

AGAMBEN'S
PHILOSOPHICAL
LINEAGE

Edited by Adam Kotsko and Carlo Salzani

EDINBURGH
University Press

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Edinburgh University Press Ltd
The Tun – Holyrood Road, 12(2f) Jackson's Entry, Edinburgh EH8 8PJ

Typeset in 10.5/13 Sabon by
Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire,
and printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 1 4744 2363 2 (hardback)
ISBN 978 1 4744 2365 6 (webready PDF)
ISBN 978 1 4744 2364 9 (paperback)
ISBN 978 1 4744 2366 3 (epub)

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Abbreviations

References to the work of Agamben are made parenthetically in the text according to the following conventions.

	Italian	English translation
AV	<i>L'avventura</i> . Rome: Nottetempo, 2015.	
CC	<i>La comunità che viene</i> . Turin: Einaudi, 1990.	<i>The Coming Community</i> . Trans. Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
CF	<i>Che cos'è la filosofia?</i> Macerata: Quodlibet, 2016.	
CR	<i>La Chiesa e il Regno</i> . Rome: Nottetempo, 2010.	<i>The Church and the Kingdom</i> . Trans. Leland de la Durantaye. London: Seagull Books, 2012.
CRM	<i>Che cos'è il reale? La scomparsa di Majorana</i> . Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2016.	
EP	<i>Categorie italiane. Studi di poetica</i> . Venice: Marsilio, 1996.	<i>The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics</i> . Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
FR	<i>Il fuoco e il racconto</i> . Rome: Nottetempo, 2014.	
GU	<i>Gusto</i> . Macerata: Quodlibet, 2015.	
HP	<i>Altissima povertà. Regole monastiche e forma di vita</i> . Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2011.	<i>The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life</i> . Trans. Adam Kotsko. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.
HS	<i>Homo sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita</i> . Turin: Einaudi, 1995.	<i>Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life</i> . Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

Italian	English translation
IH <i>Infanzia e storia. Distruzione dell'esperienza e origine della storia.</i> Turin: Einaudi 1978.	<i>Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience.</i> Trans. Liz Heron. London: Verso, 1996.
IP <i>Idea della prosa.</i> Milan: Feltrinelli, 1985; new edn, Macerata: Quodlibet, 2002.	<i>Idea of Prose.</i> Trans. Sam Whitsitt and Michael Sullivan. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995.
KG <i>Il Regno e la Gloria. Per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo.</i> Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2007; repr., Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2009.	<i>The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government.</i> Trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (with Matteo Mandarinì). Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.
LD <i>Il linguaggio e la morte. Un seminario sul luogo della negatività.</i> Turin: Einaudi, 1982.	<i>Language and Death: The Place of Negativity.</i> Trans. Karen Pinkus and Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
MC <i>L'uomo senza contenuto.</i> Milan: Rizzoli, 1970; repr., Macerata: Quodlibet, 1994.	<i>The Man Without Content.</i> Trans. Georgia Albert. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
ME <i>Mezzi senza fine. Note sulla politica.</i> Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1996.	<i>Means Without End: Notes on Politics.</i> Trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
MM <i>Il mistero del male. Benedetto XVI e la fine dei tempi.</i> Rome–Bari: Laterza, 2013.	
NI <i>Ninfe.</i> Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2007.	<i>Nymphs.</i> Trans. Amanda Minervini. London: Seagull Books, 2013.
NU <i>Nudità.</i> Rome: Nottetempo, 2009.	<i>Nudities.</i> Trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.
O <i>L'aperto. L'uomo e l'animale.</i> Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002.	<i>The Open: Man and Animal.</i> Trans. Kevin Attell. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.
OD <i>Opus Dei. Archeologia dell'ufficio.</i> Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012.	<i>Opus Dei: An Archaeology of Duty.</i> Trans. Adam Kotsko. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.
PJ <i>Pilato e Gesù.</i> Rome: Nottetempo, 2013.	<i>Pilate and Jesus.</i> Trans. Adam Kotsko. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015.
PO <i>La potenza del pensiero. Saggi e conferenze.</i> Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2005.	<i>Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy.</i> Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

	Italian	English translation
PR	<i>Profanazioni</i> . Rome: Nottetempo, 2005.	<i>Profanations</i> . Trans. Jeff Fort. New York: Zone Books, 2007.
PU	<i>Pulcinella ovvero divertimento per li ragazzi in quattro scene</i> . Rome: Nottetempo, 2015.	
RA	<i>Quel che resta di Auschwitz. L'archivio e il testimone</i> . Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998.	<i>Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive</i> . Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York: Zone Books, 1999.
S	<i>Stanze. La parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale</i> . Turin: Einaudi, 1977.	<i>Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture</i> . Trans. Ronald L. Martinez. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
SE	<i>Stato di eccezione</i> . Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003.	<i>State of Exception</i> . Trans. Kevin Attell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
SL	<i>Il sacramento del linguaggio. Archeologia del giuramento</i> . Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2008.	<i>The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath</i> . Trans. Adam Kotsko. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.
ST	<i>Signatura rerum. Sul metodo</i> . Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008.	<i>The Signature of All Things: On Method</i> . Trans. Luca di Santo and Kevin Attell. New York: Zone Books, 2009.
STA	<i>Stasis. La guerra civile come paradigma politico</i> . Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2015.	<i>Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm</i> . Trans. Nicholas Heron. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015.
TR	<i>Il tempo che resta. Un commento alla "Lettera ai romani"</i> . Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000.	<i>The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans</i> . Trans. Patricia Dailey. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
UB	<i>L'uso dei corpi</i> . Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2014.	<i>The Use of Bodies</i> . Trans. Adam Kotsko. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016.
UG	(con Monica Ferrando) <i>La ragazza indicibile. Mito e mistero di Kore</i> . Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2010.	(with Monica Ferrando) <i>The Unspeakable Girl: The Myth and Mystery of Kore</i> . Trans. Leland de la Durantaye. London: Seagull Books, 2014.
WA	<i>Che cos'è un dispositivo?</i> Rome: Nottetempo, 2006.	<i>What is an Apparatus?, and Other Essays</i> . Trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.

PART III

Submerged Dialogues

24 *Jacques Derrida*

VIRGIL W. BROWER

There is no auto-analysis¹

INITIAL AFFECTIONS

There's kinship, no doubt. Traces of Derrida ever haunt Agamben, brilliantly, even in the dark. He is expressly ingratiated by '*Derrida's critique of the metaphysical tradition*' (LD 39, original italics). Amid the myriad of his coeval influences, it is certainly worth considering that Derrida is Agamben's 'primary contemporary interlocutor'. His 'critical engagement with deconstruction can indeed be identified as the context out of which emerge almost all of his key concepts'.² Attell offers compelling discussions of this polemical relationship with regard to voicing language, sovereignty and animality. The former accounts for Agamben's direct textual engagements with Derrida which, for the most part, address his earlier works, specifically *Of Grammatology*, *Voice and Phenomena* and *Margins of Philosophy*. To address his contemporary intellectual situation, Agamben roots himself in that one he finds most rooted, dedicating an early essay, 'Pardes', to Derrida, which hails him as 'the philosopher who has perhaps most radically taken account' of the 'crisis [...] of terminology [that] is the proper situation of thought today ...' (PO 208). Here, Agamben mounts a deferential defence against caricaturisations of deconstruction (oft heard to this day) as a hermeneutical relativism of infinite deferral: '[I]t would be the worst misunderstanding of Derrida's gesture to think that it could be exhausted in a deconstructive use of philosophical terms that would simply consign them to an infinite wandering or interpretation' (PO 209).

Donee honors donor. An early imperative driving the budding dreamer of anomie is: '*we must certainly honor Derrida as the thinker*

who has identified with the greatest rigor [. . .] the original status of *gramma* and of meaning in our culture'. One 'must' do so even though Derrida 'merely brought the problem of metaphysics to light', rather than opening a genuine 'way to surpassing' it (*LD* 39, original italics). Agamben desires to surpass. He has – or had, at one time (perhaps in 'infancy') – a kind of *telos*. This 'surpassing' drive is symptomatic of a 'common temptation of both Agamben and Foucault', suggested by Derrida, based on their adoption of 'linear history' in which 'epistémés that follow on from each other [. . .] render each other obsolete'.³ The trace 'would unbind the [. . .] dialectical pact' of 'the insistent authority [or sovereignty] of [. . .] the third [. . .] this double motif' of oppositional dialectics. Deconstruction is 'not only counter-archaeological but counter-genealogical'. 'What is put in question by its work is not only the possibility of recapturing the originary but also the desire to do so.'⁴

Almost as a rule, Derrida employs refreshing fallibility and admits, early on, that 'the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work'.⁵ Already there is humble self-reference of deconstruction with itself ('its own') that forfeits any desire of 'surpassing' which would imply a sovereign authority on the part of deconstruction itself. A *sovereignty of surpassing* is perhaps detectable in the 'essential claim of sovereignty' that Derrida discerns in Agamben's style: that 'most irrepressible gesture' repeated throughout *Homo Sacer* (and not only there) to be 'the first to say who *will have been first*'.⁶ Worse, he 'wants to be first twice, the first to see and announce [. . .] and also the first to recall that [. . .] it's always been like that'.⁷

Honouring Derrida as the thinker who brings such problems to light *without* addressing that light itself (e.g., photography or heliocentrism)⁸ is one of the problems that needs be brought along, while doing so, perhaps, reveals much about Agamben's selective reading of Derrida. The unsurpassability might be attributed to Agamben's Heideggerian reading of Hegel that thereby authorises a tweaked Hegelian (or is it Aristotelian?) reading of Derrida.⁹ More often than not, it insists on thinking *gramma* as a mode of *voice* and *negativity* rather than *writing* and *trace*.¹⁰ But trace leaves the heaviest impression. '*The concept "trace" is not a concept* [. . .]: this is the paradoxical thesis that defines the proper status of Derrida's terminology' (*PO* 213, original italics). As such, 'the notion of trace constitutes the specific achievement of Derrida's thought' (*PO* 214).

Yet, for Derrida, trace would be 'neither negative nor positive';¹¹ '[I]t is not negative'.¹² It's resistant to – and misbegotten for – any binary opposition structurally conceptualised as positivity and/or negativity.¹³ Nevertheless, Agamben conceives *gramma* to have 'the structure of a

purely negative self-affection' (*LD* 39, emphasis added). The alleged proper status of Derrida's terminology does not deter him from translating trace into a function of negativity. This is something Derrida goes to great lengths to discourage.¹⁴

. . . UNOPPOSED

On these points, a criticism that Derrida makes of Husserl can be redirected – almost seamlessly – at Agamben: 'the *negativity* of the *crisis is not a mere accident*. But it is then the concept of crisis that should be suspect, by virtue of what ties it to a dialectical and teleological determination of negativity.'¹⁵ It is as if ideality is to Husserl as purity is to early Agamben. Something similar can be said for some of Derrida's later criticisms of Schmitt, who, he believes, 'goes to great lengths [. . .] to exclude from *all other* purity [. . .] the purity of the political, the *proper and pure impurity* of the concept or meaning of the "political"'.¹⁶ Schmitt allows himself 'to decide for the *presence* of the political [. . . which . . .] potentializes a logic of negativity [. . .] only to expand the control of the political [. . .] in its most pristine philosophical purity'.¹⁷ Further – between Husserl and Schmitt – Heidegger is suspect along similar lines. All three would 'have in common [. . .] not only oppositional logic (dialectical or not) [. . .] not only pure distinctions [. . .] but oppositionality itself, ontological adversity'.¹⁸ It is as if Agamben never escapes the oppositional shortcomings and crypto-teleologies that Derrida forewarns to be the very legacies of Foucault, Husserl, Heidegger and Schmitt from out of which he develops, inheriting their congenital perjuries (not to mention those of Hegel¹⁹ and Aristotle).

Despite his thresholds and zones of indifferences, Agamben remains an oppositional thinker; as if never 'truly'²⁰ testing (or losing) that 'fundamental belief of metaphysicians' vilified by Nietzsche as 'the *belief in oppositions of values*'.²¹ The oppositional ideality on which his project grounds itself seems automatically, even unconsciously, determined by compulsive repetition to develop only ever within the binary confines of one canonical opposition after another, ever doubling-down on a dialectics. Even in his more mature breakthrough text, Derrida finds him 'putting his money on the concept of "bare life," which he identifies with *zoè*, in opposition to *bios*'.²² The decisive and foundational event of modernity that Agamben desires to announce to the world – auto-constituting himself in Foucault's footsteps, to surpass, 'correct' and 'complete' him (*HS* 9) – is made to live and let to die only by insisting on a dull 'distinction [. . . that is . . .] never so clear and secure'²³

between Greek forms of life in opposition. Such a task, after deconstruction, 'isn't easy [. . .] even impossible'.²⁴

Trace is no longer simply a negativity in *The Time that Remains*. Hegel returns as the reference point. Purely negative self-affectation develops into a state of dialectical suspension (which may well be what 'negativity' was all along. Very little, if anything, has changed.) 'In this instance, the arche-trace simultaneously shows its link to – and difference from – the Hegelian *Aufhebung* [. . . the movement of which . . .] becomes a principle of infinite deferral' (*TR* 103). Here one might 'smile'.²⁵ It almost seems that Agamben sanctions himself to enframe Derrida in the very way that he, himself, discourages in 'Pardes' (*PO* 209). 'In this way, the trace is a suspended *Aufhebung* [. . .] deconstruction is a thwarted messianism, a suspension of the messianic' (*PO* 209).

If 'thwarted messianism' is 'a suspension of the messianic', then would not the 'suspended *Aufhebung*' of trace be, at the same time, a thwarted opposition? It is as if messianism, alone, must be thwarted in order to secure oppositionality itself. Perhaps nothing less than a messiah could possibly thwart dialectics. Could an unthwarted messianism ever become messianic, anyway? Especially in any Pauline valence? (At times, Derrida seems to play a role in Agamben's works much like Paul does in those of Nietzsche.) If thwarting the messianic entails opening it to a future coming of justice (or finding it opening itself, as such), yet doing so 'without horizon of expectation [. . . nor . . .] prophetic prefiguration', then Derrida perhaps thwarts it into a 'messianicity without messianism'²⁶ . . . but a messianicity, nonetheless.

Note that the very notion of suspension – exceptional as it is, in Agamben – is a practice he finds at the feet of Derrida,²⁷ for better or worse; even if it must undergo Schmittianisation (almost sovereignly so). Such 'suspension' barely evades Derrida's own suggestions on how trace or deconstruction relate to speculative philosophy. If an unopposed alliance between them is not apparent in *Glas*, it is glossed again – with refreshing directness – in a later interview:

If we take [. . .] that which makes a dialectical process possible – namely, an element foreign to the system [. . .] – this foreign element, more originary than the dialectic, is precisely that which the dialectic is to dialectize, [. . .] *there* is a non-oppositional difference that transcends the dialectic, which is itself always oppositional. There is a supplement [. . .] that does not let itself be dialectized [. . . As such,] the dialectic consists in dialectizing the non-dialectizable. [. . .] I have never *opposed* the dialectic [. . . but rather tried to think] the dialecticity of dialectics that is itself fundamentally not dialectical.²⁸

After deconstruction, readers might encounter Agamben's method much as Derrida does Hegel's: 'It wants to keep what it wants to lose.

Desire is *off for the Aufhebung*.²⁹ 'Speculative philosophy removes every difficulty, and then leaves me the difficulty of trying to determine what it really accomplishes by this so-called removal (*aufheben*).'³⁰ The sovereign state of exception seems ever to suspend innumerable zones of indistinction, leaving Agamben – barely alive – to determine what it accomplishes by its so-called suspension . . . so that he may solve, resolve and surpass it.

INITIATED AUTO-AFFECTIONS

For Agamben, such suspension is not so simple, for it is, simultaneously, an 'autosuspension' (TR 105). This is but one autographed neologism among 'a whole series of other *auto*-prefixed words'³¹ resembling those also found in Derrida. It uncannily auto-becomes difficult to auto-distinguish the deconstructive Coppola from the biopolitical and theo-economic Coppelius.

If the most important aspect of Agamben's reading of Derrida is 'trace', then the most significant facet of 'trace' is its *self-referentiality*. Trace is exceptional self-reference. This will develop throughout Agamben's works into a form of auto-affection that is perhaps his most primal – even inventive – lesson learned from Derrida. It sets the stage for later investigations: mode, modification and self-modification; affect, affection and auto-affection; suspense, suspension, 'autosuspension'; constituency, constitution and 'autoconstitution'. One might track the course of this auto-affective development from Excursus 3 of *Language and Death*, to 'Pardes', to §3.12 and §3.18 of *Remnants of Auschwitz*,³² to its most striking articulations in §2.4, §5 and §8.3 of *The Use of Bodies*. Here, early Derridean traces iterate themselves within later readings of the Stoa, specifically Lucretius, followed by a somewhat surprising gesture to Husserl with regard to the *Leib* (one's proper living body) as self-modifying/auto-affective use of one's own body.

The 'negative self-affection' quickly mentioned in *Language and Death* (LD 39) receives fuller treatment in 'Pardes', in which trace or *différance* 'in some manner signifies itself; it is self-referential [. . .] inscribed in the domain of paradoxes of self-reference' (PO 211, original italics). Such self-reference cannot function by the colloquial standards of referentiality, by which it properly achieves 'no self-reference' at all: 'Only if one *abandons* this first level of self-referentiality does one reach the heart of the problem' (PO 212, emphasis added).

A *ban* is required. Or, so it seems. Must 'Pardes' be abandoned by the author of *Homo Sacer* on this point? Is the philosopheme 'autos'

applicable to trace, at all? If ever there were a thing without or beyond *autos*, would it not be trace? Is a sovereign decision required by such a 'self' (if it is that) in order to abandon, deactivate or render inoperative its own capacity for denotation (and even connotation) from the place of reference – as if they were werewolves threatening the very survival of itself-reference – to secure this strange capacity to reference itself? If so, is this pure, negative, self-reference thereby already political (decisively sovereign)? Is it perhaps yet another articulation of a political element ever unfit for the *polis* (indecisively *sacer*)? If the ban is a sovereign apparatus of what Agamben 'so calmly call[s]'³³ modern politics and if the 'totalitarian politics of the modern [. . .] is the will to total self-possession' (*ME* 97), then perhaps any possible will beyond politics might only affect itself as erasure of its own self-possession. Agamben might call this use. Derrida might call it ex-appropriation.

Unabandoned, *différance* (or trace) may 'signify itself, but signify itself only insofar as it signifies'; 'refer to itself' and 'exhaust itself' neither in the pure presence of an [intention] nor in its absence' (*PO* 212, emphasis added). Agamben has just cited *Margins*: the trace 'must be described as an erasure of the trace itself [. . .] produced as its own erasure. And it belongs to the trace to erase itself' (*PO* 210–11, citing Derrida; repeated in *TR* 103). Here, in 'Pardes', this experience is described as one that 'exhausts itself' and 'refer[s] to itself' (with neither the presence or absence of intention), with no mention of its self-erasure other than the quotation of Derrida. But it is this singular experience of self-erasure that Agamben shall continue to reference.

Agamben on his tracks, Derrida traces a trail to ethics. Self-tracing (or trace-selving) – the self-erasure of trace – radicalises self-affection and discovers a path to a form-of-life beyond political life (cf. *OD* 98, 129, *passim*). The most precious gift Derrida might give 'is not a theory of polysemy or a doctrine of the transcendence of meaning [. . .] but a radicalization of the problem of self-reference' (*PO* 213). Self-referentiality is, for Agamben, 'the decisive event of matter [. . . that . . .] opens onto an ethics. Whoever experiences this ethics [. . .] can then dwell in the paradoxes of self-reference' (*PO* 213).

This inspires nothing less than Agamben's signature reading of Aristotle. After 'Pardes', it is difficult to imagine that the potency of his understanding of potentiality or capacity – perhaps his most significant contribution to the philosophical tradition – would have come about without Derrida. From this fodder, alone, does *dynamis* seem to bloom; revealing itself as 'the potentiality of a potentiality', 'a potentiality that is capable and that experiences itself [. . .] that suffers not the impression of form but the imprint of its own passivity', 'a *tabula rasa* that suffers its

own receptivity', 'to experience a passivity' (PO 216–17; q.v. OD 94–5). That previously conceived in terms of negativity and purity (LD 39), now seems more about passivity and receptivity. With the help of Plotinus (though using an example just as easily taken from Husserl), Agamben explains it as an eye in the dark 'affected by its own incapacity to see'; an 'experience of one's own passivity' (PO 217): 'Trace [. . .] is from the beginning the name of this self-affection' (PO 217). It transgresses territory canonically marked by the *cogito*, but accompanies its own deactivation: the 'potential to think, experiencing itself and being capable of itself as potential not to think, makes itself into the trace' (PO 218).

The trace of this experience returns in *Remnants of Auschwitz*. The quick flirtation with the passive experience of one's potential to think in 'Pardes' provides the bridge between the two discussions. Agamben suggests that the experience of shame in Levinas finds a 'perfect equivalence' in 'the structure of subjectivity that modern philosophy calls *auto-affection*' (RA 109), that is, the inner sense of Kantian time, which Kant claims acts 'upon a passive subject'. Time is auto-affection but requires that one 'behave toward oneself as passive' (RA 109, citing Kant). The lesson (already hinted in 'Pardes') is this: 'As auto-affection, passivity is thus a receptivity [. . .] a receptivity that experiences itself, that is moved by its own passivity' (RA 110).

The fracture of this experience would account for the impossible simultaneity of Levi's *Muselmann* and the witness. The former is 'a purely receptive pole', the latter is 'an actively passive pole' (RA 111). Regardless of the veracity of such a conclusion (and putting aside the insistence that passivity – specifically sexual – must be shameful [RA 110]), alongside this continuation of receptive 'purity' already developed as an amalgamation of 'Pardes' and *Language and Death*, here the possibility of an *active passivity* is introduced.

Several pages later (§3.18) this subjectification process of passive auto-affection twice returns to Derrida (only once by name and, even then, without citation). Subjectification can be traumatic precisely because of 'the event of discourse'. Agamben then gestures to the phrase from *Margins* that he has cited repeatedly in previous works. Traumatic or not, 'the fragile text of consciousness incessantly crumbles and *erases itself*' (RA 123, emphasis added). It is because auto-affection is receptive that the subjectification of any alleged subjectivity may incessantly auto-erase itself. This discloses a *constitutive* prior to anything constituted. It reveals

the disjunction on which [consciousness (perhaps subjectivity)] is erected: the constitutive desubjectification in every subjectification. (It is hardly astonishing that it was precisely from an analysis of the pronoun 'I' in

Husserl that Derrida was able to draw his idea of infinite deferral, an originary disjunction – writing – inscribed in the pure self-presence of consciousness.) (RA 123)

Is it hardly astonishing that Agamben fails ‘precisely’ to mention that Derrida draws this idea as much from an analysis of Aristotle as from Husserl?³⁴ The self-erasure of the trace as receptive self-reference now coincides with the passive auto-affection of subjectivity. A receptive *constitutive* auto-affection (self-erasure) is indissociable from an actively *constituted* result from that (yet still passive) auto-affection. The former is the desubjectifying *dynamis* at the very inception or ‘origin’ of the subjectification of the subjective consciousness of the latter.

AUTO-ERASURE OF SELF-AFFECTION

This theoretical advance from self-erasure to *receptively passive self-affection* marks the most lasting Derridean impression to persist throughout Agamben’s works. These two uses of it – first (in *Language and Death* and ‘*Pardes*’) in terms of voicing language; second (in *Remnants of Auschwitz*) in terms of subjectivity or selfhood – are restated in *The Use of Bodies*. The former finds expression through Benveniste (§2.4); the latter through the Stoa (§1.5). No longer is any overt gesture to Derrida to be found.

In the discussion of *chresis*, Benveniste’s explanation of middle voice (or diathesis) is ‘situated in a zone of indetermination between subject and object (the agent is in some way also object and place of action) and between active and passive (the agent receives an affection from his own action)’ (UB 28).³⁵ This ‘process does not pass from an active subject toward the object separated from his action but involves in itself the subject [. . . which . . .] “gives himself” to it’ (UB 28). *Chresthai*, therefore, ‘expresses the relation that one has with oneself, the affection that one receives insofar as one is in relation with a determinate being’ (UB 28, original italics). Applied to the use of the body – *somatos chresthai* – it becomes ‘the affection that one receives insofar as one is in relation with one or more bodies’ (UB 29, original italics).

The ‘constitutive’ element of self-erasure in *Remnants of Auschwitz* here discloses itself through the terminology of ‘constitution’, through which it is brought to life and enters the land of the living. By way of Diogenes Laertius and Chrysippus, synaesthesia uncovers an auto-affective experience that, ‘from the very beginning familiar to each living thing, is *its own constitution* and the sensation it has of it’ (emphasis added); a ‘sensation of itself and familiarity of itself’ (UB 50, citing Hierocles). As the discussion moves on to Lucretius, the

earlier language of erasure is replaced (probably under the influence of Hobbes and *stasis*) with that of dissolution (and *hypostasis*): 'The familiarity [. . .] of the living being with itself is *dissolved without remainder* into its self-perception' (UB 51, emphasis added). This is how a 'living being uses-itself, in the sense that in its life and in its entering into relationship with what is other than the self, it has to do each time with its very self, feels the self and familiarizes itself with itself' (UB 54). The auto-affective feeling-oneself at the heart of use-of-oneself reaches its apex in a turn to phenomenology and Husserl (§I.8.3), which seems to offer a 'correct posing of the problem of the body [. . . but which was, unfortunately . . .] put durably off course' by 'the problem of empathy' (UB 82).

Empathy is phenomenology's white whale. It dogged Husserl all his life. The problem is the other,³⁶ the impossible incorporation of an improper hetero-affectation into the proper auto-affective experience of one's lived body. Agamben's emendation of Husserl – which is one of the most startling developments of the painstaking time and space of the *Homo Sacer* project – is an application of self-erasure (now, 'dissolving without remainder') (in)to the proper phenomenological auto-affectation of one's lived body that, upon application, may yet somehow take account (if such a thing is possible) of the passive, receptive and hetero-affective trace from which it is ever indissociable. What the disruption of empathy

shows is that however much one affirms the originary character of the 'propriety' of the body and of lived experience, the intrusiveness of an 'impropriety' shows itself to be all the more originary [. . .] as if the body proper always casts a shadow, which can in no case be separated from it. (UB 84)

These theoretical threads that weave from the self-reference of trace in earlier works, through the constitutive self-erasing element haunting subjectification, to the shadowed impropriety of auto-affectation in/as the use of one's body, all tie themselves off into a magnificent bow. Its knot is nothing less than an embodied, psycho-subjective iteration of political sovereignty and the state of exception at the core of constitutional law. It is even one of biopolitics, since it is the traumatic or shameful process of desubjectification that bans a *Muselmann* – avatar of bare life – from humanity, political life and the capacity to witness. From the first texts to the latest, all these signature motifs have tangled tendrils stretching roots back to Derrida, even while his very name disappears from the discussions . . . ever faithful to its vocation.

IMMUNODEFICIENCY OF ONE'S
INFIRM CONSTITUTION

Given (a) Agamben's overt affection for Derrida's early works, and appreciating that (b₁) the element of death that haunts the colloquial living presence of speech or the physical act of writing – that is 'trace' – in those works continues to develop throughout Derrida's later ones (e.g., 'lifedeath', *survivance*, *hauntologie* and, ultimately, autoimmunity) and (b₂) Agamben's textual indifference to these later Derrida texts in which they show themselves, then (c) it is worth considering that Agamben's zones of 'autosuspension', 'autoconstitution', auto-affection, etc., are para-deconstructive endeavours to resolve and surpass what an ignored Derrida comes later to call auto-immunity (rooted in the very aporia of trace, upon which all these discussions of Agamben are arguably borne). 'Autoconstitution'³⁷ is an articulation – an impressive one at that – of an ineradicable auto-immunity more 'originary' to constitutionality (as are the states of exception themselves). After *The Use of Bodies*, it is perhaps only thinkable as a mode of auto-affection and self-use. It is a way (of which there are several) by which 'constituent power' constitutes itself while attempting to capture (and, thereby, indemnify itself from) any 'distituent potential' (*UB* 266–8) resistant to it. The prosthesis of exception to this performative capture is, for example, 'the task of modifying the text of the constitution' (*UB* 267), after the fact, mystical foundation and inception of law.

Autoconstitution is not auto-immunity. The former interrupts the (para-legal) activity to defend, secure or indemnify itself (as legal) from any passive distituents within its very constituency, while receptively constituting itself from them, nonetheless. It is, rather, a *fatale* epiphenomenon of auto-immune processes that accompanies any exercise of *autos*. It is the shadow compromising the very autonomy by which one allows oneself to dream of anomie.

NOTES

1. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, Book X, *Anxiety*, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), p. 23.
2. Kevin Attell, *Giorgio Agamben: Beyond the Threshold of Deconstruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 3.
3. Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), vol. 1, p. 333. Agamben suggests that Foucault's adoption of the term 'historical *a priori*' (indicative

- of a 'linear history') probably stems 'from Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*, which Derrida had translated into French in 1962' (UB 112).
4. Jacques Derrida, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 27.
 5. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 24.
 6. Derrida, *Beast and the Sovereign*, p. 92.
 7. Derrida, *Beast and the Sovereign*, p. 330.
 8. See *Of Grammatology*, 91–2; Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 27; *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. xxvii–xxviii, 91–2.
 9. Not surprisingly, Agamben finds 'the thought of Derrida to have its basis [. . .] in that of Heidegger' (S 158 n. 15). This linear intellectual trajectory found to 'originate' in Heidegger alone seems to disqualify – *avant la lettre* – any due diligence of Derridean readings of Hegel, which may account for the over-negativising character of Agamben's earlier writings.
 10. This is less the case in the quick gesture to *Of Grammatology* in *Stanzas* (S 155–6) than it is in 'Pardes'.
 11. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 167.
 12. Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, trans. Samuel Weber (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 53.
 13. Although simple synonymy between 'negativity' and 'negative' (or 'negation') must not be presumed.
 14. See, for example, Jacques Derrida, 'How to Avoid Speaking: Denials', trans. Ken Frieden, in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), pp. 73–142 (whose title alone almost performs a perfect Derridean response to *Language and Death*).
 15. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 40 (emphasis added).
 16. Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (New York: Verso, 1997), p. 116 (emphasis added). It is noteworthy that in this text – which devotes half of itself to critiques of Schmitt – Derrida is already citing Nicole Loraux (p. 75). It is possible, despite these criticisms, that Derrida 'generally accepts Schmitt's diagnoses'; Michael Naas, *Derrida From Now On* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 65.
 17. Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, p. 133 (emphasis added).
 18. Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, p. 249.
 19. Compare Derrida's readings of 'Hegelian philosophy – through and through a philosophy of religion' (*Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr, and Richard Rand [Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1986], p. 32), in which the 'truth of Christianity is philosophy' (p. 62, q.v. p. 70), with *The Sacrament of Language* (in which Hegel makes virtually no appearance): 'philosophy [. . .] must necessarily put itself forward as *vera religio* [true religion]' (SL 66).

20. Cf. Derrida's comments on Agamben's tactical use of 'truly' in the brackets of his block quotation of *Homo Sacer (Beast and the Sovereign)*, pp. 92–3; as well as 'true', *Beast and the Sovereign*, p. 328).
21. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 6 [§2] (original italics).
22. Derrida, *Beast and the Sovereign*, p. 325.
23. Derrida, *Beast and the Sovereign*, p. 316.
24. Derrida, *Beast and the Sovereign*, p. 327.
25. Twice Derrida smiles while reading *Homo Sacer (Beast and the Sovereign)*, pp. 92, 94).
26. Jacques Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge', trans. Samuel Weber, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 56 and *passim*. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 110, 153.
27. 'Deconstruction suspends the terminological character of philosophical vocabulary' (*PO* 208).
28. Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. Giacomo Donis (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), pp. 32–3. Cf. *Glas*, p. 162: 'Isn't there always an element excluded from the system that assures the system's space of possibility'? Cf. the 'nondialectizable antinomy' 'common' to an 'autoimmune process' in Derrida, *Rogues*, p. 35.
29. Derrida, *Glas*, p. 120.
30. Derrida, *Glas*, p. 200.
31. Naas, *Derrida From Now On*, p. 125.
32. Which could also include Part I, §1.10 of *The Highest Poverty*.
33. Derrida, *Beast and the Sovereign*, p. 326.
34. In 'Ousia and Grammé', it is an analysis of Aristotle's *Physics* from which is drawn 'thinking time and movement [. . .] that keeps its *tracing* close to itself, that is, *erases its tracing*' (Derrida, *Margins*, p. 60; Derrida's italics of 'tracing'; other italics mine).
35. Once again, the lesson is one just as easily lifted from Husserl's description of *Leib* in *Cartesian Meditations*.
36. And though he dares not utter 'other' – as if shibbolethed or shamefaced – it is no accident that Agamben mentions Levinas in all three of the steps to which I am drawing attention. He is quickly identified as one of Derrida's inspirations in the first (*LD* 39), introduces the problem of desubjectification by way of shame in *Remnants* (*RA* 104–6), and immediately follows the return to Husserl's proper body in the end (*UB* 84–5).
37. E.g., 'the sovereign autoconstitution of Being' (*UB* 147).

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