifestyle,” which alienates humans from their lives,²⁶ but Agamben also picks up on a loose thread in Foucault’s work on ancient culture and “the care of the self,” to portray life as a work of art without an author.²⁷ A form-of-life implies no pre-defined or positive identity; it is subjectless, based on self-effacement. Avoiding exclusivity of membership and constraints on potentiality, Agamben proposes life as an incessant contemplative practice, a life where all acts and processes involve possibilities, not products. Communal life, in turn, implies contact between human potentialities that cannot be fully realized within a legal, political or economic system. There is no human vocation, task or purpose. Rather, the form-of-life implies an inoperative community, where life itself is the end and where nothing like bare life can be separated, because life does not start from the *polis* and its disconnection of *bios* from *zoe*. Here, Agamben’s thinking parallels that of Jean-Luc Nancy, who rejects identitarian politics and the myth of a return to a closed, perfect community that never in fact existed – ideas which lead to totalitarian horrors – to argue instead that community can never be made or produced via a social project (or “work”, hence Nancy’s community, like Agamben’s, is “inoperative”).²⁸ Agamben is also reacting, like Maurice Blanchot, to the dangers of sovereignty. Yet whereas Blanchot places the ethical relation of his “unavowable community” in the interruption of ontology by death, Agamben here focuses on repressed possibilities for life, thus also moving away from *Homo Sacer*’s fixation on finitude as the mode of thinking about life.²⁹

The stated aim of *Highest Poverty* is to “construct” a form-of-life by using monastic practices and writings philosophically.³⁰ Agamben reads the coenobitic movements beginning in the fourth century AD as attempts to mould a positive state of exception and to harness the

creative possibility of life outside the law. In *Homo Sacer*, life outside the law connoted tyranny, monstrosity and animality; it meant being exposed, deprived of protection, with the concentration camps a space outside the law created by the law. But as Leland de la Durantaye has argued, Agamben's thought often makes poison and antidote close.³¹ Thus here the opposite – law turned into life – has emancipatory possibilities. The monastic movements sought to shape every aspect of life; on Agamben's reading, this represents the desire to overturn the entire logic of control. The Middle Ages remain a moment in a long genealogy of power – because *The Highest Poverty* ends with the triumph of church governmentality over the Franciscan poverty movement – yet they also hold the prospect of a different model of human potentiality. Agamben's work often concerns sovereignty's victims, but here I find the whole outlook much less bleak, because *The Highest Poverty* provides Agamben's only developed example of resistance, although Melville's Bartleby, the inoperative functionary who “prefers not to” perform his work, perhaps best exemplifies resistance to corporate hierarchies.³² It might seem surprising that Agamben's paradigm for rebellion is monks, but again, I would argue, his approach involves integrating into the history of philosophy elements normally excluded from it, in order to find forgotten resources for thought. Agamben sees the monks as offering a more profound form of opposition than political violence, which is inevitably repressed when the governmental machine strengthens itself by invoking a state of exception. When the state of exception has been generalized, merely subverting the law is no good, because the law, in its binary structure, already contains the possibility of its own subversion. Agamben instead looks to the medieval past for attempts to found communities which are not based on law. He sees early Christian communities as charismatic groupings, which later ossified as the church, a legal community. Christianity's potential was thus actualized in one sense, but the potential for another

dimension, that of the form-of-life, remains in the foundational documents of monastic communities.

The monks shaped all aspects of life, sanctifying it through temporal rhythms. Agamben, in an intervention similar to medieval glossing, casts them as operating a more rigorous scansion of time than Taylorism (*HP*, 19). Once more, Agamben avoids tired questions – about the contents of monastic laws or their juridical status – to hone in on a philosophically-powerful element: a mode of living where life and law are indistinguishable, where living according to the law and applying the law to a pre-existing life coincide. On his reading, the monks did not vow to obey the rule. Rather, they promised their life; they lived obedience. Rules were both constitutive and immanent, and penalties for disobedience resembled therapy (*HP*, 31); this medical dimension made them, for Agamben, an art of living rather than a legal system. Because the form-of-life concerns modes of being, Agamben can construe the monks as offering a profound form of resistance that works both on a transcendent level (of concepts) and on an everyday level (of *praxis*).

Agamben perceives in the monks an ethics and a politics freed from all concepts of duty and will, and a model for recuperating play and study as models of community formation (instead of application, production and work). In a move that, to my mind, draws on his thinking about poetry as a confrontation with language itself, Agamben argues that monastic rules were meant to be read, and that saying them therefore equalled executing them. He thus collapses any distinction between form and content to contend that orality and writing joined law and *praxis* together, and that monastic life was a non-stop liturgy. Elsewhere, Agamben argues that only human thought is potential, exposed to inactivity – the angels' intellect is always at work, and that of animals is natural³³ – and casts study as an interminable shuttling

between bewilderment and lucidity.³⁴ It is in this light, I would say, that his arguments about the roles of *lectio* and *meditatio* (recitation and memory) as constitutive parts of the monastic rule make sense. Continuous reading – monks picked up where they left off, starting again when they reached the end – can be seen as the monks’ own, circular way of exploring human thought as potential.

By the twelfth century, some of the movements’ inventiveness had already been captured by the Benedictines, and thus partially brought under church control. But it remained impossible to reduce the Christian form-of-life to the obedience of precepts, and the ideas of the monastic movements were radicalized by the Franciscans in the thirteenth century. The form-of-life no longer conformed to the liturgy or to formal rules of conduct: the Franciscans instead made the term a technical one, with life the decisive question (*HP*, 96). As the glosses on Francis’s writings by Angela da Clareno and Pierre Jean Olivi show, by following Christ, monastic life gave itself, and made itself, entirely form (*HP*, 105–7). In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben argued that a grammatical example has its denotative content “suspended,” making it exceptional;³⁵ similarly, for the monks, the life of Christ was both exemplary and exceptional. The requirement of poverty, the key element for Francis, also worked via an exception. The Franciscans shunned, and made inoperative, ownership and accumulation: they believed in “use” rather than “ownership,” reckoning that the things of the world could be returned to their original context, without ever being appropriated. Surrounded by ownership, the Franciscans showed man’s potential to not-own, and thus produced a refusal that can be usefully paralleled to Bartleby’s: the monks “would prefer not to” own.

Agamben again undertakes an impressive philological exercise, this time around the term of “use,” rehearsing its definitions in Franciscan monks and theologians including Saint

Bonaventure and Bonagratia of Bergamo, Hugh of Digne and William of Ockham, all of whom, just like the theologians working on the idea of “economy,” Agamben rightly sees as performing subtle philosophical work that remains relevant. The Franciscan movement was largely negatively defined, against a regime of ownership, focussing on the right to refuse rights. Thus Ockham’s defence of use argues that everyone can use out of necessity, distinguishing a natural right to use from a positive right. Whereas the latter takes legal form and can be renounced, the former cannot. Ockham adroitly places the monks both inside and outside the law, in their own inverted state of exception, where the law applies only in the exception. This renders the binary opposition obedience/disobedience redundant and thus, for Agamben, undermines the law of the church, which defended an idea of possession versus the monks claim to use. The monks’ flight from the world forms a new social contract, “a space that escaped the grasp of power and its laws, without entering into conflict with them yet rendering them inoperative” (*TR*, 27). Agamben thus construes the monastic movement as a very powerful form of resistance that was not limited to the contestation of the law – that would lead only to the law’s refiguring – but rather mobilized life’s potentiality, articulating a way of living differently. The Franciscans were, for Agamben, the most theoretically ambitious of the monastic movements. Other movements tried to escape economy through glory, but the Franciscans refused economy altogether.

The Franciscan movement was crushed, but, I would argue, Agamben sees it as a paradigm, a model of community whose conceptual potency remains undiminished, regardless of its historical successes and failures. Though Francis structured the movement so as to avoid conflict with the church, expressing subordination to clerics, it grew into a threat. The movement’s weak spot was its insistence on a juridical definition of “use.” Pope John XXII, in his 1322 bull *Ad conditorem canonem*, refused any distinction between use and property,

arguing that the two are indistinguishable where food and drink are concerned because ownership and consumption coincide (Agamben, again perceiving long genealogies, casts this an anticipation of consumer society: *HP*, 131). For John, use without right was an animal condition, suitable only for prelapsarian mankind. Accusing the Franciscans of heresy, he expressed the conventional papal view that the church needed legal property, and that obedience was more important than poverty.³⁶ Agamben repeats here the critique of the Catholic Church he elaborated in *Opus Dei*: the split between the person of the vicar and his function creates an ethical void, with the office more important than the form-of-life (*HP*, 116–18). This separation was impossible for the Franciscans, who defined life by poverty. However, Agamben argues that their discourse on poverty missed the opportunity to uphold the category of “form-of-life” important to earlier monastic movements, thus failing to question property radically. Though they revealed that property has no reality outside the psychological and the procedural, the Franciscans simply tried to create a space without law, leaving everything else unquestioned and unreformed. Nonetheless, Agamben retains one argument made by the Franciscans, which has particular potential thanks to its subtle conceptualization of use. Francis di Ascoli developed the idea of “bodily use” and becoming: consumable goods such as food exist in becoming, and are used as such, without ever being possessed as fixed, tangible assets (*HP*, 132–33). How is it possible, he asks, to “own” something susceptible to decay? By thus founding his concept of use in the nature of things through time, Francis offered a new ontology, rejecting essence and thus making ownership unthinkable. Olivi also made ontological claims when he shifted the question of property onto the level of existence (*HP*, 135). Human life too, we might say, generates no essences, and is knowable only by its effects. But could a community like that of the Franciscans be created now? In *The Use of Bodies*, the Franciscans provide a starting point for imagining “destitutive” resistance, which would challenge the binary operations of power via

renunciations, by giving up worldly identities. The 2008 financial crash constituted another “now of knowability” for Franciscan writings, and Alessia Ricciardi rightly suggests that the use-ownership distinction is being fought once more, in battles over internet downloads.³⁷ Bonaventure argued that the Franciscans lacked acquisitive mentality and resembled children or madmen (*HP*, 111–12), whereas Bonagratia contended that use pre-exists property, mentioning the state of innocence (*HP*, 113) and animals (*HP*, 110). If the papal interdiction of poverty, which prefigured consumerism, left a legacy in the operative and governmental ontology of the West, then the Franciscans can provide a model for resistance to consumerism via common use, profanation and destitutive protest. The idea of the multitude also ties the monks to modern politics: Agamben draws from Dante the multitude’s position as the subject of politics beyond every possible community.³⁸ The multitude incarnates potentiality, sharing nothing but the fact of existing. Despised by Hobbes as apolitical, given to war and disrespectful of contracts, the multitude has been rehabilitated by Paolo Virno, who argues that because the multitude is foreign everywhere, it must place its trust in the human intellect.³⁹ This schema evokes refugees as well as Agamben’s monks; both, in their extra- or atterritoriality, provide outlines of the coming political community. Agamben’s work, I would conclude, traces the way that we have become human in order to open the possibility of new modes of being human, which might involve the messianic, the mocked, the homeless, the exiled, the childish, the parodic, the animalistic, or even theological models from the premodern period, models that in the eyes of many, we no longer have any need for. Rebellion against the prevailing order will only be powerful if it gathers these disparate and discredited resources, because in them lies the potential for new ontologies of the human.

One can hardly extract a concise “message” from Agamben’s writings, still less a programme for action. His philosophy explores openings of thought in other philosophers, and leaves

openings for thinkers to come. Are we to act like medieval poets, thinkers or monks, and what exactly would change if we did? I would suggest that looking at the past allows us to diversify our set of paradigms, whereas looking forward entails a dumb wait for something transformative. Agamben suggests behaving as if the messiah were already here, reimagining human potential following already-existing models and tracing longer histories to recover lost potentials, to discover what we could have been, and therefore what we might still be. When government has become economy, empty words governing bare life, philosophy can offer lines of resistance by shaping new vocabularies and new identities via the recuperation of human potentials that modern consumer society oppresses or occludes.⁴⁰ In the contemporary state of exception, we urgently need to find a potential for transformation, beginning with language, where the operations of power first lie. Hence troubadour poetry, with its parody, its reshaping of time and above all its inoperative language, has emancipatory possibilities. Agamben's work provides highly original readings of medieval texts that can help medievalists see the texts they work on as part of longer continuities of concern, whereas modernists are encouraged to lengthen their models of historicization, rather than seeking the roots of modernity in modernity, and to think of medieval materials not just as foundational, but as of ongoing relevance and vitality. I hope to have shown how an engagement with medieval materials has been vital for Agamben's own thought. Study and contemplation in general can provide routes to new concepts of human life, and thus new resources for resistance. Scholarship on the Middle Ages in particular has revolutionary potential because it provides better understanding of the nature of modern political and economic structures, but perhaps most importantly because connects then and now in surprising ways, interrupting the flow of historical progress via disruptive images like troubadours, angels and monks.

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¹ See the summary in Leland de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009) 12-13, 347-48.

² Antonio Negri, "Giorgio Agamben: The Discreet Taste of the Dialectic," in *Sovereignty and Life*, eds. Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2007) 109-25 (121).

³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001).

⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005) 139, 145 (henceforth cited parenthetically as *TR*).

⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002).

⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (New York: Verso, 1993) 100.

⁷ I owe this tripartite division to Claire Colebrook and Jason Maxwell, *Agamben* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016) 8.

⁸ Giorgio Agamben, "Un libro senza patria: Giorgio Agamben intervista di Federico Ferrari," *Eutropia*, 1 (2001): 44-46.

⁹ Jacques Derrida offers something similar when he argues that poetry be seen in terms of dictation, as repetition that is accomplished without knowledge. See "Che cos'è la poesia?," in *Between the Blinds: A Derrida Reader*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia UP, 1991) 221-40.

¹⁰ Giorgio Agamben, "Philosophy and Linguistics," in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 62-76 (73).

¹¹ Idem, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) 68.

¹² Idem, *Language and Death* 72.

¹³ Idem, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Roland L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

¹⁴ Idem, *End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999) 113-114 (henceforth cited parenthetically as *EP*).

¹⁵ Arnaut Daniel poems are quoted from *Il sirventese e le canzoni*, ed. Mario Eusebi (Milan: Vanni Scheiwiller, 1984). All translations of the troubadours are my own. Full English translations can be found at <http://www.trobar.org/troubadours> [consulted 15 August 2017].

¹⁶ See Charles Jernigan, "The Song of Nail and Uncle: Arnaut Daniel's Sestina 'Lo ferm voler q'el cor m'intra,'" *Studies in Philology*, 71.2 (1974): 127-51.

¹⁷ Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone, 2007) 40 (henceforth cited parenthetically as *PR*).

¹⁸ Quoted from Walter T. Pattison, ed., *The Life and Works of the Troubadour Raimbaut d'Orange* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1952).

¹⁹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) and *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990).

²⁰ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/>, 1, q. 103 (henceforth cited parenthetically as *ST*).

²¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Opus Dei: An Archaeology of Duty*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2013) 23 (henceforth cited parenthetically as *OD*).

²² Idem, *The Use of Bodies*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2016).

²³ Idem, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

²⁴ Idem, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 3-12 and *Profanations* 61-72.

²⁵ Idem, *Means without End* 4.

²⁶ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1995).

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume III: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1988).

²⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor and others (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

²⁹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. Pierre Joris (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1988).

³⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2013) xi (henceforth cited parenthetically as *HP*).

³¹ Leland de la Durantaye, *Giorgio Agamben* 350.

³² Giorgio Agamben, "Bartleby, or On Contingency," in *Potentialities* 243-71.

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- ³³ Idem, "The Work of Man," trans. Kevin Attell, in *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life*, ed. Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004) 1-10 (9).
- ³⁴ Idem, *Idea of Prose*, trans. Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995) 63-66.
- ³⁵ Idem, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998) 22.
- ³⁶ Joseph Canning, *Ideas of Power in the Late Middle Ages, 1296–1417* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011) 115.
- ³⁷ Alessia Ricciardi, "Specters of Saint Francis: Agamben's *The Highest Poverty* and the State of Digital Culture," *California Italian Studies*, 5.1 (2014): 204-23.
- ³⁸ Giorgio Agamben, "The Work of Man" 10.
- ³⁹ Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).
- ⁴⁰ This idea is developed in *The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010).