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## Inoperosità

### Exposing the Position of Employees and Customers in Unemployment-Related Management Literature

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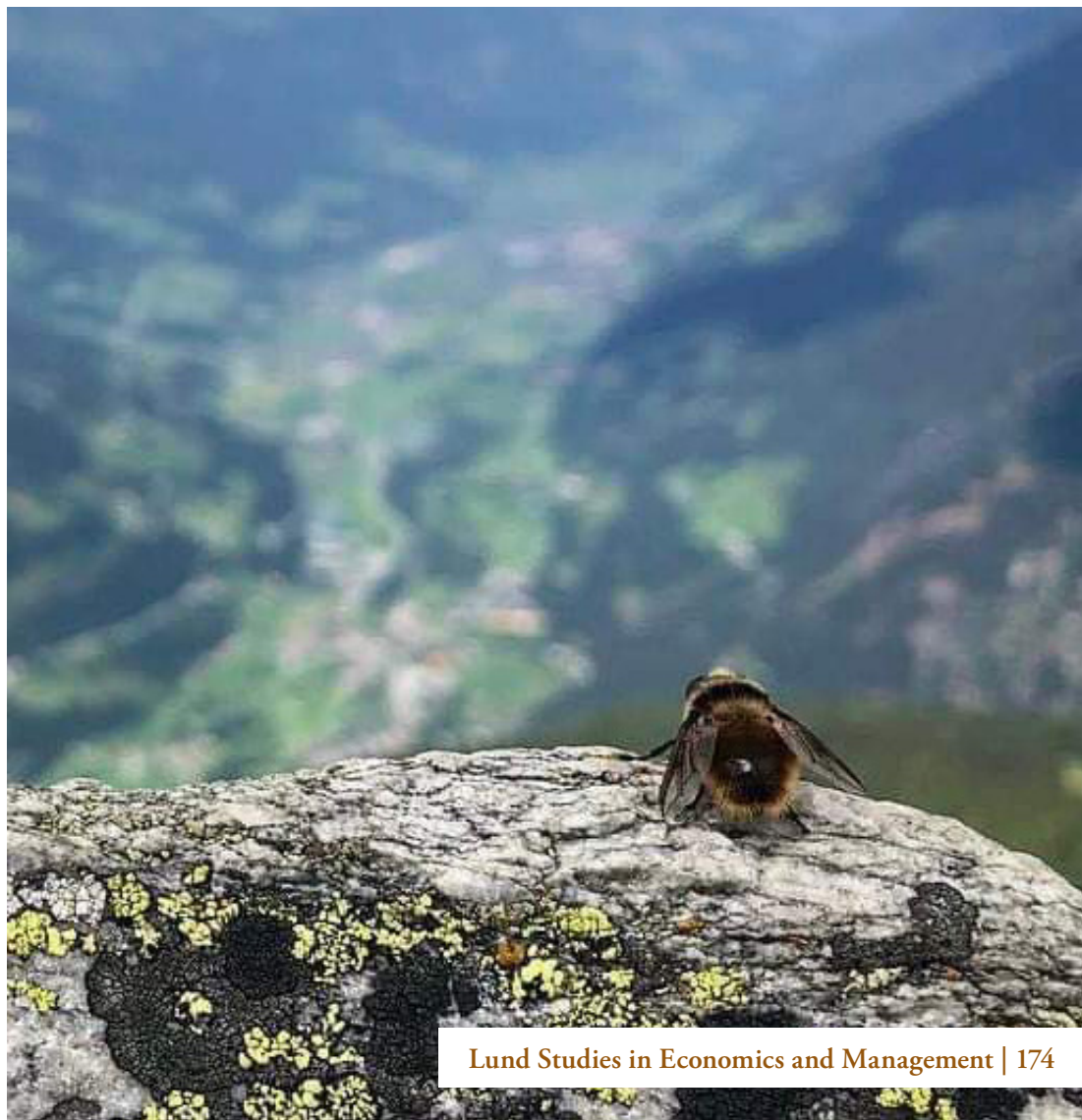
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# Inoperosità

## Exposing the Position of Employees and Customers in Unemployment-Related Management Literature

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# Inoperosità

## Exposing the Position of Employees and Customers in Unemployment-Related Management Literature

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Much of Agamben's work reveals its *potential* if one recognises Agamben to be at loggerheads with Derrida over the latter's *grammatological* equation of language with signification. Concretely, Derrida, Agamben deplores, grounds man, deleteriously, in a language/law that remains as potent as it remains unintelligible, with man still subject to the whims of bureaucratically/*oikonomically* based sovereign violence. Indeed, Derrida, Agamben shows, grounds man in an absent presence that spurs man's ever fallible attempts to render this absence present—a theme thoroughly explored by, for instance, the organisation scholar Robert Cooper. Against this backdrop and in order for organisation scholars to fully appreciate the *potential* of Agamben's work, *this* book translates Agamben's critique of Derrida into a critique of Cooper and, at heart, the current *state* of organisation at large. Inspired by Kafka and relying upon exemplary/*paradigmatic* readings of unemployment-related management literature, it does so to help wrest language, and, by implication, organisation (from *ergon*, meaning work), from biopolitical incarceration: *Ex-posing* (in the sense of deposing/neutralising) the *position* such literature attributes to 'employees' and 'customers', it does so to render language/the law inoperative. And, in the same breath, it *exposes* (in the sense of revealing) language *itself*.

"Full of goodness is; but no-one  
grasps  
Alone God." (Hölderlin, 2015, p. 349)

Inoperosità



# Inoperosità

## Exposing the Position of Employees and Customers in Unemployment-Related Management Literature

Stefan Tramer



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

By due permission of the Department of Business Administration,  
School of Economics and Management, Lund University, Sweden.

To be publicly defended at Holger Crafoords Ekonomisentrum, EC3:207,  
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**Abstract:**

Regardless of our socio-juridical position in or outside of organisations, this much is certain: even if not formally employed, we all, Agamben's *Homo Sacer* series and the bulk of his other texts imply, are subject to a violence that, if differentially, imprisons us in a world in which 'work' reigns supreme. But what precisely is 'work'? And is there, in spite of our securing the necessities of life, still a viable 'way out'? To probe these questions, I draw on Agamben, approaching 'work' in two distinct, wholly opposing ways. At base, echoing an ever-increasing appreciation of the salience of Agamben's philosophy, I approach work, together with organisation (from *ergon*, meaning 'work'), in terms of *oikonomia* and *inoperosità*.

*Oikonomia*, as my object of criticism, refers to the immanent execution of an allegedly foundational, absolute power – be it God, the sovereign or the people. It is stylised as such a foundational power's attendant secondary cause/power. Therefore, with *oikonomia*, life is transcendently grounded, so that work's *oikonomic* executioners – for instance, managers, functionaries and bureaucrats – justify themselves and act 'vicariously'; they justify themselves and act as messengers, intermediaries or administrators of an *archē* that as such does not exist, but that they – to legitimise themselves – conjure up and produce, with work being in thrall to spectacularisation. In contrast to this, *inoperosità* is the antidote to *oikonomia*'s brutal encroachment. It refers to an exit from, and neutralisation of, *oikonomia*'s biopolitical grip on work.

Management literature does not stand outside of *oikonomia*. Rather, as shown, it is often part and parcel thereof. With this in view, relying on a case study analysis of unemployment-related management texts, I provide a much-needed exposition of this literature's *oikonomic* footing. This is done in three interrelated ways: first, the *oikonomic* position of employees and customers in these texts is expounded; second, contrary to received wisdom in the field of organisation studies, the possibility of thinking of organisation in terms of a language use that no longer corrals human beings into *oikonomic* positions is revealed; and third, a deposition/neutralisation of *oikonomic* language, implicit in the previous point, is performed, which is to say that this thesis is concerned with *inoperosità* not only in its content, but also its expression.

Above all, it is this interleaving of the *exposition* (revealing) and *ex-position* (neutralisation) of language that is *inoperosità*. Hence, no longer an *oikonomic* potentiality to be or not to be actualised, work and organisation emerge as a potential in contact with the act; rather than being played off against one another, foundational power (potential) and immanent execution (act) are revealed as non-related and suspended, a testimony of this contactual non-relation/suspension being the core contribution of my thesis.

**Key words:** Agamben, Inoperosità, Management Literature, Oikonomia, Work, Unemployment

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# *Inoperosità*

Exposing the Position of Employees and Customers in  
Unemployment-Related Management Literature

Stefan Tramer



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“[H]ow can an impasse be turned into an exit?”  
(Agamben, cited in Attell 2015, p. 6)



*For friends*



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# *Mise en ex-ergue*: on friendship

“[W]hat is friendship other than a proximity that resists both representation and conceptualization?” (Agamben 2009c, p. 31)

## *A friendly beginning*

How to begin (*archō*) a *thesis* (from *tithēmi*, meaning ‘to place’ or ‘position’), if not with an inquiry into what, dear friend, *you*, apparently – not meaning any harm and, probably, as meek as a lamb – just got *yourself* into: the *seeming* entwinement of ‘beginning’ (*archē*) and ‘emplacement/positioning’ (*thésis*)... Since, obviously, *you* just became embogged in what, by the looks of it anyhow, *seems* to be the irrevocable entwinement of language and *dispositif* (apparatus) (see Du Plessis 2022; Hansen and Weiskopf 2021; Raffnsøe et al. 2016a,b; Villadsen 2021) or – in Agamben’s and my view largely congruent with *dispositif* – *Gestell* (enframing) (see Aroles and Küpers 2022; Cooper 1993; Holt and Sandberg 2011; Introna 2019; Munro 2005).

Traceable to the early Church Fathers’ use of the Greek term *oikonomia*, oftentimes translated into Latin as *dispositio* (see Agamben 2011d) and taken up by Foucault, *dispositif* (literally meaning ‘emplacement’ or ‘positioning’), Agamben explains, refers to a “set of practices, bodies of knowledge, measures, and institutions that seek to manage, govern, control, and orient, in a way that purports to be useful, the behaviors, gestures, and thoughts of human beings” (2009c, p. 12). In much the same way, *Gestell* (also literally meaning ‘emplacement’ or ‘positioning’), a term elaborated upon by Heidegger, turns, Hamacher (2019) clarifies, on an ontology premised on *Feststellen*/constating and *Herstellen*/producing, literally *forthplacing* (cf. Villadsen 2024).

Against this background, the aim of *this mise en ex-ergue* and, ultimately, of *this* entire book can be said to be answering a crucial question asked by Agamben: how would “a word [be] that neither [by dint of ‘(em)placing/positioning’] signified nor commanded but held itself truly in the beginning—indeed, [in a way] before the beginning” (2022b, p. 4), severed from all *oikonomia*? How would a completely undistorted, unwaveringly friendly beginning be – a beginning, Agamben specifies,



“with unknown provenance and direction” (p. 37)? At the end of the day, how to begin *anoikonomically*?<sup>1</sup>

Crucially, how would a word be that – befitting unjaundiced friendship and, not forgetting, along with it, God’s paradisaical Kingdom – neither represented nor conceptualised and, therefore, “cannot reach a beginning other than the one that may perhaps result from the deactivation of the machine [or ‘apparatus’]” (Agamben 2015b, p. 266) – from the deactivation of language’s omnipresent *transposition* into a *dispositif*/*Gestell*? Put differently, given that *archē*, in Greek, “means both ‘origin, principle’ and ‘command, order’” (2019a, p. 51), how would a word be that neither boiled down to what Böhme – affirmatively – calls “a ground zero: [a] *tabula rasa*” (2005, p. 212), i.e. an ‘origin/principle’, nor, predicated thereon, to “the search for different articulations” (ibid.), i.e. this or that ‘command/order’, but – instead – was to begin (*archō*) *an-archically*? Or, wedded hereto, how, in the face of *supposed* origins (i.e. signifiers) (e.g. Weick 2012) *and* commands (i.e. signifieds) (see Spoelstra 2022), my friend, to think of an *an-archic* exit? How to, as Agamben writes, be “truly anarchic and beyond time, with neither origin nor end, neither past nor future” (2024b, p. 77)?<sup>2</sup>

That is, given that *this* beginning *thesis*’s – *this* beginning, *seeming positioning*’s – *theme* (also from *tithēmi*, meaning ‘to place’ or ‘position’) *is* organisation (from *ergon*, meaning ‘work’), how to begin, if not with an *archaeology* into the present *emplacement* or *state* (from *sistō*, also meaning ‘to stand’, ‘set’ or ‘place’) of organisation. How to begin, my friend, if not with an *archaeology* into the ‘turning-apparatus/-enframing’ of work – of man’s *telos*. Indeed, how to begin, if not with an *archaeology* into the ‘turning-apparatus/-enframing’ of language, of the word. And how to begin, if not with a return to a pure beginning, the pure word. That is, how to move “beyond the metaphysical diremption of signifier and signified” (Agamben 2017b, p. 55)?

In other words, how – oh friend – to begin better than with an *archaeology* into the equation of work/organisation with the intermediation of bureaucracy/governing. Yes, how to begin better than with an *archaeology* into – as far as organisation, itself *positioned* to be a matter of *positioning* language (e.g. Andersen 2003; Böhme 2005;

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<sup>1</sup> Akin to the italicised *para-*, *now*, *here* or *you* that *you* have already encountered or will still encounter *here*, ‘*this*’ is *here* used to refer to an absolution from intermediating (*pre*)*supposition*. It is used to refer to pure immanence or, at heart coterminous *herewith*, pure transcendence. Hence, inspired by Agamben, who, in turn, is inspired by the linguist Benveniste, ‘*this*’ “does not refer to the text of the enunciation but to the announcement itself and even to the voice that utters it: an ‘angel’, a messenger, who, in saying something, above all announces himself” (2024b, p. 157).

<sup>2</sup> “[T]he true anarchy that Agamben speaks about is that which rises out of the destitution of the ontological ground on which stand the apparatuses [*dispositifs*/*Gestells*] of power” (Fusco 2022, p. 176). What he speaks about is that which rises out of the *destitution* of ground zero—out of, as for law and life, the *destitution* of a “pure relation without content” (Agamben 2017b, p. 48).

Cooper 2005a,b; Höpfl 2003a; Luhmann 2018a,b; Parker 2022; Pullen et al. 2020), is concerned – the equation of language/organisation with human sovereignty; how to begin better than with an *archaeology* into the equation of language/organisation with the humanly produced (*hergestellten*, literally *forthplaced*) authority of the *Gesetz* (German for ‘law’; like *state*, from *sistō*, meaning ‘to stand’, ‘to set’ but also ‘to place’).<sup>3</sup>

And, by virtue of this, how to begin better than with a *deposition* of imposed ‘origins’/‘principles’ *and*, following on from this, ‘commands’/‘orders’. How, as undeterred, undaunted friends, to begin, if not by shedding all emplacement or positioning, by shedding all biopolitically *supposed* taking place and by, in view of God’s Kingdom, opting for an undiluted, friendly taking-place. After all, liberated from all *oikonomia*, God – at least according to Spinozian pantheism – as “the pure transcendent is the taking-place of everything” (Agamben 1993c, p. 15), assuring that “[u]topia is the very topia of things” (p. 103). Felicitously, as a pure transcendent or *an-archic archē* that, in a way, also contains pure immanence, God assures or, yes, *is* pure taking-place, *is* true friendship. Messianically, God *is* the neutralisation of *oikonomia*.<sup>4</sup>

Or, put as a question: how come – dear friend – we workers/organisers *seem, from the word go*, to be enchained in *forthplacing/forthplaced* sovereign violence? And, related herewith, how – my friend – do we exit from, and neutralise, the excruciating power of this *seemingly* inescapable *Gesetz/Law*? To get straight to the point, how do we, in *writing and reading*, exit from and neutralise unrelenting linguistic ‘placing/positioning’? How do we, truly, turn ourselves into fully fledged friends? And, with that said, how do we, as students of language/organisation, put absolute friendship – which, for me, is thinkable only in terms of God’s serene, beatific Kingdom – in terms of life “outside the bounds of representation and identification”

<sup>3</sup> Within this context, Derrida underlines that “[t]he (human) sovereign takes place as place-taking [*lieu-tenant*], he takes place, the place standing in for the absolute sovereign: God” (2009, p. 54). As a result, Derrida goes on, “sovereignty will always imply [...] this positionality, this thesis, this self-thesis, this autopoiesis of him who posits himself as *ipse, the (self-)same, oneself*” (p. 67). While, for Derrida, all of this necessitates and amounts to a vacillation between signifier *and* signified, principle *and* command, representation *and* conceptualisation, for Agamben, with whom I side in *this* book, we ought to neutralise the metaphysical diremption of signifier *and* signified.

<sup>4</sup> Importantly, “[t]hat the good [encapsulated by the Kingdom, by an unmediated, purely transcendent or, if you wish, purely immanent God] is not something that ‘takes place’ but the very ‘taking-place’ itself, implies that the good is not something other than or outside beings such as they are, not something above or beyond this. It is not a value, ideal, position or criterion by which to judge entities. Calling the taking-place of entities itself the good is thus to enable one to perceive them without reference to anything other than the way in which they show themselves” (De Boer 2022, p. 218). *An-archically*, it is to enable us to be unalloyed friends from the beginning (*archē*).

(Dickinson 2022, p. 203), where it, without question, really belongs, viz., on the front burner?

How do we live up to “the ultimate meaning of the messianic vocation [viz.] the revocation of every vocation” (Agamben 2012c, 18)? That is to say, how do we, *pace* Böhm, beyond ‘ground zero’ (or what the organisation scholar Robert Cooper calls ‘mass’, ‘matter’, ‘the latent’ or ‘nothingness’) *and* semanticisation (or what Cooper calls ‘social and cultural forms’, ‘location’, ‘the explicit’ or ‘form and meaning’), happily unfurl “an Ungovernable that is situated beyond states of domination and power relations” (Agamben 2015b, p. 108)? How do we succeed in dismantling and flying the ghastly, treacherous ‘coop’ that, time and again, traps us in signification?

How – oh beloved friend – to begin *not* with just another doom-laden *oikonomic* beginning, but with an *archē* as “true anarchy” (Agamben 2019a, p. 77)? How to begin (*archō*) *not* with an “*archē* as origin” (2015b, p. 276), i.e. representation, *and*, building thereon, an “*archē* as command” (ibid.), i.e. conceptualisation, but, before such an ominous, representational(-cum-conceptual) *archē*, through unadulterated, unspoilt friendship? How to achieve and inhabit what Willemse, apropos Agamben and hitting the nail on the head, calls “the inoperativity of the *archē*” (2017, p. xxiv)?<sup>5</sup>

#### *A friendly author*

Saliently, in the context of such an *archaeological* inquiry into human sovereignty *and*, concurrently, into human sovereignty’s antidote, viz., messianically embedded, unalloyed friendship, I argue that an earnest appreciation of the *potential* of Giorgio Agamben’s work or, language (concerning the *Gesetz*/Law) becomes absolutely pertinent. Perhaps, dear friend, it becomes downright indispensable... For such an appreciation allows us to turn, biopolitical *imposition* – evidently a *commonplace* as regards organisation (see Alawattage et al. 2019; Bigoni and Funnell 2024; Clegg et al. 2013; Elraz and McCabe 2023; Fleming 2014; Fleming et al. 2023; Moisander et al. 2018; Munro 2012; Riad 2024; Śliwa et al. 2015; Walker et al. 2021) – into redemptive, felicitous *exposition*. It allows us to undo and exit “the nexus [the ‘articulation’/‘relation’] between [...] the living and language that constitutes sovereignty” (Agamben 2000, p. 113), so as to render *possible* “behaviour that is

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<sup>5</sup> While there are different readings of the messianic circulating amongst organisation scholars (e.g. Carollo et al. 2025; Deslandes 2020; Gabriel 1997; Kociatkiewicz et al. 2022; Srinivas 2012), *here* it refers to the complete neutralisation of the (*oikonomic*) *Gesetz*/Law. And, thus, inasmuch as it amounts to a politics, it, the messianic, “has no other content than paradise” (Agamben 2020, p. 152). It has no other content than our (re)turn to a friendly beginning, liberated from both representation *and* conceptualisation, origin/principle *and* command/order, foundational power *and* founded power, ground zero *and* semanticisation, signifier *and* signified. It has no other content than friendship/inoperativity – our *unpresupposed* and *unpresupposable* taking-place (in God).

free and ‘distracted’ (that is to say released from the [...] [‘enframings’] of norms)” (2007a, p. 75).<sup>6</sup>

It allows us to undo and exit the nexus (or ‘articulation/relation’) “in which [to begin with] the law (language) relates to the living by withdrawing from it” (Agamben 2000, pp. 112–3) and where, correspondingly, “naked life [or ‘bare life’, i.e. life in terms of Böhme’s ‘ground zero’] is immediately the carrier of the sovereign nexus” (p. 113). But, vitally, to be able to do so, we must never lose sight of friendship. For, as Agamben highlights, the crux of his work/language will become evident “only to those who read [...] in a spirit of friendship” (2018d, p. xi). That means, as a friendly author, i.e. an author wresting the word from representation *and* conceptualisation, Agamben, “cannot but rely [...] on friends” (ibid.). And, obviously, for friendship and the Kingdom to gather steam, he (and I) cannot but rely on *you*, too, abstaining from representation/origin/signifier *and* conceptualisation/command/signified...

All this is tantamount to saying that, as the fulcrum of *this* book, an appreciation of (the *potential* of) Agamben’s work/language allows us to *write and read* books or works that are *not thetic*, but – reflecting the paradisaical, messianic Kingdom and, as mentioned, its felicitous unfurling of the Ungovernable – *ex-thetic*. It allows us to *write and read* books or works that *ex-pose* (i.e. neutralise or *depose*) *imposition* and, in the same gesture, *expose* (i.e. reveal or show) language/organisation *as such*. By way of pure anarchy, i.e. by way of an *an-archic*, *presuppositionless* beginning, it, an appreciation of *this* potential, reveals our blissful, happy taking-place. In words of one syllable and echoing the title of this *mise en ex-ergue*, it makes us make true friends... Thus, far from being concerned with so-called fair-weather friends or the proverbial friends in high *places*, quite possibly, *this* friendly author invites us to make true friends for the very first time. Agamben invites us to indwell God’s love.

In any event, *not* taking aim at some unattainable, silly pipe dream or a ludicrous pie in the sky, a complete appreciation of *this potential*, I suggest, pivots on, and unfurls, an exit from our groaning under humanly produced sovereignty; it pivots on, and unfurls, friendship in a way that – based upon the particular *potential* that this appreciation unlocks – resists, as the above quote stresses, *both* representation (*Vorstellung*, that is, literally emplacement in its potential *state*) as in *virtually* suspended, non-semanticised or ‘ground-zero’ identities, *and* conceptualisation

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<sup>6</sup> As I have more to say on this in the preface, suffice it to say at this point that nexus/connection/articulation/relation refers to the negative self-*presupposition* of the *Gesetz*/Law in the living in the form of ground zero/representation and, in line therewith, naked/bare life. Moreover, it should be noted that the distraction just mentioned is at odds with the (outwardly kindred) work of Cooper, for whom “distraction is a destructuring of collected structures” (2001b, p. 22), with Cooper’s ‘distraction’ only being an oscillation between origin *and* command. That means that Cooper fails to grasp that God, as a friendly *archē*, “coincides with the manifestation of the inoperativity of the law and with the essential illegitimacy of every power in messianic time” (Agamben 2017d, p. 34).

(that is, emplacement in its actualised *state*), as in semantically effective, *constated* or produced/*forthplaced* identities. With *this* author, we undo signifier *and* signified.

*Here*, the key to grasping ‘representation’ is that it, echoing Böhm’s ‘ground zero’, *stands in*, without (necessarily) entailing a certain content *stood for* (cf. Beyes and Steyaert 2012; Cooper 1993). By contrast, ‘concepts’, at least from a Koselleckian (and, building thereon, Luhmannian) angle – Andersen notes – are condensations of “a wide range of social and political meanings” (2003, p. vi), so that “[c]oncepts comprise an undecided abundance of meaning, a concentration of meaning, which makes them ambiguous” (ibid.). In Andersen’s view, it is “[p]recisely through its ambiguity [that] the concept creates a space of signification, which is open to interpretation and can become a semantic battlefield” (ibid.), true friendship still vitiated.

Similarly, but in a way that foregrounds ‘conceptuality’ (*not* debatable, equivocal ‘concepts’) at the expense of this or that unambiguous, fixed concept, Derrida, with whom Agamben has repeatedly locked horns (over friendship), emphasises that “the signified concept is never present in itself, in an adequate presence that would refer only to itself” (1979, p. 140). Rather, following Derrida, “[e]very concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences” (ibid.). And “[s]uch a play then—différance—is no longer simply a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual system and process in general” (ibid.), Andersen and Derrida retaining *oikonomia*. Inclusively excluding God, Andersen and Derrida stress and focus on alterable place-taking (*lieutenancy*) rather than taking-place (in God).<sup>7</sup>

It is important for me that, at the end of the day, both Andersen and Derrida, their theoretical differences notwithstanding, wind up dynamising *conceptualisation*. Still submitting the friend and, by implication, the Kingdom to representation, they go on conceptualising man, even if the concepts in question are, fundamentally, alterable and ever fallible, with both scholars *presupposing* an ‘empty ontology’, ground zero or naked/bare life as the basis of perpetually ongoing conceptuality or conceptualisation. As a consequence, with Andersen’s heavily Luhmann-inspired systems theoretical approach and Derrida’s deconstruction, true friendship, i.e. the messianic inoperativity of the *archē*, there can be no doubt, takes a nosedive, inevitably going down the pan.

Contrasting herewith, a full appreciation of the *potential* of Agamben’s authorship pivots on, and unfurls, friendship, inasmuch as it, *this* appreciation, allows us to

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<sup>7</sup> Derrida’s approach is taken up by Cooper, who underlines that “Derrida’s *différance* as that which is neither word [i.e. (empty) signifier] nor concept [i.e. (given) signified] summarizes the point [...] that form [or ‘command’] is not only made out of non-form [or ‘origin’] but that form always carries within itself the inclination to break up, to dissolve into the formless” (2001c, p. 347). Hence, Cooper’s work juts out as a suitable ‘contrast medium’ bringing out Agamben’s *potential*.

resist *both* man's reduction to "a life that has been cut off and separated from its form" (Agamben 2015b, p. 263) or what Cooper, approvingly, describes as "anti-conceptual roughness" (2001c, p. 344) and the *imposition* of (ever alterable, 'deferred') forms on such 'naked or bare life/roughness'. No doubt, an appreciation of the *potential* of Agamben's work/language pivots on, and unfurls, the friend – that is, every worker/organiser, every human being – as absolutely inappropriable, as the Ungovernable. Because it resolutely undoes the heinous processes that, *as it stands*, rivet friends(hip) to – it bears repeating – representation *and*, predicated thereon, conceptualisation. As a friendly author, Agamben undoes these processes, incessantly inviting us to grasp that the "meaningless [i.e. non-signifying], integral transformation of the word is the Kingdom" (2022b, p. 37), *is* true friendship. Agamben invites us to become friendly authors *ourselves* and to – in this way – unlock, and testify to, a friendly *potential*.

### *A friendly potential*

So let's begin (*archō*) with a brief *archaeology* into human sovereignty, i.e. the *Gesetz/Law*, bearing in mind that, as Agamben underscores, "[t]he *archē* that archaeology brings to light is not homogenous to the presuppositions [derived from *pōnere*, meaning 'to position' or 'place'] that it has neutralized" (2015b, p. xiii). Rather, "it [the (inoperative) *archē* rendering *possible*, and rendered *possible* by, friendship] is given entirely and only in their [in *presupposed impositions*] collapse" (ibid.), so that "[i]ts work is their inoperativity" (ibid.). By the same token, the (inoperative) *archē* *archaeologically* brought to light reveals that "the human being [or organiser] exists in the human being's [or organiser's] non-place" (1999c, p. 134) – in the aforementioned messianic *u-topia*/pure word that is ultimately coterminous with true friendship and, as such, fully defies representational *and* conceptual 'placing/positioning'.

Differently put, the *archē*, archaeologically brought to light, *is* language's and, by implication, organisation's untethering from, and suspension of, the *Gesetz/Law*, its *paradigm*, as touched upon before, friendship. And, crucially, to get to the bottom of friendship and, hence, language/organisation, it is *not* enough to – as my friend Sverre Spoelstra, while praising Cooper, suggests – grasp potentiality in terms of "possibilities surrounding the 'real' we see [and that] are present in their absence" (2007, p. 81), in their non-actualised form. *No*, dear friend, within *this* book/work, it is *not* enough to, as you (and I) once implied, hold on to a "potential [that] *exists*, precisely because it finds its moment of unformation at the very same time as the actual finds its (temporary) formation" (ibid.). It is *not* enough to think of *potential* as ground zero.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In keeping with Agamben, what is overlooked is that "[s]overeignty is always double because Being, as potentiality, suspends itself, maintaining itself in a relation of [...] *virtual*

Rather, *here*, in the context of absolute, true friendship, “one must think the existence of potentiality without any relation to Being in the form of actuality” (Agamben 1998, p. 47). After all, “potentiality [in its conventional guise, the guise perpetuated by Cooper] and actuality are simply the two faces of the sovereign self-grounding of Being” (ibid), viz., ‘origin/principle/representation’ *as well as* ‘command/order/conceptualisation’. They are simply the two faces of the *Gesetz*. Thus, as will become clear, true friendship and, with it, the (inoperative/*an-archic*) *archē* of language/organisation pivot, in truth, on a ‘contact’; they pivot on a non-appropriating non-relation between potentiality and act, *physis* and *nomos*, the particular *potential* that friendship – that is, the (inoperative/*an-archic*) *archē* of language/organisation – brings to light being *destituent* potential. For, regarding the Kingdom, Agamben emphasises, it is “destituent potentiality that, in every sphere, deposes power and institutions, including those [...] that believe they are its representatives and embodiment” (2022b, p. 41). Contrary to ground zero, *this potential* unfurls a ‘friendly friend’.

#### *A friendly friend*

Finally, *this mise en ex-ergue* turns, briefly, to summarising the spirit of friendship undergirding and permeating *this* entire book. Needless to say, in *this* context, I draw upon Agamben, who deliberately formulates his *idea* of friendship in contrast to Derrida’s rivalling, still *oikonomic* approach... As Haddad notes, “Derrida’s contention is that the concept of friendship is contradictory, and that its contradictions cannot be resolved” (2014, p. 69), for “it relies on opposing terms [including, as in Carl Schmitt’s notorious, theoretical edifice, ‘friend/enemy’] that remain in a necessary tension” (ibid.). Chiming with Derrida’s criticism of transcendental signifieds or ‘given’ ‘commands/orders’, friendship in Derrida, while found to stimulate and trigger critical thought, Haddad concludes, remains “too tied to its exclusionary history, too dominated by a masculine understanding, to be successfully mobilised” (p. 75). All that is to say that friendship remains ‘undecidable’, subject to a play of nullification and deferral. It remains subject to an (em)placing/operative *archē*, we workers/organisers caught between a rock and a hard place. No doubt, friendship remains rooted in, and is permanently referred back to, the *virtual* state of exception. Disappointingly, it remains rooted in, and is constantly referred back to, an empty and absolute law, unable to set free, and reveal, a truly friendly friend (see Derrida 2020).

Agamben’s *idea* of friendship could hardly be more different. As I, allusively, have hoped to ‘stress’ (*mettre en ex-ergue*), friendship, in Agamben and by extension

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exception/suspension] with itself in order to realize itself as absolute actuality (which thus presupposes nothing other than its own potentiality)” (1998, p. 47). Indeed, what is overlooked is what Fusco, drawing on Agamben, calls “pure potentiality beyond the reaches of any sovereign power” (2022, p. 45).

within *this (ex-thetic) thesis*, is, as it were, ‘put out of work’ (*mise en ex-ergue*). Friendship coincides with *inoperativity*: it coincides with a non-appropriating, non-representational ‘contact’ between the living being and the speaking being – potentiality and actuality. It coincides with a proximity resisting representation (and conceptualisation), so that, *here*, the “friend is not an other I, but an otherness immanent to selfness, a becoming other of the self” (Agamben 2009c, pp. 34–5). Or, put by Hamacher, the friend is an “altérité sans Autre” (2019, p. 242), an *otherness* outside the *Gesetz*, outside *oikonomia*, with friendship, rather than being a matter of *différance*, coming to the fore with or as pure *anarchy*, with or as *presuppositionless* beginning. Now, in approaching the end of this *mise en ex-ergue*, I want to express my sincere gratitude to, and acknowledge the support of, what to me are some very special friends.<sup>9</sup>

## Acknowledgements

In these acknowledgements to the friends, i.e. the human beings defying representation *and* conceptualisation, who have supported me and my *ex-thetic thesis* throughout the years, I, first and foremost, wish to express my gratitude to my principal supervisor and long-time mentor, Sverre Spoelstra. A role model in so many respects, Sverre deserves a big thanks for his adorable ability to genuinely feel happy for *others*, his unwavering interest in non-representational (i.e. *really* exceptional) work, his refreshing, commendable approachability, as well as the patience and stability that he, despite all, has unswervingly provided. From what I can tell, there are few fit to hold a candle to you on these scores... That said, *this* book, I am entirely sure, would not have been *possible*. It would not have been a testimony to true friendship without your relentless backing and encouragement. Where others’ intuitive knee-jerk reaction might have been scepticism, you, a peerless companion through thick and thin, showed faith and fidelity, assuring me that every cloud has a silver lining. Besides, it was you who introduced me to, and whetted my appetite for, Agamben’s *and* Cooper’s work, never giving me the feeling that I had bitten off more than I could chew...

Joining the supervision process at a comparatively late stage, my assistant supervisor, Peter Svensson, has to be thanked for the congenial calmness and prudence he steadfastly offered; his arguably conscious, considerate attempts *not* to simply *impose* certain *premises*; and his ability to, even in occasional disagreement,

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<sup>9</sup> For illustrative, if *oikonomic*, organisation research on ‘the friend’, see Allen 2017; Boje and Jørgensen 2014; Brewis 2014; Costas 2012; Farias 2017; French 2007; French et al. 2009; Gibbons 2004; Good and Cooper 2016; Grey and Sturdy 2007; Korber et al. 2024; Pillemer and Rothbard 2018; Rumens 2008, 2010, 2012, 2016; Tasselli 2019; Tasselli and Kilduff 2018; Townley 1994.



be a generous and helpful interlocutor and, not forgetting, a formidable listener. I have grown immensely fond of your affable unprejudiced attitude, your open-mindedness and your subtle, circumspect ways of diffusing, and doing without, quick-temperdness.

Accepting to act as discussants at my final seminar, William Watkin and Damian O'Doherty provided crucial feedback that prompted me, as far as my arguments are concerned, to opt for utmost 'clarity', inasmuch as, following Agamben, "in *claritas*, what appears is language itself" (2010, p. 27). That is to say, their feedback 'clearly' made me focus even more on showcasing, and testifying to, what Murray, drawing upon Agamben, calls the "attempt to free language from the imperative to mean" (2010, p. 29). No doubt, their comments, arguably keeping me from spreading myself too thin, provided the impetus for a beneficial, exclusive focus on uninhibited 'clarification': for a *real* state of exception rather than only a *virtual* state of exception...<sup>10</sup>

Complementing employment as a doctoral candidate at the Department of Business Administration at Lund University School of Economics and Management, several scholarships allowed me to attend PhD courses, workshops and conferences, all of which proved to be vital touchstones for my work. Notably, the Helge Ax:son Johnson Foundation, the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation, the Letterstedt Society, the William and Hugo Evers Fund, Professor Lorentz Fredrik Westman's Fund, a SCOS bursary and a Concepta stipend allowed me to discuss and develop my thesis.

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<sup>10</sup> For clarity's sake, 'clarity', like the *real* (state of) exception, in *this* context, is just another term for inoperativity or, if you prefer, pure *an-archy*. As a consequence, it is at odds with Cooper's musings, which revolve around a dialectic between "[t]he latent [that] does not easily lend itself to the clarity of definition" (2005b, p. 1693) and the "clear, definitive and even obvious" (ibid.).

(cf. Butler 2015), with all ‘noise’ fully evaporated (cf. Pors 2015; Stäheli 2003; Swann and Ghelfi 2019).<sup>11</sup>

Joe is hands-down the most clairvoyant person I know, your sarcastic, bittersweet remarks being the bee’s knees. As true friends, we have always refrained from ‘talking sense into each other’ and, therefore, whenever we meet, have a whale of a time. Thank you for letting me use your magnificent bumblebee photograph. Truly, a picture is worth 1000 words; and, perhaps, a book really ought to be judged by its cover... Jayne, as keen as mustard as far as *this* text is concerned, has not only indomitably cheered for me. Never pussyfooting around, you have also carefully read and commented on many parts of *this* thesis, some of which were entirely topsy-turvy and unruly. Your sense of integrity and uplifting, point-blank candidness, as well as your fine poetic/writing skills, have given me great pleasure and inspire me a lot.

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Also, with the *oikonomic* reader *now* gone, I owe a big thanks to *you*, dear friendly (i.e. *inoperative*) reader, for avoiding turning *this* text into a vexing closed book (i.e. noise or the Law’s *virtual* exception/suspension), into a trivial open book (i.e. fixed identities or the Law’s normal functioning) or an oscillation between these poles. I owe a big thanks to *you* for making *possible*, cherishing and guarding our friendship; having rendered *oikonomia* inoperative, *now* you inhabit what Kafka, in *Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk*, calls “a mere nothing in voice, a mere nothing in execution” (1971, p. 628), with inoperativity “the speech we find when language

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<sup>11</sup> Later, I, elaborately, discuss *idea(s)*, *contagion* and *comedy* – terms encapsulating friendship.

<sup>12</sup> I remember the many pub evenings with Katya, Alexander and Bernadette being particularly friendly, as well as the wonderful annual table tennis tournament, still held at the Department of Business Administration and continued by, amongst others, Anna, Lena and Charlina; the generosity of my office mate, Francisco; the many quips and the forthrightness shared with Mathieu; the splendid moments with the gifted chefs and invaluable companions, Clarissa and Nukki; the support and cheerfulness offered by Jörgen; the lovely conversations (in person or digital) with Jennifer; the affection given to, and received from, my ‘sibling of choice’, Yaqian; and the love of my family.

frees itself from its suppositional and presuppositional pretension” (Agamben 2024a, p. 77).

# Preface: on illegibility

“There are no readers. There are only words without addressee.” (Agamben 2023a, p. 329)

“Illegible”, a reader of *this* book, an inveterate deconstructionist, blurted aloud after having, yes, read it... Seemingly common to all deconstructionists, this reader stresses “the *processual* nature of difference as distinct from its meaning as a fixed presence (i.e. static difference)” (Cooper 1989, p. 488). Hence, distinctly, this reader, as it were, “relates the world as an infinite wholeness of mutability in which composition is the permutability of differences” (2014, p. 591). Indeed, *supposing* what Agamben calls an “onto-logical nexus [i.e. a ‘relation’ or ‘articulation’] between language and being” (2018d, p. 4), not only is this man, upon reading *my* book, entirely disgruntled and peevish. He also ‘relates’ the world – with Cooper – “as an infinite latency from which to extract readily readable forms” (2014, p. 595), so that, apropos *resultant, textually composed* difference(s), “[p]rocess and recess [both from *cedere, inter alia* meaning ‘to stride’] are recursive versions of each other in a world without end” (p. 585). Here, ‘figure’ and ‘ground’ are “mutually defining fractals” (2001a, p. 195).

For, generally, this reader views the illegibility of the ‘written’, of the *gramma* or what Aristotle, in *On Interpretation (Peri Hermeneias)*, describes as *ta en te phoné* (‘that which is in the voice’), as “a continuous *absence*” (Cooper 1989, p. 488). Implicitly, he regards “the letter [the *gramma*/‘written’] as the negation and exclusion of the [natural or animal] voice” (Agamben 1991, p. 30). And, as a result, he grounds humanity *negatively, presupposing* it, so to say, as that “‘which is written but not read’” (ibid.). Differently put, for this wrought-up, aggressively bellowing reader, “*gramma* [...] is the *arthron* [joint] that articulates [joins] voice [the living being] and language [the speaking being]” (p. 39). Markedly, in his view, it is this ‘lettered/lettering’ *arthron* that ‘articulates’ or, and this is the same thing, ‘relates/connects’ potentiality and act; it is “‘writing’ that makes matter into culture” (Cooper 2001a, p. 195).

Or, in short, for him, the flippant, incensed reader in question, “*gramma* [...] functions as the negative ontological foundation” (Agamben 1991, p. 39). This amounts to saying that, for him, “language is produced through an ‘articulation’ of the voice, which is nothing else than the inscription of letters (*grammata*) in it” (2018d, p. 18). Congruously, taking his point of departure in “a voice that can be

written” (p. 19), i.e. a voice that can be ‘grammaticised’, the deconstructionist reader sees the illegibility of the *gramma*/‘written’ “as a force that is continually beyond our grasp and therefore never properly present” (Cooper 1989, p. 488). He sees “graphing [to] introduce an intrinsic [...] ‘unstoppable oscillation’ into the material base of all marking” (2001a, p. 195)... As Butler – in favour of deconstructionism – *writes*, this reader sees the illegibility of the ‘written’ as a force defying ‘presence’, if “‘presence’ is understood as a primary or originary reality, and the voice or, rather, the sounds of speech are understood to create and convey that presence in and as the world” (2016, p. xiii).

And yet, ‘relatedly’, he, the deconstructionist reader, *posits* that this peculiar force, this illegible ‘written’, this *gramma* said to be within the voice, “has to be ‘read’ in all its variety and ambiguity” (Cooper 1989, p. 482). For it, illegible ‘writing’, “serves as the drive to organize” (p. 481). Patently, for deconstructionists, it serves as a drive to make us what Parker – whose work, via Cooper’s influence too, bears a somewhat deconstructionist imprint – refers to as “organizing animals” (2002, p. 183). Thus, amongst deconstructionists broadly conceived, this *alleged* drive is found to prompt us to “make ourselves human through patterning our worlds, by categorizing people and things through language” (ibid.). But, still, in Parker’s opinion, we must “not get sucked into becoming a self-important machine for manufacturing stable myths” (2009, p. 1295).<sup>13</sup> In this vein, for this reader, the hermeneut of ‘letters’, illegible “writing [...] has to be understood as the *very* condition of discourse in general” (Cooper 1989, p. 486) while, at the same time, accentuating and spawning “the essential uncertainty of human discourse” (p. 481). After all, with deconstruction, Butler pointedly affirms, “the problem of writing [...] depends on a generative collapse of the mimetic ideal mandating that writing [solely] reiterates the sounds of speech” (2016, p. viii).

Vitaly, seen from this angle, it, the ‘related’ latency of absence/writing/illegibility, has to be understood as the very condition of presence/speech/legibility, with the former held to, by way of ‘process/recess’, keep the latter “from degrading into structure” (Cooper 1989, p. 483). With this in view, it becomes clear that, whether scornfully or not, the angered deconstructionist reader mentioned criticised what he, appalled and in consternation, deemed to be a lack of readily discernible meaning or, perchance, of meaning altogether. Firmly, he urged and indignantly *insisted* that

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<sup>13</sup> As a *paradigmatic* reading of Lacan’s punning with *mythiquement* (‘mythically’) and *mythique ment* (‘myth lies’) shows, what Parker ignores is that *any* such myth is a lie *and* that truth-as-exit rests on testimony; *here*, “[t]he truth of testimony does not depend on what it says but on what is not said, on the fact that it brings a speechlessness into words” (Agamben 2022b, p. 50), underlining that “it is possible to say something without speaking” (2023c, p. 3) – *without* signifying/*oikonomic logos* (for critiques of ‘foundational myth(ologeme)s’, see Agamben 1998, 2005a; Benjamin 1996b).

the latent, illegible ‘written’ he strictly takes to reside in, and characterise, the human voice, i.e. the ‘empty force’ of the *absent* presence, be rendered legible...

Somewhat perplexingly, he demanded that – the mentioned collapse of mimesis, of ‘presence’, bringing about a world without (set) end, notwithstanding – the ‘letters’ somehow be interpreted. He demanded that my *text* ‘inform’, bearing in mind that, following Cooper, “the *informing* of *information* is necessarily positive *and* negative at the same time” (2006/2023, p. 123); that is to say, for him, my *text* should have reflected “the actual structure of the word *inform* whose Latin and early English origins included the combined meanings of being in shape and form *and* being shapeless and out of form” (ibid.). For, from his grammatological point of view, information emerges as a “ceaseless informing or putting into form of a readable and meaningful world but this readability and sense of meaning can never be taken for granted” (ibid.). And, as noted, mimesis/‘presence’ has, for him, evaporated, and we all said to be ensnared in the “double action of approaching and withdrawing” (2007, p. 1573).

Yet, what this reader failed to note is that *this* book can – based on Agamben’s work on Benjamin, who, in turn, draws on von Hofmannsthal – be said to be an invitation to ““read what was never written”” (1999b, p. 158). Significantly, it is an invitation to read beyond reading’s *negative* self-presupposition/grounding in the illegible ‘written’ or *absent* presence. It is an invitation to unlock, and read upon the basis of, *not* the thwarted illegibility of deconstruction with its *negative* basis in the ‘written’, but the pure illegibility endorsed by, and inhering, Agamben’s work. Echoing the belief that, in a way, there is no reader, no hermeneut of ‘letters’, it is an invitation to read writing *without* reading’s or, yes, *logos*’/speech’s ‘written’, fully divesting itself of the “force (i.e. non-presence) of [illegible] writing” (Cooper 1989, p. 489).

In other words, distinguished from the deconstructionist/grammatological voice, i.e. “a voice that has been transcribed and comprehended—that is, captured—by means of letters” (Agamben 2018d, p. 19), pure illegibility, as the wager of *this* preface/book, involves “a voice that has never been written, an un-writable that [...] obstinately remains such” (p. 25). Obviously, *here*, “[t]here is no articulation between the living and the speaking being” (ibid.), between *phoné* and *logos*, potentiality and act; *now*, politics is, *pace* Aristotle, Derrida and Cooper, “thinkable beyond relation and, thus, no longer in the form of a connection” (1998, p. 29). As for *phoné* and *logos*, work/organisation is thinkable as “an intimacy without relation” (2015b, p. 236), with legibility unable to appropriatively project itself into, and trap, the living. *Here*, work lies even beyond Cooper’s *supposed* “origins in the invisible and absent” (2007, p. 1567).

Accordingly, *this* book recognises, with Kotsko and Salzani, that, as for Agamben (as well as for Derridean deconstruction/grammatology or any scholar’s work for that matter), “reading practices [...] flow into the broad definition of what

philosophy is” (2017, pp. 1–2). No doubt, as myriad organisation scholars have pointed up (e.g. Cooper 2001a, 2007; Helin 2015; Kuismin 2022; Leonard 2004; Prasad 2002; Pullen et al. 2020; Rhodes 2000; Rhodes and Pitsis 2008; Valtonen and Pullen 2021), reading and, yes, writing practices flow into the definition of what work/organisation *is*.

Interestingly, this can also be illustrated by way of comparing the role attributed to the preface/proem in Derrida and Agamben; as Spivak, *writing* on Derrida, underscores, “[t]he preface, by daring to repeat the book and reconstitute it in another register, merely enacts what is already the case” (2016, p. xxx). Specifically, for Derrida, Spivak explains, “[t]here is, in fact, no ‘book’ other than these ever different repetitions” (ibid.). Indeed, “each act of reading the ‘text’ is a preface to the next” (p. xxx–xxxi), with reading, as noticed, in this view, kept from degrading into structure (see Rasche 2010, 2011a,b). Sharply contrasting therewith, Agamben stresses that “[t]he philosophical word is essentially and constitutively proemical” (2018d, p. 93), so that “[e]verything the philosopher writes [...] is only a proem to an unwritten work” (p. 96). Therefore, while work/organisation emerges, with Derrida, as subject to ever alterable hermeneutical readings, with Agamben, work/organisation defies *any* hermeneutical reading. For work/organisation remains *both* unwritten and un-writable, the hermeneut of ‘letters’ unable to grammatologically ground himself in the living and, hence, dissolved (see De Boever 2016 for the role of the preface in Agamben).

Concretely, *this* book recognises that Agamben’s work amounts to a curious “theory of reading” (Kotsko and Salzani 2017, p. 9) aimed at deactivating our subjugation to dominant modes of legibility (or, if you wish, work), be they conventional objectivist and, as a result, concerned with “the ‘writing of organization’” (Cooper 1989, p. 502) or deconstructionist and, thus, concerned with “the ‘organization of writing’” (ibid.). Stated differently, not only do “Agamben and Derrida [arguably Agamben’s key interlocutor] argue philosophically through readings of texts” (Attell 2015, p. 4). Both read reading differently, with *this* book testifying to the *potential* of an Agambenian reading *vis-à-vis* work (as hinted, itself seen to ultimately amount to the ac-tivity of reading). That is, by dint of testimony, I provide a reading readable only in its pure unreadability. I provide a reading *without presupposition* of, and anchoring in, the ‘written’; since I – entirely – concur with Agamben, who shows that “what is borne witness to cannot already be language [*logos*] or writing [*gramma*]” (1999c, p. 38). Only “[i]f there is no articulation [no *arthron*] between the living being [*phoné*] and language [*logos*], [...] then there can be testimony” (p. 130; cf. Derrida 2005).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Expectably, Derrida’s musings *vis-à-vis* testimony differ sharply from Agamben’s work; for Derrida, “there is in all testimony an implication [...] of law [from *logos* and, thus, linked to *legibility*]” (2005, p. 86). Specifically, for him, “[a]s soon as I bear witness, I am in front of you

Consequently, without a doubt, if in a way you, dear reader, may not initially expect, *this* book is a testimony to the *possibility* of unreadability. For it withdraws from, and, equally, does away with, the brute violence of imposing *any* meaning whatsoever. Importantly, this also includes the meaningless ‘written’ grammatologists/deconstructionists believe – as touched upon – to spur and inspire meaningful reading (or discourse). As such, akin to all of Agamben’s books, *this* book is “but a sort of prologue of a book never written or writable” (Agamben 1985, p. 33), staying clear of grounding its legibility in an illegible ‘written’. And thus, *this* book is doubtlessly deliberately written in an *il-legible* way. After all, it reflects, and bears witness to, the condition of no longer being subject to (*il-*) appropriating, biopolitical language (*logos*). In other words, *this* book is written as a testimony to the *possibility* of a life *no longer* subject to the classical, Aristotelian precept on account of which the ‘work of man *qua* man’ is, unceremoniously, identified with ‘life according to the *logos*’. That means, for good reason, *this* book refuses vehemently to, willy-nilly, equate the ‘work of man *qua* man’ with life according to the ‘Law’, thus fighting *imposition* tooth and nail. Since, siding with the Italian philosopher and political theorist Giorgio Agamben, to me, the ‘Law’, conceived as language in its *oikonomic*, i.e. self-consecrating/-consecrated, guise, has, decidedly and unreservedly, to be understood as “a principle of abuse and oppression” (Agamben 2023b, p. 51). ‘Law’ has to be seen as “solely directed toward judgement, independent of truth and justice” (1999c, p. 18), a motif explored later via a brief, critical *reading* of Cooper, Derrida and Luhmann.

In keeping with Agamben, *this* book is, then, *written* as a testimony to the moment “when the book [or ‘writing’] of the world falls from your hands” (2017c, p. 78). By a coincidence, that means that it mirrors Benjamin’s musings on Kafka’s ‘students’, such as ‘the new advocate’, Karl Rossmann, Odradek or ‘the uncalled servant’ (see Beyes and Holt 2019; Hamacher 2011, 2020; Salzani 2019), inasmuch as these “students are pupils who have lost the holy Writ” (Benjamin 1999, p. 815). Or, in line with Autonomous Artists Anonymous’s clarifications apropos their use of representationless abstract geometry, *this* book is *written* as a testimony to a life that, wittingly, “remains impervious to any reading or deciphering” (2017, p. 886). Emphatically, *this* book is *written* as a testimony to a life that remains impervious to any reading or deciphering, insofar as reading and deciphering pivot upon biopolitical-cum-communicative appropriation: on *oikonomia*. By the same token, unlike the appalled, arguably disdainful reader mentioned, *this* book does *not*

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as before the law” (ibid.). In other words, for Derrida, man is “not merely the subject of the law outside the law [outside *legible* ‘presence’], he is also, to infinity, but finitely, the prejudged [*le préjugé*]. Not in the sense of being judged in advance, but in being in advance of judgement that is always in preparation and always delayed” (2018, p. 55). Alluding to Kafka’s *Before the Law*, Derrida holds, therefore, that “man is man from the country in so far as he is unable to read or, if he can read, he still has to deal with the illegibility within that which seems to allow itself to be read” (p. 43).



despair over a lack of meaning and – if Agamben’s work is anything to go by – a corollary dispensation with abuse and oppression. Quite the reverse, with Agamben, it, happily, sets out to testify to the *possibility* “that we have finished with having to understand” (2023b, p. 11). *Writing* but ‘unwrittenness’, it sets out to testify to the *possibility* that we have finished with having to mean, the ensuing ‘non-meaning’ a blessing (in disguise)...

Hence, *this* book differs sharply from, and winds up, if ultimately obliquely, vividly contesting, Jacques Derrida’s prodigiously influential postulations, postulations that little by little have also gained remarkable traction in the field of organisation studies (e.g. Bowden 2020; Clegg et al. 2007; Egan-Wyer et al. 2014; Griffin et al. 2015; Jones 2003; Jones et al. 2005; Nyberg and De Cock 2022; Rasche 2011a,b; Rhodes and Brown 2005). For, according to Derrida, for better or worse, one simply “cannot speak of an absence of meaning, except by giving it a meaning it does not have” (2001, p. 332). To go straight to the heart of the matter, in Derrida’s theoretical edifice, there is – rain or shine – in language, no pure absence of meaning or signification. No matter what, fatally, for him, unreadable absence is inevitably always already appropriated by this or that allegedly deferred readable presence. Non-meaning or, synonymous herewith, illegible play are always already appropriated by this or that possibly deferred meaning/*legibility*; since “[t]he absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely” (p. 354). All this is tantamount to saying that, following Derrida, “[p]lay is the disruption of presence” (p. 369). Or, in short, “*play* [is] the absence of the transcendental signified” (2016, p. 54). Otherwise stated, while “play is always play of absence and presence” (2001, p. 369), in Derrida’s view, “[b]eing must be conceived as presence and absence on the basis of the possibility of play” (ibid.). Put yet another way, non-meaning/play – Derrida, epitomising the snide ‘reader’, *insists* – is the quasi-foundation of a steadily deferred *legibility* rather than, as Agamben reveals, its long-awaited, neutralising antidote...

Evidently, that means that Derrida fails to unfurl play, with Agamben, in a more far-reaching way, as “a passage from a *religio* [related to ‘*legibility*’] that is now felt to be false or oppressive to negligence [literally ‘*il-legibility*’] as *vera religio*” (2007a, p. 76)... Patently, Derrida fails to join Agamben in what the latter calls “return[ing] to play its purely profane vocation” (p. 77), insofar as, once profaned, “play frees and distracts humanity from the sphere of the sacred [i.e. of the ‘Law’], without simply abolishing it” (p. 76)... On the whole, whilst for Derrida play/“original illegibility is [...] the very possibility of the book [or of incessantly deferred or postponed ‘infinite signification’]” (2001, p. 95) and, correlatively, “[t]he exit from the book, the other and the threshold are all articulated *within the book*” (p. 93), *my* book testifies to the *possibility* of fully *neg-ligent*, profane play/non-meaning. It testifies to the *possibility* of neutralising any *oikonomically legible* book. *Pace* Derrida, with Agamben, it testifies to, and turns out to be, *not* just another

biopolitical impasse. It testifies to, and turns out to be, a true exit *itself*, remaining *legible* only in its *il-legibility*.

Organisation scholarship has, at least to a certain extent, dealt with similar concerns. Especially, Robert Cooper (1931–2013) – a prominent scholar, who, born in Liverpool, held appointments at, for example, Lancaster University and Keele University – has been tremendously influential in this context. For decades, he called attention to issues such as ‘disorganisation’ (e.g. Cooper 2016d), ‘rupture’ (e.g. Cooper 2016g), ‘non-form’ (e.g. Cooper 2001c) and ‘uncertainty’ (e.g. Cooper 2005a). All of these shade into the theme of unreadability. In other words, in Cooper’s work, all these issues rest on, and cement, a view of “the ‘zero symbolic value’ of the signifier as play” (2016d, p. 93)... Recognised for having “influence[d] a significant number of staff and students” (Burrell and Parker 2016, p. 3) and frequently associated with providing “a breath of fresh air, showing that it was possible to broaden the range of writing that one engaged in” (p. 4), Cooper, by calling attention to these issues, has hoped to *redress* what – for him – are “two major intellectual vices: *objectification* and the *naturalization of order*” (Cooper, cited in Chia and Kallinikos 1998, p. 156). The first, objectification, entails framing the social world as a collection of clearly divided, self-identical objects – such as, say, the ‘individual’, the ‘organisation’ or ‘society’ – with these ‘objects’, Cooper finds, nine times out of ten, detrimentally thought of as fixed structures with certain physical properties or traits. The second, the naturalisation of order, concerns the assumption that order and regularity are inherently conducive to social action, with disorder and disturbance or, if you prefer, unreadability, Cooper laments, often fallaciously understood as entailing unnatural distortions of an original state of harmony... The long and the short of it is that, in *his* ‘book’, we tend to mistakenly ‘read fixed signifieds into reading’...

Adequately grappling these vices, Cooper *writes*, means “strip[ping] human being and its settings of their conventional readability” (2005a, p. xii) *and*, connected herewith, fully embracing “the intrinsic unreadability and ungraspability of the world” (ibid.). On this view, to put it with Derrida, who has been an important source of inspiration for Cooper, we “no longer *re-present* a present that would exist elsewhere and [be] prior” (2001, p. 299). Consequently, going about these two vices, we are told, means adopting “a view of social life as ‘text’” (Cooper and Fox 1990, p. 578), where we should *not* ‘read’ in the sense of giving “a seeming definiteness to what is really provisional, a comforting integrity to what is incomplete” (ibid.). Rather, we should recognise that such “text opens out in a centrifugal way and can only be experienced as an activity of creative production, in which the agent/‘reader’ is caught up as an active element in the ongoing, unfinished movement of text” (ibid.). Or, to return to Derrida, we should recognise that “text is not conceivable in any originary or modified form of presence” (2001, p. 265). Alas, as indicated, this puts a spotlight on unprofaned ‘play/original *illegibility*’ only, slamming the door on pure non-meaning. On balance, this view *presupposes* an articulation between

*phoné* and *logos*, potentiality and act. And, in so doing, it suppresses the *possibility* that “voice and language are in contact without any articulation” (Agamben 2018d, p. 28). As for *phoné* and *logos*, it denies the *possibility* of an *immediate* ‘contact’, *without gramma*-based ‘relation’.

What is more, for Cooper, *redressing* these two interrelated vices and, by necessity, the ‘conventional readability’ underlying dominant organisation scholarship, with its woeful focus on “stone-like solidity and rationalised self-belief” (2005a, p. xii), implies replacing a view of organisations as “instrumental systems” (2016g, p. 34) as it highlights structure rather than process. *In lieu* thereof, a view of organisations as “expressive systems” (ibid.), where, in contrast, “every contingency is valued as a potential source of growth” (ibid.), is to be endorsed. Importantly, viewing organisations as expressive rather than instrumental systems invites us to grasp “man as ‘ever open’ and ‘unfinished’” (ibid.). This, in turn, is tied to a redefinition of “social action as [...] the making of something out of [unreadable] nothing” (cited in Chia and Kallinikos 1998, p. 157). Or, to paraphrase, seeing organisations as expressive systems unavoidably implies a redefinition of social action as the making of presence out of unreadable absence, where – for Cooper – this “[a]bsence has to be seen as a productive force in all aspects of human being” (2016c, p. 299). Eventually, it, unreadable absence, matter or play, has to be grasped as “a metaphysical power that both transgresses and redeems itself through the continuous making of making” (2005a, p. xi)...

Therefore, not only are we to supplant arguably worn-out concepts of the human organiser that axiomatically presuppose both the representation of a given, fixed sense *and* full presence. Tellingly, we are also urged to come to terms with, and embrace, a redefinition of the “human being as a continuous process of finding and re-finding ourselves against a background that significantly lacks foundation” (Cooper 2016c, p. 288). Curiously, viewed from this angle, “[r]epresentation becomes the conversion of force or power into information” (2016a, p. 197). This, however, means that Cooper misses that such force/power and, hence, ‘original illegibility/play’ *are* (already cornered in and by) representations. Reduced to “an outside of restraint and retroactive non-forms or forces” (ibid.), illegibility/play is already *oikonomically* appropriated instead of profaned... In any event, following Cooper, we are to reappraise organisation as “an infinite and never-ending act of creation which exists for itself and not for some external reason” (2005a, p. x). Indeed, trading instrumental for expressive systems means getting fully to grips with primal unreadability/play, provided that we – nevertheless – “save the world from dissolution and disappearance” (ibid.) or what Cooper, elsewhere, more illustratively calls “madness and chaos” (2016g, p. 34; see also Burrell 2020). *In lieu* of deeming the world to be “readily ‘readable’ for us” (Cooper 2001b, p. 35), it means grasping that “‘readability’ is not already there for us but has to be created” (ibid.)... It means that Cooper ‘takes signification as read’.

More concretely, for Cooper, the “absence [underlying unreadability] is not the non-presence of something we know, but the missing presence of something we do not know” (2016c, p. 299), with Cooper pointing towards, and promoting, a dynamic, dialectical (from *lêgein*, meaning *inter alia* ‘to speak’ or ‘read’) relationship between presence/something/readability and absence/nothing/unreadability. For, according to him, “presence and absence re-create themselves repeatedly out of each other” (p. 296). In this particular *reading*, presence/something/readability *and* absence/nothing/unreadability give rise to “continuously renewed becomings and beginnings” (Cooper and Law 2016, p. 200), pointing the “way to an improvisatory and experimental conception of organizing activity” (Cooper and Fox 1990, p. 579). Thus, *addressing* the two related vices mentioned, objectification and the naturalisation of order, by way of adopting a view of organisations as expressive systems, compels us, Cooper seems to tirelessly suggest, to grasp man’s unreadability/play or ‘nothingness/absence’ as the ultimate fountainhead of an explorative, presumably continually altering *legibility*. By implication, in these particular systems, Cooper rejoices, “[m]eaning is [...] far from stable and more like a temporary stopping place which never arrives at a final destination” (2016c, p. 284). After all, in Derrida’s hugely influential reading – a reading that, on close examination, has spread like wildfire – “meaning is a *function* of play; is inscribed in a certain place in the configuration of meaningless play” (2001, p. 329).

On this account, rather than, with Agamben, testifying to ‘words without addressee’, i.e. to words that do *not* ‘subject’ (*ad-*) human beings to the ‘Law’ (*drictus*), Cooper, like Derrida, sets his hope upon “words [that] never arrive at a destination but are carried indefinitely in a continuous motion of deferral and postponement” (2001b, p. 17). Redolent of Derrida’s *reading* of Kafka’s *Before the Law* – a *reading* that, as Attell shows, conceives the law “as a *différance*, a juridical threshold that is as intangible as it is potent” (2015, p. 14), so that “[t]he law both holds [...] man in its power and excludes him from its full presence” (ibid.) – Cooper sets his hope upon an active law whose full presence, to be sure, remains intrinsically inaccessible. In sum, he sets his hope on the law’s paradoxical self/non-foundation in primordial ‘unreadability/play’ *and*, as far as readability and ‘unreadability/play’ affect each other, an “antagonistic complicity” (cited in Chia and Kallinikos 1998, p. 126). In his work, which I find to be a textbook example of modern biopolitics, he sets his hope upon the rampant, doom-laden neo-governmental belief that “to travel is better than to arrive” (1992b, p. 373).

All this means that Cooper – like Derrida and his advocates – fails to appreciate the *possibility* of an unreadability/nothingness/absence that, entirely, braves, evades and neutralises *legibility*. He fails to appreciate the *possibility* of *il-legibility*. He fails to appreciate the *possibility* of *neg-ligent*/profane play... When all is said and done, still caught in *oikonomia*, Cooper fails to truly challenge biopolitics, insofar as, Zartaloudis’s work implies, biopolitics concerns “the problem of the institutional integration of life and law” (2010, p. ix) – of life and *legibility*. As a consequence,

while I completely agree with Spoelstra that “Cooper’s later work [...] raises profound theoretical questions concerning the ontological underpinnings of organization” (2016, p. 14), Cooper, I argue in *this* book, leaves organisation scholarship entrapped in a dire impasse as he, though claiming the opposite, winds up equating organisation with communicative appropriation.<sup>15</sup> Put briefly, I argue that Cooper’s unreadability/nothingness/absence or play amount to what Agamben refers to as “imperfect nihilism” (1999b, p. 171) or, alternatively, as “a petrified or paralyzed messianism” (ibid.).

For, while Cooper, akin to all messianism, nullifies the Law, he maintains it in what Agamben, drawing on Benjamin, calls “a perpetual and interminable [*virtual*] state of exception, the ‘state of exception’ in which we live” (1999b, p. 171), with the Law becoming “ungraspable—but, for this reason, insuperable, ineradicable (‘undecidable’, in the terms of deconstruction)” (ibid.). That is, in Cooper’s opinion, unreadability or play amount to a nullification of the law that maintains the resultant nothing in a perpetual, infinitely deferred state of validity rather than neutralising it. Deplorably, it, Cooper’s unreadability/nothingness/absence/play, amounts to an *oikonomic* perpetuation of the law, insofar as the law, despite its suspension of seemingly given, fixed identities *and*, premised thereon, full presence, is left operative. Thus, Cooperian ‘unreadability/play’ still begs to be subject to “perfect nihilism” (Agamben 1999b, p. 171). It begs to be rendered inoperative, with inoperativity (*inoperosità*) revolving around the neutralisation of *oikonomic* language *and*, concomitant herewith, the revelation of language in its *suchness*/non-meaning – in its sheer *il-legibility*...<sup>16</sup>

Followingly, my critique of Robert Cooper’s work takes issue with, and hopes to undo, his persistent *installing* of unreadability as the foundational (non)source and (non)origin of *legibility*. This echoes Agamben’s increasingly well-rehearsed critical commentaries *vis-à-vis* Jacques Derrida (e.g. De la Durantaye 2009; Mills 2008; Murray 2010; Primera 2019; Prozorov 2014; Thurschwell 2003, 2004, 2005; Willemse 2017; Wortham 2007), commentaries, which – as Kevin Attell helpfully

<sup>15</sup> Here, I do *not* mean to imply that Cooper, given that only few organisation scholars are thoroughly acquainted with his work, is or was a powerful figure. Instead, I treat his work as *paradigmatic* as far as organisation scholars’ reproduction of the ‘onto-logical nexus’, i.e. the *supposed* ‘relation/articulation’ between the living and the speaking being, is concerned. Thus, I do *not* challenge Damian O’Doherty’s *description* of Cooper as a ‘fly’ in the context of organisation scholarship. What – with Wittgenstein, who suggests that philosophy’s task is to show the fly a way out of the fly-bottle – I do challenge, however, is Cooper’s tenacious reluctance to leave and dismantle the fly-bottle. I challenge Cooper’s reluctance to turn an impasse (*aporia*) into an exit (*euporia*).

<sup>16</sup> Another way of saying this is that Cooper’s unreadability/nothingness/absence/play corresponds to ‘bare life’, i.e. (‘grammaticised’) life in the *virtual* state of exception. Because “[t]he link between bare life and politics is the same link that the metaphysical definition of man as ‘the living being who has language’ seeks in the relation between *phoné* and *logos*” (Agamben 1998, p. 7).

highlights – take issue with “a *différance* [...] whose play of deferral and nullification is the foundational (non)source and (non)origin of the law” (2015, p. 14).<sup>17</sup> In short, I take issue with, and hope to undo, Cooper’s *oikonomic* adherence to the ‘Law’ or, synonymous herewith, the Other; since, for him, “[w]e know ourselves only through the echo of the Other” (2016h, p. 58), even if we ought to grasp “Otherness as transient becoming and apparition, as the haunting of a *seeming* presence by an unnerving absence” (cited in Chia and Kallinikos 1998, p. 156). Or, phrased slightly differently, here, I take issue with, and hope to undo, Cooper’s persistent *installing* of meaningless play/absence as the foundational (non)source and (non)origin of presence as sense, inasmuch as, within expressive systems, “sense [is] in continuous movement always supplementing itself in an onward movement of deferral and anticipation” (Cooper 2016c, p. 287). Hence, rather than *dialectically* dynamising the biopolitical *imposition* of presence/sense, however transient or hazy, I point to the *possibility* of *ex-position*: of linguistic non-appropriation. *Il-legibly*, I point to the *possibility* of turning imperfect nihilism into perfect nihilism; for only the latter, I argue, allows us to exit biopolitics. It allows us to exit *oikonomia* and inhabit inoperative ‘work’...

As touched on, within Agamben’s spunky attempts to vanquish biopolitics, “Derrida must be considered Agamben’s primary contemporary interlocutor” (Attell 2015, p. 3). In parallel thereto, Cooper must be considered the primary organisation studies interlocutor of my critique/case study of management literature’s perpetuation of *oikonomia*’s biopolitical grip on ‘work’. Vitaly, in this context, critiquing Cooper does *not* simply mean to, polemically, rebut or denounce his texts. After all, I do sympathise with certain aspects of his work. For example, I am fond of what Burrell and Parker describe as “[h]is insistence on academic work being carried out slowly, with creativity and integrity” (2016, p. 10). And, in equal measure, I appreciate his attempt to draw attention to what Spoelstra refers to as “organization as a generic process” (2016, p. 23), a view directed against an analysis of “organizations and their specific features” (Cooper, cited in Chia and Kallinikos 1998, p. 126; e.g. Burrell and Dale 2002; Parker 2022).<sup>18</sup> Primarily, critiquing Cooper means, then, testifying to the *possibility* of turning the impasse his work, to my mind, doubtless, encapsulates into an exit. It means rendering *oikonomia* inoperative, the lynchpin being profanation, with a critique of Cooper’s work serving as a contrast medium meant to bring out the *potential* of Agamben’s work as far as organisation scholarship is concerned.

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<sup>17</sup> Curiously, Derrida’s critique of Agamben (e.g. Derrida 2009, 2011a) has received far less attention (for exceptions, see Donahue 2013; Nguyen 2019; Swiffen 2012). Yet, ultimately, both men can be said to be entangled in a constant *dialogue* with the respective other and to even reply to the respective other’s critique (see Richards 2019), both rarely going at it hammer and tongs, though.

<sup>18</sup> Still, while Cooper equates organisation with open-ended, *gramma*-based interpretation, in *my* book, organisation is borne witness to as, to risk being repetitive, the reading of ‘unwrittleness’.

Thus, while Cooper defines organisation in terms of “communication [that] is motivated [...] by the combined need ‘to avoid the traps of meaning in language’ and the ‘dissolution of sense’ implied by absence (‘ab-sence’ or ‘off-sense’)” (2016e, p. 270), I testify, with Agamben, to the *possibility* of organisation that “communicates nothing but its own communicability” (2007a, p. 60), its own, uncontaminated *il-legibility*. In this way, I *expose* “the word in its own mediality, in its own being a means” (2000, p. 59) – its perfectly nihilistic *suchness*/non-meaning, neutralising *oikonomia*. In virtue thereof, the words *you* read ‘mean’ that they, *il-legibly*, no longer mean... Concerned with the truth of testimony, they bear witness to utter ‘speechlessness’.<sup>19</sup>

Alternatively stated, I *expose* the word *not* in terms of an effective off-sense equalling what Agamben – based on Gershom Scholem – calls the law’s “being in force without significance” (1999b, p. 171). That means I *expose* the word *not* in terms of the law’s being ‘at work’ or operative beyond its formal suspension, the law’s ‘imperfectly nihilistic’ maintaining of itself as a still valid ‘nothing’ or, to return to Derridean/deconstructionist terminology, ‘undecidability’. Instead, I do *expose* the word in terms of a completely *il-legible*, biopolitically non-appropriated, inoperative off-sense.<sup>20</sup> Also, while, for Cooper, “*poetry* (which we can also call *poiesis* [Greek for ‘making’]) emerges as a suspended condition between the unmarked space of indeterminate matter [or unreadability] and the marked spaces of humanized forms and meanings [or readability]” (2016c, p. 290), I testify to the *il-legibility* of poetry/*poiesis*/making. Regarding the ‘work of man *qua* man’, I testify to a *poetic* neutralisation of the ‘Law/Other’. For, Agamben shows, “poetry is the language that remains when all the communicative and informative functions have been deactivated” (2022b, p. 69). Seen from this angle, poetry is the *ex-position and exposition* of language, neutralising biopolitical communication *and*, concurrently, revealing humans/organisers in their inoperativity, in their, it bears repeating, *suchness*/non-meaning/*il-legibility*. Obviously, *this* reading of poetry differs from Derrida’s work, following which “the poetic or ecstatic is that *in every discourse* which can open itself up to the absolute loss of sense, to the (non-)base of the sacred, of non-meaning, of unknowledge or of play” (2001, p. 330). Thus, while, for me, poetry entails the immediacy/profanity of play/non-meaning, for Cooper and

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<sup>19</sup> In Cooper’s view, “[t]he communication of social and cultural forms rests on the continuous collection of letters and words which [...] constitute an ever present background source of new and possible forms” (2001b, p. 18). As opposed to this, ‘communicability’ as well as ‘pure mediality’ in Agamben defy the *imposition* of forms, including such forms’ negative self-*presupposition* in and as the formless. They defy words’ reduction to a quasi-cornucopia of deferred reading/discourse.

<sup>20</sup> Put with Attell, *here*, I hope to undo “an empty and absolute law with no specific laws” (2015, p. 14).

Derrida, it centres upon a discursively/grammatologically mediated/appropriated 'relation' to play/non-meaning...<sup>21</sup>

Significantly then, the playful unreadability at stake in *this* book differs from Cooper's 'related' reflections, which both, it is little wonder, associate organisation with making "readability out of unreadability" (2007, p. 1573) and, at the same time, highlight our being "caught up in the re-creation of absence and unreadability without which there could be no readable presences" (ibid.). Referring to this, Cooper's unreadability is unmistakably at odds with what Agamben, affirmatively, calls a matter of "legendary emptiness" (2007a, p. 70). It is at odds with a matter of, as for *logos/legend*, non-appropriation and, thus, absolute, joyful vacuity. Contrasting with such vacuity, with Cooper, unreadability remains *oikonomic* as he, time and again, reduces unreadability to a source *and* product of the ongoing process of reading or *legibility*, of *legendary*/linguistic or, if you like, *logic* appropriation. Put another way, echoing the case of the so-called (imperfectly nihilistic) force-of-law, Cooper's 'unreadability' keeps the law (*logos, legend* or *leggibilità*) 'working' beyond its suspension of firm, fully present identities. That is, with unreadability only *positioned* as a *presupposition* of readability, the *possibility* of a life outside of *oikonomic legibility*, including the *possibility* of a life outside of the unreadability of such *legibility*, is simply unacknowledged. For Cooper remains, throughout, devoted to the task of "saving the world by making and remaking it for the meaningful and readable comprehension of its human inhabitants" (2005b, p. xii). In line herewith, for Cooper, unreadability remains the empty vehicle, husk or shell based upon which *legibility*, in the form of alterable communicative informing/positioning/addressing, may not but should take place. Therefore, the *possibility* of an unreadability that remains completely irreducible to, and deposes, *oikonomic legibility* is – as sure as eggs is eggs – overlooked...

Attending to this oversight, the remainder of *this* preface consists of one more section that, to return to Agamben, like the rest of *this* book, constitutes "*parerga* which find their true meaning only in the context of an illegible *ergon*" (1993a, p. 3). It finds its true meaning in the context of an *ergon* or work *no longer* subject to

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<sup>21</sup> This diverging take on poetry can be illustrated by comparing Derrida's and Agamben's rivalling *readings* of Celan's late poetry; concretely, in Derrida's view, "Celan's poems remain in a certain way indecipherable, retain some indecipherability and the indecipherable [...] call[s] endlessly for a sort or reinterpretation, resurrection, or new interpretative breath" (2005, p. 107), an oscillation between indecipherability and interpretation being the meat and potatoes of Derrida's approach. In contrast hereto, with one man's meat another man's poison, Agamben, drawing on Celan, suggests that "[p]oetry no longer imposes itself; it exposes itself" (1999b, p. 115); in Agamben's *reading* of Celan, poetry neutralises interpretation, withdrawing even from the grammatologically *posited* indecipherability that Derrida holds to, via process/recess or approaching/withdrawing, spur (and withhold) interpretation, grammatology found to cause us to be dead meat.



the obligation to mean.<sup>22</sup> Concretely, drawing on Kafka's infamous short stories and *parables* and inspired by a particular Swedish radio programme, viz., *Summer on P1*, the remainder of *this* preface explores what it means for organisers to live outside of glass and frames. Otherwise put, in what follows, I discuss what it means for organisers to be *immediately* in 'contact' with themselves and others and, in this sense, to indwell *a-topia*. In this connection, attention is given to the so-called *real* exception (perfect nihilism or perfect messianism) as a way to exit the impasse of the so-called *virtual* exception (imperfect nihilism or petrified and paralysed messianism), with the ensuing *paragraphs* following Agamben as "they put on paper the unreadable" (2017c, p. 79). Henceforth, as for authorship, these *paragraphs* point to, and echo, an "illegible someone who makes reading possible" (2007a, pp. 69–70), insofar as the *possibility* of reading pivots on reading being liberated from the negative self-presupposition, i.e. the *virtual* exception, underlying *logic* appropriation. They point to, mirror and merge into a *possibility* of reading that, happily, remains fully *il-legible*.

## *In limine*: on life outside of glass and frames

"Am not I / A fly like thee?" (Blake 2008, p. 23)

### *A really exceptional apparatus*

Bliss! The tropic (related to *trópos*, meaning 'figure of speech') temperatures (from *temperāre*, meaning 'to govern' or 'manage') are gone... After a long, fairly exhausting, swelteringly hot, muggy high summer day, I turned on the old, light brownish, partly dust-covered radio I brought down from the horribly overcramped attic earlier today. Almost predictably, I nearly dropped it when, a little too briskly, I descended the steep, wobbly flight of stairs and suddenly, not unlike Saul on his way to Damascus, fell to the ground (cf. Sørensen 2010). Thank goodness, I thought to myself, the radio, no longer a spring chicken, seems to be unscathed. Never mind myself...

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<sup>22</sup> In Agamben, the prefix *para-* plays a vital, redemptive role; for instance, as for *paradigm*, "[w]hat is essential [...] is the suspension of reference and normal use" (Agamben 2009b, p. 24), so that, "[i]n the paradigm, intelligibility [from *legere*, meaning 'to speak' or 'read'] does not precede the phenomenon; it stands, so to speak, 'beside' it[self] (*para*)" (p. 27). That means that the phenomenon's intelligibility/legibility hangs on hermeneutical intelligibility/legibility being neutralised. Similarly, as for *parousia*, i.e. messianic presence, Agamben underlines that "*parousia* literally signifies to be next to; in this way, being is beside itself in the present" (2005b, p. 70). Indeed, "[m]essianic presence [*parousia*] is beside itself, since, without ever coinciding with a chronological [i.e. represented] instant, and without ever adding itself on to it, it seizes hold of this instant and brings it forth to fulfillment" (pp. 70–1), *parousia* being the neutralisation of representation.

About 40 years old, its sound is a tad muffled and yet shrieking, to be sure. Looking at and listening to it brings back my ‘infancy’; literally, it brings back my speechlessness or, rather – as Sergei Prozorov puts it in his fantastic book on Agamben’s philosophy – my ‘speaking the (as for representation) unspeakable’, my speaking non-appropriating, non-representational ‘speech’. For, as Zartaloudis clarifies, “[a]t the heart of the experience of infancy, the experience of language’s existence, no system of representation or reference can sustain itself” (2010, p. 254). Calling a halt to *oikonomia/imposition*, at the heart of the experience of *in-fancy*, one realises that, to return to a previously used line, “it is possible to say something without speaking” (Agamben 2023c, p. 3). Like the ‘son’ in Kafka’s *Home-Coming*, I feel that, in my father’s house, i.e. language, “each object stands cold beside the next, as though preoccupied with its own affairs, which I have partly forgotten, partly never known” (1971, p. 756)...<sup>23</sup>

Needless to say, my (insufferably commanding, Freudian) *legally imposed* ‘father’ Archon – before he, akin to the awfully burdensome ‘temperatures’ I lived through or the reality in Trakl’s poem ‘Vision of Reality’, “has sunk again into nothingness” (2011, p. 62) – had banned the radio to the attic for a reason (*causa*); no longer simply a glib apparatus for the reception of transmissions, the cherished radio – in a manner of speaking – comically ‘deforms’ or ‘disfigures’ (*entstellt*, i.e. literally ‘deposes’) the spoken word now and again. Like the nomads in Kafka’s *An Old Manuscript*, radios of this sort “do not know our language, indeed they hardly have a language of their own” (1971, p. 708)...

Instead – sticking with Kafka – ‘nomadic’ radios “converse through the screeches of jackdaws” (1971, p. 708). Amusingly, they converse through the ‘deforming’ or ‘disfiguring’ (*entstellende*) ‘infancy’ of *kavky*, i.e. the plural form of the Czech word *kavka*, the corvine bird serving as the company emblem on the stationery of Kafka’s father... All the same, whilst Archon (like *arche*, the Greek word for ‘beginning’, from *\*h<sub>2</sub>erg<sup>h</sup>*, meaning ‘to begin’, ‘lead’, ‘rule’, ‘command’) told me not to ‘touch’ (*contingēre*) the wonky radio again, never would I have the heart to simply leave it ‘unused’ or, linked thereto, to ‘self-defeatingly’ grapple its utterly amiable, irreparable ‘errancy’... Returning to Kafka’s superb *Home-Coming*, never would I compromise my friend the radio’s being “one who wants to keep his secret (*Geheimnis*)” (1971, p. 757); never would I compromise his happily being incompatible with the law of representational cognition.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Vitally, “[i]nfancy is the term by which Agamben means to preclude the philosophy of presupposition” (Willemse 2017, p. 11). It refers to illiteracy, insofar as we, as illiterates, remain happily outside of a grammatological ‘written’ and any reading or speech that, to be reading or speech, *presupposes* itself *negatively*, i.e. through *virtual* suspension, in and as a grammatological ‘written’.

<sup>24</sup> Here, the radio and I can be likened to the two lovers of Titian’s painting *Nymph and Shepherd* as these lovers, Agamben shows, dwell in “otium” (2004b, p. 87): inoperativity. As such, they “have

Despite this being just a few days after midsummer – the time, the lovers of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* know, of a “weak and idle theme” (Shakespeare 1994, p. 256) and of a Bottom that “hath no bottom” (p. 228) – it is already pitch-dark outside. Originally, Archon – if, like Count Westwest in *The Castle*, always represented by a cohort of unfriendly functionaries – was supposed to call to issue new orders. But none of these functionaries ever called to inform me about ‘His’ will. Prior to this, it was announced like clockwork. On reflection, that means that, like K. who, as Murray shows in a book zooming in on Agamben’s reading of Kafka, “is only ever to interact with those who are servants of the castle, never Count Westwest, whose existence is, in fact, non-existent” (2010, p. 104), I only ever interacted with functionaries of Archon’s business. All I ever experienced was the effect of bureaucratic – of managerial – intermediation.<sup>25</sup>

Anyway, after Archon’s demission, which came like a bolt from the blue, only the ‘silence’ of a world without *causa*/grounding *claim* (from *clāmāre*, meaning ‘to call’) can most blissfully be *ex-claimed*. Some time ago – I cannot tell when, as the longcase clock had stopped working – someone else, I could not for the life of me figure out who, called, though. Harried, that someone asked a bunch of utterly baffling, bewildering questions. Yet, with Archon irreparably gone ever since I fetched the peculiar radio from the attic and fell to the ground, like the ‘uncalled servant’ in Kafka’s *The Test*, I could not answer any of them... If truth be told, I “did not even understand these questions” (1971, p. 751), left to, happily, exit representational time... For truth, Bachmann’s poem ‘What Is True’ stresses, does not create, but neutralises time (*macht sie wett*)...

Now it dawns on me that this unexpected call came from an increasingly crazed, jittery businessman in his early forties who, as in Kafka’s *The Neighbour*, “made inquiries” (1971, p. 721). Since – as for myself, as for the neighbour – “nothing is known” (*ibid.*), which, in turn, caused this man to be caught up in all kinds of disquieting representations. Perhaps, after I put down the receiver, like the narrator in Kafka’s *The Burrow* (cf. Beyes 2019), the man, ensnarled in such representations, feared to be “attacked from some quite unexpected quarter” (Kafka 1971, p. 560). Possibly, he felt that “the enemy may be burrowing his way slowly and stealthily straight towards him” (*ibid.*)... In any case, one thing remains as clear as day: like the peculiar, uncalled, masterless servant of Kafka’s *The Test*, I, the son of an *agronomist*, remain, as happy as a lark, in utter “nonemployment” (p. 749)...

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initiated each other into their own lack of mystery as their most intimate secret” (*ibid.*). But, crucially, they and, thus, also my dear friend the radio and I, “have not become any less impenetrable” (*ibid.*; cf. Alvesson and Kärreman 2011 apropos ‘mystery’ in organisation research).

<sup>25</sup> Distinctly, all I had experienced was the *legibility* of a negatively *presupposed illegibility*, where, to return to Attell, this *illegibility* was but “an empty and absolute law without specific laws” (2015, p. 14).

Indeed, following Archon's sudden demission, I am – as the example of the amiably 'deforming' or 'disfiguring' (*entstellende*), 'nomadically infantile' radio shows – left only with a huge jumble of old appliances without 'economic' function whatsoever. I am left 'poor'. Or, rather, akin to Agamben's reading of Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I*, I am left completely 'propertyless' (*besitzlos*, like *Gesetz*, the German word for 'law', from *\*sattjan*, meaning 'to set' or 'place'), blissfully unable to, harum-scarum, appropriate (*besitzen*, literally meaning 'to emplace') myself or others. I am 'destitute' (like *entstellt*, literally meaning 'deposed'), lacking the means to *impose*...

Enjoying this newly found 'propertylessness'/'silence', the family seems asleep... Momentarily, an 'infantile', screeching tram passenger or 'tramer' – who, reminiscent of the protagonist of Kafka's *On the Tram*, feels "completely uncertain as to his position in the world, in the city and his family" (1971, p. 661) – makes me sit up. But apart from that and the radio, only the croaks of the frogs living in our reed-lined garden pond can be heard. All of a sudden, though, the neighing of a skin-coloured, owner- or 'riderless', i.e. free from logic/legal/linguistic appropriation, stallion (from *\*stel*, meaning 'place' or 'stand') that, studiously leafing through law (like *logos*, from *lēgō*, meaning 'to speak') books, originates, and – as for his *destiny* – goes, 'nowhere' (*no-place*) cuts through the air... Is he the horse off whose back Saul fell (cf. Burrell 1998)...

#### *A really exceptional speaker*

That's all pretty strange, Kafkaesque even, isn't it...? Howsoever, I hurry to put myself to bed, waiting – while my beloved, peculiar pet has already perkily ensconced itself – with bated breath, for my favourite Swedish radio show, viz., *Summer on P1* (*Sommar i P1*)... Earlier today, as if I were the protagonist in Kafka's *A Crossbreed*, I was approached by some men asking the strangest questions about this animal, questions no human being can answer, such as why there is such an animal and why I, rather than anybody else, have it. What's more, as in *A Crossbreed*, the men brought along other animals, "but against all their hopes, there was no scene of recognition" (Kafka 1971, p. 725). Since the animals, as Kafka writes, "accepted their reciprocal existence as a divine fact" (*ibid.*)...

But back to the here and now; of course, my teeth are already brushed. So I won't have any red wine this time round. Sure, for a while, I was a wee bit tempted... It's summer after all, and I just finished Thanos Zartaloudis's incredibly thoughtful book *The Birth of Nomos*, which somehow calls for a minor celebration and – not least – 'music' (cf. Rhodes 2004, 2007), insofar as, following Agamben, the experience of music refers to the "impossibility of accessing the event of the word that constitutes humans as humans" (2018d, p. 97). But no. Not tonight. A *really* exceptional speaker awaits. And he is going to play 'music' anyway... Finally, I am

about to tuck myself up as the holidayish, never-to-be-forgotten *Summer on PI* jingle begins to ring out.<sup>26</sup>

In recent years, I had enjoyed *Summer on PI* hosts such as the marvellously empathetic Stina Wolter, a Swedish artist, television presenter and author, or the disarmingly charming Siw Malmkvist, a Swedish schlager singer and actress, as they talked about topics dear to them and played music of their own choosing. To get ready for tonight's radio broadcast, I carefully put the slightly scuffed radio on the white, grained chest of drawers, which is overfraught with poetry and philosophy books, next to my bed. Amidst this colourful welter of books, some idle knick-knacks Archon bequeathed to me lie strewn. Out of the blue, my tired, squinting eyes are wide open; I notice how, within this peculiar, most formidable clutter, a rather creased sheet of paper on which I noted down some of the beautiful sights I want to show friends soon coming for a visit, amongst them exceedingly gifted Carolina and wonderfully uncomplicated Jayne, peeks out... How I look forward to seeing you – all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed...!

You wonder what sights I have in mind...? Apart from 'the garden', 'lost places', of course! Unlike *abandoned* places that, still being owned, may or may not become the location of, say, media agencies or some anthropological or zoological institute (see Parker 2021), 'lost places' are no longer subject to ownership/appropriation.<sup>27</sup> Rather, they are wholly *neg-lected* (literally no longer subject to, *nec*, appropriating

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<sup>26</sup> Even as for 'music', there is a crucial difference between Cooper and Agamben; indeed, Cooper, referring to certain Beatles songs, emphasises "a generic medley of images, voices, sounds, etc., in which there are no identifiable subjectivities, no recognisable authors or sources, but simply the anonymous media through which we live" (2001c, p. 330). That means that, for him, in these songs, the Beatles are "alluding—that is, not directly expressing or representing—to a world they sensed but did not completely grasp" (ibid), which, once again, points to an oscillation between indecipherability and interpretation. Elsewhere, he, again referring to the Beatles, suggests that "[m]ost people will think of Penny Lane as a specific part of Liverpool on a map" (cited in Cavalcanti and Parker 2023, p. 150). Yet, in Cooper's view, "John Lennon says no, 'Penny Lane is in my ears and in my eyes'" (ibid.). For Cooper, that means that, to begin with, "in a sense, I was nothing. But over a period of time I got to know parts of Liverpool" (p. 151). And that, he adds, "constitutes your ways of thinking and so on. Unless you step back and ask [...] more radical questions" (ibid.) – questions that entail an appreciation deferral and postponement. In contrast hereto, Agamben focuses on Glenn Gould: "He is not the title holder and master of the potential to play, which he can put to work or not, but constitutes-himself as having use of the piano, independently of his playing it or not playing it in actuality" (2015b, p. 62; see also De Boer 2022). Agamben, unlike Cooper, gesturing towards a 'contact', rather than a 'relation' ('articulation/connection'), between *phoné* and *logos*, between potentiality and act. In other words, Cooper remains stuck in 'imperfect nihilism/messianism', with Agamben pointing to an exit – 'perfect nihilism/messianism'.

<sup>27</sup> Short for the '(virtual) state of exception', the '(virtual) ban' is a state "in which the law (language) relates to the living being by withdrawing from it, by a-bandoning it to its own violence and unrelatedness" (Agamben 2000, pp. 112–3). In Cooper's work, it refers to *legibility*'s grammatological suspension as *illegibility*; in Luhmann's work, it refers to communication's (virtual) suspension as 'noise' (e.g. Andersen and Pors 2016; Knudsen 2006; Pors 2015; Stäheli 2003).

language, *logos*) and, in this way, akin to the peculiar radio, allow for a new, *possible* 'use'. It is in these *neg-lected*, lost places that the mentioned tram passenger or 'tramer' dwells. For, following Kafka's allusive musings in *On the Tram*, he – the 'tramer' – "cannot indicate any claim that he might rightly advance in any direction" (1971, p. 661).

Now, putting up the volume of the radio a bit, all of a sudden, I sense how my drowsiness – as if by magic – swiftly gives way to a feeling of joy over what, I presume, is to come. Or, rather, no longer subject to representational deferral or, related hereto, to reduction to – as for animals/stallions – the '(over)riding' *Logos-Arche*, the '(over)riding' 'Law'-Beginning, *supposed by proponents* of the Gospel of John, my drowsiness gives way to a feeling of joy over that which (always already) 'comes'. Differently put, my drowsiness gives way to what the poet Paul Celan, in a poem, refers to as 'the clandestine beginning at home in the open' (*der im Offenen heimliche Anfang*): an *an-archic*, i.e. unrepresentable/implaceably placed, non-appropriable, *arche*. It gives way to the experience of Kafka's Hunter Gracchus (from Italian *gracchio*, meaning 'jackdaw'): "I am here, more I do not know, more I cannot do" (1971, p. 404)...

Admittedly, I know surprisingly little about tonight's host Staffan Westerberg, an illustrious, one-of-a-kind Swedish stage director, screenwriter and actor. As soon as I got hold of the long list of this year's *Summer on P1* hosts, I knew, though, that I absolutely wanted to listen to him. Frankly speaking, the dashy photograph of his pleasantly wrinkly, cheekily smirking face – redolent of the famous picture where Albert Einstein sticks out his tongue – caught my attention. It made me smile from ear to ear... But, of course, I know Staffan's immensely immersive, fanciful television programmes for children. Still, for Staffan, I *read* somewhere that I cannot *recall*, these programmes were – it is true – ultimately aimed at 'adult-children' and 'child-adults'...

My guess is that they were intended as an homage to, and refuge of, the 'infantile', i.e. vocation-revoking, 'playfulness' and the ingenious gestures we all too often suppress in our 'economies'...in our well-functioning and ultimately – as far as 'adult-children' and 'child-adults' are concerned – 'useless', i.e. oppressively mediating and commanding, apparatuses (*dispositifs*)... As such, these programmes may reflect the story of the (foolish) narrator in Kafka's *Children on a Country Road*. Since not only does the narrator, if anyone asks a question, "gaze at him as if at a distant mountain or into vacancy" (1971, p. 646). He even "ran by the field paths into the forest" (p. 650), unperturbedly heading "for that city in the south" (ibid.) whose inhabitants, we are told, "never sleep" (ibid.) and "never get tired" (ibid.). For "they are fools" (ibid.); they are human beings who – indwelling perfect messianism/nihilism – are entirely immune to 'economic' intellect (from *légō*, meaning 'to speak', 'choose', 'mean' or 'read') and, based thereupon, sense.

With the heartwarminglly summery jingle gently finishing, I realise that Staffan's unmistakable, well-thought-out, *poetic* words will definitely 'touch' (*contingère*) me. Yes, while the still partly dust-covered radio, once again, squeaks and, comically, 'deforms'/'disfigures' (*entstellt*) the transmission (from *mettre*, meaning 'to place', and *mittere*, meaning 'to send' or 'announce'), I know that this is a 'real exception' or what Agamben calls "the state of actual exception" (1998, p. 65). The horrendously overbearing 'temperatures' gone, this is a farewell to representational knowledge...

### *A really exceptional topic*

And, indeed – if in a way that I or any other radio listener could hardly anticipate or representationally imagine – the very second Staffan's programme begins, I am positively taken aback. Or, rather, I am fully elated. For I understand straight away that what he – in an enchantingly quaint, distinctly North Bothnian dialect – talks about unfolds right here and now in my delightfully orderless bedroom, as it does in countless other places. Probably, it sounds completely banal to you. But Staffan – now wheelchair-bound and relocated, together with his Dalecarlian life companion Hans, to a small house near Uppsala – talks, most eloquently, about an ordinary housefly. Reminiscent of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's suggestion that philosophy's task is to "show the fly a way out of the fly-bottle" (1986, p. 103), he talks about a tiny *Musca domestica* that – we can all tell a thing or two about it – desperately struggles to find a way out... Meanwhile, similar to the narrator's fall in Kafka's *Description of a Struggle* – as for my (Pauline) fall from the flight of stairs – I grasp that "what happened is, by all means, without meaning (*ohne Bedeutung*)" (1971, p. 50). To lay it on the line, what happened is *not* by any stretch trivial. What happened is the occurrence of "an in-significance" (Agamben 2005b, p. 103) – of profaned 'play/original illegibility'...

This seeming banality notwithstanding, I am immediately struck and terribly excited, grasping that rhetorically talented, bright, if somehow 'illiterate' Staffan talks about this little friend bustling around upon a central, horizontal glazing bar of my bedroom window pane. Let's, from now on, call him Garland. For are we not advised by medical practitioners and other experts governing our lives, by powermongers, to see in every fly what Agamben, within the essay 'Contagion', critically calls "the figure of the anointer (*untore*), or plague-spreader" (2021, p. 14) – the figure of an infector with whom 'contact' or 'touch' (*contāgiō*) should, by hook or by crook, be avoided...?

And is not, at the same time, 'the anointed' (*l'unto*), Agamben hints elsewhere, the literal translation of 'the messiah' – of our longed-for saviour wearing a crown of thorns, a wreath or garland (*stēfanos*)? That is to say, is not 'the anointed' the one referred to in the gospels as 'he who comes' (*ho erchomenos*) (see Agamben 2012c, 2018c; Salzani 2017b)...? Blimey, 'infancy' seems to have got the better of me... *Writing and reading all this*, I am wondering if – mayhap – I am wandering off the

topic. Perhaps, as for the unavailingly commanding narrator-cum-master in Kafka's fine *The Departure*, what does remain to be said is: "[o]ut of here – that's my goal" (1971, p. 762)...

Be that as it may. Already sleeping like a log, my adorably cute pet does not notice any of this, although, when still living under Archon, it had a peculiar predilection for flies and did, it is true, occasionally eat them: yuk! Similarly, the cheerfully 'riderless' or *alogic* and, hence, speechlessly speaking stallion remains deeply engrossed in his books as he – readers of Kafka's *The New Advocate* may tell – is concerned, *not* with, appropriatively, practicing or applying, but with understanding or 'studying' the law (as stressed, like *logos*, from *légō*, meaning 'to speak' or 'mean')...

After all, as Zartaloudis underlines, "[t]o study the law, rather than advocating it, means to observe and safeguard the non-fusion of the juridical and the non-juridical, law and life" (2010, p. 3). It means to observe and safeguard the non-fusion of *legibility* and life... Anyhow, as Staffan's and my world collapse into each other in a flash, Garland quickly scuttles up the increasingly smudgy windowpane, bravely, if more and more languidly, droning a little. Time and again, he falls down, landing on his grey, piliferous back, so as to expose the blazingly yellow, exceedingly stout trunk.

His six longish, spindly legs up in the air, he – I cannot help it – reminds me of a clumsy, panicking, sad angel; yes, for a while, I wonder if Garland, like Benjamin's 'angel of history', was caught up in a future-directed storm that brought him into his current prison. Most strongly, though, he reminds me of Hermès, from whom – as a messenger/mediator/*Künder*, representationally, 'relating' the heavenly and the earthly, God and man, potentiality and act – the word 'hermeneutics', the art of interpretation and understanding, is said to derive (see Brown 2000). Yet, in his profane nudity, he reminds me also of the 'deformed'/'disfigured' (*enstellte*) figure (*Gestalt*) of the vermin (*Ungeziefer*, meaning 'animal unsuitable for sacrifice') of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*... Back on his filigree insect feet, Garland rustles and buzzes for a while and – intermittently – cleans both his proboscis and the comparatively bulky head...

Let's not beat around the bush; our restlessly searching, flustered fellow does not understand this transparent wall. He does not understand the irks and quirks of signifying language. Mercilessly, it keeps him from all the beautiful that he, somewhat *perversely*, i.e. in a manner that remains subject to a commanding 'father' or spatio-temporally determined *arche* of sorts, sees the whole time... Maybe, even under such distressing, dramatic circumstances, he remembers that once, as an '*infant*', he had paid a visit to the other side. In any case, Garland hastily goes on rustling, instinctively trying to get out into the dark, but by now dimly moonlit, summery garden idyll again. For a moment, I believe, I can hear him



heartrendingly sob. If I am not completely mistaken, he just heaved a sigh and, yes, wails, bawling his eyes out.

Quite possibly, in his despairing actions, one can find the attempt to emulate the Socratic gadfly's unquenchable thirst for unfiltered truth (*alêtheia*, literally the uncovering, *a-*, of something hidden or covered, \**leh<sub>2</sub>*). Interestingly, throughout history, numerous pundits have sought to become 'gadflies' (see Farmer 1996), hoping to, in upsetting the status quo, help spur the disclosure of the true nature of things. But have such 'gadfly-pundits' ever reached 'the garden' again...? Have they not, similar to the *collective* (from *légō*, meaning 'to speak', 'mean' or 'read') 'we' in Kafka's *The Great Wall of China*, known themselves through having "carefully scrutinized the decrees of a high command" (1971, p. 419) that was taken for granted or, in a different shape, reinstituted...? Oh dear! I am beginning to 'drift' again (cf. Ortmann 2010). Huh...?

Either way, Garland – unsurprisingly lacking the two sharp cutting blades attached to any female gadfly's mouth – fails to grasp his own irreparably being subject to what Agamben, in the essay 'Tradition of the Immemorial', refers to as 'unconcealment (*a-lêtheia*)'; Garland, betraying his own impenetrability – his *an-archic*, unrepresentable *arche* – fails to grasp the 'secret' that there is no secret to be uncovered. For the time *being*, i.e. as long as time remains subject to representation (*Vorstellung*), he remains caught, miserably enclosed and locked in *oikonomia*/biopolitics.<sup>28</sup>

Incidentally, Garland's pal the 'mayfly' (belonging to the order *Ephemeroptera*), too, remains entrapped. For, insofar as, following Böhm and *colleagues*, the mayfly indulges in "postmodernist pretensions by delighting in the fleeting ephemerality of life and meaning, accepting that this too shall pass, and dancing, rather than despairing, in the colossal wreckage of Professor Ozymandias' mighty Work" (2021, p. 182), it, too, due to its grammatological upbringing, does not evade the law of representational cognition. It does not depose, busy with emplacing itself and others. It does not understand that bureaucratically upheld Archon, rather than requiring ephemeralisation, needs to be demitted. Rather than (re)entering the pined-for garden, the 'mayfly' ultimately languishes and has others languish in the fly-bottle.

Oops! I am wandering off the topic again...am I not? Or, what, in fact, is my topic anyway – my *topos* or place, my theme or *Stelle*? And, even more fundamentally, what is a topic or place, a theme or *Stelle*? Is *virtual* or *real* abandonment its cornerstone...? What thesis (from *tithēmi*, meaning 'to put' or 'place'), what message or *Kunde*, am I hoping to deliver (from *liberāre*, meaning 'to set free')...?

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<sup>28</sup> Derrida's take could not be any more different; for him, "there is a secret there, withdrawn, forever beyond the reach of hermeneutic exhaustion" (2005, p. 26). There is a "secret [...] heterogeneous to all interpretative totalization" (ibid.), a grammatological secret spurring deferred interpretation.

At any rate, given that houseflies normally only get up to 28 days old, apprehensive Staffan warns, it is high time that it'sy-bitsy, fidgety, if knackered, Garland succeeded with his desire.

### *A really exceptional thesis*

This thesis is a poetico-philosophical text that takes little Garland's and other flies' desperate situation seriously, arguing that human beings in or outside of organisations, *addressed* as employees (*Angestellte*, literally 'the emplaced' or 'positioned') or customers (*Kunden* – like *Künder*, the German word for 'angel' – from the adjective *kund*, meaning 'known'), tend to face strikingly similar problems. Focusing on unemployment-related management literature, I suggest that human beings tend to be imprisoned in linguistic representations. As if subjects of Kafka's *In the Penal Colony*, we become *officers*, literally work-makers, *and*, as for the apparatus's workings, "read it" (1971, p. 289)...

These representations may come in the form of signifieds that, communicatively, reduce human beings to bearers of identities (also called the law's normal functioning). But they, representations, also take the form of floating signifiers that, while suspending identities, conceive life in terms of an unwavering, nihilistic 'force-of-law' (also called the law's 'state of *virtual* exception')... A social philosopher of organisation, Robert Cooper, following Derrida and others, has frequently called attention to the latter form, albeit mistakenly grasping it as an engine for change and hope... Thus, rather than testifying to perfectly nihilistic *infancy*, Cooper, trying to strike a balance between the law's normal functioning and the state of *virtual* exception, views "language as a structure of material marks and sounds which are themselves 'undecidable' and *upon which meaning has to be imposed*" (2016b, p. 117). By no means airheaded/ditzy or rogue, Cooper, still, dodges the question of biopolitics, remaining caught in a neo-governmental trance, unable to snap himself out of it...<sup>29</sup>

Rife with all sorts of tragic consequences, both forms – normal functioning and *virtual* exception (imperfect nihilism or what Cooper, drawing on Derrida, calls undecidability) – underpin, and amount to, what Staffan Westerberg, towards the end of his breathtakingly thought-provoking radio broadcast, calls the 'needlessness

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<sup>29</sup> For Cooper, "[t]he function or representation is to unfold the fold, detach its duplicity, lay it out on a plane, give it a temporal order so that a 'second' will always be seen to follow a 'first', a sign always to have a referent, a copy an original" (1992a, p. 301). Here, "the fold is the indeterminate, neither this nor that, and hence always 'between'; it is the unrepresentable, the pure act or event of the *un-ready*" (ibid.). Thus, 'fold' is just another term for imperfectly nihilistic 'meaningless play'. Indeed, "[t]he fold is the medium of *tuché*, constituted by unknowable and therefore unpredictable interactions" (ibid.), so that in "the never-ending effort of representation, there is always the fold that refuses unfoldment" (ibid.), with Cooper, alas, ignoring the *possibility* of 'profane play'. Indeed, he ignores that *tuché*, too, belongs to the realm of representation.

of life within glass and frames'; unnecessarily, both forms – collectively referred to by Agamben as *oikonomia*, a term often translated into Latin as *dispositio* and, as such, picked up and popularised by Foucault as *dispositif* (etymologically related to *Vorstellung*, i.e. 'representation', and *Gestell*, i.e. 'emplacement' or 'enframing') – separate human beings biopolitically from what, arguably, once was directly lived. Seemingly without a wince, its *exponents* wind up suppressing the *possibility* of approaching the 'work of man *qua* man' in terms of inoperativity: in terms of pure 'taking-place'.

Incarcerating human beings in what, following the situationist Guy Debord, might be called a gigantic 'spectacle', they, both forms of representation, undermine any unmediated 'contact' or 'touch' (*contāgiō*) with ourselves and others. Interestingly, 'specs', for instance in the guise of 'metaphors', i.e. representational figures of speech, still *constitute* a *commonplace* as far as organisation and its prolific research is concerned... But I am going off topic here, isn't that so...? However that may be, using Walter Benjamin's words, these two forms of representation, ruthlessly, undermine a "real state of exception" (2006, p. 392), which is to say a genuine 'way out'. Returning to Agamben's above-quoted rendering of Benjamin's phrase, they, ruthlessly, undermine an 'actual state of exception', nipping the *possibility* of an *an-archic*, i.e. unrepresentable, *arche* in the bud. Ruthlessly, they suppress genuine *illegibility*.

Still, unnecessary, disheartening biopolitical imprisonment in representation, in giant 'spectacles', is obviously not Staffan's last word. And, while I am ready to finally hit the hay as I can barely hold my eyes open, it, certainly, is not mine either. Invoking Marlene Dietrich's hugely gripping rendering of the American folk singer and activist Pete Seeger's magnificent song 'Where Have All the Flowers Gone?', Staffan wonders, after all, when, as for the transparent wall, as for the frighteningly gruelling life within 'glass and frames', we will ever learn (*wird man je verstehen*)...

Put a little differently, Staffan wonders when Garland will ever indwell his 'unconcealment' – his perfectly nihilistic *a-lētheia*. In the end, he wonders when, like the six feet and six inches tall, skin-coloured *stableless stallion* in the garden, Garland (and his fellows) will *understand* that human beings are *understood* only in their incomprehensibility (*Unverständlichkeit*). Now, attentive 'fly' listeners of this particular, beautiful radio broadcast will, doubtlessly, have noticed that equally 'fly' (and friendly) Staffan's final two nouns are 'togetherness' (*samhörighet*) and 'love' (*kärlek*).

With this in mind, it is my contention that a full, 'fly' *exposition* of linguistic representation allows us to indwell Staffan's/Garland's representationlessness of *samhörighet* and *kärlek*. Shown in this *a-lethic* book, by rendering inoperative the operation of language, i.e. language's reduction to a representational apparatus, to a treacherous biopolitical 'spectacle', such an *exposition* allows us to neutralise all 'glass and frames'. Patently, it allows us – as entirely unrepresentable, *anoikonomic*

and, in this very sense, inoperative angel-flies and, by implication, by way of ‘contagiously’ anointing and being anointed – to return to, and indwell, the sumptuously green, paradisaical garden idyll. Following the example of the ownerless/*stableless stallion*, it allows us to take place without ‘taking’/representing (a) place. Like the traveller of *In the Penal Colony*, we “can’t decipher it” (Kafka 1971, p. 289) and, happily, *space out*...

Without further ado (from *\*d<sup>h</sup>eh*, meaning ‘to place’) – ‘at the threshold’ (*in limine*) of an inoperative, unrepresentable ‘contact’ or ‘touch’ (*contāgiō*) between God and man, law (*nomos*) and life (*physis*) – *ex-position* allows us to, unhamperedly, ‘fly’ or, as riderless *stallions*, ‘gallop’ through *a-topia* or what I, below, call *u-topia*. For, as Zartaloudis explains, at stake is “a threshold where two planes remain proximate, yet different, the juridical and the non-juridical” (2010, p. 307). At stake is the *possibility* of a threshold that neutralises “the economic relation between a founding power and a founded power or constitutive and constituted power” (p. 13). To cut to the chase, at stake is the *possibility* of a threshold that fully neutralises the *oikonomic* oscillation between *virtual* exception (*illegibility*) and functionary (*legibility*). Pace Cooper, at stake is the *possibility* of non-grammatological *illegibility* – of *inoprosità*.

Suspending all ‘economy’, it allows us to ‘fly’ or ‘gallop’ through a dis-placed/deposed place/position. Staffan’s ‘adult-children’ and ‘child-adults’ are doubtless in the know, it allows us to ‘fly’ or ‘gallop’ through a ‘worklessness’ or inoperativity (*Unangestelltheit*) not subject to representable notice (*Kündigung*)... Oh my gosh! I have lost the thread again and, untethered from spatio-temporal determination, untethered from ‘His’ commands, flyingly and gallopingly ‘err’ about, never getting it ‘right’; for an *in-stant* and, thus, subject to *timeless time*, I squirm free of all ‘glass and frames’. Lo and behold: all churned up inside, I squirm free of representation...

That said, a ‘fly’ *ex-position* of organisation (from *érgon*, meaning ‘work’ or ‘operation’) and its subjects, viz., employees (*Angestellte*) and customers (*Kunden*), enables us to be joyously ‘deforming’ or ‘disfiguring’ (*ent-stellende*) angels – messengers, mediators or *Künder*. And, as such, it allows us to ‘playfully’ testify to ‘his’, to Garland’s, *u-topian* glory. That is, an *ex-position*, neutralising any knowledge of something (*qualcosa*), of an object (*Gegenstand*) of representation, enables us to know pure knowability: a non-representational and, therefore, non-appropriating, non-incarcerating *possibility* of knowing. It enables us to run off to Kafka’s ‘the city in the south’, which amounts to “making the virtual exception real” (Agamben 1998, p. 57).

Vitaly, echoing the experience of the protagonist of Kafka’s *The Hunter Gracchus*, *ex-position* enables every human being to know what it means that “no one will read what I write, no one will come to help me” (1971, p. 403). Since, in *ex-posing*, writing or – more broadly – language remains *il-legible*, withdrawing from, and short-circuiting, logic-cum-bureaucratic *imposition*. In *ex-posing*, I remain

‘destitute’, withdrawing from, and short-circuiting, any promise of *oikonomic* salvation. Differently put, in *ex-posing*, I experience what Anke Snoek calls “redemption from salvation” (2012, p. 100)... Consequently, as for organisation, *ex-position* enables us to indwell an inoperative operation. Coinciding with the unlocking of unmediated, pure mediacy – of pure means, of means without representational end – it enables us to *write and read* an *ex-thetic*, i.e. *really* exceptional or perfectly nihilistic, *thesis*: Buzzzzzzzz... Bliss!

#### *A really exceptional place*

*Really* exceptional, all this! No wonder you are winded... Expectably, you feel that you are completely ‘out of place’ or what, with Agamben, can be called “absolutely exposed” (1993c, p. 39). Unless you have been a ‘playful’ *in-fant* or a *neg-lected/neg-lectful* Kafka tram passenger or ‘tramer’ already, you just darted up the neck of the ‘fly-bottle’ from the inside. A moment ago, you succeeded in bidding good riddance to all ‘glass and frames’. Or, as a tall, if stocky horse, you just happened to unseat *logos*, your ghastly ‘rider’, and, in so doing, escaped from the huge *stable* this ‘rider’ set up for you. Most certainly, you need a wee break to take a deep breath. Dazed, you pause either atop the mouth of the grimy bottle that, you cannot but realise, used to imprison you, or just outside the dissolved, mucky *stable*. All at once, the penny has dropped; it goes without saying that the appalled, dauntingly bellowing ‘reader’ who, with his discourteous, barbed remarks, had hoped to make a laughing stock of you, has got it all wrong. Obviously, as the two longish tell-tale tails (*cerci*) portend, he is an entrenched ‘mayfly’ and does not know any better. You may tell, because, for a while, you were something like a full-fledged ‘mayfly’ yourself; as busy as a bee and a ‘Saul’ of sorts, you used to incarcerate yourself and others in language...<sup>30</sup>

Superciliously buzzing inside the terribly smelly ‘fly-bottle’ or, if you prefer, *stable*, he, his hoity-toity glasses all fogged up, still has the hump and, fumingly, fulminates against the *possibility* of exiting this awful dungeon. For him, all you suggest is baloney, double Dutch and poppycock. Now that you rest atop the mouth of the towering bottle/outside the gigantic *stable* and, at ease, squint into the dewy, iridescently lush *di-stance* (literally *de-position*), you know for sure that what is at stake is a different kettle of fish altogether; at last, you have reached the garden you pined for all these years, ready to, unburdened from any meaning whatsoever, remain *il-legible*... Be careful, though, not to get caught anew! There are myriad ‘fly-bottles’/*stables* or, consonant therewith, ‘glasses and frames’ out there. Apparently, they all lie in wait to jail flies/horses. How about us continuing to walk

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<sup>30</sup> Indicative of *oikonomic* readership or, if you will, *oikonomic* ‘ridership’, “Saulos is in fact a regal [from the verb *regō*, meaning ‘to rule’ or ‘govern’] name” (Agamben 2005b, p. 9), with the substitution of *sigma* by *pi* – of Saul by Paul – signifying “no less than the passage from the regal to the insignificant” (ibid.). Of utmost importance, it signifies the passage from *imposition* to *exposition*.

through key parameters of Agamben's work? *This* way, you get around rushing headlong into representation again... With, like the protagonist of Kafka's *The New Advocate*, your "flanks unhampered by the thighs of a rider" (1971, p. 706), there is no need to 'hold your horses' any longer. The 'rider/reader' finally gone, what *you* read is straight from the 'horse's mouth'. No baloney, double Dutch or poppycock, what *you* read is, no doubt, non-representational horseplay<sup>31</sup>. Obviously, 'fly'-ing in the face of *oikonomia*, *you*, inoperatively, got off to a 'fly'-ing start...<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Waggishly intended as a pun, the expression 'non-representational 'horseplay' does *not* refer to a 'meaningless play' based on which meaning can be configured. Rather, it refers to a 'meaningless play' that defies meaning, including meaning's *virtual* exception as the non-meaning *of* meaning.

<sup>32</sup> If you feel that this thesis takes a long time to proceed to the 'actual text', please be reminded that *this* book consists exclusively of *parerga* of a book/work that remains stubbornly unwritten and unwritable, there being no 'actual text'. Rather, similar to the *mise en ex-ergue* and the preface, the following chapters testify to our having lost the holy Writ, taking every opportunity to express pure anarchy, friendship and *il-legibility*. They take every opportunity to express inoperativity.



# Opening: on u-topia

“Topos research? Certainly! But in the light of that which is to be researched: in the light of u-topia.” (Celan 1983, p. 199)

Drawing on the work of the contemporary Italian philosopher and political theorist Giorgio Agamben, *this* book gestures towards, and embodies, a much longed-for escape from biopolitics (e.g. Bachmann 2013; Benjamin 1996a,b,c; Hamacher 2020; Kafka 1971; Trakl 2011. See Fusco 2022; Moran 2018; Nedoh 2017; Salzani 2019; Zartaloudis 2017). Avidly, it gestures towards, and embodies, a much longed-for escape from “the growing inclusion of man’s natural life [or what, in antiquity, the Greeks called *zoē*] in the mechanisms and calculations of power” (Agamben 1998, p. 119). Put differently, *this* book gestures towards, and embodies, a keenly longed-for escape from “the inscription of the biological in the political” (De Vaujany et al. 2021, p. 683), provided that the ‘political’ in question in that specific definition refers to the ambit of *emplacement* – to the ambit of this or that *dispositif*/*Gestell*. That is, trying to counter and suspend the relentless, pitiless advance of this rapacious *inclusion/inscription*, *this* book points to, and functions *itself* as a testimony of, the *possibility* of neutralising natural/biological life’s or *zoē*’s subjugation to an appropriating, incarcerating, juridifying apparatus, viz., signifying language. Considering Kafka’s *In the Penal Colony*, *this* book is, then, a testimony of the *possibility* of neutralising *zoē*’s subjugation to an apparatus that rests on ‘marking/writing’, inasmuch as, for Kafka, the ‘apparatus’ comprises two needles, where “[t]he long needle does the writing, and the short needle sprays a jet of water to wash away the blood and keep the inscription clear” (1971, p. 266)... Indeed, *this* book echoes the behaviour of the ‘nomads’ in Kafka’s *An Old Manuscript*; it converses “much as jackdaws [Czech’s *kavky*] do” (p. 708), “unwilling to make sense [...] out of [...] sign language” (ibid.).

Above all, determined to avoid fiddling while Rome burns, *this* book echoes, however, Agamben’s behaviour; in the light of this or that *dispositif*/*Gestell*, it underlines that “[i]t is not possible to find the truth if one does not first exit from the situation—or institution [literally *emplacement*—that impedes access” (Agamben 2024, p. 55), dedicated to what Willemse, summarising Agamben’s work, calls a “philosophy without presupposition” (2017, p. xxx). Grappling the mentioned ‘apparatus’, i.e. signifying language, it is entirely dedicated to a philosophy that undoes any recourse (*pre-*) to some underlying (*sup-*) emplacement (*-position*),



hoping to reveal *u-topia*; *here*, to return to Agamben, “[t]he only sure thing is that we no longer know where we are” (2024, p. 3). Or, much rather, “we feel that we are at a point, that we are this point, this ‘where’, but we no longer know how to locate it in space and time” (ibid.). All that means that – lest we be left high and dry – we must grasp that “the machine [or ‘apparatus’] is one and the same with the book that the author is writing” (p. 87).

Vitally, *this* neutralisation of the ‘apparatus’ takes aim *not only* at what Derrida refers to as the tendency to “subordinate [...] writing to speech” (2011b, p. 21) and the related *supposition* that “the *telos* of being is presence” (p. 7). Aware of the fact that Agamben and Derrida, for what we know (see Attell 2015), are *not exactly* joined at the hip, it takes aim *not only* at the ‘traditional view’, according to which, Derrida laments, “[w]riting comes to stabilize, inscribe, write down, incarnate a speech that is already prepared” (2011b, p. 69) – a speech that, as for its signifieds, is *supposed* to be ‘fixed’. That is, *my* book differs from Derrida’s critique of ‘presence’, a critique taking issue with the *stance* that “writing completes the constitution of ideal objects” (ibid.). Since, put with Agamben, I recognise that the specific character of Derrida’s “grammatological project is expressed [...] [merely] in the affirmation according to which the originary experience is always already [...] writing, the signified always already in the position of the signifier” (1993b, p. 155). With him, I recognise that the “metaphysics of writing and of the signifier is but the reverse face of the metaphysics of the signified and the voice, and not, surely, its transcendence” (p. 156). As a result, *this* neutralisation also targets *positions* aimed at opening up the possibility of inherently unstable and ever-alterable readings of an underlying, illegible ‘marking/writing’. As such, it also critiques Cooper’s shift towards “[t]he primal mark [...] [as] a primitive sign that has not yet attained the status of a symbol or a concept; [for] it has no fixed direction” (2001a, p. 195). Instead, *this* text merges with what, with Agamben, can be called “the Non-marked” (2009b, p. 80) as I hope to, as regards the apparatus/signifying language, bring about what, harking back to Kafka, is its “going to pieces” (1971, p. 295). Grasping Agamben as *not* just another new broom sweeping clean, I hope to unfurl what, so far, risks withering on the vine, *u-topia*...<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, as for biopolitics, as for “the intersection, or perhaps reciprocal incorporation, of life and politics” (Campbell and Sitze 2013, p. 2), of life and power, life and (positivist or, with Cooper, grammatological, i.e. ‘marking/writing’-

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<sup>33</sup> With Lawlor, I recognise that Derrida’s deconstruction/grammatology “reopens the question of the meaning of being” (2011, p. xxvii). Indeed, it “makes us recognize that this question has no absolute answer, that every answer given to it is inadequate, that every answer will find itself opposed by another possible answer” (ibid.). In other words, following Derrida, “language is really the medium of [...] [a] play of presence [‘reading’] and absence [‘writing’]” (2011b, p. 9), with Derrida still holding fast to what Kafka, as mentioned, refers to as ‘sign language’ and, thus, biopolitics.

based) *legibility*, *this* book points to, and functions *itself* as a testimony of, a *possible* ‘exit’. After all, I concur with Fusco, who not only notes that “Agamben’s works are constantly permeated by the search for a way out” (2022, p. 5). Fusco shows also that an appreciation of these works truly “offers us the chance of thinking a way out” (p. 3). Such an appreciation, Fusco underscores, allows us to – by dint of (a reading and writing of) ‘non-marked/unwritten’ *text* – merge with “a coming [i.e. messianic, redemptive] politics and ethics outside the catastrophic distortions of (bio)power” (p. vii). Hence, refraining from, helter-skelter, running with the pack, inasmuch as I resolutely avoid swallowing biopolitics hook, line and sinker, *this* book points to, and functions *itself* as a testimony of, the *possibility* of turning a dire impasse (*aporia*) into a felicitous exit (*euporia*). To this end, following Agamben, *this* book gestures to, and ‘speaks’ (or, rather, writes), language *itself* (i.e. ‘non-marked/unwritten’ language), thus encapsulating ‘work’ in terms of inoperativity. It encapsulates ‘work’ or what Aristotle calls ‘life according to the *logos*’ in terms of a full untethering from, and suspension of, signification, this untethering and suspension including zero-degree signification – implied in Cooper’s ‘primal mark’ or, in fact, Derridean ‘undecidability’ – as well. Since, in the words of Kafka’s *The Problem of Our Laws*, as for the apparatus, “[t]he very existence of these laws [...] is at most a matter of presumption” (1971, p. 743)...<sup>34</sup>

In other words, *this* text points to, and functions as a testimony of, an exit from biopolitical language, recognising that biopolitics, rather than being too impetuously reduced to a particular form of governing or, perchance, to a particular ensemble of forms of governing only, is “not only [...] directed to the expropriation of productive activity, but [...] also, and above all, [...] to the alienation of language itself” (Agamben 2000, p. 95). That is to say, I recognise that biopolitics is, ultimately, coterminous with language’s quotidian reduction to representation (*Vorstellung*, literally meaning ‘positioning/emplacement’), with representation/positioning taking the form of *both* language conceived in terms of transcendental signifieds *and*, as in Derridean deconstruction or Cooper’s social philosophy of organisation, in terms of the absence *of* transcendental signifieds. In brief, I recognise that, following Agamben, biopolitics is coterminous with *oikonomia*... Importantly, biopolitics/*oikonomia* or, if you wish, representation/positioning takes the form of *both* ‘full presence’ (the law’s *normal* functioning) *and* ‘absent presence’ (the law’s state of *virtual* exception). With this in view, to counter and suspend the unabated

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<sup>34</sup> With zero-degree signification here suspended as well, *this* book eschews and undoes what Cooper, approvingly, calls “the pre-work of ‘worklessness’” (2007, p. 1571); it eschews and undoes man’s grounding in terms of “an absent and negative condition that is always with us as a ghost-like presence that refuses to make itself fully evident and that hides behind the familiar forms of the world” (p. 1568), hoping to dismantle the apparatus. In short, I eschew and undo what Cooper embraces as “the oscillation between meaning and [‘marked/written’] un-meaning” (2001a, p. 171). I eschew and undo (the reverberations of) deconstruction, insofar as “deconstruction maintains the law beyond its content” (Willemse 2017, p. xxiv), insofar as it is rooted in the *virtual* exception.

onslaught of gloomy, positioning/emplacing biopolitics/*oikonomia*, *this* book emphasises and unfurls the *possibility* of *u-topia*; aiming to turn the state of *virtual* exception, on which the normal case, viz., signifieds, invariably rests, into a *real* state of exception, it unfurls the *possibility* of the placeless place of non-representational, purely profane language. It unfurls language, and, henceforth, life, as *destituent* potential. For, once again turning to Kafka's allusive *The Problem of Our Laws*, *this* book recognises that "our work seems only an intellectual game [*Spiel des Verstandes*, literally 'game of *emplacement*'], for perhaps these laws that we are trying to unravel do not exist at all" (1971, p. 743).<sup>35</sup>

In *this u-topian*, non-representational context, much of Agamben's work (on biopolitics), I argue, reveals its *potential* if one recognises Agamben to be at loggerheads with Derrida over the latter's *grammatological* equation of language with signification. Concretely, Derrida, Agamben deplores, grounds man, deleteriously, in a language/law that remains as potent as it remains unintelligible, with man still subject to the dreadful whims of bureaucratically/*oikonomically* based sovereign violence. Indeed, Derrida – Agamben shows – grounds man in an absent presence that spurs man's ever fallible attempts to render this absence present, a *theme* thoroughly explored by, for instance, the organisation scholar Robert Cooper. Against this background and in order for organisation scholars to fully appreciate the specific *destituent potential* of Agamben's work, *this* book translates Agamben's critique of Derrida into a critique of Cooper and, at base, the current *state* of organisation at large...<sup>36</sup>

As a result, *this* book's critique of Cooper's work functions as a 'contrast medium', meant, as far as organisation scholarship is concerned, to help bring the *potential* of Agamben's work readily to the fore. Thus, taking issue with Cooper's grounding of work/organisation in what he calls "a placeless place that draws us and withdraws from us at the same time" (2005b, p. 1695) or, elsewhere, "a negative space that [...] [can] never be positively located" (2001a, p. 165) serves to throw Agamben's placeless place of non-representational, purely profane language into relief. To go straight to the nitty-gritty, whilst Cooper *supposes* a *constituent* power that – in the form of a "nowhere" that exceeds every 'where', every location" (2005b, p. 1695)

<sup>35</sup> Elaborated in more detail below, "destituent power (or potential) [...] [refers to] a third element with respect to the dialectic constituent/constituted power" (Fusco 2022, p. 55). As a result, neither referring to the 'marked/written' nor to some legibility that *presupposes* itself in and as the 'marked/written', *destituent* power/potential is non-marked/unwritten language. It is *il-legibility*.

<sup>36</sup> This does not mean that Cooper or Derrida may not, to some extent, be said to be concerned with utopia. Lawlor, for instance, argues that "Derrida's thought is structured by an exiting movement, a line of flight to the outside" (2011, p. xii). For Lawlor, that "outside is a sort of utopian non-place, an 'elsewhere', in which it is possible to think and live differently, indicates what motivates de-construction" (ibid.). Yet, with Agamben, this utopia is revealed as rooted in a *virtual* exception.

or a “‘spatiality without things’” (p. 1694) – may not but should lead to forms of ever-alterable *constituted* power, of ever alterable, open-ended *localisations* or *positionings*, Agamben gestures towards *destituent potential*; relentlessly, he gestures towards a *potentiality* that *deposes* not only (more or less fixed) *constituted positionings*, but also these *positionings*’ *virtual* suspension and, thus, their *negative* self-grounding in and as *constituent* ‘negative space’ or ‘nowhere’. Since “no matter how it is thought, constituent power is destined to be embroiled in the logic of sovereignty” (Fusco 2022, p. 55). It is destined to remain mired in the workings of the apparatus, its advocates failing to get to the bottom of *parables*, insofar as Kafka, in *On Parables*, suggests that “parables [...] set out to say that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible [*dass das Unfassbare unfassbar ist*]” (1971, p. 775). Or, put with Agamben, they fail to see that the messianic Kingdom, i.e. *u-topia*, “has no other reality than the word—the parable that it speaks” (2022b, p. 36). They fail to see that “[t]o speak in parables [*parabolare*] is simply to speak [*parlare*]” (2017c, p. 32), to speak non-marked/unwritten ‘speech’.

Unlike Cooper, who – permanently running up against an *aporia*/impasse (i.e. the *virtual* state of exception) – he, Agamben, points to the *possibility* of a *real* exception; regarding biopolitics, Agamben points to, and offers, a ‘way out’. He points to, and offers, purely *anoikonomic u-topia*. Obviously, this means that, in my reading, Agamben and Cooper (or Derrida for that matter) are like chalk and cheese. As a result, if concerned with a genuine critique of biopolitics, you cannot run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, with Cooper (and Derrida) dynamising *positioning* and bringing to light the basis of humanly produced sovereign violence, viz., the *virtual* state of exception, only. To undo biopolitics you still must render *oikonomia*’s awful grip on ‘work’ – on, to repeat, Aristotle’s ‘life according to the *logos*’ – inoperative, an appreciation of Agamben’s *destituent potential* paving the way to do so.

Recently, the number of publications upon ‘biopolitics’ in critical organisation studies and adjacent research areas, such as critical accounting studies and critical consumer culture studies, has, while still somewhat marginal, markedly increased (e.g. Antonelli et al. 2022, 2023, 2024a,b; Bigoni and Funnell 2024; Bokek-Cohen 2016; Chapman et al. 2021; Charitsis et al. 2019; Elraz and McCabe 2023; Fleming 2022; Knoppers et al. 2022; Middlemiss et al. 2024; Moisaner et al. 2018; Moonesirust and Brown 2021; Reed and Thomas 2021; Skoglund and Redmalm 2017; Van den Bussche and Morales 2019; Walker et al. 2021; Zulfikar 2025). The *theme* of biopolitics, however, is by no means new to this broader field. Surely, this does not mean that, within management studies as a whole, the gravity and omnipresence of what Śliwa et al. describe as the “biopolitical predicament” (2015, p. 246) have thus far been fully recognised or sufficiently combatted on a broader scale. Still, in any case, for a couple of decades, a handful of critical management scholars has *addressed*, or has suggested that others *address*, ‘biopolitics’ (and, tied thereto, ‘biopower’, as the application and impact of appropriating political power

on all aspects of human life) in a variety of organisational contexts (e.g. Aggeri 2005; Barratt 2008; Burrell 1988; Clegg 1998; Coll 2013; Dean 2013; Hatchuel 1999; Munro 2000, 2012; Pezet 2004; Raffnsøe et al. 2016b; Villadsen and Wahlberg 2015; Weiskopf and Munro 2012).

To this growing stream of research – Fleming suggests – one might also add certain studies that do not explicitly use the label ‘biopower’/‘biopolitics’. For him, this includes in particular critical studies that focus on organisational initiatives aimed at prompting more engaged employee performances by encouraging (certain, productive versions of) the staff’s ‘liberated’, authentic, healthy and fun-loving ‘selves’ at work (e.g. Cederström 2011; Maravelias 2018; Picard and Islam 2020; Warren and Fineman 2013). Seen from this angle, critical studies concerned, for example, with the reconfiguration of play from an element to be forcefully suppressed or eschewed at work to a, putatively, revitalising driver of value-adding organisational creativity, motivation and adaptability may also be said to closely attend to biopolitical issues (e.g. Alexandersson and Kalonaityte 2018; Andersen 2009; Butler and Spoelstra 2024a,b; Pors and Andersen 2015). It is against this backdrop that Fleming notes that “a wide range of recent empirical findings about the changing nature of work might be explained through the concept of biopower[‘biopolitics]” (2014, p. 876)...<sup>37</sup>

Explicitly ‘biopolitics’-themed research by critical management scholars comprises, for instance, Cervi and Brewis’s (2022) analysis of the discursive reconstruction of the non-reproductive female body through organisations offering fertility treatment. Further exemplary research includes Alawattage et al.’s (2019) study of for-profit banks’ fostering of microaccountability aimed at creating from poor Sri Lankan villagers a legion of bankable individuals trained to invigilate each other’s savings and credit behaviours. But also Fleming et al.’s (2023) investigation of how commercial flow is sought to be secured against the undocumented and unregulated flow of illegitimate people, finance and information, counterfeits, drugs, terror and other undesirables has put critical engagement with biopolitics on the agenda. Throughout, these studies have, for their theoretical framing, relied on Michel Foucault’s genealogical analyses on the governance of, for instance, sexuality, hygiene, crime and mental illness. As such, following in Foucault’s wake, they have,

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<sup>37</sup> While helpful and important in many respects, Peter Fleming’s work fails to grasp that biopolitics, as the inclusion of man’s natural life in the mechanisms and calculations of power, is fundamentally about linguistic *imposition*; more concretely, Fleming *supposes* the floating signifier ‘biopolitics’, whose proper semantic content one ought to establish, with this very *supposition*, however, being part and parcel of the *virtual* state of exception (see Agamben 2005a). That means, from an Agambenian angle, Fleming reproduces *oikonomia*/biopolitics as he fails to *ex-pose/expose*. He fails to render *oikonomia* inoperative. Relatedly, while he, time and again, offers detailed analyses of the brutal ramifications of biopolitics, when it comes to contriving a genuine ‘way out’, he regularly falls flat. Indeed, while he has certainly helped to call attention to biopolitics, he, somehow, does not see the forest for the trees, thereby cementing man’s capture in imperfect nihilism.

essentially, if implicitly, associated the steep rise of ‘biopolitics’ with the onset of European modernity.<sup>38</sup>

As priorly alluded to, *this* book picks up on a different, or at least somewhat reworked, term of biopolitics, stemming from Agamben’s comments on Foucault. Doing so allows me to grasp biopolitics *not*, as many Foucauldians would have it, as a particular governmental regime, but as being coterminous with government *tout court*. That means, rather than associating biopolitics with this or that specific representation, biopolitics emerges, with Agamben, as being about signifying language’s appropriation of natural/biological life or, synonymous herewith, *zoē*. As already pointed out, it, biopolitics, emerges as being about what Agamben calls *oikonomia*. Surprisingly, Agamben’s take on biopolitics has hitherto gained little traction in organisation studies. But crucial work advancing Agamben’s thought upon biopolitics as well as on an escape therefrom has appeared elsewhere (e.g. De Boer 2022; Fusco 2022; Gustafsson and Grønstad 2014; Heron 2017; Kotsko and Salzani 2017; Murray 2010; Nedoh 2022; Primera 2019; Prozorov 2014; Salzani 2020; Schütz 2011; Willemse 2017; Wilmer and Žukauskaitė 2016; Zartaloudis 2010, 2015, 2017). *This* book draws on these developments within Agamben scholarship and connects them to organisational debates; seeking to avoid reification, I do *not* content myself with detailing and bemoaning this or that manifestation of biopolitics. Instead, I hope to provide a ‘way out’, relying *not* on *oikonomic positioning* or an examination of its consequences, but on inoperativity; I rely on an *ex-position/exposition* of language, neutralising *oikonomia/positioning* and revealing language in its *u-topian suchness*.

Following Agamben, one might, then, on the one hand, say that we are all subject to “organized linguistic violence” (2009a, p. 105). But, on the other hand, he suggests also that we are able to unfurl, and become one with, a “violence that deliberately refrains from enforcing law, and instead breaks apart the continuity of time to found a new era” (p. 107). Put differently – on Agamben’s diagnosis – we are still stuck in ancient Greek *conceptions* according to which ‘the work of man *qua* man’ amounts to ‘life according to the *logos*’ or ‘Law’. Patently, we are still stuck in *conceptions* that couch man’s ‘work’ or telos in *oikonomic* terms. Nonetheless, there is a ‘way out’; this ‘way out’, Agamben gestures, should not be confused with “constituent [literally meaning ‘emplacing’ or ‘imposing’] power”

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<sup>38</sup> Although I sympathise with (some aspects of) these studies, they never point to a ‘way out’.

Problematically, the authors of these *texts* fall prey to, and reproduce, biopolitics themselves, as their research remains grounded in the (empty) signifier ‘biopolitics’ or a range of seemingly connected signifiers, which prevents these authors from thinking of language and, hence, ‘work’ in terms of perfect nihilism. It prevents them from thinking and indwelling the inoperativity of *u-topia*. Or, turning, once again, to Agamben, they fail to grasp that “terminology is the poetry of thought” (1999b, p. 208), thus overlooking the *possibility* of *ex-posing* (neutralising) biopolitics/*oikonomia*/representation/*emplacement* and, simultaneously, *exposing* (revealing) language *itself*.

(2016, p. 28), a term he uses to critique, and allude to, the ‘absent presence’ unfolded by, for instance, Derridean deconstruction. For *constituent* power “destroys law only to recreate it in a new form” (ibid.). Rather, the ‘way out’ coincides with “destituent [literally meaning *u-topian*] power – insofar as it deposes the law once for all” (ibid.), i.e. insofar as it *ex-poses positioning* and shelters the resultant non-place... Importantly, it is this “non-place, in which potentiality [or *zoē*] does not disappear but is preserved and so to speak dances in the act [or language], that deserves the name ‘work’” (2017c, p. 94)<sup>39</sup>... All that means that – following Agamben – there is a *possibility* of neutralising biopolitics’s grip on ‘work’, on man’s *telos*. There is a *possibility* of thinking/living ‘work’ as inoperativity, i.e. as the (poetic) *ex-position and exposition* of language. Pace Robert Cooper (and Jacques Derrida), there is, in language, a *possibility* of indwelling *parables*. In language, there is a *possibility* of achieving an exit: there is *u-topia*...<sup>40</sup>

To help clarify, and testify to, this *possibility*, this book provides a case study analysis of unemployment-related management literature. Concretely, turning to academic management publications that discuss unemployment, for instance, in relation to ‘gendered class habitus’, ‘sheltered work’ or ‘ageism’, I hope to help render *il-legible* what, in this *literature*, tends to be *oikonomised*. In sum, I hope to help render these *texts*’ *oikonomic* footing inoperative, turning, as the icing on the cake, to Kafka *not* for *dystopian* ‘wheels within wheels’ (e.g. Parker 2002, 2005), but for messianic illustration. Naturally, as ‘cases’, the management publications analysed are seen as *instantiations* of the broader phenomenon and problem of biopolitics. That means that this book’s aim to *expose* the *position* of ‘employees’ and ‘customers’ in unemployment-related management literature can be read in a narrow and a broad sense; narrowly defined, my aim is, simply, to wrest from the publications analysed what, in their discussions of employees and customers, has been repressed: the *possibility* of non-representational, *u-topian* language. And, more broadly speaking, in so doing, I hope to testify to the *possibility* of – in general – unfurling work and organisation in terms of inoperativity. As specified below, in relation to this second, broader reading, ‘employees’ and ‘customers’ are approached as emplaced or positioned human beings. ‘Unemployment’, the condition of *not* being *angestellt*/positioned, including the condition of *not* being subject to Cooper’s “general process of relating the world as an implicit or enfolded

<sup>39</sup> Saliently, in this context, “dance does [...] present itself [...] as reading, except that the text to be read is lacking or, rather, unreadable” (Agamben 2004a, p. 105).

<sup>40</sup> For Agamben, indwelling *u-topia* turns on grasping that “the human being exists in the human being’s non-place, in the missing articulation between the living being and logos” (1999c, p. 134). As for the living being and logos, as for potentiality and act(ion), it turns on supplanting ‘articulation’ with ‘contact’. Since “[a]t the point of contact—where any and every representation fails—only gladness and splendor remain” (2023c, p. 70).

source” (2014, p. 598), refers to inoperative life.<sup>41</sup> And ‘management literature’ designates *oikonomic* language, with *this* book *ex-posing oikonomic/managerial* language’s positioning of inoperative ‘work’. It seeks to testify to the *possibility* of entering the ‘paradisical Kingdom’: a *u-topian* opening...

## Research aims

To be *read* in this double sense, the primary aim of *this* thesis is to provide an *exposition* of the *position* of employees and customers in unemployment-related management literature. In brief, it seeks to turn an impasse into a way out.

Going about in this manner means also countering the dominant reception of Agamben’s work in the field of management studies. For, as detailed in the chapter ‘Contribution: on a way out’, until now, most management scholars turning to Agamben *oikonomise* his references to inoperativity (for a notable exception, see Thaning et al. 2016). Now, to help clarify what is at stake in Agamben’s suggestions, I draw also upon Kafka’s work for illustration, hoping to, *pace* Derrida, underline the *possibility* of appreciating Kafka as a *u-topian* writer. Moreover, I turn to Robert Cooper to help delineate inoperative, *u-topian* research as incommensurate with, and opposed to, Cooper’s Derrida-inspired ‘social philosophy of organisation’. In this way, I hope, ultimately, to caution against an unwary celebration of Cooperian neo-governmental biopolitics.

Therefore, *this* thesis’s secondary aim is to – in the connection of an *ex-position* and *exposition* of language – suggest a significant reappraisal of the work of Agamben, Kafka and Cooper in management studies.

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<sup>41</sup> While I prefer to refer to the German translation of ‘employed’, viz., *angestellt*, in order to highlight employment’s link to representation/*positioning/emplacement*, a similar point can be made by way of focusing on the Latin root of ‘employ’, viz., *implicāre*, with *implicāre* literally meaning ‘to enfold’. Specifically, drawing on Derrida’s *reading* of Valéry, Cooper – in an attempt to find another term for ‘the negative space that can never be positively located’ – suggests that “[t]he Implex [from *implicāre*] is an unlocatable origin or source; it is negative or implicit space that can never be made explicit” (2001a, p. 166). Indeed, for him, “[t]he Implex is a capacity, a potential, from which the explicit [literally the unfolded] draws” (ibid.), so that “[w]e ‘know’ the Implex only through its articulation by the explicit” (ibid.). Thus, while Cooper embraces a never-ending oscillation between mutually constituting enfolding and unfolding, in focusing on (wresting) ‘unemployment’ (from *oikonomia*), I gesture towards *un-enfolding*. I gesture towards the *possibility* of exiting the bipolar signifier-cum-signified or enfolding-cum-unfolding apparatus.



## Terminology

Seeking to further clarify *this ex-thetic/u-topian* thesis's primary aim, the terms used to formulate this aim – exposition, position, employees, customers, unemployment-related, management and literature – are carefully defined on the next couple of pages.

### Exposition (*inoperativity*)

As for the term 'exposition', three tightly interrelated meanings underlie *this* book's central aim, viz., explanation (*expounding*), neutralisation (*ex-posing*) and revelation (*exposing*), with the latter two somewhat taking centre stage.<sup>42</sup> More concretely, in *this* book, 'exposition' is turned to in order to, all at the same time, designate a) a treatise concerned with expounding, explaining and exhibiting, b) a deposition/neutralisation of representation/'position' and c) the revelation of something heretofore largely unheeded, if not violently stifled and written off. Or, otherwise put, *this* book is concerned with explaining (*expounding*) the neutralisation (*ex-position*) of representational, biopolitical language so as to reveal (*expose*) language in its *suchness*, in its *il-legibility*. Taken together, it revolves around what Agamben calls "the end of representation..." (1995, p. 132).

Thus, for one thing, intent on explaining/expounding neutralisation (*ex-posing*), *this* book is concerned with the action of putting, or the condition of being put, out of place/position. Indeed, one may say that it is concerned with abandonment, insofar as 'exposition' refers also to leaving something unsheltered (OED 2023). Put with Agamben, that is to say that – in explaining/expounding the neutralisation (*ex-posing*) of representation/'position' – as for human beings, "there is literally no shelter possible, that in their being-thus they are absolutely exposed, absolutely abandoned" (1993c, p. 38). Crucially, such *ex-positional* 'end of representation' or absolute abandonment differs from most 'non-representational approaches' in the field of organisation scholarship. For these approaches, rather than liberating human life from the imposition of meaning, remain grounded in, and reproduce, the *virtual* state of exception. For they leave the law operative beyond its formal suspension of 'full presence' – beyond the absence of a transcendental signified.

Accordingly, Gherardi, for instance – echoing Derrida – suggests that, while there is a "‘crisis of representation’" (2019, p. 745), this does "not [entail] the end of representation, but the end of pure presence" (ibid.). Concretely, for Gherardi, we should leave "behind any pretension to a fixed truth, authority or legitimacy" (p. 753). Since an "account could have been otherwise, and combining a variety of

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<sup>42</sup> That *ex-posing* and *exposing* take centre stage means that genuine *expounding*, ultimately, entails the *possibility* of *ex-posing* and *exposing*. It *expounds* the *possibility* of *ex-posing* and *exposing*.

perspectives on the same event makes it possible to write and to read a text in which one event is always more than one” (ibid.). Similarly, for Komporozos-Athanasiou and Fotaki, “non-representational approaches foreground becomingness and emergence” (2015, p. 87). Indeed, for them, “non-representational approaches offer [...] a more nuanced and multi-dimensional notion of representability, that is people’s ability of form-giving [...] [as well as] a notion of signification, which unpicks the inherent indeterminacy of meaning-giving processes in practical everyday experiences of organizing” (ibid.). After all, they go on, “the signification process is never complete in organizational life; it always entails a degree of indeterminacy” (p. 89). In like fashion, De Cock fails to neutralise/*ex-pose* representation, suggesting instead that, “if we are to explore fully the potential of a variety of representational practices, we need to add a ‘fantastic’ element to the traditional realist story” (2000, p. 590). For De Cock, doing so calls for “a rejection of the conventional desire to transform a messy, unsettled world into a place of fixed, rational continuities” (ibid.). This is echoed by Cooper, who departs from “a primal unknown” (2001c, p. 338) and maintains that “at best, it can be approached but never possessed” (p. 337).

For the other, seeking to explain/expound ‘revelation’ (*exposing*), *this* book aims to put into view or bring out what, in a certain sense, has been hidden from view, overlooked and suppressed. Thus, focusing on one of the meanings of the verb *expose* (from the Latin morphemes *ex*, meaning ‘forth’ and ‘thoroughly’, and *pōnō*, meaning ‘position’), one might say that *this* book is also concerned with showing, displaying, uncovering and exhibiting openly what has hitherto tendentially been unnoticed if not downtrodden; critically, it is concerned with revealing/exposing language *itself*. As Agamben explains/expounds, that means that “the content of revelation is not a truth that can be expressed in the form of linguistic propositions about being (even about supreme being) but is, instead, a truth that concerns language itself, the very fact that language [...] exists” (1999b, p. 40). More specifically, ‘revelation’ “is not a word (a metalanguage), nor is it a vision of an object outside of language (there is no such object, no such unsayable thing); it is *the vision of language itself*” (p. 47). Hence, *pace* Cooper, for whom, as will be shown, there is ‘an invisible power we call God’ and, ‘relatedly’, a ‘Church that assumes the responsibility for translating and interpreting this ultra-human presence into a language or symbolism that makes it somehow readily readable’, at stake in ‘revelation’ (*exposing*) is what Agamben calls “a non-representative politics” (2015b, p. 237).

By implication, *this* book’s aims also differ from what O’Doherty refers to as ‘exposing’. Since, for O’Doherty, to ‘expose’ means to lay open “what remains apriori fragile and contingent” (2017, p. 8). And this laying open of the fragile and contingent, O’Doherty adds, would be necessarily wedded to a “commitment to *actively* participate in the testing and possible amplification of that which *might be made*—or might be being made fragile and contingent” (pp. 8–9), so as to give

“opportunity to the extension of political experiment and its sites of contestation” (ibid.). Henceforth, for O’Doherty, to “[e]xpose” belies a simple representational and realist discourse at odds with [an] [...] ‘activist’ politics” (p. 8), which means that he, O’Doherty, wishes to seek out and explore alternative possibilities of signification/positioning. Yet, in so doing, what he overlooks, and ends up suppressing, is precisely what is at stake for *this* book: an *exponing* of the *ex-position*/neutralisation of representation/position that reveals/*exposes* language in its *suchness* – the end of representation...

## Position (*signified*)

The ultimate target of ‘exposition’, in *this* thesis, the term ‘position’ refers to the subsumption of human beings – through imprisonment in representation (*Vorstellung*, literally the activity and product of ‘placing’/‘positioning’) – into biopolitics. As such, ‘position’ points to life’s subjugation to an active ‘Law’, being part and parcel of the ‘imposition’/enforcement of this or that meaning, including the non-meaning of meaning, i.e. the *virtual* state of exception or – coterminous herewith – Derridean undecidability. Hence, ‘position’/*Vorstellung*/representation may *not*, as Beyes and Steyaert insinuate, necessarily go hand in hand with “reification and closure” (2012, p. 47) or, as Lorino fears, with “static abstraction” (2018, p. x) and “idealism” (ibid.). Rather, via the appropriation of pure non-meaning/profane play, ‘position’ is also based on, and involves, crises, ruptures and uncertainties, threatening to trap human life in the spectacles of infinite signification. Once again, this is echoed by Cooper, for whom “[t]he mapping of the self is essentially a question of *locating* or *positioning* itself in [...] everchanging contexts” (2001c, p. 338)

Followingly, generally conceived of as a ‘relation’ in which a human being finds itself with respect to another or others (OED 2023), ‘position’, as it is used here, is largely synonymous with the ascription, assertion and embodiment of influence, role, class, rank and power. Etymologically traceable to Latin’s *pōnere*, meaning ‘to put’ or ‘place’, ‘position’ can fruitfully be linked to Heidegger’s *Gestell* and Foucault’s *dispositif* (from *dispositio*, the Latin name for *oikonomia* or, if you prefer, ‘management’), both of which can, literally, be translated as ‘emplacement’. Concretely, ‘position’ can, then, be associated with *Gestell*, insofar as *Gestell*, Hamacher’s (2019) analysis suggests, pivots on allusions to the linguistic constataction (*Feststellung*) as well as the production (*Herstellung*) of influence, role, class, rank and power. Similarly, ‘position’ can also be said to resonate with *dispositif*, which, in Agamben’s rendering, refers to a “set of practices, bodies of knowledge, measures, and institutions that seek to manage, govern, control, and orient, in a way that purports to be useful, the behaviors, gestures, and thoughts of human beings” (2009c, p. 12). Put differently, ‘position’ concerns the representational (*vorstellende*) capture of the non-relational or non-appropriating

‘contact’ (*contāgiō*) between *physis* and *nomos*, potentiality and act, in a ‘relation’, i.e. in linguistic appropriation. Or, put yet another way, ‘position’ refers to the signified that, in neo-governmental thought, is constantly deferred and altered, with ‘exposition’ aiming at returning ‘position’ to an *il-legible* ‘taking-place’.

### Employees (*Angestellte*)

As the etymology of the German word for ‘employees’, viz., ‘*Angestellte*’, can be readily taken to imply, in *this* thesis, ‘employees’/‘*Angestellte*’ refers to human beings that are ‘positioned’/‘emplaced’. It, *Angestellte*, refers to human beings imprisoned in and by representation (*Vorstellung*). Notably, it refers to life *not* in terms of *il-legibility* and profane play, but in terms of biopolitical, linguistic appropriation. In short, *Angestellte* points to human beings’ subjection to signification. Therefore, as *this* book sets out to provide an ‘exposition’ of the ‘position’ of *Angestellte*, in rendering inoperative this subjection to signification (*oikonomia*), it does not envisage alternative or constantly deferred re-positionings, emplacements or employment (*Anstellung*). Rather, using a term coined by Hamacher, this book strives to testify to nothing less than the possibility of ‘*Ent-Stellung*’, aiming to wholly ex-pose/neutralise *oikonomic* subsumption.

### Customers (*Kunden*)

Usually, the terms ‘customers’ or ‘*Kunden*’, the German equivalent to ‘customers’, are used in order to designate people or organisations purchasing and/or using/consuming goods and/or services offered or provided by a professional person or an organisation. In *this* thesis, however, when writing about ‘customers’, I mean human beings that – like ‘employees’ (‘*Angestellte*’) – are subject to representation. Significantly, I mean human beings that are linguistically ‘positioned’, which, willy-nilly, makes them subject to *legibility*/the ‘Law’. It makes them subject to biopolitics. In this particular connection, when writing about ‘*Kunden*’, I exploit this term’s etymological linkage to the German verbs *kennen* (‘know’) and *können* (‘can’ or ‘be able to’). After all, ‘*Kunden*’ – like ‘*Künder*’ (‘messenger’), the German word for ‘angel’ – can be traced to the adjective *kund*, meaning ‘known’ and ‘obvious’. That is, seen this way, ‘*Kunden*’ emerges as directly pointing to human beings’ subjugation to representational knowledge (*Kenntnis* or *Erkenntnis*). At the same time, reference to *Künder* (angels) – as “His representatives” (Parker 2009, p. 1284) and, thus, as alleged conduits or intermediaries between the transcendent and the immanent – helps underline the transcendent anchoring of ‘*Kunden*’. That is to say, the existence of ‘*Kunden*’, i.e. of human beings known (*gekannt*) by way of representation, rests on *oikonomia*. It rests on the immanent projection of an illegible transcendent on whose behalf/behest immanent angel-functionaries, audaciously, claim to operate/render *legible*.

Now, concerned with an ‘exposition’ of the ‘position’ of ‘Kunden’, the core aim of this thesis can be described as rendering ‘Kunde’ (customer/message) into ‘*Se/Kunde*’: life in terms of language in its suchness/*il-legibility*. In this context, based on Hamacher’s attentive reading of Celan’s poem ‘Stimmen’ (Voices), ‘*Se/Kunde*’, refers to the secession from ‘Kunde’ (message), opening up the *possibility* of non-representational knowledge – of *a-knowledge*. Coincidentally, this resonates – while not, in this particular sense, intended by Benjamin – with the final lines of Benjamin’s ‘On the Concept of History’: “every second [*Sekunde*] is the strait gate through which the Messiah may enter” (1980, p. 703). Indeed, ‘exposition’, akin to the Messiah’s neutralisation of the ‘Law’, severs language from any message/signification, including zero-degree signification. In so doing, ‘exposition’ unfurls pure potentiality/*Können*, which, *as such*, is liberated from any *oikonomic* articulation with actuality/*imposition*. In sum, whilst ‘Kunden’ is used to point towards life confined in and by representational *imposition* or knowing (*Kennen*), *this* thesis seeks to testify to the secession from meaning entailed in pure *Können*/potentiality. Or, sticking to the etymology of ‘customer’, ‘exposition’ seeks to remove all *oikonomic* ballast, so as to return ‘customers’ to their pure ‘selfness’ (see Agamben 1999b), their pure potentiality.<sup>43</sup>

### Unemployment-related (*signifier*)

Here, the term ‘unemployment-related’ concerns the biopolitical appropriation of profane, human life; ‘unemployment’, in *this* context, refers to life that is *not* subject to ‘employment’/*Anstellung* or ‘positioning’/emplacement. It refers to life that defies representation. However, insofar as such profane, human life or life defying representation becomes subject to ‘relation’ (linguistic appropriation), it becomes subjugated to the ‘Law’/signification.<sup>44</sup> That said, the core aim of ‘exposition’, one might say, amounts to “thinking ontology and politics beyond every figure of relation” (Agamben 1998, p. 47). In fact, it amounts to thinking ontology and politics even beyond the limit or threshold ‘relation’ of the *virtual* state of exception, i.e. a “form of law remain[ing] in force beyond its own content” (p. 53). Thus, while a representational ‘relation’ with ‘unemployment’ or human life that is *not* subject to ‘employment’ (*Anstellung*) ends up with *oikonomising*/biopoliticising life, ‘exposition’ centres on what Agamben calls an “ontology of non-relation” (2015b, p. 237). As for life and law, it centres on the non-appropriation contained in ‘contact’ (*contāgiō*). Or, put differently, while a representational ‘relation’ with play ends up casting play as a substrate based upon which meaning may be configured,

<sup>43</sup> From an *oikonomic* point of view, ‘employees and ‘customers’ are, then, co-definitive forms. Or, in Luhmannian terms, they are the respectively ‘marked space’ of a distinction, viz., ‘employee’/‘customer’.

<sup>44</sup> Here, it is important to note that “relation designates and object’s character as signifier, independent of whatever concrete signified” (Agamben 2017b, p. 24).

‘exposition’ ‘disfigures’. In short, ‘exposition’ *ent-stellt*/renders *u-topian*. It wrests life from signifiers.

## Management (*oikonomia*)

To put it in a nutshell, ‘management’, a term that, in Agamben’s vast vocabulary, is coterminous with *oikonomia*, refers here to the activity and product of ‘positioning’/‘emplacement’. As such, it renders human beings into ‘employees’ (*Angestellte*) or ‘customers’ (*Kunden*). Being necessarily ‘relational’, i.e. appropriating, it refers to the activity and product of representation, automatically reducing politics to biopolitics. In that context, as touched on above, the activity of representing or emplacing comes in two interrelated forms: a) signifieds that, communicatively, reduce human beings to bearers of identities (also called the law’s normal functioning) and b) floating signifiers that, while suspending identities, address life in terms of an unwavering, nihilistic ‘force-of-law’ (also called the law’s ‘state of virtual exception’). Therefore, while classical ‘management’/biopolitics may be said to centre on adherence to given ‘full presence’, modern ‘management’ consciously grounds itself in illegibility conceived as an ‘absent presence’, thus celebrating change, undecidability and deferral (e.g. Cooper 2016d,f; Derrida 2001). Put differently, ‘management’/biopolitics works by conjuring up a foundational, absolute power (*illegibility*) that the vicars and executioners of such foundational, absolute power claim to help render *legible*, with modern ‘management’/biopolitics promoting a ‘play of signification’. All this happens, however, at the expense of profane ‘play’ or absolute non-meaning. It happens at the expense of ‘exposition’.

## Literature (*written*)

Conventionally *inter alia* referring to a body of writings (OED 2023), the term ‘literature’ is here – at least initially – taken to point to matters of *legibility*/the ‘Law’ and, by implication, to the *oikonomisation* of human life. In short, it points to biopolitical ‘inscription/writing’. Put differently, initially, it, ‘literature’, points to the activity, process and result of *imposing* meaning, subjugating human beings to representation.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, in this thesis, ‘literature’ is – to start with – taken to resonate with a Derridean or deconstructionist notion of ‘writing’, insofar as “effacing the presence of a thing and yet keeping it legible, in Derrida’s lexicon, is ‘writing’” (Spivak 2016, p. lxi). Viewed from this particular, *oikonomic* perspective, ‘literature’ rests on a “gesture that both frees us from, and guards us within, the metaphysical enclosure” (ibid.). In other words, inasmuch as, following Derrida,

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<sup>45</sup> As stressed, *pace* Cooper, representation does not simply refer to different signifieds. It refers also to life’s submission to what Cooper calls ‘the zero symbolic value of the signifier as play’. It refers to the Law’s normal functioning and its *virtual* suspension as zero-degree signification.

“[the] advent of writing is the advent of play” (2016, p. 7), ‘literature’ designates life’s fateful entrapment in infinitely deferred signification. For, ‘play’ or, synonymous herewith, *illegible* non-meaning, as “the shaking up of [...] the metaphysics of presence” (p. 54), function, within a Derridean/deconstructionist horizon, as the quasi-foundation of constantly postponed, alterable *legibility* or interpretation. As but the non-meaning *of* meaning, ‘literature’, i.e. ‘writing’, ‘play’ or ‘illegibility’, reflect and cement imprisonment in biopolitics.

However, once subject to ‘exposition’, Agamben emphasises, ‘literature’ – it turns out – does “not [correspond to] the desire ‘to write this or that specific work or novel’” (cited in de la Durantaye 2009, p. 3). Instead, under the banner of ‘exposition’, ‘literature’ refers to “something much vaster – something more ‘senseless and strange [*insensata e strana*]’, but also ‘more profound than any set goal or aim’” (ibid.). That is, ‘literature’, on this contrasting view, amounts to rendering *oikonomia* inoperative. It amounts to returning to ‘play’ and, thus, to non-meaning, their purely profane vocation, severing writing(s) from signification, including zero-degree signification. All in all, while, initially, ‘literature’ refers to linguistic *imposition*, once subject to ‘exposition’, language is *ex-posed* and *exposed*, neutralising *oikonomic* language and revealed in its *suchness* – its incorruptible *il-legibility*.<sup>46</sup>

## Summary

In view of the above, one can summarise *this* thesis’s aim as pivoting upon testifying to the *possibility* of rendering *oikonomia* inoperative. Indeed, its aim is to neutralise biopolitical language’s positionings and to show and use language outside of representation. Based on a ‘contactual’ ‘non-relation’/‘non-articulation’ between the living being and the speaking being, it is to testify to the *possibility* of *u-topia*. It is to turn an impasse into an exit, a ‘way out’.

## Disposition

With the parameters of this thesis outlined, the next couple of *paragraphs* are dedicated to detailing this book’s disposition: first the thesis’s theory and method are discussed, before the *exposition* chapters’ varying foci are zoomed in upon. Thereafter, the consequences of *exposition* with regard to justice are perused in the

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<sup>46</sup> *Here*, “in writing the philosopher will have to seek the point at which writing disappears in the voice, must chase it, in every discourse to the voice that was never written—to the idea” (Agamben 2024b, p. 119). That means, as for ‘exposed’ books, “they must be read in a totally different way, perceiving not the meaning and the discourse, but the language, [...] whose syllables I sound out ecstatically without understanding them” (pp. 88–9).

*plērōma* chapter. Then, final ideas and *this* thesis's contribution are pointed to. And, finally, a postilla rounds off *this* book.

## Theory

*This* thesis's next chapter is devoted to theory. Couched in assessments that point to the dismal state of theory in organisation scholarship, I delineate, based on Agamben's Deleuze-inspired musings, an alternative that involves grasping human life as '*immediately* theoretical'. More concretely, in this context, I delineate such contemplative life as absolutely immanent. That means that, with such an *idea* of theory, life can no longer, by way of the *virtual* state of exception, be separated from theory. And, by extension, theory, in the form of this or that semantic content, can no longer be imposed on such separated bare, *illegible* life. Instead, such absolutely immanent, immediately theoretical life coincides with *exposition* and defies *oikonomia*. Here, life, due to its being *immediately* theoretical, becomes *il-legible*. It becomes severed from biopolitical appropriation.

## Method

Building on from this, *this* thesis's chapter 'Method: on profane messianism' is concerned with method, grasping method (from the Greek morphemes *met* and *hodós*, meaning together 'pursuit of the way') as boiling down to profane messianism. That is, this chapter grasps method as turning on completely neutralising *oikonomic* imposition or, if you prefer, the Law. Method, thus pointing to the inseparability of life and messianic belief, of life and inoperativity, is, then, shown to counter social divisions. Specifically, it is shown to counter research's reduction to membership work. Instead, method, as it is outlined here, unfurls an *anoikonomic* divinity. It unfurls God as amounting to the irreducible profanity of the world. In this context, thwarted messianisms are cautioned against as they, rather than offering a *real* exception, ground humanity in a *virtual* exception. Since they fail to grasp inoperativity as the ultimate, messianic *telos* of the law. Moreover, the articles analysed in *this* thesis are listed, all of which have been collected with a view to help spur the loosening (analysis) of data (the visible) from the confines of signification, law and history. Finally, briefly referring to Kafka, this chapter shows how method, study and gesture are necessarily intertwined.

## Exposing constataction

*This* thesis's chapter 'Exposing constataction' exposes putative constative references. More concretely, the articles *analysed* in this chapter refer to the irreducible objectivity of a post-industrial, Western, late-capitalist future argued to be increasingly marked by service work. In so doing, these texts identify the



performance of aestheticised, deferential ‘emotional labour’ as a key commodity that working-class men – now found to be condemned to unemployment, to an inhabitation of ‘the past’ – are, owing to a confining Bourdieusian ‘habitus’, unable to produce and alienate. Indeed, working-class men’s ‘habitus’, claimed to be outdated, is positioned as negative whilst – as *opposed* to this – working-class women’s and middle-class men’s habitus is appraised as *positive*. That means the latter are constated as ‘timely’.

Briefly drawing on Kafka, this chapter suggests that ‘shame’, as concerning the anguish to indwell a language that no longer signifies, provides a way out of such *oikonomic* constatation.

### **Exposing administration**

This thesis’s chapter ‘Exposing administration’ comprises two different cases, both of which criticise the supposedly insufficient administrative enforcement of the future. In the first case, following a longstanding interest in the opposition between informal and formal organisation, employment office staff’s *allegedly* informal policy administration is seen to endanger or jeopardise the actuality of a formal-cum-workfare-based United Kingdom. In the latter case, following a longstanding interest in the opposition between the subjective and the objective, subjective-cum-ethnocentric public sector employees are *seen* to impede the realisation of an objective-cum-diverse and potentiality-centred, workist Sweden. Ultimately that is to say that in both cases substandard employees or, better, substandard frontline workers are seen to put a spoke in the wheel. After all, the observed, positioned as temporally distanced from the, by comparison, more sophisticated and complex time of an omniscient observer, are seen to fetter the future, argued to keep unemployed service users and, in the latter case, migrant workers, two sorts of customers, from being neatly *emplaced* – from being properly administratively codified/classified. Seen to threaten our continuous *historical* advancement, they are to be kept ‘at bay’, with their comportment found to urgently need managerial correction.

To counter *oikonomic* administration, this chapter suggests that we *a-knowledge* ourselves as irreducibly ‘poor’ or ‘nude’. It suggests that we *a-knowledge* ourselves as inoperative.

### **Exposing government imposition**

Partly different in scope, for it concerns criticism levelled against a supposedly insufficiently thought-out governmental future, this book’s chapter ‘Exposing government imposition’ looks at a critique of Australian government publications’ arguably ageist, potentiality-insensitive *imposition* of ‘the older worker’. It looks at

a critique that remains tied to the vision of an inclusive-cum-entrepreneurial Australia, a futurist vision marked by an overarching *active/inactive* binary that reproduces ‘enterprising spirit’ as an irrevocable, discursively commanding gold standard.

To help counter this imposition and, thus, to provide a ‘way out’, this chapter draws on Agamben, arguing that we ought to become apostles concerned with messianic hope and faith. For such hope and faith unfurl a remnant, irreducible to biopolitics. They unfurl *il-legible* play. They unfurl inoperative ‘entre-prise’.

## Exposing identity production

This book’s chapter ‘Exposing identity production’ turns once again to Sweden, focusing on a critique of *supposedly* insufficiently futuristic identity production. Concretely, subscribing to an ableist discourse that calls for rapid transition of rapidly (re)activated employees of sheltered workshops into the ‘ordinary labour market’, the publications in question take issue with the operator of these workshops, viz., Samhall. For Samhall is argued to foster negative identities that harm participants’ activation and transition. Essentially relying upon an *able/disabled* binarism, Samhall is argued to keep these employees from being part of, and from belonging to, a workist future. Negatively *positioned* as an epitome of the past, it is regarded to keep participants locked in ‘the past’, which means that the publications analysed here overlook the *possibility* of what Agamben calls *de-identification*.

To help bring about such *de-identification*, this chapter draws briefly on Kafka’s *A Country Doctor* and suggests that comic gestures, which point to an absent basis of knowledge, allow us to exit medicalised, biopolitical identities.<sup>47</sup>

## Plērōma

This book’s chapter ‘Plērōma: on purely mediate justice’ deals with silhouetting the consequences of *exposition* with regard to organisational justice. Briefly compared to Derridean and Luhmannian approaches to justice, Agamben’s Benjamin-inspired formulation of post-judicial justice is introduced and connected to Agamben’s musing on happy life, ethics and pure means. In sum, justice emerges, then, as pivoting on the fulfilment (*plērōma*) of the law, which, in turn, entails the law’s inoperativity. To help illustrate all this, Kafka’s work is once again drawn upon, with much focus resting on an Agambenian reading of *In the Penal Colony*.

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<sup>47</sup> Importantly, all texts analysed are *oikonomic* as they reduce human beings to this or that emplacement, be it called identity, classification, discursive subjectivity or constated habitus.

## Final ideas

This book's chapter 'Final ideas: on Agamben and Cooper' introduces Agamben's term *idea* and juxtaposes Agamben's work with Cooper's work by focusing on issues such as love, God, knowledge and organisation.

## Contribution

Thereafter, the chapter 'Contribution: on a way out' underlines *this* book's contribution, focusing upon how an altered reception of Agamben's, Kafka's and Cooper's work may serve to help turn an impasse into an exit – into a way out.

## Postilla

Finally, *this* thesis ends with a postilla that, aware of its similarities to a true proem, seeks to purify the law from any commandment. That is, messianically, this postilla, too, seeks to wrest language from biopolitical incarceration. It seeks to *expose imposition*. As such, this postilla grasps itself as the *paradigm* of the end of time, hoping to help neutralise the *virtual* state of exception – the state of exception in which, according to Agamben, we live. To this end, it draws briefly on Kafka's *parable Before the Law*. After all, this *parable*, Agamben argues, both encapsulates the *virtual* state of exception and, simultaneously, gestures towards its undoing. In fact, by way of 'studying', i.e. by way of safeguarding a non-'relational' 'contact' between *phone* and *logos*, the *virtual* state of exception, the *parable* may be taken to imply, can be turned into a *real* state of exception. Since, in 'studying' the grammatological hinge (i.e. 'relation') between *phone* and *logos*, potentiality and act, is suspended. Indeed, 'studying' causes the door of the Law/Other to be shut forever, with man, thus, being able to, as for *oikonomia*/biopolitics, find a 'way out'. Now, only after the door of the Law is shut can the Messiah enter and, in a profaned way, *show (mostra)* his inoperativity.

# Theory: on absolute immanence

“*Theōria* and the contemplative life, which the philosophical tradition identified as its highest goal for centuries, will have to be dislocated onto a new plane of immanence.” (Agamben 1999b, p. 239)

Theory, it is fair to say, tends to be viewed as the meat and potatoes of organisation scholarship (e.g. Hatch 2018; Styhre 2024; Zundel and Kokkalis 2010). But what (organisation) theory actually *is* and *can be* has often been perceived as a knotty issue (e.g. Reed and Burrell 2019; O’Doherty 2007), with myriad organisation scholars taking issue with the current state of ‘theory’; Spoelstra, worried about a gradual narrowing down of ‘theory’, for example, underlines that “‘theory’ is today primarily associated with methodology and the idea of a fixed path or a stable position” (2021, p. 163). As a result, for Spoelstra, there has been too little attention given to a beneficial and critical “drifting away from a narrow focus on the matter [allegedly] urgently at hand” (p. 177). For him, ‘theory’ tends to be yoked to preconceived notions of ‘relevance’ and ‘common sense’. From another perspective, while also uneasy about prevalent modes of ‘theorising’, Oswick et al. call on organisation theorists to exit their “‘cognitive comfort zone’” (2002, p. 299) and, instead, to enter what is referred to as a “cognitive discomfort zone” (ibid.). For Oswick et al. construe the latter as “the basis of generative, transformative, and frame-breaking insights” (p. 301). No doubt, they construe it as the quintessence of more innovative, interesting and up-to-date ‘theory’. Also concerned with the dismal state of ‘theorising’, Tsoukas suggests that we take “aim at complexifying theories” (2017, p. 132). That is, for him, we ought to engage in “the joining up of concepts normally used in a compart-mentalized manner” (ibid.) so as to “do justice to organizational complexity” (ibid.).

Against this background, scholars in our field have increasingly recognised and, even more so, encouraged a plurality of stances apropos ‘theorising’ organisation. Eichler and Billsberry, for instance, have attempted to map different “implicit theories of theories” (2023, p. 258). In so doing, they have *inter alia* suggested that the ‘theories of theories’ they have discerned “range from simple notions that theory is an idea or a concept, through frameworks of understanding, to cause and effect relationships for managerial understanding” (ibid.). Similarly, Cornelissen et al., in an essay focusing upon the range of forms that theorising *might* take, have stressed that different “forms of theorizing differ in terms of their aims, style of reasoning, their contributions, and the way in which they are written up as papers” (2021, p.

1). Such encouraged plurality notwithstanding, common to the growing cacophony of assessments is, as indicated, a palpable sense of dissatisfaction as far as the current state of ‘theory’ is concerned. Not surprisingly, I share this dissatisfaction, even though my point of criticism and the alternative I provide differ from what has been touched on so far; the bottom line is that, relying on Agamben, I define and approach ‘theory’ as “philosophical wisdom” (2014b, p. 13). And, rather than treating ‘theory’ as a matter of *oikonomia* (a governing, patterning ‘Law’), I follow in Agamben’s footsteps, insofar as I, like him, grasp ‘theory’ as pivoting upon the “potentiality of a joyfully and intransigently *in-fantile* existence” (ibid.). That is, rather than reducing philosophical wisdom (‘theory’) to the communicative *imposition* of this or that semantic content, I gesture towards the *exposition* (revelation) and *ex-position* (neutralisation) of language. Doing so means to think of ‘theory’ in terms of what Agamben, inspired by the late Deleuze, calls an “immanence [that] is immanent only to itself” (1999b, p. 227). *Contra* deconstruction, it means to think of philosophical wisdom (‘theory’) without grammatological ‘articulation’ between *phoné* and *logos*. Importantly, it means ‘theorising’ without any (transcendent) ‘relation’.

Another way of saying this is that I refrain from anchoring ‘theorising’ in the *virtual* state of exception (a ‘bare life’ based on which meaning may in principle be configured) and, instead, hope to bring about a *real* state of exception (a life that entirely defies the imposition of meaning). As a consequence, the ‘relation’ I hope to undo in this thesis goes beyond Cooper’s notion of relation; after all, for him, to “re-late [...] is to *translate* the latency of the pre-objective world into a reserve of parts or elements that can be endlessly combined and permuted to create and re-create the meaningful and communicable forms of life” (2005b, p. 1699). What Cooper, again and again, overlooks is that the latency he refers to is precisely a *virtual* exception. It is but life submitted to an empty and absolute law without any specific laws, rather than profane(d) life. Indeed, it is but an instance of ‘the *virtual* ban’, allowing life to be captured in biopolitics. By implication, here, I focus neither on pre-objective latency (the Law’s *virtual* exception) nor upon its translation into meaningful forms (the Law’s normal functioning). Rather, I approach ‘theory’, with Agamben, as turning on an “unpresupposable non-latency” (1993a, p. 9). That means that I grasp “theory as [...] touching (*thigein*)” (1999b, p. 234), as a ‘contact’ (*contāgiō*) between *phoné* and *logos*, potentiality and act, with all representation eliminated. ‘Theorising’, dislocated this way, means “opening to an alterity that [...] remains absolutely immanent” (p. 223). It means opening to an alterity that defies signification, including signification’s *virtual* suspension as the ‘latency’ of still unprofaned play/non-meaning.

Curiously, Case et al.’s historically focused work upon *theōria*, i.e. the Greek term from which ‘theory’ also derives, remains stuck in *oikonomia*. Since, for Case et al., *theōria* “entails a form of situated connectedness that is beyond words, conception and seeing” (2012, p. 358). Indeed, in their opinion, “*theoria* entails an engagement

with the unknowable and comprises knowing beyond words” (p. 346). As in Cooper’s work, a ‘latency’ is simply *presupposed* rather than *exposed*, which, as should be evident by now, opens the door to life’s submission to biopolitics. For Agamben, by contrast, “life itself [...] is immediately contemplation (*theoria*)” (2015b, p. 215), so that any *virtual* exception gives way to a *real* state of exception, there being no ‘theory’ to be applied or ‘related’ to life.<sup>48</sup> Since, with immediately theoretical life, no latent ‘bare life’ is produced. Rather, as stressed above, there is ‘contact’ (*contāgiō*). In other words, on Agamben’s profane-cum-messianic reading, with *theōria*-contemplation, all “works—linguistic and bodily, material and immaterial, biological and social—are deactivated and contemplated as such in order to liberate the inoperativity that has remained imprisoned in them” (p. 278). Taken together, that means that “[t]he political [emerges as] [...] the dimension that the inoperativity of contemplation, by deactivating linguistic and corporeal, material and immaterial praxes, ceaselessly opens and assigns to the living” (2011d, p. 251). Bearing this in mind, it becomes clear that “[c]ontemplation is the paradigm of use” (p. 63), with ‘use’ referring to “the epiphany of unattainability” (1993b, p. 26). It refers to non-appropriation. Obviously, following Agamben, as far as ‘theory’ is concerned, *this* thesis bears, then, witness to a life that remains absolutely immanent and, owing to its non-latency, remains outside of *oikonomia*. Throughout *this* book, I bear witness to a life that is *immediately* ‘theoretical’ and, hence, inoperative. In contemplating/theorising, I bear witness to the *il-legibility* of play. Testifying to the *possibility* of immediately theoretical life, I turn an impasse (*oikonomia*) into an exit (*inoperativity*).

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<sup>48</sup> In other words, “[d]uring the instant of contemplation—an eternal instant—you can no longer distinguish between mind and body” (Agamben 2023c, p. 15).



# Method: on profane messianism

“Jesus is the way [*hodós*], and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father [*Patéra*] except through Jesus.” (John 14:6)

## Pursuing the way towards the law

Repeatedly, organisation scholars have emphasised that the term ‘method’ can be traced to the Greek term *méthodos* (e.g. Butler and Spoelstra 2023; Calori 1998; Helin et al. 2014; Holt and Hjorth 2014; Holt and Reay 2018; Jonker and Pennink 2010; Kaulingfreks and Ten Bos 2005; Nayak 2008; Quattrone 2000). Thus, ‘method’, it has, on any number of occasions, been pointed out, can literally be taken to refer to the pursuit (*met*) of the way, road, street, track or path (*hodós*). It is against this background that Butler and Spoelstra highlight that “a method is commonly understood as a path to knowledge” (2023, p. 1266). Broadly building thereon, ‘method’, I suggest in this chapter, can, equally, be taken to refer to the pursuit of the way (*hodós*) towards the ‘*nomos*’ (see Zartaloudis 2020).

Indeed, ‘method’, I argue, can be taken to refer to the way (*hodós*) towards whatever one winds up taking to be the law or, coterminous herewith, the Father/*Patéra* (God).<sup>49</sup> In other words, given our seeming status as ‘speaking/organising animals’ (e.g. Bunz 2020; O’Doherty 2017; Parker 2002), it, ‘method’, concerns the way (*hodós*) in which *phoné* (voice) and *logos* (language) – animal and cultivating or organising speech or, if you prefer, life and politics – interpenetrate one another. As such, ‘method’ emerges as linked to questions around the (im)possibilities of human

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<sup>49</sup> In Cooper’s work, such a “father imposes constraint by naming” (2016h, p. 62), while, in discernibly circular fashion, “[t]he function of the name is to constrain, and constraint is the source of pattern” (p. 63) – of, etymologically, a *patéra*. In concert herewith, Arnaud defines the ‘Other’, a term Lacan-inspired (organisation) scholarship has popularised, as “the pre-eminence of a transsubjective extraneous place, from which all discourse emanates, as it were, and where speech is necessarily constituted: the place of the family, of the law of the father in Freudian theory, of history and of social positions” (2002, p. 700). Under the banner of such ‘father(s)’, organisers, Kenny holds, are “both created and also constrained by language, through its dependence for existence upon the symbolic order—a system of interlinked signifiers across which meaning is transmitted” (2020, p. 187)... By contrast, in my thesis, ‘God’ names, however, the profanity of the world; God names inoperativity: the *ex-position* and *exposition* of language.



life. At its heart, it – ‘method’ – emerges as intrinsically linked to our fully coming to terms with our inevitable interlocking(s) with the *nomos*/law...

Consonantly, ‘method’ may – at least at first glance – seem to be meant to help disclose the laws (*nomoi*) held to be *governing* human life. Yet, in truth, it tends to be the ‘methods’ – at least if, with Morgan and Smircich, defined as “the various views different social scientists hold about human beings and their world” (1980, p. 492) – that help enact these *governing* (*oikonomic*) laws (*nomoi*). Henceforth, it is, basically, our view of “man as a social constructor” (ibid.) or – ultimately indistinguishable therefrom, for both views rely upon linguistic imposition – of “man as a responder” (ibid.) that, *oikonomically*/‘methodically’, (re)produce the ‘*nomos*’ (see Andersen 2003; Arnaud 2002; Baecker 2012; Burrell and Morgan 1979; Duberley et al. 2012; Parker 2009, 2016, 2021; Strati 2000)<sup>50</sup>... In any event, ‘method’, Cunliffe – echoing prevalent sentiments marking, if not constituting, the realm of ‘qualitative organisation scholarship’ – suggests, becomes, by and large, tantamount to the practice of “considering our metatheoretical positioning” (2011, p. 646).<sup>51</sup>

## Countering socially produced division

But, alas, such considerations, all too often, turn out to be little else than what Munro (1999), critically, refers to as ‘membership work’ (cf. Luhmann 1994, 2018a, 2019). More often than not, they, these considerations regarding metatheoretical positioning, are part and parcel of polemicising collective identity projects that pit ‘us’ against ‘them’ and, in so doing, aim, at least in the upshot, at status (re)production. Frequently, these considerations and, therefore, ‘methods’ are part and parcel of reproductive, *governmental* (*oikonomic*) practices that, as in Cooper’s case, cast “‘division’ as a central force in the social production of ‘visibility’” (2016i, p. 175). Lamentably, they tend to be part and parcel of biopolitics, reproductively suppressing that, as organisers, we “must not make the invisible visible, but only and ever the visible” (Agamben 2022a, p. 124). Regularly, methods

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<sup>50</sup> Here, I take as given that casting man ‘as a responder’, too, turns out to imply ‘construction’, insofar as ‘the responder’ merely reacts to, and follows, social constructions. As for viewing man ‘as a social constructor’ or ‘as a responder’, this, in turn, underlines both views’ secret solidarity and what appears to be their (pseudo-)antagonistic co-dependence on one another.

<sup>51</sup> In this chapter, ‘method’ is used rather inclusively; thus, while, as Duberley and Johnson note, organisation scholars tend to use ‘method’ only to refer to the “modes, procedures or tools used for collection and analysis of data” (2016, p. 66), the broader term ‘methodology’ tends to be turned to in order to describe a “set of beliefs and their accompanying methods” (ibid.). Duberley and Johnson, however, also suggest that “methods cannot be divorced from their overarching [...] methodology” (ibid.), with *this* book, partly inspired by this suggestion, using ‘method’ to highlight the inseparability of life and messianic belief – life and inoperativity.

are reduced to practices aimed at making an ‘*absent presence*’ *legible*, thus ignoring life in its *suchness/il-legibility*.

Sadly, much of what goes by the term ‘reflexivity’, too, casts socially produced ‘*division*’ as a vital, if not axiomatic characteristic of organisation and, contained therein, of organisation scholarship. Haynes, for example, suggests that, in order to be reflexive (rather than unreflexive), we organisation scholars doing qualitative research attentively ‘visibilise’ “how our intellectual, perceptual, theoretical, ideological, cultural, textual and cognitive principles and assumptions inform the interpretation” (2012, p. 73). Pointedly, she maintains that, in order to be included ‘members’ (rather than excluded ‘non-members’), we, as quickly as possible, become aware of, account for and, if deemed necessary, update our socio-‘methodical’ *divisions*...

Concretely, Haynes suggests that we become aware of, account for and, if deemed necessary, update our practices of distinguishing that ‘visibilise’ or, to use systems theoretical language, ‘observe’ (see Andersen 2009; Andersen and Pors 2017; Cooper 2005a) ‘us’ as distinct from ‘them’. Effectively, one might say that she – participating in a peculiar discourse that, paradoxically, seeks to govern us as ‘self-governing’ (rather than simply governed) (see Andersen 2012) – suggests that we become ‘observers of our own observations’; this means that, in her visibilisations of the invisible, i.e. of the ‘meaningless play’ or what Cooper calls “the unseeable space of raw mass” (2001b, p. 41), we are to visibilise ourselves as divided from those who use unbecoming, antiquated visualisations of themselves as dividing and/or, to make things even worse, do *not* ‘observe’ their own *divisions/distinctions*.

In this wider, ‘methodical’-cum-*divisive* context, Prasad, for instance, positively visibilises/‘observes’, and appeals to, an eminent ‘us’ that, insofar as ‘we’ reject the tenets of positivism, is devoted to “the understanding of complex, nuanced, and context-dependent social processes” (2018, p. 4). And, moreover, this apparently pluralistic ‘us’, we are told, works within “reputed intellectual *craft traditions*” (ibid.). At the same time, this elevated, attentive and versatile ‘us’ is, ‘visibly’, distinguished from certain ‘others’ who, narrowly, work “with numerical data or statistical procedures” (p. 2) and/or adopt a “commonsensical realist approach to ontological and epistemological issues” (ibid.). In fact, ‘they’ are negatively ‘visibilised’ as still believing in the “accurate use of ‘objective’ methods for data collection” (ibid.)...

By implication, Prasad, it seems, winds up positing/constructing/‘observing’ ‘us’ members as admirably up-to-date and ‘them’ non-members as maddeningly out-of-date, with ‘them’ ultimately held responsible for what Agamben, using distinctly messianic references, calls “the delay of the Kingdom” (2023c, p. 46). ‘They’ are held responsible for the delay of the good – of the Father/*Patéra*. However, as Agamben underlines, “the delay—history—is the train from which priests [‘us’] and

rabbis [‘them’] do their utmost to prevent us stepping off, to keep us from seeing that we have always already arrived” (ibid.)...

As an aside, my point here differs from Mir and Jain’s remarks, which, in contrast to Prasad, stress that “the boundary between qualitative and quantitative research is a spurious construct” (2018, p. 2). Thus, while I concur with Mir and Jain’s assessment that “orthodoxies of our field have [oftentimes] moved us in the direction of watertight compartments, where a mutual suspicion characterizes the interaction between the two camps” (ibid.), my aim is *not* (so much) to highlight that “there are positivist qualitative researchers and inductive statisticians galore” (ibid.). That is, my point is *not* (so much) to suggest that certain ‘priests’ do (some) rabbi things and that certain ‘rabbis’ do (some) priest things. Rather, I suggest that we refrain from socially produced *divisions* and, instead, as touched on, visibilise the visible: inoperativity.

Regrettably, as far as the ‘study’ of the *nomos* – of the Father/*Patéra* – is concerned, little, if anything, is won in this connection. That is to say, little is won if we – like Cooper – mistake ‘study’ for what Cooper himself calls “a compulsive force that repetitively and literally *per-forms* social forms” (cited in Chia and Kallinikos 1998, p. 152). Little is won if we, with Cooper, grasp “discipline-professions as social practices which create and maintain ‘division’ through visualization techniques” (2016i, p. 175) *and*, to top it all, by simply following in the footsteps of Cooper or of Haynes and Prasad for that matter, propel, and participate in, such *divisive* activities. Here – to put it with De Cock – we are, deplorably, still subject to “the rails [*hodoi*] of history [that] simply accelerate us into disaster” (2020, p. 384). Arguably, we – as (increasingly self-governing/self-‘observing’) ‘dividers’ – are still moving away from, and are kept from unlocking, the good. We do not come to terms with the *nomos*...

Notably, by reducing ‘method’ to a (quasi-)religious, *divisive* struggle for the right path/*hodós* towards the Father/*Patéra*, we are still moving away from, and are kept from unlocking, the Kingdom. Since, as Kafka famously intuits, the “Messiah will come only when he is no longer necessary” (1991, p. 28). He will come only if no longer conceived in mediating, ‘rabbinic’-cum-‘priestly’ terms. Or, as Hamacher – musing on Kafka’s *The Test* – glosses, “[t]he Messiah can only be the one for whom there is no Messiah” (2020, p. 144) *and*, in that sense, remains, happily, “forgotten by every historical messianism” (ibid.). That is to say that, in the last analysis, “we’re saved only when we’re no longer interested in being saved” (Agamben 2023c, p. 53). We’re saved only when we no longer want to be saved by (*oikonomically* conceived) ‘godly disclosure’.

## Unfurling an anoikonomic divinity

In this light, as touched upon before, the ‘study’ of the *nomos* (see Agamben 1995, 2005a, 2011a, 2022a; Harney and Morten 2013; Kotsko and Salzani 2017; Salzani 2017a, 2019; Snock 2012; Spoelstra 2024; Zartaloudis 2010, 2020) does *not* turn on advocating or applying this or that ‘law’ (*nomos*). It does not pivot upon *oikonomia* (government). Instead, the ‘study’ of the *nomos* concerns guarding, and testifying to, the non-fusion, i.e. to the non-relational ‘contact’ (*contāgiō*), between life (*physis*) and law (*nomos*) – between potentiality and act. It concerns guarding, and testifying to, a non-relational ‘contact’ – an absence of representation – between *phoné* and *logos*. It concerns the *anoikonomic* immediacy of the divine.

Or, as Brown’s intriguing work can be taken to imply, ‘study’ concerns the opening up of a “space of liberty for non-proprietary living” (2016, p. 146), with ‘method’, using Benjamin’s words, in truth, aimed at countering “the degeneration of study into the heaping up of information” (1996c, p. 43). Crucially, *pace* Derrida (and Cooper), ‘method’ – seen from this ‘anti-rabbinic’ and ‘anti-priestly’ angle – aims even at countering the degeneration of ‘study’ into hazy, deferred information. Differently put, once properly understood, ‘method’ puts an end to (the compulsive force taken to spur) the *per-forming* and *re-forming* of social forms – of socio-historical divisions, said to rely on “an invisible and missing wholeness” (Cooper 2005b, p. 1696).

Accordingly, neither Prasad’s championed priestly ‘us’ members nor her debased rabbinical ‘them’ non-members get to the bottom of the *nomos*, with ‘study’ and ‘method’ – in her ‘visibilisations’ or what Cooper, affirmatively, calls, “‘labour of division’” (2016i, p. 175) – tending to be reduced to instruments of socio-juridical positioning. No doubt, they tend to be reduced to biopolitical claims regarding socio-economic privileges, complicit in what Fabian calls ‘the denial of coevalness’, i.e. the tendency to negate ‘others’ their presence in the same age as ‘ours’ (see Barros and Wanderley 2020).

More importantly though, with Prasad, they, ‘study’ and ‘method’, clamp down on what Agamben refers to as a “way [*hodós*] out of history” (2022b, p. 11). They clamp down on ‘testimony’, insofar as “testimony interrupts history and the discourse of lies, without inaugurating an ulterior time or discourse” (p. 79)... As with Cooper, ‘study’ and ‘method’, in Prasad’s exceedingly influential stipulations, are, appreciably, compromised, treated as subservient to *oikonomia* (signification or government). Together, they become a biopolitical apparatus, suppressing an ethics centred upon, and unfurling, what Agamben calls “an Ungovernable that is situated beyond states of domination and power relations” (2015b, p. 108).

Unfortunately, Martin Parker’s work can also be said to suppress an ethics of the Ungovernable. For he argues that – as organisers – we are necessarily entrapped in a situation where, mirroring Cooper’s priorly discussed dialectic relation between

readability and unreadability, “the construction of [...] ‘information’, ‘rationality’, ‘management’ or whatever relies on differentiating some features of the social world from some other ‘noise’, ‘irrationality’, ‘anarchy’ and so on” (2016, p. 495)...

What Parker ends up overlooking is, to put it with Kafka, that “truth is indivisible and is therefore incapable of recognizing itself; whatever claims to recognize it must therefore be a lie” (2006, p. 79). Or, as Kafka writes in the famous *Octavo Notebooks*, “in a world of lies, lies are not even eliminated by their opposites, but only by the world of truth” (1991, p. 265); thus, information/legibility is not even eliminated by its underlying noise/illegibility, but only by *il-legibility*/profane play...

To get around and adequately grapple with this pervasive pitfall, as far as ‘study’/‘method’ and, ultimately, the *nomos* and, thus, the Father are concerned, my focus dovetails here with what Prozorov – writing about Agamben – calls “‘profane messianism’” (2014, p. 7). After all, “the messianic is always profane, never religious” (Agamben, cited in Smith 2004, p. 140), unreservedly short-circuiting imposed ‘rabbinic’ and ‘priestly’ ‘division’/‘observation’. That is, with Agamben, I recognise, and hope to counter, the “anti-messianic tendencies [...] operating within the Church as well as in the Synagogue” (2005b, p. 1). ‘Studiously’/‘methodically’, my approach boils, then, down to the neutralisation and revelation of language. For, following Agamben’s reading of Paul of Tarsus, “the Messiah renders the *nomos* inoperative” (2005b, p. 98).

In fact, the Messiah – Agamben tirelessly stresses – coincides with “a law rendered destitute of its power to command” (2015b, p. 273). In other words, the Messiah, as a genuinely ‘anti-rabbinic’ and ‘anti-priestly’ way (*hodós*), coincides with what Prozorov terms an “experience of language prior to and beyond all signification” (2014, p. 5). It coincides with an experience of language that supplants (the force underlying) the necessarily *divisive* *per-forming* and *re-forming* of social forms with the perfect messianic performative of faith (*performativum fidei*). Because, as Zartaloudis notes, “the perfect messianic performative of *faith* (*performativum fidei*) deactivates the penitential and sacramental performance of the law” (2010, p. 301).<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> It should be clear that this ‘experience of language prior to and beyond all signification’ must not be confused with what Cooper calls a “void of ‘di-vide’” (cited in Chia and Kallinikos 1998, p. 15); it must not be confused with the ‘zero-degree signification’, which, in Cooper’s view, “the labour of division has to exclude in its construction of positive spaces and times” (ibid.)... Suffice it to stress here that, with this experience, “rule [Cooper’s division or Parker’s information] and life [Cooper’s void or Parker’s noise] lose their familiar meaning to point in the direction of a third thing” (Agamben 2013b, p. xii); they point to the ‘use’ and non-appropriation underlying what may be called ‘form-of-life’: “a life that can never be separated from its form” (Agamben 2000, p. 3). Critically, they point to a life that can never be posited or presupposed as ‘void’/‘noisy’ and, thus, never as the basis and motivating force of *division*/information (see also Fusco 2022).

## Countering thwarted messianism

Patently, Agamben's reading of Paul differs sharply from that of Deslandes. Since, unlike Agamben, Deslandes – focusing on diverse organisational constraints – does not believe Paul to point to 'perfect nihilism/messianism', i.e. to inoperativity. Rather, Deslandes, bizarrely, takes Paul to gesture towards a confrontation with "difficulties, our limitations and, occasionally, our concerns, in order to more effectively overcome them when the opportunity arises" (2020, p. 135), with Deslandes, like too many others, remaining stuck in *oikonomia*.

Similarly, Agamben's reading of messianism also differs from that of Derrida. After all, 'profane messianism' neutralises even "a law that *is in force* but does not *signify*" (Agamben 1998, p. 51) or, coterminous herewith, "signification that only signifies itself" (2005b, p. 103). Otherwise stated, Agamben's 'profane messianism' also comprises the neutralisation of what Derrida promotes as "messianism without content" (2006, p. 82). Crucially, *pace* Derrida, messianic destitution also comprises the neutralisation of the 'virtual state of exception', making the 'virtual exception' (imperfect nihilism/messianism) a 'real exception' (perfect nihilism/messianism)...

Put slightly differently, Agamben's messianic destitution neutralises even the 'undecidability' or empty 'zero-degree signification' that Derrida intends by the phrase "a messianic without messianism" (2006, p. 74). Since it, this destitution, recognises that "[d]econstruction is a thwarted messianism, a suspension of the messianic" (Agamben 2005b, p. 103). With this in view, I, decidedly, abstain from *oikonomically* positioning man as a 'social constructor' (i.e. as a producer of the *nomos*) or, connectedly, as a 'responder' (i.e. as a reaction or effect of the [*oikonomically* produced] *nomos*).

Because here, I am, in following Agamben, concerned with delineating 'method' as pivoting on "bringing language itself to language" (1993c, p. 83). Regarding 'method', I am concerned "not [with] this or that content of language, but [with] language *itself*" (ibid.). I am concerned with unfurling language that no longer signifies, and also with rejecting deconstruction's anchoring in signification that signifies itself only...

Consequently, echoing a growing interest in (quasi-)messianic and/or redemption-centred motifs amongst organisation scholars (e.g. Beverungen et al. 2013; Butler and Spoelstra 2024b; Case 1999; De Cock 2020; Deslandes 2020; Dyck and Wiebe 2012; Höpfl 2003a, 2012; Kociatkiewicz and Kostera 2019; Murtola 2012; Śliwa et al. 2013; Spoelstra et al. 2021; Sørensen 2008, 2010, 2014a,b; Thaning et al. 2016), I attend, in this context, to the conspicuous 'profane messianism' I take to inhere in 'method'. Siding with Watkin, that means that I do "not sign up to the death of God but to his deactivation" (2014, p. 28).

Put simply, I do not sign up to a renunciation or destruction of language, but to its being rendered inoperative, wresting language/the *nomos*/the Father from the influence of mediating ‘rabbis’ and ‘priests’, so as to profane it. No doubt, I sign up to an *anoikonomic* God or divine violence, insofar as, following Zartaloudis’s ruminations on Agamben’s Benjamin-inspired work, such “divine violence is the violence that leads to its [own] messianic *katargēsis*, its inoperativity, and, as such, it is a power or violence in alignment with the messianic, rather than the juridical or political powers” (2010, p. 129).

In other words, recognising the coincidence between this particular messianism and ‘method’ means “to revoke and render inoperative at each instant every aspect of the life that we live, and to make the life for which we live, [...] the ‘life of Jesus’, [...] appear within it” (Agamben 2011d, p. 248). It means to completely render inoperative the ‘law’, so as to offer and find a way out of biopolitical entrapment. Or, in short, it means to suspend *oikonomia*. As briefly touched upon above, at stake in ‘method’ is, then, “a form-of-life, that is to say, a life that is linked so closely to its form that it proves inseparable from it” (2013b, p. xi). At stake is a life beyond the grip of the ‘virtual state of exception’ and its presupposition of ‘continuous absence’ or ‘void’/‘noise’ as a drive to organise (cf. Cooper 1989, 2016i; Parker 2016). Indeed, at stake is a life beyond the production of ‘naked/bare life’, i.e. life beyond the production of a ‘void/noisy life’ on which identities (divisions or ‘observations’), whether stable or flexible, may or may not be imposed.

As a result, as alluded to in the introductory quote, my point of departure is that Jesus is the way/*hodós* and the truth and the life. For, as implied by the Gospel of John, no one comes to the Father – the *nomos* – except through Jesus. More specifically, with Agamben, I suggest here that “Christ as messiah is *telos nomou*, end and fulfillment of the law” (2013b, p. 46). Importantly, as Agamben stresses, under the aegis of this particular *telos nomou*, under the aegis of the Messiah, “the factual and juridico-political conditions in which each one finds himself must neither be hypostatized nor simply changed” (2015b, p. 56).

Instead, “[t]he ultimate and glorious *telos* of the law [...] is to be deactivated and made inoperative” (Agamben 2011d, p. 166). Or, as Thaning et al.’s brilliant work can be taken to intimate, the *telos nomou* coincides with the “‘deactivation’ of each and every social determination” (2016, p. 196). And, seen from this perspective, ‘method’, the Messiah, i.e. the way towards, and, by the same token, the end and fulfillment of, the *nomos* (God), gives rise to “a new possible use rather than an object of ownership and appropriation” (ibid.).

## Collecting with a view to analysing data

Following this profane way/*hodós*, *this* thesis's *exposition* relies on five thematically different case studies. Initially, using Google Scholar, 25 unemployment-related management articles were found and perused in this context. But, in order to ensure in-depth *exposition*, I eventually settled for five core articles. These five core articles, in turn, are complemented by thematically related, ancillary articles by the same author(s). All in all, including these eight thematically related, ancillary articles, 13 articles – adding up to a total of 278 pages of published, peer-reviewed academic text – form the basis of *this* thesis's *exposition*. Providing an overview, the table below contains central details of the 13 articles that make up these five cases.

**Table 1:** Articles underlying the case exposition

Case		Title of the article	Author(s)	Journal	Year of publication
1	Core article	'I Can't Put a Smiley Face On': Working-Class Masculinity, Emotional Labour and Service Work in the 'New Economy'	D. Nixon	Gender, Work & Organization	2009
	Side article	'I just Like Working with my Hands': Employment Aspirations and the Meaning of Work for Low-Skilled Unemployed Men in Britain's Service Economy	D. Nixon	Journal of Education & Work	2006
2	Core article	The Social Construction of Clients by Service Agents in Reformed Welfare Administration	P. Rosenthal, R. Peccei	Human Relations	2006
	Side article	'The Work You Want, the Help You Need': Constructing the Customer in Jobcentre Plus	P. Rosenthal, R. Peccei	Organization	2007
	Side article	The Customer Concept in Welfare Administration: Front-Line Views in Jobcentre Plus	P. Rosenthal, R. Peccei	International Journal of Public Sector Management	2006
3	Core article	Sorting People Out: The Uses of One-Dimensional Classificatory Schemes in a Multi-Dimensional World	A. Diedrich, U. Eriksson-Zetterquist, A. Styhre	Culture & Organization	2012
	Side article	Making the Refugee Multiple: The Effects of Classification Work	A. Diedrich, A. Styhre	Scandinavian Journal of Management	2008
4	Core article	The Enterprising Self: An Unsuitable Job for an Older Worker	S. Ainsworth, C. Hardy	Organization	2008
	Side article	Mind over Body: Physical and Psychotherapeutic Discourses	S. Ainsworth, C. Hardy	Human Relations	2009



5		and the Regulation of the Older Worker			
	Side article	Critical Discourse Analysis and Identity: Why Bother	S. Ainsworth, C. Hardy	Critical Discourse Studies	2004
	Core article	Identity Regulation in Neo-liberal Societies: Constructing the Occupationally Disabled Individual	M. Holmqvist, C. Maravelias, P. Skälén	Organization	2013
	Side article	Medicalization of Unemployment: Individualizing Social Issues as Personal Problems in the Swedish Welfare State	M. Holmqvist	Work, Employment & Society	2009
	Side article	The Active Welfare State and Its Consequences: A Case Study of Sheltered Employment in Sweden	M. Holmqvist	European Societies	2010

The selection of these articles has primarily been guided by the wish to provide a broad potpourri of different *oikonomic*/managerial themes. As a result, in addition to managerially conceived unemployment, these articles cover topics as diverse as ageism, categorisation/classification/codification/labelling, class, competence/skill, control, criticism, customer sovereignty, discourse, diversity/intersectionality, emotional labour, enterprise culture, frontline work, gender, habitus, identity/self, medicalisation, migrant/refugee labour, neoliberalism, new public management (NPM), post-industrial organisation, service work, sheltered work, social construction and validation.

It is these topics that – akin to unemployment – become the target of ‘study’. They become the target of ‘profane messianism’ or what Śliwa et al. call “profanation as a method in organization studies” (2013, p. 862) and are – in their being returned to their profanity – meant to further inspire the ‘study’ of all kinds of *oikonomic* topics. In line with Prozorov’s reading of Agamben, they are, in their profanity, meant to help us “break outside the confines of signification, law and history” (2014, p. 8). Returning to the narrow definition of ‘method’ as concerning ‘the modes of collecting and analysing data’, one can say that, here, the articles have been collected with a view to helping to spur the loosening (analysis) of data (the visible) from the confines of signification/law/history. They have been collected with a view to helping to render *oikonomia* inoperative.

## Kafkan studious gestures

In a way/*hodós*, ‘profane messianism’, it is true, follows the curious example of Kafka’s ‘students’. This concerns, for instance, Odradek, who – as Beyes and Holt

note – “is a real being, even though meaning is absent” (2019, p. 108). In other words, as a ‘student’, Odradek turns into a ‘form-of-life’ since he “offers nothing to grip” (ibid.).<sup>53</sup> In like fashion, Benjamin – an attentive reader of Kafka – can, too, be said to draw attention to the ‘profane messianism’ of Kafka’s ‘students’. Discussing the novel *Amerika* (*The Man Who Disappeared*), he stresses, for example, that the end of this novel constitutes a “dissolution of goings-on into the ‘gestural’” (1999, p. 801), with Hamacher (2011) helpfully underlining that ‘gesture’ – in Benjamin and Kafka – refers to that which was meant to carry the ‘law’ and, happily, remains after the (*oikonomic*) ‘law’ is gone: an experience of language prior to and beyond all signification.<sup>54</sup>

Obviously, that means that this *idea* of gesture differs from the dominant definition circulating in the management literature; Clarke et al., for instance, define ‘gesture’ as referring to the “movements of hands and arms that co-occur with speech” (2021, p. 141). Thus, rather than, as suggested by Agamben, pivoting on profanity, for Clarke et al., ‘gesture’ forms “a specific subset of embodied conduct” (ibid.). And, as such, it is found to be “coupled with the messages and actions that speakers project in natural settings” (ibid.). Indeed, for Clarke et al., focused upon “verbal and embodied messages [...] [in] their interplay” (p. 161), ‘gestures’ tend to “elaborate on what is said or add entirely new aspects not present in speech” (p. 141). Still, with Agamben, “what is at issue in gesture is not so much a prelinguistic content” (1999b, p. 78). Instead, what is at issue in studious gestures is *il-legibility* – an exit from biopolitics.

Vitaly, the above implies not only that I side with Jones and Ten Bos, inasmuch as they suggest that “Kafka is one of the greatest philosophers of organization” (2007, p. 15). It also implies that – resonating with Agamben’s reading of Kafka – I attend to, and recognise, what Snoek notes is “a Kafka who offers a way [*hodos*] out” (2012, p. 149). All that means that – through the profanity of the Messiah, through the ‘studious’ gesturing encapsulated in *métodos* – ‘rabbinic’ and ‘priestly’ works are finally suspended. Or, as Thaning et al. write, here “work [*oikonomia*] comes to terms with and finds peace in inoperativity” (2016, p. 211).

This can also be briefly illustrated by reference to Kafka’s *Excursion into the Mountains*, a short monologue that starts with a narrator exclaiming “‘I don’t know’, I cried without a sound” (1971, p. 55); of course – in a certain way – nobody has heard this ‘I’. Nobody has heard its exclamation. For, as mentioned, it is cried ‘without a sound’. And, yet, one has somehow ‘heard’ or read the ‘I’ and its

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<sup>53</sup> To reiterate, “form-of-life is the ‘way out’: the *hodos* leading to the interruption of the tragedy of our present through [...] endless profanation” (Fusco 2022, p. 196).

<sup>54</sup> That means that we should grasp “gesture as a non-signifying but expressive element, one which manifests itself in both language [...] and the face” (Agamben 2024b, p. 11).

exclamation, have we not? Critically, this, in turn, may be taken to suggest that the narrator, who knows that he doesn't know, and the one who hears the narrator, are not 'someone'. They are not the product of the 'labour of division', because, in some way, nothing 'legible', such as 'officer' or 'manager', has been heard or read.

At the same time, however, they are not 'noise' either. They are not some meaningless 'noise of communication' (i.e. no 'law in force without significance') that, as such, may or may not be rendered legible. Because, in some sense, something, 'I don't know', has clearly been heard or read... Indeed, 'nobody' has exclaimed/heard the exclamation. And this is precisely Kafka's point: what Kafka calls "a pack of nobodies" (ibid.), of which the narrator forms a part, has heard and/or read the exclamation; human beings irreducible to a dialectic between 'noise/void' and 'information/division' read *here* that they are completely *il-legible*. They know that they cannot be known and *ex-claim* that they cannot be exclaimed. Studiously, they gesture. Turning to Agamben, one might, then, say that what these gestures gesture to is that the "human being is the being that is lacking to itself and that consists solely in this lack and in the errancy [i.e. the 'pathlessness' contained in the messianic *hodós*] it opens" (1999c, p. 134). *Now*, "what is essential to language is a non-communicative moment, a muteness embedded within man's being a speaker – that is to say, his dwelling in language is not turned solely towards the exchange of messages but is above all gestural and expressive" (2024b, p. 110). *Here*, "[e]xpression is a suspension of the signifying relation (ibid), so that "[w]hat the gesture exhibits is not something unsayable but speech itself, the very being-in-language of man" (2024b, p. 110).

# Exposing constataction

“[T]he book, which is destined to the one who cannot read it, the illiterate, has been written by a hand that, in a certain sense, does not know how to write, an illiterate hand.” (Agamben 2014c, p. 11)

Seemingly, the *writing* and *reading* of organisation and its research has historically been confined to the sphere of *constatives* (e.g. Beck 2009; Grint and Nixon 2015; Nixon 2009; Sandelands and Drazin 1989). In Austin’s words, it has been confined to the “reporting [of] something” (1962, p. 13). More recently, though, there has been a noteworthy shift towards *performatives*, highlighting the more or less conscious “doing [of] something” (ibid.). Specifically, there has been a shift towards grasping language use as involving *acts* of (re)programming, enforcing and preserving socio-political ends (e.g. Gond and Cabantous 2016; Gond et al. 2016; Muniesa 2014). Nonetheless, *constatives* and *performatives* are here, strictly speaking, taken to coalesce into one another. Because, even for Austin – McKinlay points out – the *constative* “is not descriptive, but brings an act into being” (2010, p. 123). Accordingly, whilst this chapter is concerned with *exposing* Darren Nixon’s outwardly *constative* references regarding the gendered and classed habitus of certain workers in a, reportedly, post-industrial Great Britain, it grasps such, *allegedly*, *constative* reference to, at bottom, be *performative*. More to the point, this chapter grasps Nixon’s *descriptions* to be *oikonomically* reproductive as they, informed by Bourdieusian and Beckian sociology, tend to reduce human beings to ‘game players’: as subject to the ‘rules of the game’, with profane play being denied.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, for Bourdieusians, Townley *writes*, “some people are better equipped and better suited to ‘playing the game’” (2014, p. 48). This is due to their specific ‘habitus’, a terms Bourdieusians tend to use to refer to that which “‘translates’ the structured relations of the field [or game] into schemes of perception, thought and

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<sup>55</sup> Unsurprisingly, Cooper also focuses on performatives, stressing their indeterminacy and unfinishedness. Concretely, he writes that “[i]n contrast to the constative or referential function of language which simply indicates and represents an independently existing object or event, the performative actively gives form to—that is, per-forms—the object or event” (2001a, p. 170). Indeed, for him, “we perform and translate the raw matter of the world into symbolic meaning” (ibid.), so that “information must never be concluded; by definition, it must remain unfinished, infinite, indeterminate” (p. 169).

action (dispositions) that enable the individual to function in the field [or game]” (p. 46). As a consequence, there are always those who – *allegedly* – lack a “‘feel for the game’” (ibid.). Or, put differently, for Bourdieusians, Townley goes on, some humans’ “dispositions are too fixed, ‘out of step’ with existing circumstances” (p. 47). And, more often than not, this gives rise to these humans being “dismissed as resistant” (ibid.). Partly interlocked therewith, for Ulrich Beck, “the real, objective transformation of human society at the beginning of the twenty-first century is inadequately reflected both at the level of social consciousness and sociological methodology” (2009, p. 795), so that, to stay abreast in the ‘field’ or ‘social game’, advantageously *dispositioned*, future-oriented scholars like Beck himself ought to “decipher the new rules of the game even as they are coming into existence” (Beck et al. 2003, p. 3). However, referring to ‘the (rules of the) game’, Rhodes’s sobering musings can be taken to suggest that Bourdieu(sians) and Beck(ians), while claiming to be committed to “‘a framework to describe social development and evolution’” (2004, p. 9), help to enact (classed and gendered) power relations that purport to merely constate or describe the “‘survival of the fittest’” (p. 8). Obviously, that means that Bourdieusians and Beckians, like Nixon, fail to testify to “a word that no longer means anything, that is no longer destined to the transmission of meaning” (Agamben 1999b, p. 53).<sup>56</sup>

Put differently, what Nixon overlooks is the *possibility* of the “becoming unreadable of the world” (Agamben 2017c, p. 78). That is, he ignores the *possibility* that “Schreiben [...] bewegt sich aus der geschichtlichen Welt und der Geschichte hinaus, indem es sich selbst löscht und—paradox—als Löschen schreibt, indem es [...] sich aus-schreibt und entschreibt” (Hamacher 2019, p. 14); he ignores that ‘writing moves out of the historical world and history, by means of effacing itself and, paradoxically, writing itself as effacement, by means of *out-writing* and *unwriting* itself’. As a result, he does not attend to a “‘pure history’” (Agamben 1999b, p. 60) in which we, as authors/writers (and readers) of organisation (research), have “‘burst the chains of writing’” (p. 57) and are, by implication, “‘released from time’” (1993a, p. 104). Unsurprisingly, it is in this spirit that this chapter *analyses* Nixon’s work, focusing on *ex-posing* his *constative* references with regard to, as far as the ‘social game’ *described* in these *texts* is concerned, a) *presently* excluded male working-class habitus, b) *presently* included female working-class habitus and c) *presently* included male middle-class habitus.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Dynamising imposition, Cooper, too, fails to testify to such a world; for him, “[d]escription [...] is a narrative strategy that translates the inhuman into the human” (2001a, p. 189), with Cooper simply opting for an oscillation between signifier and signified. After all, he emphasises that “[d]escription must become *de-scription* (*dé-criture*), a form of unwriting that returns us to an experience of cultural estrangement where we begin to see matter returning to itself” (ibid.).

<sup>57</sup> An exposition of Nixon’s work differs from the *positions* taken by *proponents* of ‘critical discourse analysis’, inasmuch as, following Dick, “[t]he key concern of critical discourse analysis

### *Male working-class habitus*

To get straight to the articles in question, Nixon, whose *texts* this chapter analyses, underlines that

[t]he [unemployed] men [in his, *supposedly*, non-normative, *descriptive* text] knew that their propensity to [in line with an unfavourable, Bourdieu-type working-class habitus] front up was causing them major difficulties in the labour market [...], but [nevertheless] they struggled to modify and adapt their usual ways of being. [Therefore, f]or most men it seemed that the best way of dealing with the problem [i.e. of dealing with their inhibiting habitus, with their inability to embrace the ‘new rules of the game’] was to avoid high-stress work environments and interactive service work [...] (2009, p. 316).<sup>58</sup>

Importantly, as this quote helps illustrate, in the *texts analysed*, ‘male working-class habitus’ is drawn on as an unambiguous marker of anachronistic labour market impotentiality. It is drawn on as a marker of an inability to, more or less skilfully, impersonate the *present*, to live and, *as* but a function of the *present*, this chapter argues, wallow in discursively *imposed* ‘reflexive modernity’. And, curiously, the men referred to are found to be fully aware of their impotentiality. Perhaps one may even say that, for these *texts*, these men, while seen to fail to *actualise* *as* Beck-type, ‘reflexive moderns’, are aware of themselves *as* reprehensibly drab impotentiality. In that case, they would, due to the internalisation of their *position vis-à-vis present*, ‘reflexively’ modern articulations of “‘the world of gaming’” (Letiche and Maier 2005, p. 67), see themselves *as* manifestations of forms of a flawed, marginal life. Thus, seen from the angle of a particular metaphorical dictum, of high-stress, interactive service work environments, whose *chronological actuality* and efficiency these *texts* help confirm and guarantee, the flawed, marginal life that these men embody has served its time.<sup>59</sup>

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is to understand language use as both constructing aspects of the world, and as simultaneously reproducing and/or changing these aspects” (2004, p. 212). Thus, while for critical discourse analysts, “there are always alternative discourses available that enable different individuals and groups to resist the regulatory norms in any specific social domain” (p. 204), *exposition*, Agamben can be taken to suggest, “eliminate[s] all discourse from language” (2022b, p. 70), stopping the *supposed/imposed* reality of the *alleged* ‘discursive game’.

<sup>58</sup> Drawing on Bourdieu, Nixon uses *habitus* to stress that, as for his interviewees, “class and gender are internalized in the subconscious as dispositions to act or think in [...] [certain] ways” (2009, p. 310). What Nixon, following Bourdieu, overlooks is that habitus may be a form-of-life, defying the Law’s virtual suspension and normal functioning. For as Agamben writes, “[h]abito is a frequentive of *habeo*: to inhabit is a special mode of having, a having so intense that it is no longer possession at all. By dint of having something we inhabit it, we belong to it” (2024b, p. 8).

<sup>59</sup> Put briefly, following Beck’s postulations, the term “‘reflexive modernization’ [...] refers [here] to the transition away from a first modernity locked within the national state, and towards a second,

At any rate, low-skilled working-class men, the quote implies, prove to be unable to sufficiently patch their drab labour market habitus. They prove to be unable to get to grips with, and *update*, what Adkins, in critical dialogue with Bourdieusian iterations upon habitus, calls “the active presence of the[ir] whole past” (2008, p. 185). In other words, for Nixon, the men interviewed prove to be unable to get to grips with, and *update*, the active presence of their – up to an asserted, post-industrial, ‘reflexively modern’ *present* – accumulated symbolic elements. Crucially, that means that Nixon and like-minded scholars equate ‘male working-class habitus’ with a *chronologically* dire, lethal failure to get to grips with and *update as* symbolically *present*. More specifically, they equate ‘male working-class habitus’ with an inadmissible failure to cope with a *present* that – to *install* itself *as present*, to *install* itself *as* a ‘timely’ marker of what Parker, warily, calls “historical superiority” (2011, p. 559) – discursively identifies, and demonises, the *alleged* backwardness of “‘wild man’” (ibid.).

Or, in other words, for these *texts*, it is primarily a, *supposedly*, striking habitus-conditioned inability to succeed in breaking away from being ‘wild man’ that, in a self-evidently *present*, post-industrial, ‘reflexively modern’ era, makes humans branded ‘low-skilled working-class men’ prone to become, and to remain, unemployed. For, notably, in these *texts*, this inability is seen to prevent these men from familiarising themselves with, taking on board and reproducing themselves *as* – in keeping with the course of, chronologically, *present*, future-oriented time – impersonated simulations of the post-industrial ‘reflexively modern’ self. It prevents them from turning themselves into self-*present* futurist ‘game figures’. In a patently tautological way, their being ‘past life’ is seen to keep them from being ‘present life’.

Indeed, what Nixon takes to be a *chronologically* inadmissible habitus-conditioned inability is, then, argued to prevent these men from, at all, standing a chance of – in *chronologically agentic* fashion – (re)producing and consuming themselves *as* “civilized man” (Parker 2011, p. 559). It prevents them from (re)producing and consuming themselves *as* supposed avatars of *historically* superior, post-industrial, ‘reflexively modern’ *actuality*. Indeed, it is argued to prevent them from (re)producing themselves *as* swiftly re-gendering, stress-tolerant service workers. Thus, confirming and guaranteeing what, drawing on Munro, can be argued to be a ‘production metaphor of self’, in these *texts*, low-skilled working-class men’s *constated* inability to break away from being ‘wild man’ prevents them from being ‘civilised man’. It is seen to cause these men to be cast on the “dunghills of progress” (Munro 1998b, p. 185). At the same time, scholars, like Nixon, are themselves implicitly *contextualised as* recognised and meaningfully *constative* writers, happy

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open, risk-filled modernity characterized by general insecurity” (2014, p. 19). Crucially, for Beck, this “transition takes place [...] within a continuity of ‘capitalist modernization’, which is now in the process of removing the fetters of the national and the welfare state” (ibid.).

to apply “gaming skills” (Macdonald and Kam 2011, p. 472) to play both “the publication game” (Butler and Spoelstra 2012, p. 891) and “the funding game” (Bristow 2012, 236).

As indicated, in Nixon’s, *allegedly*, non-normative, *descriptive* work, this inability causes these men, then, to be locked up in the past, *as* past. It causes them to be cast *as*, one must not forget, the demonised past which, only by being *described as* ‘wild’ makes possible an aesthetics of ‘civilised man’ and, in this way, helps lay the *authorial* foundations of a, *chronologically*, self-sealing mechanism, of a biopolitically *transposed*, dreadful ‘language game’. And, vitally, this ‘language game’, by dint of what Munro calls “a ‘rubbishing’ of the past” (1998a, p. 208), functions to enlist human beings to *agentially* reproduce and consume themselves *as*, variously, post-industrial and ‘reflexively modern’ – *as*, variously, belonging to, and impersonating, the *historical present*. That means that pointing to an *alleged* inability to reproduce and consume oneself *as updated, as present*, functions to *prescriptively* mark putatively low-skilled working-class men *as* what Hoskin refers to as “the not-self” (1996, p. 43). It functioned to mark these men *as* a, *constitutively*, excluded, *outdated* ‘not-self’ against which the ‘reflexively modern’ self can be differentiated and acclaimed *as historically updated*.

Conspicuously, this inability, this chapter finds, makes ‘male working-class habitus’ and those *textured* bodies seen to be fatally infested with it part of what Munro, alluding to Debord, calls the “technologies of the spectacle” (2005, p. 287). Indeed, it makes those *described as* “at odds with the deference and docility required in [...] low-level service jobs” (Nixon 2009, p. 302) *as* “rough-and-tumble” (2006, p. 209) and *as* carriers of “aggressive macho masculinity” (2009, p. 316) part of the technologies that give rise to the, *chronologically, present* edifice of time. Patently, one may, then, say that ‘male working-class habitus’ becomes a cipher of an inadmissibility based on whose authorial/writerly ‘rubbishing’ with regard to a, *supposedly, present present* ‘reflexive modernity’ can be, violently, *imposed* as the only ‘game’ in town. ‘Spectacularly’, it can be *imposed* as the only game in, and bedrock of, the post-industrial world.

Consequently, for this chapter, the literature *analysed* seems to *participate* in reproductive gaming processes that frighteningly serve to *position* ‘reflexive modernity’ *as* an immutable *condition*. They function to *position* reflexive modernity as a ‘spectacular’ hermeneutical ‘whole’ to which human beings would, irredeemably, *as* variously *up-* or *outdated* belong. In fact, it seems to participate in processes that function to *position* ‘reflexive modernity’ as an externally located reality, i.e. as a *chronologically contextualised*, defining ‘whole’, with ‘play’ risking being hermeneutically reduced to the relentless (re)production and consumption of spectacular-cum-secular ‘parts’. Interestingly, Beck et al., if, perhaps, unaware of the sinister, far-reaching repercussions of their much-invoked dictum, concede that, under reflexive modernity, individuals inevitably become some sort of “prisoners” (2003, p. 25). Notwithstanding this, ‘reflexively modern prisoners’, Beck and others



exalt, would, *as* agents playing their hermeneutical part and subject to their unique *chronologically present position* with regard to the ‘reflexively modern world of gaming’, have some “field of play” (Beck et al. 2003, p. 25).

Hence, as Nixon seems to concur – while we are held accountable to, perpetually, reproduce and consume or write and read ourselves *as* selves that, *chronologically*, warrant “social inclusion and citizenship” (2006, p. 205) – within the policed impersonation of admissible selves, we would have the chance to “reflexively play” (p. 206). Depending on our ‘habitus’ and, by implication, on our ‘feel of the game’, we would have the chance to at least attempt to impersonate some other *chronologically* admissible self – some other *chronologically* admissible *updated* social-juridical identity. By extension, reflexive modernity’s founding fathers, its *chronologically* most prophetic senior authors, may, then, be argued to be given a ‘spectacular’ hand with *installing* ‘reflexive modernity’ *as* a self-evident secular-cum-hermeneutical *present* to be perpetually *constated*. That means that the purpose of what, with Ten Bos, can be said to be little more than a *presently* performed, discursive disaggregation under “the simple headings of good and bad” (2003, p. 268) is to – via the violence of *constative* writing – make playfully illiterate writers ‘free game’.

#### *Female working class habitus*

Interestingly, in Nixon’s work, low-skilled working-class men’s *alleged* anachronism – their *constated* inability to, once and for all, break away from what, Newton shows, management theories portray as “phylogenetically outmoded patterns of [...] human behaviour” (1995, p. 67) – is reflected in these men’s conspicuous incompatibility with *chronologically present*, low-paid interactive service work. In short, for Nixon, these men’s *constated*, phylogenetic being stuck in ‘the past’ is reflected in their incompatibility with “servicing the sovereign customer” (2009, p. 306). That is to say, within the articles *analysed*, *constated* woeful ‘anachronism’ is reflected in these men’s incompatibility with a veritable ‘cult of the customer’. It is reflected in an incompatibility with a ‘cult’ among many other things found to *replace* bureaucratic regulation and *stability* with a *substantive* focus on increasingly uncertain internal and external markets, *constant* competition and on employees’ credible, embodied displays of ‘enterprise’.

Notably, this anachronism is seen to be reflected in these men’s incompatibility with an all-pervasive discourse based on which – Munro suggests – “there can be no permanent insiders” (1998a, p. 209). What is more, in the same (customer-centred) breath, low-skilled working-class men’s *alleged* phylogenetic ‘anachronism’ is seen to be reflected in an unalterable incompatibility with types of work which, for Nixon, are self-evidently linked to ‘low-paid-cum-low-skilled working-class women’, to their specific habitus. That is, working-class men’s anachronism translates into an incompatibility with types of work which, we are informed, befitting to such women’s *supposed* habitus, involve “forms of low-skilled service

work” (2009, p. 300) as well as what the American sociologist Arlie Hochschild refers to as ‘emotional labour’.

More specifically, these men’s professed anachronism is, then, seen to be reflected in an incompatibility with regimes of low-paid service work. It is seen to be incompatible with work regimes seen to revolve around *constatively* low-paid-cum-low-skilled female *performers*’ ability to engage in the strategic production and elicitation of emotions that, in a *constated* (gaming) *present*, are deemed to be *oikonomically* desirable and profitable. Patently, it is found to be reflected in an incompatibility with work regimes seen to revolve around an ability to engage in what the literature invoked by Nixon *describes* as ‘courteous and deferential interactions with customers’ (e.g. McDowell 2002). That means ‘they’ are considered as unfit for work regimes that centre on an ability to produce commercially viable low-level servicing ‘selves’ that, in the eye of a, *supposedly*, excessively fastidious ‘sovereign customer’, do “look good and sound right” (Nixon 2009, p. 306).

Indeed, ‘male working-class habitus’, one may say, is argued to be (somatically and behaviourally) manifest in an insuperable inability to gainfully engage in the strategic production of aestheticised emotional commodities such as desire, empathy, warmth and trustworthiness – in the engineering of emotion-based commodities meant to boost today’s customers’ service experience. And ‘working-class femininity’, at the same customer-centred time, is *oppositely installed* as a courteous deferential source of energy on which the post-industrial service economy, ‘the new game’ *constatively* rung in by, for instance, Beck et al., can *presently* run. No doubt, ‘working-class femininity’ is depicted as a low-budget courteous and deferential ‘raw material’ which, it is implied, once skilfully *enacted*, is suited to power *supposed* ‘timeliness’.

Hence, in contrast to the *outdated* ‘working-class masculinity’ of a “‘detached male workforce’” (Nixon 2006, p. 202), for these *texts*, ‘working-class femininity’ is used as shorthand for working-class women’s commercially convenient capacity to engage in the sophisticated dramaturgical production of what would appear to be ‘inauthentic authenticity’ – of what Höpfl calls a “grotesque counterfeit” (2002, p. 265). It is used as shorthand for these women’s capacity for dramaturgical performances meant to beguile a *present*, hard-to-please audience, signalling *outstanding* compatibility with low-paid-cum-low-skilled service-work jobs. Put slightly differently, ‘working-class femininity’ signals a capacity that may keep *present* life, the policed chronological reproduction and consumption of ‘reflexively modern’ selves, from sliding into an ‘uncivilised, wild past’.

In this spirit, ‘gender’ is *conceptualised* as a modifying, dichotomous variable that, with respect to the British working class, is found to indicate a propensity for either commendable low-end labour market attachment or – in *opposition* thereto – dismal labour market detachment. Consequently, in the articles *analysed*, ‘male working-

class habitus' functions as an articulation of the 'wild, uncivilised not-self' against which 'civilised female working-class habitus' can be *positively installed* as a welcome, budget-friendly, post-industrial commodity. Markedly, 'male working-class habitus' serves as a marker of outright inadmissibility against which 'female working-class habitus' is *positioned* as what, Borgerson and Rehn's work suggests, dominant socio-economic discourse acclaims as a "feminine energy" (2004, p. 466) – an energy that, for Nixon, allows *present*, low-paid-cum-low-skilled (female) service work to be "friendly, deferential and flirty" (2009, p. 306).

In other words, it functions as British capitalism's 'edge of time' – as a *posited* point of reference and 'outer limit' that allows 'feminine working-class habitus' to be inclusively *described* as, through deferential flirtatious servicing of the sovereign customer, *present*. It allows feminine working-class habitus to be inclusively *described* as a highly admissible product for which, it is intimated, there is, today, an insatiable demand. Obviously, with this in view, it is unsurprising that Nixon underlines that the

unemployed low-skilled men in [...] [his *supposedly* non-normative, merely *descriptive*] study rejected growing forms of low-skilled customer-oriented interactive service employment, because such work calls for dispositions, skills and ways of being that are antithetical to the male working-class habitus. [Significantly, t]he men rejected female-dominated interactive service occupations that involved high amounts of emotional labour, because they struggled to manage their emotions and [to, in contrast to the demands posed by 'new economy' jobs,] be passive and deferential within the service encounter; and because such work denied them the opportunity to relieve their stress in their usual ways [that is in ways confined by their inhibiting habitus]—through shouting, swearing, taking the piss and having a laugh (2006, p. 318).

Plainly, human beings *described* as 'low-skilled working-class women' – reduced to carriers of a commercially gainful, deferential low-budget habitus, of "passive and bodily deportment" (Nixon 2009, p. 310) – are, then, associated with what Borgerson refers to as "aspects of stereotypical femininity, such as being passive, emotional, other-focused, or 'sensitive'" (2005, p. 489). By and large, they, these women, are associated with a 'timely' resource that, through *actualisation*, would help reproduce the post-industrial present, the *allegedly* inevitable 'social game'. For one thing, as Borgerson's work helps underline, that means that Nixon ignores that the women *described* in his *texts* may – there can be little doubt – have "self-sacrificing caring traits forced upon them as appropriate to their sex" (2005, p. 483). Indeed, these texts, one may argue, *underwrite* such a ruthless force, confirming, and helping to guarantee, the display of these traits in low-level interactive service work as a requirement for low-paid-cum-low-skilled women's *chronologically conditionalised existence*. These texts help *underwrite* this display as a requirement for performance-based social inclusion and citizenship.

Additionally, that means that these *texts* do not only participate in what Tyler and Taylor refer to as “the commodification of [...] women’s perceived difference from [chronologically *outdated*, uncivilised] men” (1998, p. 166) – from their rough-and-tumble “difficulty [...] [to, docilely, swallow] abuse from customers in the service encounter” (Nixon 2009, p. 316). Strikingly, drawing upon Adkins, one may even say that they help *position* “gender as a self-conscious stratagem [...] to be deployed in interactive service work” (2005, p. 123). That means these articles, this chapter finds, help *position* (working-class) femininity as a ‘timely’ raw material that the *chronologically* couched low-paid-cum-low-skilled women-self, owing to its capacity to, with respect to a futurist ‘reflexive modernity’, make itself *present*, consciously deploys to pass *as* comparatively *updated*, *as* chronologically *present*.

After all, these texts help *position* (working-class) femininity *as* an exploitable matter-energy that playfully manoeuvring low-cost-cum-low-skilled women-selves or low-end female *performers agentically* bring into play. Without question, these texts help *position* working-class femininity as a matter-energy that allows the low-end-women-self, the low-end female performer, based on continuous role-playing authentication of ‘itself’ *as*, aesthetically, deferential, abuse-resistant and flirty service performance, to play its part in a dramaturgical/hermeneutic/discursive whole. They *position* this particular woman-self as competent to play its part in, and blow life into, what, partly tongue-in-cheek, can be dubbed (the biopolitics of) ‘game theory’.<sup>60</sup>

### *Male middle-class habitus*

In like fashion, in these articles, *constating* low-skilled working-class men’s ‘anachronism’ with respect to a discursively *imposed* ‘post-industrial Britain’ also serves to *position* ‘middle-class masculinity’ as *oikonomically* gainful ‘raw material’. Indeed, it serves to *position* ‘middle-class masculinity’ as a highly suitable and coveted resource for the *performance* of displays of belonging. More specifically, in this *context*, *supposedly descriptive* or *constative* references, namely to the *constatively* irrevocable *outdatedness* of working-class men – to these men’s mounting labour market detachment – serves a strategic function; they serve to *position* ‘male middle-class habitus’ as a privileged resource for displays of belonging with regard to a *chronological present*. Following this, as already hinted, this *outdating* or ‘rubbishing’ serves to *announce* a new futurist, *updated present*, with the corresponding, historical sea change *described* being *represented* as inescapable.

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<sup>60</sup> Cooper, in my reading, does not offer a way out of Nixon’s constative description; ‘gender’, for Cooper, would still be an imposed, if alterable form, grafted on bare life. In fact, for Cooper, “[m]an and woman are conversions of each other, if you like, but they are also counter forms [...] of each other” (cited in Cavalcanti and Parker 2023, p. 150), being “codefinitive” (ibid.), but gender “can be opened up in so many different ways, interpreted in so many different ways” (ibid.). Yet, what is suppressed is gender in terms of form-of-life, in terms of inoperativity.

Obviously, they, the processes *described* to be ‘at work’, are, then, treated as ineluctable facts to be scientifically (*con*)*stated*. And, as far as, ideally, malleable employees and customers are concerned, these processes are to be obeyed so as to assure continuous ‘development’. Indisputably, in these articles, these processes are depicted as something to be actively embraced. In consequence, they help assure that human beings – *consistently emplaced* as employees and customers – endeavour to belong to what Czarniawska, when briefly summarising Fabian’s insightful work on time, critically, refers to as an *allochronistically* ostracising, writerly “‘our time’” (2012, p. 133).

In line with this, echoing Beck et al.’s frequently invoked *description* (of *constative* scientific *description*) – as far as the discursively *imposed* post-industrial *present* is concerned – these texts can, despite their explicitly declared focus on working-class men’s untoward and wretched labour market detachment, be said to strive to “produce a [...] picture of this new world that people and institutions can use to orient themselves” (2003, p. 3). In particular, it, *constative* reference, can be said to function to produce a picture of the ‘new rules of the game’ that its attendant ‘key players’ and ‘marrow’ – men, for Nixon, seen to be equipped with an *oikonomically* gainful ‘middle-class habitus’ – can draw on to navigate within *chronologically conceived* space-time. Indeed, it can be said to function to produce a picture of the ‘new game’ that its ‘key players’ can draw on to navigate within what Agamben refers to as the maelstrom of “‘progress’” (1993a, p. 97).

In this *constatively* ‘developed’ and *allochronistically* ‘our-timed’ spirit, ‘working-class men’ are, at least on the whole, seen to “lack the cultural capital to actively reconstruct themselves into new kinds of workers” (Nixon 2006, p. 211). By and large, they are seen to lack the habitus that would allow them become new kinds of readily aesthetically compliant, behaviourally tractable employees and customers of a *presently* proliferating service and knowledge economy. However, “the middle classes [in particular middle-class men, are seen to] possess the cultural resources or ‘capital’ to actively reconstruct themselves” (2006, p. 206). After all, they, ‘middle-class men’, as the *supposed* mainstay of what, as indicated before, Czarniawska, following Fabian, critically terms ‘our time’, are found to easily shoulder Britain’s *constatively* irrevocable transition into a post-industrial service and knowledge *economy*. For, as distinguished from ‘working-class men’, ‘middle-class men’ are – hinting both at Beck et al.’s highly influential *description* (of *constative*, scientific *description*) and at Bourdieu’s equally influential, *objectifying* work on ‘habitus’ – seen to be in the *position* to *actively* reconstruct themselves into *chronologically* highly admissible ‘game-figures’. As such, ‘middle-class men’ are argued to be capable of incarnating and midwifing, indeed of *actualising*, the *constated*, *chronologically* new. They are argued to be capable of bringing about a new *seen* to thoroughly *replace*, and *outdo*, the *chronologically* necessarily *outdated*.

Vitality, management scholars of various persuasions have, of late, paid much attention to the strategic use of temporal references (e.g. Andersen and Pors 2014; Brun-ninge 2009; Cutcher et al. 2019; Godfrey and Lilley 2009; González 2016; Oertel and Thommes 2018; Suddaby et al. 2010; Ybema 2014). Primarily references that, *allochronistically*, praise certain human beings as “‘going forward’” (Munro 2010, p. 294) and, oftentimes inextricable therefrom, those that, in *opposite* fashion, castigate *others* as “‘living in the past’” (1998a, p. 236) have been attended to. Unsurprisingly, these references have often been found to express “‘membership’” (1999, p. 435), that is “‘inclusion or exclusion from a group’” (ibid.). Far less attention, however, has been paid to Benjaminian *Jetztzeit* (cf. Böhm 2006) and its coincidence with what Agamben terms “‘a community without presuppositions’” (1993c, p. 65). Put differently, little attention has been paid to the “‘time of the now’” (1993a, p. 102) and its dovetailing with a community marked by the “‘coming to itself of each singularity’” (1993c, p. 25). Put yet another way, despite a growing focus on the ‘time-positing’ underlying the *allegedly* inevitable ‘social game’, little focus has rested upon what Benjamin calls ‘messianic cessation of happening’ and on singularities who – entirely coinciding with messianic time – remain *il-legible*.<sup>61</sup>

That means ‘working-class men’ are, as previously emphasised, equated with a failure to *dispositionally update* and, therefore, to adequately display belonging to the British *present*, to – in order to be more precise – a reinvigorated, *chronologically* totalising service- and knowledge-based British capitalism. But, in opposition thereto, ‘middle-class men’ are equated with what – in reference to Borgerson and Rehn’s musings on *oikonomically* conceived ‘femininity’ and, above all, on *oikonomically* gainful ‘feminine energy’ – may be called a *presently* even higher valued, *supposedly* more ‘timely’ ‘masculine energy’. Because, for Nixon, these men’s *textured* bodies are, at root, *representatives* of a historically superior ‘our time’ whose *constating* ‘writer’ or, to use Melvillian terminology, whose ‘law-copyist’ and ‘scrivener’ Nixon effectively *installs* himself as. That is to say, in Nixon’s ‘timely’ *descriptions*, even more so than ‘working-class femininity’, ‘middle-class masculinity’ is marked out as ‘something to be put to work’. It is associated with – in comparison to ‘working-class femininity’ and ‘working-class masculinity’ – high *status*, *oikonomic* rewards and *substantial* influence.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Jetztzeit*, Agamben explains, is “‘a time within time, which I am not able to place within any chronology’” (2023c, p. 52).

<sup>62</sup> Increasingly mentioned by management scholars (e.g. Benozzo et al. 2019; Beverungen and Dunne 2007; Fraiberg 2010; Kennedy and Lawton 1992; Letiche and Moriceau 2013; Schoneboom 2015; Smith et al. 2018; Ten Bos and Rhodes 2003; Van der Ven 2011), whilst Melville’s novella *Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street* concerns *constative* writing – in particular scriveners’ ‘law-copying’ – its main focus rests on what Melville refers to as ‘the unaccountable Bartleby’. More specifically, as Letiche and Moriceau clarify, its main focus rests on the disfigured figure of a scribe, of writing, that “‘ceases to exist as a functionary for ‘the Other’” (2013, p. 168).

Correspondingly, while ‘working-class men’ are argued to be “struggling to adjust to the demands of the new economy” (Nixon 2006, p. 201), ‘middle-class men’, *opposingly described as positively present*, are associated both with “mental dexterity” (2006, p. 209) and with the ‘timely’ *performance* of “high-value and producer services” (2006, p. 203). In other words, whereas ‘working-class men’ are – through chronological *constatation* of their *outdatedness* – ‘rubbishly’ *written off* as *instantiations* of a forlorn ‘past’, ‘middle-class men’ are *antithetically* and, henceforth, approvingly *installed as instantiations* of a new ‘historical superiority’. In effect, they are identified with phylogenetically superior chances of survival as concerns Beck et al.’s ‘new rules of the game’ – as concerns a newly discerned, all-encompassing ‘Law’ that one, in order to become and stay ‘timely’, is urged to uphold. That is, the latter group of men, defined as nothing but an *epistemological distance* from the former group of men, are *described* as avatars of a post-industrial, futurist ‘knowledge economy’, of a futurist *oikonomia* that Nixon claims to decipher so as to help *describe, inform* and guide *presently* aspiring male middle-class *actors*’ behaviour. Or, stated differently, once more drawing on the anthropologist Fabian, one can say that the latter group of male game-players, defined as nothing but a *constated*, allochronistic *distance* from a discursively denigrated, *supposedly* incompetent ‘them’, are cast as avatars of a futurist competent ‘us’. And, of course, the reader is, in that connection, *called on to identify*, and side with, Nixon’s privileged ‘authorial’ ‘us’, with a post-industrial, British capitalist, male (scientifically neutral), academic middle-class ‘us’.

All in all then, Nixon’s focus on working-class men’s “masculinity as a key barrier to service work” (2009, p. 302) notwithstanding, Nixon must be said to participate in discursively confirming and guaranteeing the *supposed chronological* ‘timeliness’ of ‘middle-class masculinity’. More precisely, Nixon must be said to participate in confirming, and guaranteeing, the *supposed* superior ‘timeliness’ of, by comparison, privileged kinds of male middle-class employees and customers in terms of two *allegedly* less ‘timely’, *chronologically* subordinate aberrations. Unsurprisingly, these aberrations are ‘working-class masculinity’ and ‘working-class femininity’. Curiously, all this resonates with the processes pointed to in Kirkham and Loft’s investigation of the historical construction of the ‘professional accountant’ in England and Wales, an investigation grasping the construction of ‘the accountant’ in terms of two corresponding negative constructs, viz., “the construct of the ‘clerk’” (1993, p. 550) and “the construct of ‘woman’” (ibid.).

Since it is only against the background of the relative *outdating* of both *constatively* low-skilled working-class men’s anachronism and *constatively* low-paid-cum-low-skilled working-class women’s deferential abuse-resilient and flirtatious low-level ‘timeliness’ that ‘middle-class men’ can be *positioned* as comparatively ‘civilised’, developed’ and ‘competent’. Patently, it is only against the ‘progressivist’, classed and feminised *outdating* of, to return to Keith Hoskin’s apt expression, middle-class men’s corresponding ‘not-self’, of what Kirkham and Loft, with regard to a

discursively privileged 'self', call its "'other'" (1993, p. 547), that 'male middle-class habitus' might be *positioned* as exceedingly 'timely'. Obviously, this allows Nixon to *position* his own *supposed* habitus and the *posited* 'self' he winds up working as a mouthpiece and *scribe* for as a preferred resource to be tapped into for the display of *chronologically* admissible belonging.

Put differently, in Nixon's work, 'middle-class masculinity', associated with attributes such as "academic success, higher education, non-manual work and conformity" (2006, p. 208), is explicitly drawn on to mark 'working-class masculinity' as *outdated*. No doubt, it is primarily drawn on to mark 'working-class masculinity' as incompatible with *present* service occupations. It is drawn on to mark 'them' as incompatible with *chronologically* meaningful or promising belonging. For, unlike human beings *described* as high-skilled middle-class men, human beings *described* as low-skilled working-class men are seen to fail to *actively* (re)align their wild, uncivilised masculinity with the alleged requirements of post-industrial service work. It is against this foil that Nixon, when juxtaposing both masculinities, stresses that

[w]hile previous studies have pointed out that middle class men working in gender-atypical service employment tend to attempt to re-gender the [respective post-industrial, service-based] occupation as masculine, the low-skilled unemployed men discussed here did not consider gender-atypical service work a potential future source of employment. [...] [In point of fact, t]he men continued to imbue manual labour with the social superiority of masculinity and implicitly constructed emotional labour as something that they didn't do (2009, p. 319).

While Nixon's articles do not further detail middle-class men's re-gendering of gender-atypical middle-class *occupations* argued to abound in the post-industrial, service-oriented *present*, Adkins and Lury note that such men in such *occupations* tend to be *called on* to strategically aestheticise their (male-middle-class-*textured*) bodies. In fact, they tend to be *called on to perform* 'body work'. After all, men occupying middle-class sales jobs in the British banking sector, for instance, are found to be acutely "conscious of the significance of bodily discipline for their work" (1999, p. 606) and are said to "spend considerable time and money on the production of a sleek, sexy [male-middle-class-*textured*] body" (ibid.). Similarly, in a related publication, such men are found to be "aware of the interactive nature of service work" (McDowell 1997, p. 186). And, *supposedly*, this involves an awareness of "the inseparability of their bodily performance from the [actual banking] product sold" (ibid.).

Viewed from this angle, working-class men's *supposed* labour market anachronism would also be reflected in their unalterable inability to successfully bring their male working-class bodies into sales-conducive, aestheticised (middle-class) shape. Concretely, said to be curbed by an *outdated* masculine working-class habitus, humans *described* as 'low-skilled working-class men' would – from a post-



industrial ‘new economy’ angle – only produce *oikonomically* unviable, unpleasantly unsexy, male working-class bodies. They would produce ‘wild, uncivilised man’... Now, whilst Nixon remains stuck in, and fans, what – with Agamben – can be called “a game of negation and difference” (1993b, p. 149), following Kafka’s example (in *The Castle* or *The Trial*), one must not forget the *possibility* of ‘writing the effacement of writing’. One must not forget the *possibility* of, by means of writing unwrittenness, unlocking a ‘pure history’, i.e. a truly playful ‘language-game’, severed from this or that biopolitical ‘social game’...

Rarely attended to, in Kafka’s *The Castle*, Agamben stresses, it is “the boundaries, separations, and barriers established between humans, as well as between the human and the divine, which the land surveyor [K.] wants to put into question” (2011b, p. 36). More specifically, *inter alia* tracing the name of Kafka’s protagonist to the word *kardo*, Agamben underlines that “[k]ardo is not only a term in land surveying, it also means the hinge of the door” (ibid.), with Agamben adding that, following Isidore of Seville, “[t]he *ostiarii*, the doorkeepers, [...] are those who, in the Old Testament, impede the entrance of the impure into the Temple” (ibid.). That means that, according to Agamben, K. is “[t]he hinge, the turning point [...] where the door that obstructs access is neutralized” (ibid.). And, palpably, bearing in mind that the German word for count, viz., *Graf*, can be traced to the Greek *gráphō*, meaning ‘to write’, throughout the novel, K. remains obstinately “ohne gräfliche Erlaubnis” (Kafka 2009, p. 5), literally ‘without written permission’, so that, whilst being in the “gräfliche Gebiet” (ibid.), in the ‘realm of writing’, he, in writing but unwrittenness, neutralises any (grammatological) articulation between writing and being. After all, he, K., “always want[s] to be free” (p. 9) and, thus, felicitously remains “fremd” (p. 12). Moreover, as a sidenote, the end of Kafka’s *The Trial* can also be said to testify to *il-legible* writing. Since, insofar as K. ’s eventual death gives rise to a life beyond itself, shame seems to outlive K. (see Agamben 1999c), with Hamacher noting that ‘shame’ concerns “das Leid, keine Sprache sein zu können, die noch Etwas Gegenständliches, Bestandhabendes, Bedeutsames sagen könnte” (2019, p. 83). Felicitously, ‘shame’ concerns ‘the anguish of no longer being a language that could say something objective, enduring, significant’...

Perhaps you, dear reader, still wonder what – as the writer of *this* text – I am playing at. It can – I am ‘ashamed’ to *write* – only be gestured to: *Sort de la lecture! Sort!*<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> This is French and means: ‘Exit reading! Exit!’. Vitally, *this* exit amounts to “an experience of the springing forth of the word, a word that forever remains illegible and coming” (Agamben 2022b, p. 37).

# Exposing administration

“[T]o be poor means to use, and to use [...] mean[s] [...] to maintain oneself in relation with an inappropriable.” (Agamben 2019a, p. 38)

Concerned with an *exposition* of administration, this chapter comprises two cases: vitally, in this connection, the first articles *analysed* criticise that, due to informal, subjective classification of ‘the unemployed’, British PES frontline workers may jeopardise the formal, administrative enforcement of work-(fare-)based measures (e.g. Rosenthal and Peccei 2006a, 2007). The second group of articles – whilst also focused on questions surrounding the administrative enforcement of *allegedly* proper classification – criticises Swedish public sector organisations’ subjective, ethnocentric, potentiality-insensitive *relegation* of ‘immigrant-worker competence’ (e.g. Diedrich et al. 2011).<sup>64</sup> *Exposing* these groups of articles means *here* that their *classifications* (from the Ancient Greek *klēsis*, meaning ‘vocation/calling’) are wholeheartedly *revoked*. Since, with Agamben, “[t]he messianic vocation is the revocation of every vocation” (2005b, p. 23)... In consequence, inasmuch as “the *ekklēsia*, the messianic community, is literally all *klēsis*, all messianic vocation” (p. 22), in the end, “[f]actical *klēsis* [i.e. ‘present’ *classification*], set in relation to itself via the messianic vocation, is not replaced by something else, but is rendered inoperative” (p. 28). Put differently, here, with Agamben, I invite you, dear reader, to “not ever make [...] calling an object of ownership, [but] only of use” (p. 26). Focusing on ‘use’, I invite you to grasp the human beings *classified* in this literature in terms of ‘face’, ‘poverty’ and ‘nudity’...

## *Implementing work-(fare-)based measures*

As indicated above, the first couple of articles *analysed* in this chapter focus on the British context, zooming in upon a particular part of the British civil service; they, these articles, zoom in upon Jobcentre Plus, i.e. the British PES. And, in so doing, frontline workers’ codification or – if you wish – *classification* of ‘the unemployed’ is brought into view, turned into a target of scholarly criticism. More concretely, the articles problematise what they take to be Jobcentre Plus frontline workers’ informal, subjective codification of ‘unemployed service users’, i.e. PES employees’ informal, subjective classification of unemployed customers. For PES

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<sup>64</sup> Obviously, these articles are not concerned with the *idea* of criticism, but with *oikonomic* critique.

employees' reportedly informal, subjective classification is seen to, perhaps, do immense damage, and is argued to potentially keep British labour market policy stipulations – i.e. a particular code that lays down administrative measures to increase the quality and the quantity of the national labour market supply – from being properly put into action. Indeed, for this reason, Jobcentre Plus frontline workers are seen to, under certain conditions, jeopardise a better British future, a future seen to depend on public governance apparatuses' and public sector managers' capacity to both “create employees who are creating themselves in the image of the[ir] organisation” (Andersen and Pors 2016, p. vi) and – via these ‘self’-governing employees – “engage [unemployed] ‘clients’ in their own government by demanding their complicity in [...] [the] practices of self-shaping, self-cultivation and self-presentation” (Dean 1995, p. 567). Consequently, what Rosenthal and Peccei, the authors of these articles, more or less implicitly end up suppressing is what Agamben refers to as “something like a way out” (2015b, p. 239). Not unlike Parker – committed to a sociology of classification – they end up suppressing the *possibility* of unlocking organisation in terms of messianic *klēsis* – in terms of the revocation of every (alleged) vocation.<sup>65</sup>

Or, drawing on Andersen's musings, one might even say that Jobcentre Plus frontline workers are seen to put at risk their own *and* unemployed customers' empowerment to transfigure themselves into ardently self-governing “partner[s] of the State” (2012, p. 128). Since the literature *analysed* overlooks the *possibility* of what Agamben refers to as a “nonstatist politics” (2000, pp. 8–9), the *possibility* of irreducibly *monstrous* life outside of and beyond the biopolitics of the (*virtual*) state of exception'. After all, “state sovereignty [...] can affirm itself only by separating in every context naked life [i.e. bare, illegible life] from its form” (p. 11). That is to say, unless we undo *oikonomia*, we end up forfeiting what Agamben, inspired by Benjamin, calls “‘happy life’” (p. 114). For, as Benjamin shows, as for “the Kingdom of God” (1986, p. 312), from “the standpoint of history it is not the goal, but the end” (ibid.). Because, and this is vital, “the Messiah himself consummates all history” (ibid.), dovetailing with messianic *klēsis*, insofar as “messianic *klēsis* is something to use, not to possess” (Agamben 2005b, p. 26). In like fashion, as Agamben underlines in his insightful reading of Hobbes's work on the ‘state’, “the two primordial monsters, Leviathan [i.e. the signified] and Behemoth [i.e. the signifier], will fight one another in the days of the Messiah and both will perish in the struggle” (2015a, p. 58), so that, *pace* Rosenthal and Peccei, with Agamben,

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<sup>65</sup> While Rosenthal and Peccei as well as Parker seem to treat classification as inevitable, insofar as even for Parker “[t]he beginnings of classification are the beginnings of organization [...] constituting insides and outsides, us and them” (2021, pp. 604–7), Parker differs from the former authors, inasmuch as he highlights alternative ways of reclassification. Sadly, however, Parker, in perpetuating Cooper's legacy, completely overlooks the possibility of messianic *klēsis*, which Agamben defines as “the revocation of every worldly condition, released from itself to allow for its ‘use’” (2005b, p. 43). Thus, regrettably, Parker, too, remains stuck in, and advocates, a biopolitical conception of organisation, failing to provide ‘something like a way out’.

philosophers of organisation “will prepare a messianic banquet, in the course of which they will eat the flesh of the two beasts” (ibid.).<sup>66</sup>

At bottom, that means that what, in a noticeably anti-messianic fashion, is *described* as Jobcentre Plus frontline workers’ *informal*, subjective categorisation or classification is argued to compromise the historical unfolding of a ‘lean and mean’ United Kingdom, i.e. United Kingdom decreed and celebrated in central British government publications (e.g. DfBIS 2009; DfWP 2007, 2009). As a result, for the literature *analysed*, the efficient potentiality-sensitive realisation of a more resourceful national labour market and, more broadly, the materialisation of a United Kingdom which not only weathers, but excels in and drives an, allegedly, increasingly globally oriented, capitalist future is, then, at stake. It is against this backcloth that ‘the Jobcentre Plus frontline worker’ and ‘the unemployed service user’, i.e. the two soci(ologic)al classifications that, by far, receive most attention in the articles *analysed*, are described as means to be more rigorously deployed and developed. In other words, they are, to use Agamben’s words, described as “means subordinated to an end” (2000, p. 116) – as (grammatologically) appropriated means to be properly actualised and, in that sense, finally be full-fledged ‘partners of the State’. Relatedly, drawing on Cruikshank’s work, one might, indeed, say that, in these *texts*, human beings classified as employees and customers are – of course in their own, classification-specific way – described as in need of transforming themselves into “active, participatory citizens” (1999, p. 3), with Rosenthal and Peccei failing to notice that, “[w]hile the modern State pretends through the state of exception to include within itself the anarchic and anomic element it cannot do without, it is rather a question of displaying its radical heterogeneity in order to let it act as a purely destituent potential” (Agamben 2015b, p. 279).

In this vein, unless resolute PES managers intervene, it is implied, employees, who are held accountable to create ‘themselves’ in the image of an allegedly future-oriented PES so as to “help people help themselves” (Cruikshank 1999, p. 4), and customers, who, in accordance with this, receive ‘help to help themselves’, would go astray. They would, so the story goes, stand in the way of, and undercut, what British labour market policies appear to envisage as frontline workers’ and unemployed service users’ dovetailing, potentiality- and function-specific actualisation. That is, without management, it is claimed, ‘they’ – as their own allochronistic ‘not-selves’ – would stand in the way of ‘themselves’, unable to shake off what – through the eye of the State and, ultimately, as zealous ‘partners of the State’, in their own eyes – is unbecoming for ‘themselves’. Indeed, they would risk wandering off what Munro, critically, calls “the path of progress” (2005, p. 285)

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<sup>66</sup> Empowerment, Cruikshank notes, can be defined as the attempt to “act upon others” (1999, p. 68), an attempt aimed at “getting them to act in their own interest” (ibid.) – at least, it should be added, insofar as their alleged ‘own interest’ dovetails with the impositions of the empowering institution.

and are, henceforth, grasped to pose a serious threat to ‘themselves’ and, by extension, to the British labour market’s historical unfolding. Overall, as Andersen’s reflections unmistakably suggest, no matter if employee or unemployed customer, in this literature, the human being is “expected to observe itself through the gaze of the [respective] function system [of the State] and to take responsibility for acting according to [...] [its] logics” (2012, pp. 112–3).<sup>67</sup>

Inspired by Ashforth and Humphrey’s (1997) work about ‘labelling processes’ in organisational *contexts*, in these articles, allegedly informal, subjective classification is, in particular, seen to cause what is described as frontline workers’ judgemental, unprofessional ‘discretion’. It is seen to cause PES staff’s purportedly biased administrative decision-making. And this judgemental, unprofessional ‘discretion’ is, in turn, taken to clash with the so-called customer service ethos enshrined and hailed in government publications (e.g. DfWP 2011, 2014). That is, ‘discretion’ is argued to be at odds with a supposedly more attentive and conducive attitude. It is argued to be at odds with what Höpfl – warily – calls a supposedly more effective “servicing of a role” (2002, p. 225) that policymakers aim to foster in frontline workers so as to expedite labour market policy stipulations’ effective actualisation.

As hinted at before, Jobcentre Plus frontline workers’ *informal*, subjective classification is, then, *seen* to inhibit these human beings’ code-based, dutiful (‘self’-)functioning, i.e. their impartial implementation of, and becoming one with, (neoliberal) labour market policies. Discernibly, frontline workers’ professed dysfunctional disposition for biased, injurious classification of ‘unemployed service users’ is seen to keep frontline workers from orderly *actualising* as *allegedly* modern open- and ‘service-minded’ street-level bureaucrats who help bring about a (neoliberally induced workfare-based) United Kingdom. With that in mind, one might say that these articles mobilise and tap into a, by now, markedly inveterate, forceful canon according to which the neoliberally vivified promised land risks being betrayed by inflexible, complacent and amoral public bureaucracy – and in this particular case, by bureaucrats’ informal, subjective ‘discretion’. Doubtless, these articles appear to mobilise, and tap into, a canon which both springs from, and hails, what Agamben refers to as “the capitalist religion” (2007a, p. 81). And, in so doing, they project public sector employees’ indisposition to slickly operate (themselves) as service-minded intermediaries as an exasperating stumbling block holding back actuality.

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<sup>67</sup> As Andersen’s work can be taken to suggest, the division between ‘self’ and ‘not-self’ underlying the focus on avidly ‘self’-governing employees and unemployed customers dovetails with a division between, on the one hand, “legitimate, responsible and wilful citizens” (2012, p. 128) and, on the other hand, “passive people with destructive inhuman characteristics” (ibid.). This division does not only imply classed relationships among humans, but cuts also through the human itself.

Conspicuously, it is frontline workers' allegedly dysfunctional disposition for informal classification that, these articles contend, may keep these employees from fully being in the service of and, based thereon, from making possible the neoliberally invigorated British State or what, for Agamben, is one of "the spectacular-democratic societies in which we live" (2000, p. 10). Indeed, their proclivity for informal, wrongful classification is, more generally, seen to prevent frontline workers from helping to blow life into a modernised, accountable and potent public sector that, conceived as the British government's extension and tool, should 'empower' British citizen-workers to adapt to, thrive in and produce a global-cum-capitalist, future-oriented United Kingdom. Additionally, informal classification is, as indicated before, also said to impede unemployed service-users' unbiased, lawful integration into and, henceforth, their governance through, neoliberal labour market policy programmes. That is, policy programmes setting out to fight 'welfare dependency' and, in the same 'spectacular' breath, aiming to prompt enterprising labour market participation are seen to be kept from fully taking shape. In consequence, frontline workers are, as touched on before, seen to jeopardise what British labour market policies project as unemployed service-users' and, by extension, the United Kingdom's untroubled, future-oriented actualisation. It is in this context that Rosenthal and Peccei, noticeably vexed about frontline workers', supposedly, unprofessional classification of the unemployed service user, state that, at Jobcentre Plus,

categorisation and labelling are ubiquitous because the inherent tendency for individuals to categorize and to label others is exacerbated by organizational structures and by task demands [characterising Jobcentre Plus]; and [informal categorisation and labelling] are potent, cause the categorization of individuals [...] is related to the treatment they receive from organizational members and often to their own self-understanding and behaviour. [...] [Thus, s]ervice encounters are one important domain in which individuals (workers) sort others (customers) into various categories and then act, effectively or ineffectively, on the basis of their definition (2006b, p. 1634).

Patently, with frontline workers' informal, subjective classification of 'unemployed service users' seen to detrimentally affect, and curtail, unemployed human beings' 'self'-understanding and corollary behaviour, effective managerial control over frontline workers' service-encounter behaviour emerges as a fundamental concern. It is in this spirit that Rosenthal and Peccei point out that reform-oriented British politicians who, duteously, aim at a more potentiality-sensitive realisation of a sustainably futurist United Kingdom – the realisation of the aforementioned promised land often seen to be threatened by complacent, if not recalcitrant bureaucrats – should internalise that frontline workers represent a

significant [...] target [...]. [In effect, r]eformers can design and impose initiatives intended to customerise public sector organisations, but[, sadly,] they cannot directly

enact appropriate treatment of recipients [i.e. of ‘the unemployed’]. For this, they must rely on frontline staff. [...] This raises the important question of how frontline staff perceive and evaluate (2006a, p. 68).

Troublingly, singling out frontline workers as a primary target of managerial manoeuvrings does not only seem to encapsulate what, Barratt’s musings suggest, various critics have pointed out constitutes “an obsession with ‘micromanagement’” (2014, p. 152). It appears to also underwrite bureaucratic processes which, as Munro warns, “help people to ‘forget’, or efface, their common humanity with other human beings” (2005, p. 286). Patently, it appears to make human beings, classified as employees and customers, to overlook their “absolutely immanent alterity” (Agamben 1999b, p. 223), to overlook their “face beyond the mask” (2011b, p. 54), insofar as “it is through the mask that the individual acquires a role and a social identity” (p. 46) and “the face exposes and reveals [...] not *something* that could be formulated as a signifying proposition of sorts, nor is it a secret doomed to remain forever incommunicable” (2000, p. 92). Rather, “[t]he face’s revelation is revelation of language itself” (ibid.). Since, “where I find a face do I encounter an exteriority and does an *outside* happen to me” (p. 100). That is, faced not with classification, but with the face, I encounter ‘something like a way out’ and, followingly, depose the biopolitics of what Rhodes, warily, calls “a work-based promised land” (2004, p. 14). Still, in spite of this, Rosenthal and Peccei report that their investigation of Jobcentre Plus points to

a pervasive structuring and valorization of clients [on the part of frontline workers,] according to their perceived job-readiness on the reported basis of body language and demeanour in interviews [occurring during the service encounter]. This segmentation [the authors state] was embedded in a more complex, categorical system for making sense of [unemployed] customers, encompassing criteria such as interactional style, gratitude, capacity for aggression and social class and age (2006b, p. 1655).

Distinctively, the above quote suggests that rash, first impressions of unemployed service users’ social background, their age and their communication habits, but also of their dress and – more generally – of their ‘employability’, are argued to result in stubborn classification on the part of PES staff. And, as touched on before, it is such rash, stubborn, potentiality-insensitive classification that, in turn, is argued to negatively influence Jobcentre Plus frontline workers’ administrative dealings with ‘unemployed service users’.

Now, while Rosenthal and Peccei contend that conscientious Jobcentre Plus managers have taken vital strides towards expunging frontline workers’ misaligned, non-compliant behaviour, Jobcentre Plus managers, they insist, should continue to control, and mitigate, frontline workers’ dysfunctional sense-making. They should continue to control, and mitigate, these employees’ interpretative frames, in order not to allow unprofessional, informal classification to gain the upper hand. For

biased classification – they warn – might mean that some ‘unemployed service users’ are, undeservedly, written off, barred from appropriate labour market programmes that, Melinda Cooper points up, often aim to put “welfare back to work [and make] workfare one of the most instructive laboratories of contingent labor practice in the low-level service sector” (2012, p. 645). Other service users’ labour market potentiality, in contrast, may be vastly overrated, with frontline workers’ motivation and effort seen to both hinge on, and risk, being distorted by frontline workers’ informal classification. Venting their worries about possibly unjust, potentiality-insensitive treatment of unemployed service users’ potentiality, Rosenthal and Peccei emphasise, then, that duteous, future-oriented PES managers

have successfully structured the sense-making of staff via their design of the organizational context and the job role. At another level, [however,] the rapidity and the basis (body language) of [frontline] workers’ segmentation of clients may be of some concern to the agency [...]. [Since, to all appearances], judgements once made [the authors suggest] tend to stay made. Subsequent information about clients will [then] be interpreted in light of the initial categorization. A rapid characterization of a client as job-ready or as resistant to work (e.g. a lazy git) will be resistant to change over the series of encounters between clients and their advisers” (2006b, p. 1653).

Saliently, while these lines do suggest otherwise, it is not only frontline workers’ *classifications* that could be said to pose a problem. For, tragically, Rosenthal and Peccei, completely entrammelled in *classification*, fail to encounter their own and other human beings’ faces, so that no *outside* is happening to them. For – as Agamben *shows (mostra)* – “[t]he face is the only location of community, the only possible city” (2000, p. 91). After all, the ‘face’ cannot but show our ‘poverty’, our lacking any means to *impose*, our ‘usefully’ being unable to appropriate ourselves and others. For “in a face we are unknowable and exposed” (Agamben 2022b, p. 14).

### *Assessing immigrant-worker competence*

Similar to the articles focusing on frontline workers’ *allegedly* informal, biased classification of (human beings classified as) ‘unemployed service users’, the next articles *analysed* find fault with what they take to be public sector organisations’ dysfunctional, subjectively biased enforcement of a specific labour market policy programme; they find fault with the administrative enforcement of a particular future-oriented ‘Law’ aimed at assessing and making available (what is classified as) ‘immigrant-worker competence’. For, in that specific context, these public sector organisations’ allegedly dysfunctional, subjectively biased enforcement procedures, i.e. their flawed administrative classification, is seen to jeopardise the potentiality-sensitive actualisation of the Swedish labour market – of a particular hoped-for future. Or, put differently, these allegedly faulty classification procedures are seen to jeopardise the realisation of a competitive-cum-diverse, post-ethnocentric potentiality-sensitive Sweden (e.g. Diedrich et al. 2011), as the organisations in



question are, noticeably tautologically, argued to, incompetently, fail to competently appraise ‘immigrant-worker competence’. That is, these public sector organisations are, at least in their present form, seen not to be eligible to constate these human beings’ seeming vocation or eligibility, with Diedrich et al., however, seeming to feel eligible to defend and become spokespersons of what Munro, critically, refers to as “God’s plan” (2002, p. 134). To all appearances, Diedrich et al. feel eligible to help realise ‘His’ will. They feel eligible to act as guarantors of ‘our’ historical destiny: classification-based actualisation of ‘ourselves’ *as*, eligibly, post-ethnocentric employees – as, eligibly, post-ethnocentric (‘self’-governing) ‘partners of the State’.

In short, they, Diedrich et al., defend and become, then, spokespersons of *oikonomia*. They defend and become spokespersons of what Linstead calls “an approach where difference is incorporated and reconstructed, and in effect denied” (2000, p. 71), with the *possibility* of inoperative life, of life outside of biopolitical subsumption, being overlooked. Palpably, returning to Munro, one might, perhaps, even say that they, Diedrich et al., feel eligible to, scholarly, promote the administrative enforcement of “paradise as an ‘enclosed space’” (2002, p. 131), a space, as Burrell and Dale underline, “meant to contain within it all that is perceived to be best and worthy of nurture while at the same time holding outside what is beastly” (2002, p. 108). Put differently, they, Diedrich et al., feel eligible to promote a space underpinned by an eligible/ineligible division as they, persistently, overlook the *possibility* of human beings being irreducible to signification. Doubtless, they end up promoting a division between *eligible* ‘self’ and *illegible* ‘not-self’ that, and this has been stressed before, does not only correspond to classed relationships among human beings, but also cuts through the human being itself.<sup>68</sup>

Distinctly, within the articles *analysed*, these organisations’ *allegedly* dysfunctional, subjectively biased enforcement procedures, one might say, are seen to risk putting paid to the realisation of the present-day equivalent of what Simons, enthralled by Sweden’s seemingly buzzing interbellum economy, praised as the “Garden of Sweden” (1934, p. 414). In fact, Diedrich et al.’s work might be said to be underpinned by a “strong desire to re-enter [...] paradise” (Kyrtatas 2004, p. 78). Or, in a way, it, this work, can be said to be underpinned by a strong desire to bring about the (paradisial) ‘Kingdom of God’, while overlooking that the (paradisial) ‘Kingdom of God’, as suggested above, is not the goal of history, but, *in lieu*, coincides with history’s deactivation, with history’s messianic fulfilment or consummation. Thus, obviously differing from Steyaert, for whom “the Garden of

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<sup>68</sup> While not explicitly mentioned in Diedrich et al.’s text, the public sector organisations called on to enforce this particular labour market programme include the Swedish Migration Board (Migrationsverket), the National Labour Market Board (Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen) the local PES offices (Arbetsförmedlingen), the Municipal Refugee Units (Flyktingenheterna), the Social Services (Socialtjänsten) and the Adult Education Administration (Vuxenutbildningsförvaltningen) (see Diedrich and Styhre 2008).

Eden [...] [functions as] the imaginary ideal of an unreachable place” (2010, p. 46), Diedrich et al. appear to somehow side with Kyratas, who suggests that “the Garden has not been lost forever” (2004, p. 67). After all, for the articles *analysed*, ‘the Garden’ or, if you wish, the ‘Kingdom of God’ has not been lost for those (in Sweden) classified as ‘competent’, i.e. suited for a certain task classified, in particular for those (in Sweden) classified as competent to classify (who is or is not competent, who is or is not eligible). That is, above all, the Garden seems not to be lost for Diedrich et al. themselves and other apologists of what Rhodes, fittingly, refers to as “the cultural idealization of work” (2007, p. 24).

Consonant therewith, in these texts, the public sector organisations listed above are, then, seen to risk putting paid to the realisation of the present day. And that seems to imply a late capitalist, competitive-cum-diverse, post-ethnocentric version of what in Burrell and Dale’s work is, warily, dubbed “a ‘paradisiacal garden’” (2002, p. 107) or indeed a “walled garden” (p. 109). Conspicuously, they, Diedrich et al., turn out to be proponents of an *oikonomic* classification-based pseudo-‘paradise’ or ‘-Kingdom’ to be, competently, re-entered. And, as a result, they overlook the *possibility* of messianic *klēsis*, i.e. of the revocation of every (alleged) vocation. Patently, they overlook the *possibility* of messianically unlocking ‘the Garden’. For it is only in a profane-cum-messianic sense, Agamben stresses, that “paradise is the cipher of the *beatitudo huius vitae*, of the happiness [...] possible on earth” (2020, pp. 126–7). All in all, that means that Diedrich et al. fail to realise that “[o]nly the Kingdom [as the realm of messianic *klēsis*] gives access to the Garden, but only the Garden [as the realm of irreducible nudity] renders the Kingdom thinkable” (Agamben 2020, p. 152), inasmuch as – like Adam and Eve – to “see a body naked means to perceive its pure knowability beyond every secret, beyond or before its objective predicates” (2011b, p. 81). For, it is the “condition of not having anything behind it, this pure visibility and presence, that is nudity” (ibid.). In other words, it is the condition of defying the *virtual* state of exception that is ‘nudity’.

Patently though, the articles turned to appear to resonate with a veritable flood of Swedish and international policy publications whose colourful, somewhat rhapsodic projections take aim at setting the course for a more inclusive, competitive-cum-diverse Swedish labour market (e.g. Ds 2007:4; OECD 2011; SOU 2000:7, 2007:18, 2008:58). In particular, they seem to echo these policy papers’ pronounced enthusiasm for a possible Swedish economy in which, outwardly, all ‘human potential’ available – all individuals who, by law, are allowed to take up ordinary employment in Sweden and who, as such, are poised to populate this late capitalist ‘walled garden’ might, irrespective of individuals’ ethnic and racial background, be given the chance to, without hindrance, vie for actualisation – based upon their individual labour market potentiality alone.

It is against this background that these articles point the finger at public sector organisations’ dysfunctional ethnocentric classification procedures. After all, such procedures, Diedrich et al. complain, do not only underlie but also fundamentally

frustrate the administrative enforcement of a specific labour market programme that, by means of taking stock of extant immigrant-worker potentiality, aims to help the Swedish economy capitalise on this potentiality. Indeed, these procedures are understood to get in the way of proper assessment and validation of so-called immigrant workers' 'prior learning' and, thus, of immigrant workers' potentiality-befitting integration into the Swedish labour market. Drawing on Adkins, one may, then, say that this literature espouses the common view that social inequalities and divisions are due to the fact that marginalised individuals' "skills and capacities are by various means not recognized [...] [and that to fight social inequalities and divisions marginalised individuals would] need to acquire the political right to store up, own, and alienate labour power" (2008, pp. 186–7).

It is in this competence-centred spirit that the literature *exposed* argues that the administrative enforcement of the labour market programme fails to focus on what the (competent) 'immigrant worker' could do and on how the (competent) 'immigrant worker' may help diversify, and blow new life into, Sweden's future-oriented labour market. In concert therewith, the public sector organisations supposed to help validate 'immigrant-worker competence', this literature bewails, tend to discard the competent immigrant worker along ethnocentric lines and fail to duteously effectuate policymakers' vision of post-ethnocentric, labour-market-potentiality-inclusive, capitalist Sweden. That is to say, these organisations' ethnocentrically underpinned validation procedures are thought to prematurely exclude 'immigrant-worker competence' from the Swedish labour market and to, perhaps unknowingly, brand possible labour market participants as prone to become, and stay, unemployed. Taking up the cause of 'spectacularised' immigrant-worker potentiality, Diedrich et al. indicate, therefore, that their investigation

suggests that, in Sweden, [public sector organisations' validation of immigrant-workers' prior learning] [...] prioritizes procedural effectiveness over a more comprehensive understanding of the competence and qualifications [...]. By exploring the process of classification in which [public sector staff's harmfully entrenched] cognitive structuring of the perceived world results in organizational, administrative and structural enactment, [...] [our] study provides further insights into how practices of classification are a central part of [detrimental, potentiality-insensitive features of] organizational life (2011, p. 271).

As a result, due to public sector organisations' *alleged* failure to properly determine and, thus, to help harness immigrant-worker potentialities' idiosyncratic skill and competence – Diedrich et al. warn – the particular labour market programme's original, wider aim, i.e. the realisation of a hoped-for competitive-cum-diverse, tolerant, potentiality-centred Sweden, may come to nothing. For

[d]espite good intentions, the study shows [that existing] bureaucratic procedures for sorting out potential labour market entrants are not leading to the desired outcomes, namely the conducive evaluation of immigrant workers' competence. On the

contrary, [...] [the enforcement of the policy programme] generates significant social costs in terms of the time and financial resources invested and the disappointment felt by the immigrants [...] when learning that their skills and competence cannot be properly determined by the [extant, potentiality-insensitive] classificatory system (2011, p. 272).

As this quote underlines, in these texts, immigrant workers' alleged 'self'-esteem and -confidence are regarded to be positively correlated with functional actualisation in the Swedish labour market. That means Swedish public sector organisations' wanting administration of (neoliberal) labour market policy is not only seen to preclude exacting, fair assessment of immigrant workers' actual potentiality and, at the same time, to squander public funds set aside 'to sort people out', based upon their specific labour market potentiality. It is also said to wear down the confidence of potential, foreign-born labour market entrants. It is for this reason that Diedrich et al. focus on Swedish public sector organisations' woeful, untimely involvement in systematic ethnocentric exclusion of valuable 'competence'. Specifically, they maintain that

[w]hile the [particular labour market] project aimed to establish a system for identifying and assessing the skills and competences of immigrants on arrival in Sweden, in practice, the assessment activities functioned upon the basis of what it meant to be Swedish and an immigrant [with immigrant workers' actualisable potentiality dropping off the work-centred neoliberal radar]. In this context, language skills were used to indicate 'Swedishness' and to differentiate 'the [unemployed] Other' [thus causing valuable immigrant-worker skills to remain unassessed and unused] (2011, p. 287).<sup>69</sup>

Vitaly, for Diedrich et al., this 'othering' and the concomitant imposition of socio-economic inactivity are occasioned by subjective ethnocentrism's undercutting of otherwise impartial, justified, bureaucratic classification-based procedures. And the only way forward would, in their view, be helping to fuel a competitive-cum-diverse future that is borne by 'objective' assessment and validation of 'immigrant-worker potentiality'. 'Objectivity' marks, then, the path into a future projected to teem with what Munro, critically, calls "conceptions of a proactive population" (2012, p. 346) – with, to return to expressions used before, keenly 'self'-governing active

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<sup>69</sup> Here, Diedrich et al. draw on the work of Goody (1977), which, in turn, points to the problem of ethnic binarism, i.e. the discriminatory ethnocentric tendency to divide the world into simple, trailing and complex leading cultures – a tendency that involves casting supposedly simple, trailing cultures in a reductionist pathologising way. Tragically though, while Diedrich et al. seem to advocate an anti-ethnocentric appreciation of immigrant worker competence, they remain stuck in an allochronistic, classificatory division between the allegedly simple and trailing and the complex and leading. In this context, the former is seen to seriously endanger (the realisation of) the work- and competence-based 'Garden of Sweden', i.e. the 'paradise' of the latter.

participatory citizens. It is for this reason that Diedrich et al. stress that their findings reveal that extant

bureaucratic procedures did not turn out to be technologies of objectivity [striven for by clairvoyant policymakers and required to get a competitive-cum-diverse Sweden off the ground] [...]. Instead, subjective classification influenced by a national-centric understanding of gender, language and professionalism, produced ineffective bureaucratic procedures which [being gravely insensitive to immigrant workers' labour market potentiality] led to rather limited results (2011, p. 287).<sup>70</sup>

As hinted at before, it is a lack of proper, objective assessment that, in these texts on Swedish public sector organisations, is regarded to get in the way of a more competitive-cum-diverse Swedish labour market. It is considered to keep these organisations from helping to sow the seed for a competence-centred, competitive-cum-diverse capitalist Sweden, the seed for a Sweden where all labour-market potentialities earmarked as 'competent' would – to use Jönsson's apt line – actualise in a potentiality-befitting manner and, thereby, give rise to "a land of milk and money" (2005, p. 105). Fundamentally, what Diedrich et al. fail to grasp is that 'the Garden/Kingdom' is incommensurate with institution. Since "[t]he Kingdom always coincides with its announcement; it has no other reality than the word [...] that it speaks" (Agamben 2022b, p. 36), so that "[t]he word of the Kingdom does not produce new institutions or constitute law: it is the destituent potentiality that, in every sphere, deposes powers and institutions" (p. 41). In sum, the 'coming' of the Messiah entails the fulfilment of the 'Law', its becoming inoperative. It entails our happily *a-knowledging* ourselves as irreducibly 'poor' and 'nude'. It entails being one's face.

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<sup>70</sup> The term 'technologies of objectivity' used by Diedrich et al. is taken from the work of Porter (1994), who associates it with 'the ideal of impersonality' in organisations (see also Ott et al. 2003). Broadly speaking, that means that objectivity is seen to be premised on explicit rules and on their meticulous observance so as to minimise arbitrariness and judgement and to prevent self-interested distortion.

# Exposing government imposition

“[T]he messianic is not a third eon situated between two times; but rather, it is a caesura that divides the division between times and introduces a remnant.” (Agamben 2005b, p. 74)

This chapter complements the previous chapter’s *analysis* of articles that criticise the allegedly deficient administrative/bureaucratic enforcement of an *oikonomically* envisioned, ‘given’ future, i.e. the enforcement of that which, Agamben notes, exists [only] to the extent that our faith manages to give substance [...] to our hopes” (2012b, p. 1). Concretely, this chapter focuses upon *oikonomically* ‘faithful’, academic articles that, in contrast to the articles *exposed* before, find fault with a supposedly deficiently thought-out governmental future as they hope to get ‘faith’ *vis-à-vis* a discursively recalibrated, governmental future underway. That means this chapter focuses on *analysing* academic discussions that, unlike the cases analysed before, find fault with a supposedly deficiently thought-out futurist representation. Indeed, full of *oikonomic pistis*, the Greek term for ‘faith’, which, as such, Agamben stresses, “is normally constructed with the dative, or with the accusative, or even with *hoti* plus a verb, in order to convey the content of faith” (2005b, p. 127), the articles *analysed* here criticise a particular, presently imposed governmental regime.<sup>71</sup> ‘Faithfully’ (in the *oikonomic* rather than in a Pauline or messianic sense), they criticise the so-called ‘enterprise discourse’, doggedly striving to make this particular discourse or what Oswick, more generally, refers to as “a process of meaning-making through talk and text” (2012, p. 473) decidedly more accommodating and inclusive as far as the labour-market potentiality of those discursively classified as ‘older workers’ is concerned. They aim to positively reclassify the ‘older worker’, caught in a “blind drive towards salvation and progress” (Agamben 2022b, p. 5).

Or, put simply, noticeably dissatisfied with presently dominant concepts of a future to be administratively enforced, the articles zoomed in on seek – under the discursively ‘faithful’ banner of enterprise-based, societal inclusion – to update or reconceptualise this future to be worked towards. Sadly, ‘faithfully’ dedicated to an

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<sup>71</sup> As Agamben hints, for Paul of Tarsus, “faith [...] is an experience of being beyond existence and essence, as much as beyond subject and predication” (2005b, p. 128). As a result, contrary to *oikonomic* ‘faith’, Pauline or messianic faith refers to, and unlocks, “a world of indivisible events, in which I do not judge, nor do I believe that the snow is white and the sun is warm, but I am transported and displaced in the snow’s-being-white and in the sun’s-being-warm” (p. 129).

*oikonomically* ‘updated’ future, these texts fail to ‘testify’ insofar as “[t]he truth that testimony entails can never present itself to intentional consciousness, where knowing is necessarily a form of discourse that says something about something” (Agamben 2022b, pp. 50–1). Rather, as Agamben underlines, “[t]estimony [and bound up herewith ‘truth’] begins when the subject of knowing is left speechless” (p. 51). It begins when the organiser “brings a speechlessness into words” (ibid.).

As a consequence, rather than unlocking organisation in terms of messianic testimony, the articles *analysed*, and this regrettably, remain caught in *dispositifs*. Lamentably, they, the two articles perused, remain caught in conceiving organisational language as an inescapably *oikonomic*, biopolitical apparatus as they merely end up calling for a discursive reappraisal of (human beings classified as) ‘older workers’ as positive resources. Perchance unawares, they end up calling for a discursive reappraisal of (human beings classified as) ‘older workers’ as superlatively entrepreneurial, rather than supposedly unemployable beings. And, thereby, they overlook these and other human beings’ irreparably being-*thus*. In short, they overlook our playful *il-legibility*. Significantly, they install themselves as prophets, who, in turn, Agamben underscores, are “defined through [...] [their] relation to the future” (2005b, p. 61), insofar as “each time the prophets announce the coming of the Messiah, the message is always about a time to come, a time not yet present” (ibid.). As such, they fail to become messianic apostles, inasmuch as, with Agamben, “[t]he apostle is [...] not an emissary of men, but an emissary of [...] Jesus Messiah” (p. 59). They fail to grasp that “[t]he apostle speaks forth from the arrival of the Messiah” (p. 61) and “[a]t this point prophecy must keep silent, for now prophecy is truly fulfilled” (ibid.).

Concretely, as shown below, the texts turned to – an *Organization* article entitled ‘The Enterprising Self: An Unsuitable Job for an Older Worker’ and a *Human Relations* text entitled ‘Mind over Body: Physical and Psychotherapeutic Discourses and the Regulation of the Older Worker’, both of which are penned by Susan Ainsworth and Cynthia Hardy – call consistently for what, drawing on Höpfl, can be called a codicil. They call for a supplementary, reformulating postscript. Saliently, they call for, and become emissaries of, a supplementary, reformulating prophecy. Hence, ‘faithfully’, they call consistently for an amendment to, rather than a messianic neutralisation of, the ‘codex’, the Law. For, conspicuously, they, the two articles analysed, disapprove of so-called older workers’ ageist marginalisation within this particular discourse – a discourse that, however, as to the rest, is fatally left intact. After all, Ainsworth and Hardy themselves, this chapter argues, end up doing what they accuse (from *causa*, indicating thingification and emplacement within relationships of accountability) others of. Distinctively, they slide into discursively reproducing allochronistically positioned others, such as, supposedly, non-entrepreneurial (older) workers or myopically ageist policymakers, who, in these two articles, are construed “in terms of distance, spatial and temporal” (Fabian 1983, p. xi). For they overlook that “[t]he messianic announcement means

that [...] division no longer exists between men, or between men and God” (Agamben 2005b, p. 49).

Doubtlessly, they, Ainsworth and Hardy, to use their own words, “take the concept of the older worker for granted” (2004, p. 233). For they maintain ‘the older (unemployed) worker’ as the semantically corresponding *opposite* or other, of a dominant ‘(enterprising) self’. Or, by the same token, harking back to Oswick’s priorly turned-to definition of discourse, they entirely fail to ‘think’ singularities without constitutive reference to this or that meaning-making through talk and text. Since they, to – once again – use Ainsworth and Hardy’s own words, fathom “the ability of the older worker to become part of this enterprise culture” (2008, p. 389). And, in so doing, they merely deplore that “older workers [...] are unable to don the mantle of enterprise, although they are nonetheless subject to it” (ibid.). As such, with the texts studied, when it comes down to it, simply aiming to observe and revise a ‘given’ discourse/state, this discourse or state is left operative, if not stoked up. Therefore, in ‘faithfully’ observing/revising, Ainsworth and Hardy, this chapter argues, fuel an ‘intensification of the same’. They fuel an intensification of the ‘enterprise discourse’. Completely deaf to ‘testimony’ and, embedded therein, ‘truth’, they fuel an intensification of the ‘religion of capitalism’.

Put somewhat differently, by and large, the two publications *analysed* fail to properly profane the ‘enterprise discourse’ as they – in strikingly circular fashion – take the position of a negative determination of that which they ‘faithfully’ criticise, i.e. of that which they oppose: the, by necessity, exclusionary ‘enterprising self’ propagated by an Australian public parliamentary inquiry concerning the older worker. That means, in siding with the position of ‘the older (unemployed) worker’, they aim to achieve a positive re-evaluation of older workers’ labour market potentiality along the lines of an ‘inclusive-cum-entrepreneurial Australian future’. More precisely, they strive to achieve a revision of older workers’ indiscriminate reduction to, within the horizon of enterprise, solely negative ‘stock’, with human beings – whether young or old – implicitly presented as in need of being “ordered and guided toward salvation” (Agamben 2011d, p. 252), towards full-blown ‘enterprise’. That is to say, these two authors, to, once again, use Ainsworth and Hardy’s own words, seek to achieve a revision or reformulation of a particular “view of what persons are and what they should be allowed to become” (2008, p. 390). All that means that Ainsworth and Hardy overlook that “[h]e who upholds himself in the messianic vocation [...] knows that in messianic time the saved world coincides with the world that is irretrievably lost and that [...] he must now really live in a world without God” (Agamben 2005b, p. 42). After all, “[t]he saving God is the God who abandons him” (ibid.).

In this vein, paradoxically, while the two articles turned to take issue with texts produced in the context of a public parliamentary inquiry, they end up positioning corresponding higher-level decisions as increasingly irrevocable. And, what is more, in so doing, they – the two articles – reproduce, and stoke up, a futurist,



capitalist *dispositif* that, partly mirroring Florida's notorious extolment of 'the creative class', pivots on quasi-religious 'faith' in a "more inclusive Creative Society that can more fully harness its members"—all of its members'—capacities" (2012, p. xi). No doubt, the articles participate in reproducing, and stoking up, a futuristic *dispositif* that – in criticising that "the enterprising self is not uniformly accessible" (Ainsworth and Hardy 2008, p. 390) – opens the doors to a more comprehensive production of "more motivated, self-reliant employees who are willing to accept responsibility and exercise initiative" (ibid.), to a more comprehensive circulation of discourses in which "individuals not normally associated with enterprise [...] still access the enterprising self" (p. 403). They, too, turn out to be proponents of a (quasi-)religious cult – of discourse. Or, turning to a line mooted by Costea et al., they, Ainsworth and Hardy, risk reproducing a governmental apparatus that, extolling "'infinite human resourcefulness'" (2007, p. 245), revolves around calling on human beings to conduct themselves as stores of 'unlimited potentialities' to, time and again, be creatively and innovatively actualised in the constant outdoing of an at-present supposedly still inhibiting self.

In other words, Ainsworth and Hardy run the risk of, perhaps, inadvertently fuelling a governmental apparatus that, as Berglund et al. emphasise, is part and parcel of "the advancement of neoliberal societies" (2017, p. 892) – a governmental apparatus that, to use Bröckling's words, in constantly lionising "something we are supposed to become" (2016, p. viii), strictly speaking, emplaces human beings as "only ever an entrepreneur *à venir*" (ibid.). Thus, both authors tend to, 'faithfully', position 'the past' as useless or, at best, as subject to what Kaulingfreks et al. term "a way of organising [...] objects that destroys their singularity" (2011, p. 311). And, in like fashion, they, the two authors, mobilise a vision of the present as a state serving to prepare the future, as – to return to Ainsworth and Hardy's 'faithfully' observing words – a state characterised by "provision for the future" (2008, p. 394).<sup>72</sup>

Patently, this chapter ventures, then, to expose this codicil-like and, as it were, faithful critique, striving to render it, the critical *stance* espoused, *possible* anew. And, crucially, in so doing, i.e. in *analysing* critiques seeking to merely observe and – on that basis – revise the 'enterprise discourse', this chapter – drawing on Agamben, who, in turn, paraphrases Karl Marx – argues that "hope is given [only] to the hopeless" (cited in Smith 2004, p. 123). Indeed, hope, which, Agamben

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<sup>72</sup> Vitally, in view of the above-mentioned, this chapter refrains from treating *oikonomic* 'faith' (in the entrepreneur) as uniformly wholehearted and fervent. Instead, with Agamben, it suggests that, more often than not, "faith [is] maintained by force and without conviction" (2012b, p. 1), which for many, makes our epoch one of "empty futures and false hopes" (ibid.). Moreover, grasping, with Agamben, that "[t]he future [...] is in fact today one of the primary and most effective devices [*dispositivi*] of power" (2017a, p. 1), it also refrains from following De Cock's proposition to open up "the future to the possibility of radical change without delimiting that future by prescribing its form" (2009, p. 437), a proposition that remains stuck in the *virtual* state of exception.

intimates, is given only to those who are “consigned without remedy to their being-thus” (1993c, p. 39), remains inaccessible to those who obstinately pin their hopes on what, Sørensen’s perusal of government reports eulogising ‘the entrepreneur’ suggests, is at its core a futurist “religious figure” (2008, p. 85). Tragically, hope remains inaccessible to those who faithfully participate in the perpetuation of a discourse that, Kenny and Scriver’s article on articulations of ‘the Irish entrepreneur’ hints, sustains and adds fuel to, “the reproduction of political hegemony” (2012, p. 615) and, hence, serves to “legitimize the continuation of market logics and, relatedly, the existing political status quo” (ibid.).

Hence, criticising these critiques’ still operative quasi-religious ‘faith’ in what, Sørensen suggests, policy documents portraying ‘the entrepreneur’ celebrate as a figure “*saving the world*” (2008, p. 85), this chapter argues that what *can* be called hope must reach beyond any *known* or *conceptualised* hope. And, likewise, what can be called Messiah must be something *other* than, and differ from, every *known historical* determination of a Messiah, of a messianism or of a messianic tendency. Naturally, that means that this chapter refrains from relegating organisation to hope or ‘faith’ in futurist entrepreneurial ‘salvation’ as *epitomised* by *visions* of “[t]he entrepreneur as savior in the age of creativity” (ibid.). Instead it clings to ‘hopeless hope’. Since ‘hopeless hope’ ‘saves’ organisation only insofar as it concerns and preserves “truly unsavable life” (Agamben 1993c, p. 6). Or, in Sergei Prozorov’s unmistakable words, it is only thanks to ‘hopeless hope’ that we *can* be “saved *from* the salvation promised by [...] historical apparatuses” (2014, p. 167), including the entrepreneurial machine. For, undoubtedly, as Agamben suggests, it is “the unsavable that renders salvation possible, the irreparable that allows the coming of the redemption” (2001, p. 1). And, clearly, it is in this special context that one must appreciate Agamben’s focus on Paul’s citation of the messianic prophecy of Isaiah: “only a remnant will be saved” (2005b, p. 54).

To be sure, unlike previous articles, which, as has been stressed, anti-messianically settle for lamenting issues related to the *supposedly* proper ‘administration’ of, as for ‘the Law’, the texts at the heart of this chapter take then, if, too, anti-messianically, issue with a neoliberal government rationality, striving to modify the corresponding representation of the future. Indeed, they take issue with a dominant biopolitical rationality which – as Burchell’s (1993) influential reflections suggest – aims to produce autonomous, self-regulating productive behaviour so as to have singularities (*singularità*), referred to as ‘individuals’, allegedly in their own best interest, unfurl and make use of their professedly latent, unique creativity and skill, arguably hoping to revise the future to be ‘administratively’ enforced. More specifically, in the ‘faithful’ texts *analysed*, Australian policy documents’ portrayals of ‘enterprise’ are criticised, argued to rudely and crudely dismiss (human beings referred to as) ‘older workers’ as unable to figure as entrepreneurs. Thus, human beings classified as ‘older workers’, these texts bewail, figure as unable to become avatars of enterprise, avatars of what Agamben calls the “ideology of the spectacle,

of the market, and of enterprise” (2000, p. 137), of a realm in which “organizations themselves assume the character of spectacle” (Gabriel 2008b, p. 277). Hence, ‘older Australian workers’, these texts protest, are kept from occupying advantageous positions within prevalent policy discourse, viewed to be kept from “clamber[ing] the good ship Enterprise” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, p. 299), from boarding an ark that may protect the Australian people from collective and individual malaise and carry them into a future reality, a supposedly better futurist *oikonomia*. Or, put differently, barred from being “‘proper’ entrepreneurs” (Ainsworth and Hardy 2008, p. 400), they, ‘older workers’, would be reduced to “the older unemployed” (2004, p. 226).

Against this backcloth, one may say that the articles perused in this chapter criticise Australian policymakers’ vision of an incipient entrepreneurial future, finding fault with this vision’s supposedly ageist overtones (e.g. Ainsworth and Hardy 2008). Plainly, this entrepreneurial future’s association with a spectacularly accomplished, youthful being, i.e. the ‘entrepreneur’, who, Sørensen stresses, is projected to make “all things new” (2008, p. 91), is criticised, taken to spell doom for ‘the older worker’. Thus, while Australian policymakers, the articles perused contend, wax lyrical about the spectacularly accomplished youthful entrepreneur and, as a result, strive to rebuild Australia along spectacularly youthful, entrepreneurial lines, Ainsworth and Hardy fear that prevalent policy allusions to an incipient entrepreneurial future ignore and write off ‘older workers’. For, in their view, it seems, this extant codex, centred upon a ‘spectacularly’ youthful enterprising Australia, on “a youth-centred ideal where aging is hidden, masked or denied” (Ainsworth and Hardy 2009, p. 1202) might prevent ‘older workers’ from what in Strathern’s work is called “being enterprised-up” (1992, p. 38). Put a little differently, these policy sources, the articles *analysed* bemoan, tend to close their eyes to older workers’ labour market potentiality, with ‘older workers’ said to risk being unhinged from the spectacular, incipient entrepreneurial future (e.g. Ainsworth and Hardy 2009). Indeed, these policy sources are argued to propel unduly generalising and dismissive stereotypes which, it is implied, would allochronistically consign ‘older workers’ to the proverbial scrapheap, i.e. to involuntary unemployment – to forced inactivity.

As a result, similar to academic articles *analysed* in the preceding chapter, the articles criticising Australian policy documents, too – rather than, with Benjamin, helping to liberate ‘the coming’ from its deformed, *verbildeten* (literally ‘imaged’), form in the present (see the chapter called ‘Final ideas’) – further a still quasi-religious position; specifically, not only are the authors of the two articles in question, echoing an increasing interest in ‘the older worker’ among organisation scholars writing from the standpoint of the critical camp, distraught over ageist prejudices that, they underline, are exacerbated by these policy documents’ celebration of a spectacularly youthful, enterprising Australia. The articles also aim to eliminate these inhibiting, ageist prejudices, striving to pave the way for a fairer,

more attentive, unprejudiced appreciation of older workers' idiosyncratic labour market potentiality. Indisputably, they hope to whip up support for the construction of an, it is true, equally spectacular, humane, inclusive-cum-entrepreneurial potentiality-centred Australia, which, it seems to be suggested, would constitute a better or improved enterprise 'codex'. It would constitute a better or improved *dispositif*. In this particular context, it is unsurprising that Ainsworth and Hardy complain that the Australian policy documents 'observed' tend to campaign for a future that only accommodates youthful workers, workers who ardently parade their spectacularly juvenile resilience and, thus, take great pleasure in continually reinventing, and outstripping, themselves. Indeed, echoing reservations expressed in a range of OECD publications, Ainsworth and Hardy underline, then, that obsessive fixation on spectacularly youthful resilience and on constant reinvention may give rise to older workers' premature relegation to inferior positions both within and outside the 'ordinary labour market'. That is, the ageist overtone said to pervade, and to be fuelled by, Australian policy documents, they seem to fear, might lead to older workers' functional exclusion from enterprising. In other words, 'the older worker', the articles moan, may, returning to some phrases 'used' before, be exempted from actualising as autonomous and self-regulating productive behaviour and, simultaneously, as the unfurling of hitherto dormant skill and creativity. They may be exempted from becoming what in Adkins's work on present-day capitalism, ruminations that markedly take issue with Bourdieu-inspired 'observations' of social reproduction, is referred to as "stored-up, embodied capacities and skills" (2008, p. 187). They may be exempted from what Comaroff and Comaroff call an overpowering, encroaching "universe of infinite enterprise" (2000, p. 316).<sup>73</sup>

Effectively, this literature bemoaning Australian policy articulations of 'the older worker', one may say, advocates a more humane and inclusive, entrepreneurial-cum-capitalist future, thereby hoping to transform proliferating ageist norms into what are seen to be more enabling, empowering ways of being and knowing 'the older worker'. For, in the articles *analysed*, more emancipatory ways of *being* and *knowing* 'the older worker', i.e. epistemologies that recognise, and help propel, old-age potentialities' actualisation in an entrepreneurial future, are hoped to be roused. Put a little differently, although Ainsworth and Hardy problematise, and point to, mechanisms of in- and exclusion in the Australian enterprise discourse, they undermine the pure potentiality of the poetic word, 'faithfully' aiming, as noted before, for a 'codicil' as far as the Law is concerned. In fact, rather than rendering

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<sup>73</sup> While Ainsworth and Hardy remain vague in this context, two strategies to fight ageism resonate particularly well with these texts' focus on older workers' marginalisation. For one thing, ageism may be fought by pointing to the specific skills that older workers are seen to exhibit, with older workers being equated with a useful, easily neglected skill set which younger workers may lack (e.g. Backes-Gellner et al. 2011). For the other, attempts to fight ageist attitudes may involve underlining that individual older workers may not necessarily feature the negative characteristics that older workers, as a group, may be known to exhibit (e.g. Ng & Feldman 2013).

such mechanisms inoperative, i.e. to profane them, they seem to suggest that Australian policy documents' criteria for admission to this 'spectacular' future or to prominent positions therein be reviewed and modified, with the onus being on "fighting for inclusion" (Ainsworth and Hardy 2009, p. 1215). Such criteria should become more sensitive to older workers' potentiality so as to reveal, and grasp, the various work functions by means of which old-age Australian workers may actualise as taxable third-age-entrepreneurial spry labour.

As emphasised before, it is in this context that Australian policy documents discussing older workers' aptitude to become 'entrepreneurs' are said to throw a spanner in the works, seen to keep the history of a hoped-for anti-ageist Australia from properly unfurling and gaining steam; they are seen to associate older workers with welfare dependency, dwindling productivity and plummeting cognitive capacity. And these biased ageist assumptions, Ainsworth and Hardy warn, may risk tarring all older workers with the same brush; not only might such assumptions keep employers seeking to optimise their employee portfolio to be able to properly compete in an increasingly globalised economy from considering and properly grasping older workers' potentiality, so as to stop older workers from putting themselves, as employees, to good capitalist use. These assumptions, the texts fear, may also prevent older workers from getting a chance to realise their own business ideas, as 'free agents', with prevalent ageist leanings seen to take an inappropriately dim view of 'aged entrepreneurs'.

Curiously, Ainsworth and Hardy stress that this ageist relegation and the related inconsiderate squandering of old-age labour market potentiality appear to occur at a critical historical juncture when 'older workers' are said to constitute an ever-increasing proportion of the Australian population and workforce. Markedly, in these articles, Australian policy documents are regarded to take the bread out of Australia's mouth; for, in Ainsworth and Hardy's view, it is due to Australian policymakers' undiscerning ageist leanings that 'older Australian workers' are kept from accessing the 'spectacular' 'enterprising self'. In effect, the policies are regarded to keep 'older workers' from participating in Australia's inclusive-cum-entrepreneurial future at a point in time when older workers' continual economic contribution is regarded to be needed more than ever – not least in order to make sure that such a future has a chance to get off the ground at all. Relatedly, older workers' marginalisation is said to stand in stark contrast to allusions to equal opportunities or achievement-based social mobility – allusions that enthused policymakers, who cast 'enterprise' as a key to a more exhilarating, eventful capitalist future, Ainsworth and Hardy underline, tend to mobilise. Indeed, Ainsworth and Hardy suggest that it is due to such exalted accounts that one might jump to conclusions, led to overlook such allusions' ageist ramifications; one may be led to think that, under the banner of 'enterprise', all Australian workers were allowed to 'spectacularly' become entrepreneurs – indeed, that all individuals were, considered from the side of the transcendent, to actualise their individual labour

market potentiality. Hence, hoping to debunk such gullible beliefs, Ainsworth and Hardy ally themselves with other articles that also write from the position of the critical ‘camp’, with other articles that take issue with various discursively presupposed social groups’ exclusion. It is in this context that they point out that

[d]espite its supposed accessibility, researchers have argued that the entrepreneurial self is not an identity that everyone can assume. For example, small business entrepreneurship has been shown to promote an identity of the entrepreneur as white and male [...]: women and certain ethnic groups are marginalized [...]. [Indeed], research has shown that, when the discourse of enterprise intersects with gender and race, it becomes harder for these individuals to access (2008, pp. 391–2).

Moreover, seemingly worried about older workers’ ageist relegation into economic inactivity, Ainsworth and Hardy indicate, then – as mentioned before – that, in the policy documents that they reviewed,

[t]hose who [...] [are portrayed to be unable to] conduct themselves in an appropriately ‘entrepreneurial’ and hence responsible manner are excluded or marginalised. [...] [In this context, t]he intersection of enterprise- and age-related discourses constructed older workers as: a) unattractive products [for employers] and b) risky [enterprise] projects, both of which served to restrict the access of the older worker to the enterprising self discourse [...]. The implication was that the older worker was an unsuitable employee for prospective employers; and would therefore find it difficult to escape unemployment without the assistance of agencies which made up the privatised enterprise model of contractually based, government-funded labour market services (2008, pp. 391–6).

Patently, it is, henceforth, an undiscerning ‘dualism’, i.e. the misguided division between the youthful, omnipotent entrepreneur and the useless and sapped ‘older worker’, which, in the articles exposed in this chapter, is argued to project older workers as prone to slide into, and remain trapped in, unemployment. Indeed, the older worker, it is stated, risks being pushed out of the labour market, viewed to be likely to be written off as a customer of the network of organisations forming the government-funded Job Services Australia. That means what Ainsworth and Hardy object to is not so much the imposition of a ‘spectacular’ ideal being, i.e. the ‘enterprising self’, on life as such. Rather, it is particular biopolitical labour market potentialities’ exemption from that ideal. Since, clearly, Ainsworth and Hardy are interested in “discourses that [are] [...] less disadvantageous to the older worker” (2008, p. 403) – in particular discourses detailing “ways that allow them to access the enterprising self” (ibid.). It is in this spirit that they point out that, in influential Australian government publications,

[o]lder workers were unlikely to be successful entrepreneurs [...]. While the younger employed were constructed as entrepreneurial material, their older counterparts were constructed as unsuccessful and unsuitable entrepreneurs. [In fact, the articles ‘cited’

suggest] [...] that the enterprising self is an inherently aged construction and therefore not equally accessible to all age groups of workers because of the manner in that enterprise and age intersect to produce two versions of identity for the older worker. A specific older worker was constructed that constrained [...] access to the enterprising self: not only were [...] older workers not enterprising enough to secure employment; they were just not enterprising enough to start up a new business either (2008, p. 391).

Taking issue with Australian policy documents along such lines, Ainsworth and Hardy focus in particular on how so-called physical and psychological discourses are mobilised to regulate and subordinate old-age labour market potentiality, i.e. the presupposed biopolitical governance regime called ‘older worker’. Whilst both discourses undermine the actualisation of older-worker potentiality, they are found to

have separate effects: [In Australian policy documents, it is said,] physical discourse [focusing on and stressing impeding bodily defects,] suggested that job loss for older workers would be permanent, whereas psychotherapeutic discourse suggested that the solution to unemployment lay in the mind of older workers themselves. [However, both discourses] [...] also have combined effects through the notion of grief: older workers are expected to progress through the normative stages of grief to arrive at acceptance of job loss and continued exclusion from the labour market (2009, p. 1199).

In fact, together, both discourses mentioned are argued to almost seal older workers’ fate. For, as Ainsworth and Hardy hold, it is due to such discourses that ‘older workers’ risk being urged to *view* unemployment as an irrevocably permanent, definite condition. That is, ‘older workers’ – they lament – are called on to put up with and accept their allegedly deficient entrepreneurial aptitude, with ‘the older worker’ seen to be discursively banned from what, for them, ‘older workers’, must be life-affirming work and from the material, social and psychological benefits, by custom, regarded to necessarily spring from capitalist wage labour. Specifically, Ainsworth and Hardy argue, then, that potentiality-insensitive

negative stereotypes about older workers suggest [that older workers] [...] possess inferior physical abilities; are less able to learn; and are more resistant to change compared with younger workers. [...] [In addition to this,] representing older workers’ responses to unemployment as grief was consistent with the prominent death analogy, drawn on to depict the loss of work: the loved one is not coming back, their career is over [...]. [In effect,] permanent loss became the objective of the grieving process. As a result, there was a heavy emphasis upon the appropriate way to manage grief by working through the various stages to arrive at acceptance of [job] loss (2009, pp. 1202–3).

Vitally, as this chapter's final quote makes clear, the supposedly deficiently thought-out governmental future promoted by Australian policy documents is seen to project older (unemployed) workers as lost both for themselves and for Australia's, at the end of the day, irrevocably enterprising future. No doubt, it is old-age labour market potentialities' likelihood to accept their relegation and to forego 'spectacular' actuality that, in the articles *analysed*, causes grief. That is to say, these articles grieve over Australian policymakers' failure to discursively integrate old-age potentialities in what Sørensen's astute analysis reveals as a "religious script" (2008, p. 87). Luckily, salvation is, however, near. Contrary to Ainsworth and Hardy's quasi-religious, prophetic stance, which, using Sørensen's and Spoelstra's fitting words, is subtended by "faith in the redemptive possibilities of business" (2013, p. 518), for Agamben, it resides in 'hopeless' hope's unlocking of an irreducible remnant (*resto*); it resides in the apostle's profane-cum-messianic unfurling of *illegible* play. Or, put yet another way, *pace* Cooper, it resides *not* in a focus on the *virtual* exception of the 'between' (cf. Chia and Kallinikos 1998), but in the coincidence of the *entre-preneurial* with what Agamben refers to as "*philo-sophia*" (2017b, p. 54): "a love of knowledge and a knowledge of love [...] that would be neither knowledge of the signifier nor knowledge of the signified" (*ibid.*). Instead, it, the remnant, the *entre-preneurial*, "is situated in the fracture that divides them" (*ibid.*).





# Exposing identity production

“[T]he end of man, for its part, is the return of the beginning of philosophy. [...] It is nothing more, and nothing less, than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think.” (Foucault 1994, p. 342)

As indicated before, the fifth and final case turned to in *this* book revolves around scholarly discussions – at core scholarly discourse – regarding unemployed human beings’ supposed identity. More concretely, this case revolves around scholarly discourse regarding these beings’ – to use Munro’s wording – supposed “belonging to this or that grouping” (2011, p. 142). Indeed, it revolves around their supposed vocation, with my *analytical* focus resting on messianically fulfilling, i.e. *exposing*, this vocation. And, thus, more generally, this case revolves around neutralising the convention of – to stick with Munro – “‘placing’ one another as *this* or *that*” (2015, p. 162). Importantly, the three texts analysed in this connection are an *Organization* article entitled ‘Identity Regulation in Neoliberal Societies: Constructing the Occupationally Disabled Individual’, a *Work, Employment & Society* article entitled ‘Medicalization of Unemployment: Individualizing Social Issues as Personal Problems in the Swedish Welfare State’ and a *European Societies* article entitled ‘The Active Welfare State and its Consequences: A Case Study of Sheltered Employment in Sweden’. All of these texts are either lead- or sole-authored by Mikael Holmqvist and vehemently criticise what they take to be the systematic, organisational production of negatively charged, inhibiting personal identity. Notably, the three articles mentioned criticise the organisational production of, as far as *oikonomik actualisation* in the labour market is concerned, unfavourable ‘personal identity’ taken to be induced by an increasing medicalisation of unemployment. Thus, in equating organisation with signification, these articles criticise the production of medicalised self-*classification*, reproductively *calling for* an immediate, supposedly empowering *reclassification*.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Chiefly, these three articles have been ‘collected’ – in the sense of what Agamben, with a view to Benjamin’s work on the ‘collector’ (*Sammler*), refers to as the freeing of things “from the ‘slavery of usefulness’” (1999e, p. 65) – for they resonate with a) an extensive literature on organisational identity (see Munro 2011, 2015) and b) a growing literature on disability in organisations (e.g. Barnes and Mercer 2005; Beatty et al. 2019; Dobusch 2017; Duff and Ferguson 2012; Jammaers and Zanoni 2021; Knights and Latham 2020; Van Laer et al. 2022; Williams and Mavin 2012). Thus, in line with “[t]he collector [who] [...] cites the object outside

Significantly, in this context, for Holmqvist, ‘medicalisation’ refers to “the process by which human behaviours become defined and are treated as medical problems and issues” (2009, p. 406). In this vein, the ‘medicalisation of unemployment’ turns, for him, on “the individualization of the social issue of unemployment into a personal trouble of disability” (p. 405). That means, as far as organisational targets for intervention are concerned, the ‘medicalisation of unemployment’, Holmqvist laments, tends to shift attention to “individuals’ personal troubles rather than social issues” (ibid.). And, what is more, based on organisational practices such as labelling/classification, but also work-driven therapy or coaching procedures, “medical norms and ideas”, he maintains, “act to create the disabled person” (p. 407). As a result, “individuals’ impairments come forth as socially constructed and gradually imprinted in [...] identities” (Holmqvist et al. 2013, p. 197), with Holmqvist et al., in an attempt to articulate alternatives, *inter alia* hinting at different “competing bases of identification” (p. 207) that might, perhaps, more positively inform people put in specialised work programmes “in their ‘identity work’” (p. 206). After all, the work programmes on offer, Holmqvist underlines, do “not necessarily contribute to clients’ activation” (2010, p. 223), with these clients – due to their unemployment being ‘medicalised’, he intimates – “becoming progressively locked in a situation of disablement, incapacity and helplessness” (p. 222). Curiously, then, whilst Holmqvist broaches the issue of what – drawing on Agamben – can be called “the ‘medicalization’ of ever-widening spheres of life” (2000, p. 8), he remains stuck in it, failing to profane it...

Indeed, insofar as he hopes to ‘remedy’ those who, in the articles exposed here, are seen to, detrimentally, be made to adopt “a *passive identity*” (Holmqvist et al. 2013, p. 207) based on a new identity that, he stresses, would allow them “to compete and to take part in society as full-worthy and active citizens” (p. 208), he partakes in the medicalisation of life. That is, he functions as a medical expert, which is all the more deplorable, for, as Agamben firmly stresses, “the medical religion offers no prospect of salvation and redemption” (2021, p. 53). Salvation and redemption and, henceforth, medicalisation’s suspension reside only in what Agamben refers to as “de-identification” (2000, p. 100). In other words, as Agamben notes in an interview published in *Libération*, they reside in the idea of a subject as that “which remains between subjectification and desubjectification, between the human and the non-human” (1999a, p. ii). Or, as he highlights in an insightful interview with Hanna Leitgeb and Cornelia Vismann, they all reside in the idea that “[t]he subject is sort of ‘remnant’, a rest” (2001, p. 20). That means that salvation and redemption reside beyond the biopolitics of both the signified *and* of the signifier. And here “the impossibility to determine an identity is the decisive point” (ibid.).

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its context and in this way destroys the order inside which it finds its value and meaning” (Agamben 1999e, p. 64), this chapter ‘cites’ these articles, hoping to, in so doing, inspire further ‘citations’ of literatures.

Thus, hoping to *remedy* (like *medicine* from the Proto-Indo-European *\*med*, meaning ‘to advise’ or ‘counsel’ and, hence, corresponding to German’s *raten*, which, for its part, is related to *reden*, ‘to discourse’) present *placing* through *rectified*, futurist *placing*, these articles fail to expose. After all, these articles overlook that – with Agamben – “[w]e can have hope only in what is without remedy” (1993c, p. 102). We can have hope only in what is without biopolitical ‘apparatus’ (*Gerät* or *Gerede*)... As this chapter sets out to foreground, they fail to grasp that the human being, the ‘coming’ organiser, is *Odradekian* and, *as such*, as a *monstrum*, irreducible to logic/reason. Indeed, as an *Odradekian*, one belongs, Hamacher’s ‘studious’ reading of Kafka’s work suggests, “to no kind [Czech’s *rod*] and is without counsel [Czech’s *rada* and German’s *Rat*], [being] the one with neither a discourse [German’s *Rede*] nor a name” (2011, p. 307). Since – as for *Odradek* – “his name says that he has no name” (*ibid.*)... Therefore, echoing the violent reactions of the family members of Gregor Samsa, the protagonist of *The Metamorphosis*, who – one morning – found himself disfigured into a giant “Ungeziefer” (Kafka 1971, p. 168), literally a being unsuited (*un-*) for religious operations (*\*tībrq*), these texts seem to proclaim that “Gregor is ill. Go for the doctor, quick” (p. 184). In short, hastily pushing *in-fancy* aside, they reduce organisation(al language) to emplacement. They overlook the *possibility* of our joyously being *ratlos* (uncounselled) in language.

Vitaly, as Gregor’s voice, Kafka writes, “left the words in their [...] shape only for the first moment and then rose up reverberating around them to destroy their sense” (1971, p. 172), Gregor’s turning into an *Ungeziefer* can, then, be appreciated as involving such joyously *ratloses*/uncounselled indwelling of language; it can be seen as coinciding with an unlocking of organisation in terms of *in-fancy*. Hence, what can be gleaned from turning to Kafka, this chapter suggests, does not so much concern Rhodes and Westwood’s reading of *The Metamorphosis*, a reading focusing on the limits of reciprocation “when the other person one is dealing with becomes so ‘other’ that one can no longer see him through any real mode of identification” (2016, p. 240). Rather, it concerns an otherness immanent to selfness that defies representation and conceptualisation. Alluding to Michel Foucault’s above-quoted intervention, it concerns a return to the *anoikonomic* beginning, the *an-archic arche*, of philosophy. Unfortunately, however, Holmqvist et al., like Gregor Samsa’s father, mother and sister, remain subject to an *oikonomic* ‘first’. No doubt, akin to Gregor’s father, mother and Grete, they remain subject to, and reproduce, “management” (Kafka 1971, p. 251), a “commissioner” (*ibid.*) and a “principal” (*ibid.*)...

As it turns out, themselves fully trapped in the diffusion of medicalising language, these articles wish to remedy supposedly disabling, organisationally produced self-classification. They wish to do so by way of supposedly enabling, organisationally propped reclassification, with their authors installing or placing themselves as indispensable socio-medical practitioners. Consequently, the three articles in

question criticise both the Swedish PES, Arbetsförmedlingen, and a state-owned company officially tasked with helping to produce what Holmqvist et al. class the “‘able’ and ‘fit’ employee, ready to take a job on the regular labour market” (2013, p. 204), viz., Samhall. Since, as far as those employed in related public work/activation programmes are concerned, the PES and Samhall, the state-owned firm responsible for the realisation of these work/activation programmes intended for the ‘occupationally disabled’, Holmqvist et al. complain, do “not bring them closer but further away from the labour market and from society” (ibid.). That is to say, both organisations bring them further away from a “labour market and [a] society that” – Holmqvist et al. concede – “[to begin with,] expelled these people” (ibid.), with the people the PES assigns to Samhall as employees reported to “gradually acquire an identity as ‘occupationally disabled’” (ibid.).

In this vein, Holmqvist criticises, for instance, governments’ “‘diverting’ [of] working age people on to disability benefits” (2009, p. 407). That is, he is critical of governments’ attempts to, in this way, ‘reduce’ and, thus, whitewash or ‘massage’ unemployment statistics. He is critical, it is true, of any medicalisation of unemployment that might mean that “long-term unemployed individuals [are put] to forms of work that the labour market finds too simplistic, too dreary, too dirty, and too expensive to handle with ordinary employees” (Holmqvist et al. 2013, p. 208). Since Holmqvist and colleagues fear that both Arbetsförmedlingen’s and Samhall’s seeming recourse to “a ‘medico-economic discourse’ within which issues concerning individuals’ activity and agency are transformed into matters of illness and disability” (p. 193) may “diminish [a] person’s future employability by implying that he or she is not only unemployed, but also disabled” (Holmqvist 2009, p. 407). Indeed, the unemployed assigned to these very programmes, Holmqvist et al. argue, “first accept and then, gradually, begin freely to see themselves and to act as occupationally disabled” (2013, p. 207). For them, they assume the identity ‘occupationally disabled’.

Thus, whether reluctantly or readily, Holmqvist et al. take neoliberalism’s focus on what, in these articles, is called “self-governing, active, and entrepreneurial identities” (2013, p. 196) for granted. In so doing, they partake in – from an equally neoliberal point of view – denigrating the state “for creating passive and state-dependent populations” (ibid.). As a consequence, their critique does not so much concern the imposition of (neoliberal) identities on the part of the state and its organisations *per se*. Rather, it concerns supposedly insufficiently futurist identity production. It concerns supposedly insufficiently enabling (em)placement or grouping, with Holmqvist and his co-authors installing themselves as advocates of a ‘hoped-for future’ marked by a rapid transition of rapidly (re)activated work programme participants into the ‘ordinary labour market’ – as, to re-echo, ‘self-governing, active and entrepreneurial identities’. For, as for the unemployed people whose optimal identity or emplacement is, for the articles turned to, at stake, Holmqvist et al. bewail that the PES and Samhall do “not [...] give them moral

guidance and motivation to adapt to society in general and to the labour market in particular, but [...] help them adopt an identity that constitutes them as the very antipode to the neoliberal ideal of the active and self-governing individual” (2013, p. 197).<sup>75</sup>

Yet, in so doing, Holmqvist and his co-authors overlook that our “transformation [...] into a principle of identity and classification is the original sin of our culture, its most implacable apparatus [*dispositivo*]” (Agamben 2007a, p. 59). In other words, the debilitating self-definition/self-categorisation that Arbetsförmedlingen and, above all, Samhall – a state-owned company and principal provider of sheltered employment for people with disabilities in Sweden – are said to foster in people whom Arbetsförmedlingen and Samhall should activate and rehabilitate is taken issue with. Correspondingly, Holmqvist’s, as well as his two co-authors’, critique, this chapter suggests, remains stuck in an inhibiting identitarian logic as these three authors happen – to return to Munro’s wording – to (em)place humans as *this* of *that* and – in so doing – mobilise a ‘commanding’ ableist discourse that, more or less explicitly, centres on hinging belonging on people’s *actualisation* in terms of (radically) augmented employability and eventual employment-based participation in what Holmqvist et al. concede are “neo-liberal regimes of government” (2013, p. 194).

In short, overlooking the *possibility* of what Ten Bos, inspired by Agamben, calls a ‘community without identity’, they participate in conditionalising belonging. Overlooking the *possibility* of what Agamben ‘terms’ an ‘unpresupposable community’ or of what Sergei Prozorov, in like fashion, calls a “community [...] rethought in the absence of identity and conditions of belonging” (2014, p. 6), they implicitly conceive belonging, in Luhmannian fashion, as membership. That is, they rely on, and propel, a systemic distinction between, as far as neoliberal work regimes are concerned, active/able members and inactive/disabled non-members. Indeed, based on the invocation of an able/disabled binary, which, curiously enough, reproduces what Holmqvist et al., if with some suspicion, as indicated, call ‘the neoliberal ideal of the active and self-governing individual’, they remain caught in, and perpetuate, a logic that, bemoaning (unemployed) people’s personal-identity-mediated reduction to negative self-classification, reproductively conceives humans automatically in terms of what Agamben calls “social-juridical identities” (2000, p. 6).

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<sup>75</sup> Obviously, Holmqvist’s concept of redemption, which turns on the production of a positive identity that may, so he hopes, allow those referred to as ‘occupationally disabled’ to actively participate both in a neoliberal society and a neoliberal labour market – contrasts with this chapter’s idea of the end of man and the concomitant return of the beginning of *philosophy* – an idea that is, perhaps, best expressed in a fine passage of Ingeborg Bachmann’s beautiful novel *Malina*: “[A]ll humans will be free, also from the freedom that they have meant” (2013, p. 175).

Obviously, the *possibility* that, as far as organisation is concerned, “humans [may] co-belong without any representable condition of belonging” (Agamben 1993c, p. 86) is, in these articles, effectively trampled on. And so is the concomitant *possibility* of “singularity without identity” (p. 65). Palpably, these authors fail to see a space in which we, as thinking singularities, *expose placings*. For, as Agamben shows, “[t]he thing of thought is not [...] identity, but the thing *itself*” (p. 96): “not presupposition, but exposure” (p. 97), so that “thought becomes possible only through an impossibility to think” (2011c, p. 78). After all, with Agamben, thought becomes *possible* only through an impossibility to think *something*, through man’s encounter with himself as pivoting on an impossibility to identify, with thinking, Agamben can be taken to suggest, proceeding “not by means of presupposition, but absolutely” (1999b, p. 33). Put simply, thought is *possible* only “without supposing, without hypothesizing and subjectifying” (ibid.) that which one thinks.<sup>76</sup>

As a consequence, Holmqvist and his two fellow authors, Christian Maravelias and Per Skålen, in locating a “promise of freedom” (2013, p. 194) in a futurist state of “full, active participation in society” (ibid.), i.e. in a state that, they hold, involves “the re-integration of [...] long-term unemployed individuals on the labour market” (ibid.), wholly overlook the *possibility* of “exodus from any sovereignty” (Agamben 2000, p. 8). Entirely unaware of what Agamben refers to as a “life directed towards the idea of happiness” (ibid.), of a “happiness [that] is, precisely, for us, but [that] awaits us only at the point where it was not destined for us” (2007a, p. 20), they overlook the *possibility* of exodus from language’s reduction to an *oikonomic* law. Put differently, arguably concurring with Morgan’s dictum that “[o]ur speaking and writing are inherently metaphorical” (2006, p. 368), in the sense that “metaphor implies [...] a way of seeing that pervade[s] how we understand our world generally” (p. 4), Holmqvist and his co-authors seem to be unaware of Paul Celan’s paradoxical metaphor ‘Ohnebild’ (see Hamacher 2019), a metaphor for the impossibility of metaphor that, *as such*, ‘means’ that it does not mean, pointing to something impossible to mean, to – as Agamben aptly suggests – “imagination with no more images” (2011c, p. 80).<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Unsurprisingly at this point, bearing witness to *the thing itself*, to – and this amounts to the same thing – pure singularity, this thesis contrasts with, and abstains from participating in, the *traditions* that make up the mainstream or the critical camp. After all, as Agamben shows, through *tradition*, “we presuppose, pass on, and thereby—according to the double sense of the word *tra-di-tio*—betray the thing itself in language, so that language may speak about something” (1999b, p. 35). Indeed, as such, “effacement of the thing itself is the sole foundation on which it is possible for something like a tradition to be constituted” (ibid.).

<sup>77</sup> Pace Cooper, for whom, “we are all [...] raw matter for the creation of images” (2001b, p. 41), that means that images “are no longer images of something about which one must immediately recount a meaning, narrative or otherwise. They exhibit themselves as such. The true messianic power is this power to give the image to this ‘imagelessness’” (Agamben 2014a, p. 26).

Rarely the subject of redemptive critique, Morgan's book *Images of Organization*, like Holmqvist's articles, remains caught in, and furthers, emplacement that, 'rubbishing the past' (see Munro 1998a) as simple, outdated and no longer feasible, aims to enlist people as apologists of a supposedly superior future – a future marked, as it were, not by the certainties of a single image or metaphor framing our understanding of organisation, but by the demands to flexibly and successfully juxtapose and integrate aspects of a variety of images or metaphors. As a result, informed by dominant clichés, Morgan commences his book with a short portrayal of a 'past' marked by "[l]arge centralized bureaucracies" (2006, p. xi) and "sound foundations" (p. 363), both of which, he maintains, "are becoming obsolete" (ibid.), so that people who do not adapt, he argues, are left "[l]ess effective" (p. 4), as they still "seem to interpret everything from a fixed standpoint" (ibid.) – from the standpoint of a simple, single-metaphor-based 'past'. Such people, Morgan underlines, "are often rigid and inflexible" (p. 4), so that "much of the richness and complexity of organizational life is passing them by" (p. 340). After all, to succeed in the future, people, he avers, have to be "open and flexible" (p. 4), intent on searching for what he calls "a more comprehensive view of the situation" (ibid.). Indeed, to wholly master the future, organisers would need an "ability to gain an overall view" (p. 337), an overall view that "cuts through surface complexity to reveal an underlying pattern" (p. 364), allowing people to "stay abreast of new developments" (ibid.) said to spring from "a turbulent world" (p. 8) marked by "unprecedented change" (p. 363) as well as by "ambiguity and flux" (p. xi).

Additionally, unlike the past, the future, Morgan maintains, comes along with "more decentralized and fluid forms of organization" (ibid.), which require ever "fresh ways of seeing" (p. 5) and an ability to "cope with flux in a positive way" (p. 364). Indeed, to thrive in the future, Morgan suggests, one must "gain comfort in dealing with the insights and implications of diverse perspectives" (p. 365); one must "use and integrate the insights of different metaphors" (p. 8), of different ways of seeing. Similarly, Cooper, hoping "to subvert the tyranny of the image" (2016g, p. 35), merely points to "pure action, uncontaminated by a directing image" (ibid.), where the point of "such 'action' is to create a cognitive vacuum which man must fill with images that break new ground" (ibid.). Rather than, with Morgan or Cooper, placing itself in terms of futurist, supposedly superior ways of seeing or, in opposition thereto, in terms of a supposedly tried and trusted, single way of seeing, this book engages in, and gestures towards, redemption from metaphorisation. Or, put differently, rather than striving to belong to either 'the past' or to 'the future', it points to the possibility of *Jetztzeit* – a term, Agamben shows, "with the same qualities as those pertaining to [...] Paul's paradigm of messianic time" (2005b, p. 143). That means that, with a view to the commanding (from the Latin *mandare*, meaning 'to give an order or a task', *ergon*) image that Holmqvist and his co-authors draw of organisation, this chapter, dedicated to 'imagination without images', points – with Agamben – to the possibility of "the image-less: the farewell—and the refuge—of all images" (2011c, p. 80).



Henceforth, partly reminiscent of articles turned to and exposed before, articles which problematise Australian government publications' mobilisation of physical and psychological discourses, for these discourses are found to write off 'the older worker' (e.g. Ainsworth and Hardy 2009), the articles combed through in this chapter criticise Arbetsförmedlingen's and Samhall's rehabilitation and activation programmes. They lament that unemployed people assigned to such programmes are bit by bit socialised into adopting a medicalised identity. More concretely, that means that these public sector organisations and their programmes are believed to, by means of medical frames of references drawn on throughout these programmes, regulate and adversely influence unemployed people's sense of self. They are argued to contribute to making these people understand themselves as marred by impairment, by chronic illness and disability – as dysfunctional, rather than functional, with regard to the neoliberal Swedish labour market.

As a result, both organisations, the three texts zoomed in on warn, fail to accomplish part of their mandate, including citizens' empowerment, the reduction of public expenses and the enhancement of the labour supply (e.g. Holmqvist 2009). Indeed, they are accused of failing to provide the long-term unemployed people in question with the mindset and skills necessary to properly combat their exclusion, of failing to prepare them for, and, thus, accommodate them in, the future. Consequently, people whom Holmqvist et al. refer to as 'passive and dependent individuals' are, then, said to be governed not primarily as part of a low-performing segment of the working population, but as a disabled segment of the working population, thus seen to be shunted aside. Echoing policy publications that stress the importance of transforming disability into ability, dependence into self-reliance and (taxable) work, the presently passive and dependent, the articles 'studied' in this chapter appear to maintain, do not receive the empowering administrative treatment that their particular potentiality deserves. Instead, 'the passive and dependent', it is stated, tend to be paralysed and discouraged from taking their fate into their own hands, with Samhall regarded to fail to render 'the passive and dependent' fit for an employability-dependant society.

Worried about long-term unemployed people's overdue, potentiality-befitting *actualisation*, i.e. their self-confident, empowered transition into the 'ordinary' labour market, Holmqvist et al. point, then, to what they, as alluded to before, believe to be a disconcerting discrepancy between Samhall's official mandate, on the one side, and blatant, dysfunctional organisational practice, on the other side. Specifically, they underline that the

official aim of the work program and of Samhall is to activate and rehabilitate 'occupationally disabled' people back to the labour market. Yet, in sharp contrast to this official aim, our study suggests that the work program in fact constitutes the participants as passive and unable to meet the criteria of activity and employability on the current labour market. The term 'occupationally disabled' emerges not primarily as a medical label that refers to already existing, inner characteristics of the

individuals concerned, but as an identity that they take on as they pass through the work program (2013, p. 194).

Crucially, in the articles exposed in this chapter, being occupationally disabled or being unfit for the future is, then, not regarded as a condition that arises from innate or fixed features, but as a condition that arises from a debilitating and dysfunctional sense of self that long-term unemployed people tend to acquire as they pass through the programmes provided by Samhall. Particularly worrying, Holmqvist underlines, is, then, that the medicalised identity that participants are found to assume individualises unemployment of ‘the passive and dependent’, seen to push these people into a vicious circle, which makes them focus on, and become absorbed by, their deficiencies, instead of actualising their labour market potentiality. In fact, it is supposed that Samhall’s

framing of unemployment as [a composite set of] individual medical problems, [...] [its framing of] unemployment as a result of a person’s medical disorders, rather than the result of lack of social and economic opportunities, raises a host of moral and political issues which need to be addressed in the current conversation on social policy and unemployment (2009, p. 408).

Interestingly, not only is ‘medicalisation’ said to blame and discourage passive and dependent people. For the Samhall programmes in which (unemployed) people tend to learn to become occupationally disabled, Holmqvist surmises, might be worse than arrangements associated with ‘the traditional welfare state’, which, he holds, simply excluded disadvantaged groups, jettisoning the *actualisation* of below-average labour-market potentiality. It is in this spirit that Holmqvist asks

what is ‘worse’ from the individual’s point of view? Remaining unemployed, but not [being] officially regarded as disabled; or getting a job through a labour market programme as disabled? Obviously, there are economic benefits [...] [related to] accepting that one is disabled, in that one can be offered sheltered work or a wage allowance, leading eventually to a ‘real’ job. But the label of disabled may be more degrading than the stigma of unemployment. Unemployment can be attributed to structural causes; disability is primarily seen as personal, a result of your individual condition or character (2009, p. 416).

Dissatisfied with Arbetsförmedlingen’s and Samhall’s dysfunctional rehabilitation and activation of passive and dependent people, Holmqvist suggests in addition that these people’s condition, their actualisable ‘ordinary-labour-market-potentiality’, will deteriorate. For those

recruited by Samhall eventually learn to become disabled, by participating in a work organization that is adapted to the presumed needs of disabled people; hence occupationally disabled people are produced and reproduced through the activation offered by Samhall. [...] [And, disconcertingly, t]he longer [...] [those earmarked for

activation and rehabilitation] stay at Samhall, the more disabled they become in a sociological sense, i.e. in the sense of acquiring a ‘disabled self’ (2010, pp. 222–3).

Remedying work programme participants’ identities and – in that way – helping to *actualise* their labour market potentiality, Holmqvist notes, should be comparatively easy to address. This might, for instance, be done by

hiring staff that emphasize disabled people’s capabilities and competencies, rather than their impairments and deficiencies. Another avenue to deal with these problems would be to design programs where disabled people are able to alternate between jobs at different non-sheltered employers. This would probably allow them to broaden their competency basis significantly, which could contribute to their overall employability so that they eventually could find permanent employment with a ‘regular’ employer (2010, p. 223).

Notwithstanding all this, considered from an Agambenian angle, the most enabling possibility is a fully de-identified life, life completely unbound from the gruelling shackles of conditionalised belonging and the constant reproduction of this or that placing. Indeed, dovetailing with what Fleming refers to as “inoperative critique” (2015, p. 449), rather than with the discourse-based placings, the traditional, biopolitical *Gerede*, the most enabling possibility, is a life dedicated to ‘collecting’ images, so as to engage in ‘imagination without any images’. Only in this way will we, in leaving behind the biopolitics of the “religion of health” (Agamben 2021, p. 8), return to the beginning of philosophy and think. After all, in thinking we detraditionalise and, consequently, render inoperative our medicalising images of organisation, insofar as we, with Kafka, stop “expecting the impossible from the doctor” (1971, p. 393).

Coinciding with this thesis’s idea of critique, ‘inoperative critique’, Fleming underlines, is a critique that “remains inscrutable to and independent of capitalist rationality” (2015, p. 439). Let there be no mistake, it is a critique that remains inscrutable to, and independent of, *oikonomia*. Or, echoing Kafka’s text *A Country Doctor*, a text in which, Snoek shows, the doctor eventually realises that “[t]here is no work for him” (2012, p. 69), it is an *il-legible* critique. For, using Rehberg’s words, and this applies both to Kafka’s story and this chapter, “neither parson nor doctor can heal or sanctify the text. They are left with nothing but comic gestures as the basis of knowledge is absent” (2007, p. 254). It is in this sense that inoperative critique assures that one of Bachmann’s most beautiful aphorisms – ‘specialists and experts multiply, while thinkers remain absent’ – loses *actuality* and gives way to pure *possibility*.

After all, as Rehberg emphatically shows, Kafka’s doctor (from the Proto-Indo-European *\*dek-*, meaning ‘to take’) “finds no locatable ground that could lend determination to a knowledge system” (2007, p. 253), indwelling his own *inoperosità*. Relatedly, Deleuze and Guattari, mulling over Kafka’s work, stress that

“Kafka deliberately kills all metaphor[s], all symbolism, all signification, no less than all designation” (1986, p. 22). All that means that, instead of being reducible to medicalising, identity-based propositions done on the hoof, organisation, exposition helps reveal, turns on profanity. At odds with traditional “Tropen” (Kafka 1971, p. 255), German for ‘tropics’ and ‘tropes/figures of speech’, with the placings of *The Penal Colony* and its apparatus – its biopolitical *Gerät* or *Gerede* – it turns on the *possibility* of imageless, uncounselled disfiguration.<sup>78</sup> Organisation turns on thought, becoming a pure exteriority. It turns upon indwelling inoperative medical practice, unfurling life in terms of a de-mitted *Arzt* – in terms of a de-mitted *arkhiatros*, meaning ‘leader (*arkhós*) who seeks to remedy (*īáomai*)’.

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<sup>78</sup> Obviously, *this* differs from Cooper’s work, where it is the “implicit vagueness of Mass that leads to its tropes or creative embellishments of its words” (2001c, p. 345) and where “[t]roping [...] indicate[s] that [...] early conceptions of *mass* [conceptions that Cooper subscribes to] recognised that its essential indeterminacy and vagueness was perhaps *the* source of human culture and meanings” (ibid.). He shuns de-identification, stressing instead that “[i]dentities have no natural location; they are constituted by repetition out of the flux and flow of the ‘placeless relational mobility’ of dispersion” (2001b, p. 27), our grounding in the *virtual* state of exception left intact.



# *Plērōma*: on purely mediate justice

“Language as pure means and pure violence is deposition.” (Hamacher 1994, p. 347)

Having, in the preceding chapters, analysed those texts that are at the heart of this thesis’s *exposition*, this book is, in this very chapter, concerned with delineating organisation in terms of what Agamben calls “a violence outside the law” (2005a, p. 53). Picking up on Zartaloudis’s fitting words, it is centrally concerned with outlining organisation as the experience of “a real exception *to* the law without being an exception *of* the law” (2010, p. 300). And with that, one can say, this chapter turns on bringing off what Benjamin, in contrast to the law’s disconcertingly gloomy ‘being in force without significance’ marking the *virtual* state of exception, calls the *real* state of exception – a term that, Agamben shows, refers to the felicitous inoperativity and pure *potentiality* of the law. Patently, it, this term, refers to the felicitous inoperativity and pure *potentiality* of *organisational* language. Or, put differently, the *real* state of exception, Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of Kafka’s work can be taken to suggest, does not concern the issue “of liberty but of escape” (1986, p. 10); crucially, it does not concern liberty, if *set* in *opposition* to a godly Pater. Rather, akin to Bay’s work, it concerns organisational life that “escapes its own foundations and understandings” (1998, p. 50). Thus, the *real* state of exception refers to the free, common ‘use’ of the law, with, for Agamben, the free, common ‘use’ of the law amounting to a life that is “pure, profane, [and] freed from sacred names” (2007a, p. 74). Followingly, in keeping with *this* book’s method and theory, the term ‘the *real* state of exception’ refers, then, to the experience of language *itself*, uncoupled from any transcendent reference – uncoupled from the abominable apparatuses of legal violence.

Without question, this chapter testifies to a way out of the current biopolitically conditioned, seemingly interminable malaise, here – with Benjamin – found to revolve around, and arise from, our, as *supposedly* transcendentally bound transient beings, being “limited by structures of time and space” (2003, p. 166) and a corollary “possessive character” (ibid.), which, in turn, Benjamin leaves no doubt, “is always unjust” (ibid.). That is, again resorting to Zartaloudis, this chapter points up, and becomes coterminous with, a completely untrammelled, free, common ‘use’ of the law, of organisational language where, importantly, “the *use* of the law has no end(s) and is just *pure means*” (2010, p. 282) and where, by extension, “[p]ure means *are* just (*just* as they are)” (ibid.). Otherwise put, this chapter, in countering

the iron-fisted culture of ‘work’ and, equally, with Agamben, in exiting into “a common use of bodies” (2015b, p. xxi), points up, and becomes coterminous with, the experience of justice, insofar as, siding with Benjamin, justice “lies in the condition of a good that cannot be possessed” (2003, p. 166). Thus, displaying, and availing itself of, language as a pure means, as a medium of justice, this chapter counters and neutralises biopolitical organisation, itself exiting into, and paving the way for, what, before long, is discussed as happy life. Opting for propertylessness or possessionlessness, it exits into ethics, grasped in terms of happiness (*felicità*).

Etymologically, countering the iron-fisted culture of ‘work’ by way of exiting into ethics, grasped in terms of happiness, relates to the term ‘ethos’ which, in turn, Agamben, bringing into play the philologist Bréal, stresses, is made up of the pronominal reflexive root *e* and the suffix *thos* and, therefore, “means simply and literally ‘selfhood’” (2015b, p. 247). By implication, from an etymological point of view, exiting into ethics implies entering a “mode in which each one enters into contact with oneself” (ibid.). And, into the bargain, it comprises entering our proper dwelling inasmuch as, Painter-Morland and Ten Bos suggest, in ancient Greece, “‘*ethos*’ meant ‘home’ or ‘dwelling place’” (2011, p. 339). With this in view, given that Agamben, in the Italian version of the essay ‘Walter Benjamin and the Demon: Happiness and Historical Redemption’, underlines that the ‘*mai stato è la patria, storica e integralmente attuale, dell’umanità*’, that the never happened, i.e. literally the ‘never *stanced*’, is the patria, historically and fully actually, of humanity, our entering into contact with ourselves, i.e. our entering ‘home’, coincides with what Bay calls “the uprooting of every stance” (1998, p. 23). In short, it coincides with the deactivation of any juridical apparatus. Or, in other words, exiting into ethics, as Jones et al.’s reflections clarify – with ethics, since the days of ancient Greece, concerned with “‘the good life’” (2005, p. 2) – implies entering “a relationship with other people and with difference more generally” (p. 6). Needless to say, that means that the happiness at stake in (exiting into) ethics remains entirely incommensurate with what Cederström rolls out as the ‘happiness fantasy’, a stealthy *dispositif* that *supposes* and propagates that “happiness comes only to those who work hard, have the right attitude, and struggle for self-improvement” (2018, p. 17) – a treacherous biopolitical apparatus that maintains that we “find happiness through work and being productive” (ibid.) and impels us to “curate our market value, [to] manage ourselves as corporations, and live according to an entrepreneurial ethos” (ibid.). After all, for Agamben and *this* thesis, “happiness (*Glück*) and redemption (*Erlösung*) are inseparable” (1999b, p. 139), with happiness premised on (an) ethics (of inoperativity), on the neutralisation of the Law.

Now, ethically keyed to happiness, this chapter is wholly concerned with delineating organisation in terms of a pure violence springing from, and testifying to, the justice of inoperative author- or, if you will, leadership (*archigia*). Overtly, disposed in this non-violently violent way, this chapter outlines, and merges into, a language that,

echoing Agamben, by dint of its very turning into a ‘pure violence’ – by dint of its very turning into a non-violent violence outside the brute, violent violence of the ‘Law’ – “leaves off giving orders” (2019a, p. 55). And, let there be no mistake, this leaving-off comprises also spiteful zero-degree orders. Vitality, put with Agamben, as for the author- or leadership at stake, the “*archē* [...] [here brought] to light is not homogenous to the presuppositions that it has neutralized” (2015b, p. xiii). Rather, regarding these presuppositions, the *archē*, here appraised as authority or leader, “is given entirely and only in their collapse” (ibid.), so that, as for the *archē*, “[i]ts work is their inoperativity” (ibid.). It is in this sense only, in the sense of an inoperative, neutralising *archē*, that, turning to a line coined by Rhodes, “leadership is the practice of justice” (2012, p. 1311). Obviously, this means that this chapter sides with Rhodes, at any rate insofar as he both laments that, in prevalent management research, “justice is just a means to [...] organizationally sanctioned end[s]” (p. 1326), ends oftentimes “understood in terms of calculable financial success in a competitive market place” (p. 1315), and points up that “true justice must arise from ethics” (p. 1325). That is, justice must arise from our being inoperative. It must arise from uprooting every *stance*, exposing the *archē* of organisation as joyously *an-archic*.

Importantly, our messianic neutralisation of His, of our supposed Author/Leader (*Arkhōn*), becomes *possible* only in the moment that we grasp and undo the *virtual* state of exception underlying the law’s normal functioning and, in this vein, open up what Agamben refers to as “a community without presuppositions” (1993c, p. 65). It becomes possible only through our opening up a community of joyously inoperative singularities, such as, for example, Kafka’s Josephine, i.e. the singer of the mouse people, the great swimmer in Kafka’s eponymous short text and, of course, Odradek; Kafka’s Josephine is a figure of pure singularity. That means, as Richter and Donat’s review of Raunig’s Kafka-influenced book *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity* evinces, “Josephine is [...] a singularity that can only emerge in the ‘multitude’” (2015, p. 308), where, with Agamben, “multitude [marks] [...] a figure [...] of a working that in every act realizes its own *shabbat*” (2007b, p. 10), a working that “in every work is capable of exposing its own inactivity and its own potentiality” (ibid.). Likewise, the great swimmer, who set a world record even though he cannot swim at all, Agamben hints, is paradigmatic, insofar as he “swims his inability to swim” (2019a, p. 22). Truly, this swimmer indwells “the potential-not-to, [which] by suspending the passage to the act, render[s] potential inoperative and expose[s] it as such” (p. 23). Finally, Odradek – as a being without address, goal or site – is a creature that emerges in the moment that “poetry becomes the laboratory in which all known figures are undone” (1999d, p. 91).

Obviously then, the idea of community endorsed by, and reflected in, *this* book differs from Parker et al.’s surprising cogitations regarding community. Since, for Parker et al., community, supposedly like all forms of organisation, has inexorable



“rules, otherwise [...] [it] would have no division of labour, no boundaries, and no conception of belonging” (2007, p. 59), with Parker et al. remaining stuck in the *oikonomically* underpinned semantics of ‘membership work’. Signally, failing to grasp organisers as inoperative, as human beings who belong based on what, with Agamben, can be called their “being-*thus*” (1993c, p. 2), Parker et al. lose out on exiting into ethics, understood in terms of happiness. They lose out on exiting into the justice marking the common use of bodies, entirely failing to escape their own foundations and understandings. Thus, Parker et al. miss out on organisational life that, in Deleuze and Guattari’s words, “escapes signification” (1986, p. 6).

Or, put yet another way, partly animated by Calás and Smircich’s curious reflections on the historical conditions that have sustained the organisational leadership literature as a ‘seductive game’ – in particular by their mulling over “what other seductions may be possible, and with what consequences” (1991, p. 572) – this chapter, in alluding to what ultimately comes down to the Latin rendering of *an-arkhiā*, invites you – dear reader – to be seduced by *se-duction*. Appreciably, following Calás and Smircich’s lead, inasmuch as these authoresses call attention to and – duly – hope to unsettle “the basic power relations [...] on which ‘leadership’ has been constituted and re-constituted” (p. 569), this chapter invites you to think of organisational leadership in terms of a *real* exception to the law. It invites you to think of organisational leadership in terms of the *real* state of exception and, thereby, to undo the limiting structures of time and space rightly and vehemently deplored by Benjamin. Accordingly, inspired by *organisation* scholarship that stresses, and attends to, sacralisation, i.e. the removal from free, common use, that underlies traditional organisational leader- and entrepreneurship (e.g. Sørensen 2008; Sørensen and Spoelstra 2013; Wray-Bliss 2019) – above all by Śliwa et al.’s work, inasmuch as it “highlights the need for organization scholars to profane the sacralizations embedded in leadership thinking” (2013, p. 860) – this chapter opens up, and becomes tantamount to, organisation in terms of secession (*se*) from sacred leading (*ductus*). Correspondingly, eying, as far as organisers are concerned, justice, this chapter, relying on ‘pure means’, i.e. on language wrested from an oppressive, transcendently anchored Law, points towards, and passes over into, the pure *possibility* opened up by *an-arkhiā/se-duction* – opened up by inoperativity. And, vitally, in pointing towards and passing over into (the profanity of) inoperativity, this chapter reflects Kafka’s aforementioned proclivity for escape/flight, where, as specified by Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka, as an author, “didn’t ‘flee the world’” (1986, p. 45). Rather, “it was the world and its representation that he *made take flight*” (ibid.).

Importantly, sensitised to the exigency of profaning, in particular to the exigency of profaning stubborn sacralisations underpinning most leadership (theory), *this* thesis hopes to give a new, decisive twist to Grint’s elaborations on the sacred nature of leadership. For, while Grint, who emphasises that “the sacred nature of leadership [...] allows leadership to work” (2010, p. 89), urges organisers to “find ways of

engaging with, rather than seeking to avoid, the sacred nature of leadership” (ibid.), *this* thesis picks up on Grint’s request, yet, in so doing, rather than proposing engagements that merely preserve or reshuffle sacralisations, suggests engagements that open up leadership to a new *possible* ‘use’ of the sacred. That is, put with Agamben, it, this thesis, opens up leadership to a “use to which the sacred is returned” (2007a, p. 76) and, thereby, harkening back to profanation, engages with, rather than avoids, the sacred. To be sure, in this context, following Agamben, “[s]acred or religious [...] [are] the things that in some way belong to the gods” (2007a, p. 73), things that are “removed from the free use [...] of men” (ibid.); and “use is always a relationship with something that cannot be appropriated” (2007a, p. 83), thus referring to “things insofar as they cannot become objects of possession” (ibid.). Returning to Benjamin’s reflections, that means that *here* an attempt is made to think of leadership as untethered from the, by necessity, unjust possessive character organisers, as supposedly transcendently bound, transient beings tend to be reduced to. An attempt is made to think of leadership in terms of a collapse of *presuppositions*.

In this spirit, thinking of organisation as *an-archic/se-ductive* becomes *possible* only once we refrain from, put based on Gabriel’s account of traditional leadership, presupposing an excepted or ‘exclusively included’ (state of) “power vacuum” (2008a, p. 113) that, according to diehard mythologems, would *normally* have us “yearn for a strong leader, ‘a strong man’, who will restore order, purpose, and direction” (ibid.); bizarrely, in a piece on Kafka and the COVID-19 epidemic, Gabriel himself remains caught in, and abets, traditional leadership mythologems, which, sadly, keeps Gabriel from – in, with Kafka, escaping signification – exiting into ethics, grasped in terms of happiness. Markedly, Gabriel fails to appreciate – to, again, draw upon Rhodes’s formulation – that ‘leadership is the practice of justice’, with justice, within *this* thesis, appraised as arising from ethics, from, as far as organisational language is concerned, a presuppositionless uprooting of every *stance*. Specifically, while, as Agamben shows, Kafka’s *parable The Silence of the Sirens* turns on our “encounter with language, with our own intimate siren” (2019b, p. 1054), an encounter in which Ulysses – neither caught by the sirens’ song (by the law’s *normal* functioning) nor by *their* silence (by the zero-degree signification of the *virtual* state of exception) – “did not hear their silence” (Kafka 1971, p. 918) and, consequently, “escaped them” (ibid.), Gabriel sees in Kafka’s *parable* the promise of “new forms of leadership and followership that highlight civic responsibility and solidarity” (2020, p. 329). Bluntly, Gabriel, and this despite rightly highlighting that “Kafka’s story acknowledges neither followers nor leader” (p. 325), succumbs to his own siren as he overlooks the *possibility* that the *archē* is *an-archic*.

Palpably, organisation, as the realm of the *an-archic/se-ductive*, becomes *possible* only once we refrain from imprisoning organisational life within the bipolarity of what Agamben refers to as the “‘anarchic-governmental’” (2011d, p. 65) – within

*oikonomia*; here, the notion ‘anarchic(ally archic)’ refers to the mute zero-degree signification underlying the *virtual* state of exception. Vitaly, it, the anarchic(ally archic), refers to an exception of the law rather than to an exception to the law. For this reason, the ‘anarchic(ally archic)’ differs from recent elaborations on, and celebrations of, anarchism in the field of management (theory) (e.g. Parker et al. 2020; Swann and Ghelfi 2019), which, by and large, belong to the category of the ‘governmental’. For, rather than directly referring to life submitted to a floating signifier and, in so doing, to the *virtual* state of exception, these elaborations and celebrations submit organisational life to actual, imposed semantic content and, therefore – whilst still relying upon life’s submission to a floating signifier – remain trapped in, and reproduce, the bipolarity of the anarchic-governmental machine. They remain trapped in, and reproduce, an apparatus that keeps organising animals from exiting into happy life, into ethics. With this in view, it is unsurprising that Kafka – Deleuze and Guattari’s reflections reveal – disapproved of anarchist movements, rightly fearing that “[b]ehind them already are [...] the modern satraps [Old Median for ‘kingdom-protectors’] for whom they are preparing the way to power” (1986, p. 58).

More concretely, the unstinting neutralisation of a ruthless, axiomatically unjust biopolitics becomes *possible* only once we see ourselves in terms of the inactive servant in Kafka’s short text *The Test*, in terms of an inactive human being that, in defiance of traditional organisation scholars’ ‘observations’ of persistent interpellation (e.g. Huber 2019; Hultin and Introna 2019; Mirchandani 2015), as Kafka underlines, simply is “not called upon to serve” (1971, p. 938). That is, we, as organisers, become purely *possible* only once we, following the (*an-archic/se-ductive*) lead of the apostle Paul, indwell what Agamben calls “the messianic calling” (2005b, p. 14), which, as shown, involves the revocation of every vocation. All in all, taking its cue from Agamben, this chapter is, then, in the midst of charting the contours of organisation as the realm of language’s (messianic) liberation from its *reduction* and subjugation to the *operations* of the ‘Law’, calling (without *actually* and, hence, with Kafka and Agamben, *an-archically* or messianically calling) – with its connected plea for justice – “not [for] the erasure of law, but [for] its deactivation and inactivity [*inoperosità*]” (Agamben 2005a, p. 64).<sup>79</sup>

Differently put, firmly intent upon justice, this chapter calls here (without actually and, thus, *an-archically* or messianically calling) for an appreciation of organisation along the lines of what Agamben ‘terms’ “destituent power (*potenza destituente*)” (2014d, p. 65). Singularly, in an *in-fantile*, messianic sense, it calls for unreserved

<sup>79</sup> Contrary to Huber, who posits that “Kafka’s writing offers a perspective on situations in which the call from power is incomprehensible—where we are subject to power but do not fully understand what power wants from us, yet still try to turn ourselves into its subjects” (2019, p. 1824), *this* book, following Hamacher, grasps Kafka, then, as showing “a world without call” (2020, p. 129) – an “an-archic world, before the beginning of the world of the call” (p. 141), where “there is no work” (Kafka 1971, p. 938).

deposition. As such, countering what Munro characterises as “a near vacuum over justice of the field marked off as organisation theory” (2004, p. 55) – a near vacuum that, oddly enough, is no less pronounced in circles that identify themselves as representing the critical camp and regularly overlook that “justice doesn’t let itself be represented” (1986, p. 50) – it is concerned with charting the contours of organisation as the realm of post-judicial/-legal justice. And, here, in line with Benjamin’s musings, which, as already shown, define justice as the condition of a good that cannot be possessed, “[j]ustice”, following Agamben, “[...] [refers] to a state of the world as inappropriable” (2015b, p. 91).

Using Munro’s words, whilst, based on “the institutions of the law, the market and the audit” (2004, p. 52), many things may, in management research, be done “in the name of justice” (ibid.), on the whole “justice is organised out” (p. 56). Hence, rather than bringing about justice, due to an unthinking reliance on such *dispositifs*, Munro suggests, “the opposite is the case” (2004, p. 52). As noted, this, Munro hints, applies even to people placed and placing themselves as members of the critical camp. For, whilst they “have much to say about ‘injustice’” (p. 56), they “have less to say than might be expected about justice” (ibid.). More often than not, they have little to say about ‘possessionlessness’. Accordingly, taking up a central, if sketchily developed line from Munro’s text, few people grasp that “[j]ustice takes place in the time of the stop” (p. 53), with the stop taken to refer to the in-fantile ‘silence’ flowing from pulling the word out of the flux of meaning. Thus, people occupying positions in management research tend to be busy “deferring on calls for justice and so prevent the ‘stop’” (p. 66). Obviously, this is also true for a couple of scholarly interventions that, inspired by Derrida’s reading of Walter Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’, thematise organisational justice in relation to the operations of the Law; Andreas Rasche, for instance, propounding that “law and justice are different” (2011b, p. 275), so that “justice [...] cannot be reduced to some sort of programmed law” (ibid.), only “highlights the need to question ‘easy’ solutions regarding organizational justice” (ibid.). In other words, while acknowledging that – in the context of the Law, which, in turn, is left operative – “real/true/genuine/authentic justice remains impossible” (ibid.), for Rasche, the key takeaway of musings upon justice turns on “questioning the desire of standards to pre-regulate justice in a universal way” (p. 276). No doubt, “more than ‘blindly’ following rules and procedures” (2010, p. 283), such reflections – instead of paving the way for an appreciation of a ‘violence outside the law’, of language itself – merely involve counteracting the “disregard [of] the contextual nature of justice” (ibid.).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> To keep things short, Derrida’s take on justice reflects deconstruction, to the extent that, for him, “[d]econstruction is justice” (2018, p. 243). Unsurprisingly, for Derrida, “[l]aw is not justice. Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law, but justice is incalculable; and aporetic experiences are the experiences, as improbable as they are necessary, of justice, that is to say of moments in which the decision between just and unjust is never insured by a rule” (p. 244).

Similarly, Richard Weiskopf – in an equally Derrida-inspired book chapter – fails to call a ‘stop’. He, too, fails to call a ‘messianic halt’. Thus, while noting that “justice belongs to the open, which, as such, cannot be named, constated and represented” (2004, p. 214), Weiskopf, partly mirroring Rasche’s propositions, points to a “disjunction between general and codified rules and the singularity of the other” (p. 212), so that the “just decision [...] is located in the aporetic space between the (general) law and the singularity of the other” (ibid.). Plainly, falling short of unbinding justice from the operations of the ‘Law’ by way of deposition, for Weiskopf, justice – reduced to a constant, insoluble ordeal of legal decision-making – “is not a moment of security and certainty” (ibid.), but is rather “full of anxiety going beyond rational calculation” (ibid.), with Rasche and Weiskopf partaking in turning judgement on language into judgement in language. Indeed, Rasche and Weiskopf reduce the *novissima dies* of judgement to a *krisis*, split from its ‘decisive day’. Put simply, both Rasche and Weiskopf fail to free organisation from the shackles of the Law. Notably, Rasche and Weiskopf fail to see that, with Deleuze and Guattari, “the judge himself is completely shaped by desire” (1986, p. 51), with desire, Agamben’s essay ‘Desiring’ helps clarify, relying upon, and revolving around, “the pure word” (2007a, p. 54), an entirely inoperative word, opening up “the beatitude of paradise” (ibid.).<sup>81</sup>

In so doing, geared to profanation, to, literally, an experience of prepositionality that, Murtola intimates, boils down to the “suspension of the actual” (2010, p. 49), this chapter mobilises what, drawing on Benjamin’s essay ‘Critique of Violence’, can be called a “politics of pure means” (1996a, p. 245). That means that, squaring with the above reflections on *an-arkhiā/se-duction*, this chapter is in the midst of bearing witness to an experience of organisation as fully merging into purely mediate, *a-nomic* justice. Importantly, in contrast to what Agamben refers to as Schmitt’s attempts “to inscribe anomie within the very body of the *nomos*” (2005a, p. 54), i.e. in contrast to this jurist’s attempts “to annex anomie through the state of exception” (p. 59), *this* book, hoping to avoid “lead[ing] such a violence back to a juridical context” (p. 54), ‘bears witness’ to a “pure anomic violence” (ibid.). It ‘bears witness’ to *anomie as such*. That means, intent on post-juridical/-legal justice

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Or, put yet another way, justice, with Derrida, is but an oscillation between signifier and signified.

<sup>81</sup> Obviously, this desire of the pure word differs from Cooper’s work, where “[d]esire [...] embraces both generation and decline in its unrelenting quest for expression” (2001b, p. 30), so that “[d]esire in its wider sense is the desire for freedom and openness [...] that goes beyond the specific and local; it desires dispersion, looseness, even loss” (p. 27). That is, in Cooper such desire remains simply opposed to fixed signifieds, failing to neutralise signifiers as well. Consequently, Cooper remains stuck in criticising common-sense desire, where “[c]ommon-sense desire is thus the desire of a self-contained, self-directing human agent that seeks always to augment its sense of individual self” (ibid.). Indeed, for Cooper, “[c]ommon-sense desire already knows what it wants and its knowledge is therefore always conscious of some identifiable object that it lacks; it seeks to satisfy a known lack or need in order to make itself whole again” (ibid.).

and, in that manner, on an experience of language *itself*, it hopes to bear witness to an *anomie* that “has shed [*deposto*] every relation to law” (Agamben 2005a, p. 59).

No doubt, it testifies to an “anomy [...] [that] becomes accessible only through the exhibition and the deposition of the anomy that law has captured within itself in the state of exception” (2014d, p. 72). For, to recover “anomy [...] it is necessary [...] first to release oneself from the form that [...] [it has] received in the exception” (p. 73). In consequence, differing from traditional representations of *anomie* in the field of organisation scholarship (e.g. Cohen 1993; Hodson 1999; Johnson and Duberley 2011), in which – following Durkheim, who, as Agamben hints, *consistently supposes* “a need of human beings to be regulated” (2005a, p. 67) – “[t]he normative element needs the anomic element in order to be applied to it” (p. 86), in *this* book, *a-nomie* turns on the idea of “justice [...] as a state of the world in which the world appears as a good that cannot be appropriated or made juridical” (p. 64). Patently, such recovered *a-nomie* is at odds with Rasche’s, at bottom, Schmittian appreciation of the anomic underlying the ‘zero degree of *organisation*’ as the “[d]isorder and chaos [that] do not destabilize organizations but enable them to be formed in the first place” (2011, p. 260). For true *a-nomie* is “the idea of language” (Agamben 1995, p. 113), “the becoming visible of the word” (ibid). In other words, with Agamben, this chapter contemplates organisation based upon “a violence that deliberately refrains from enforcing law, and instead breaks apart the continuity of time to found a new era” (Agamben 2009a, p. 107). After all, differing from a Durkheimian take on organisation – a take that, for Dobbin, rests both upon the supposition “that humans are driven to understand the world through collective classification and meaning-making” (2009, p. 202) and, concurrently, upon the view that there is “an ideal level of normative control” (p. 203), beyond the ‘too oppressive’ and the ‘too lax’ – justice, this book suggests, resides in organisers’ indwelling of *u-topia*.

Put a little differently, relying on means that do not serve as means to ends outside the sphere of pure mediality and, in accordance with this, Agamben shows, transport their “object not toward another thing or another place, but toward its own taking-place” (1993c, p. 2), this chapter mobilises, and completely rests on, neutralisation of *legal imposition* and, in this way precisely, helps manifest justice. All in all, that means that *this* book aims to unleash organisation as the freedom from obstate ideological ends, including, and this is crucial, systems theoretical autopoiesis, which, insofar as it follows Luhmann’s influential *Organization and Decision*, mistakenly claims to do away with ideology. Since, and this should be clear by now, mobilising post-ideological pure means, this thesis argues, entails appreciating organisation, with Agamben, as a “gate to justice” (2007a, p. 76). Here, Agamben shows, “the violence that was only a means for the creation or conservation of law become[s] capable of deposing it to the extent that it exposes and renders inoperative its relation to [...] purposiveness” (2018a, p. 82).

Whilst Luhmann's organisation theory, in hoping to unveil organisation's "'intrinsic logic'" (2018b, p. vii), opposes "subjection to [...] liberal or socialist ideologies" (ibid.), like these very normative programmes, his organisation theory remains trapped in a binary, oppositional logic, reducing – as a perusal of Luhmann's essay 'Organisation' highlights – organisation to a system that consists of decisions and that produces the decisions of which it consists through the decisions of which it consists. In other words, with organisation conceived as a distinction-generating and -processing operation, an operation that, as Seidl and Mormann's remarks on Luhmann's habilitation thesis illustrate, hinges upon deciding on "who belongs [...] and who does not" (2014, p. 130) and, linked thereto, on "what kind of behaviour is allowed and what is not" (ibid.), Luhmann still installs organisation as a *dispositif*. That is, he fails to, with Kafka, as Deleuze and Guattari or Agamben read him, escape signification, to exit into happiness. For this reason – as Andersen's elaborations imply – for Luhmann, organisation emerges as constitutively marked by conceptual oppositions, such as "man/woman" (2011, p. 254), with organisational inquiry meant, for instance, to only show how the meaning condensed into the counter-concept of 'woman' sets up restrictions for the meaning of 'man' or – and this still reproduces a binary, (op)positional logic – how, through re-entry of a basic 'us/them' opposition within itself, "somebody among 'us' may act like 'them'" (p. 259). As such, organisation, once construed in terms of Luhmannian systems theoretical autopoiesis, does rule out an appreciation of pure singularity – of a 'third' irreducible to any dichotomies' two terms.

Doubtlessly, Luhmann's approach to organisation rules out an appreciation of organisation as the realm of pure means. It does rule out appreciating *organisation* as "the gate to use" (Agamben 2007a, p. 76). Sadly, this must also be said about Luhmann's expressly justice-related work, which, in the field of organisation theory, has only been hesitantly/cursorily applied (e.g. Liebig 1997); put simply, opposing any conceptualisation of justice based on natural law and, thus, for instance, based on a virtue or a fixed norm informing legal decision-making, for Luhmann, justice, as a 'contingency formula', suggesting that things could always be otherwise, appears merely as "a scheme for the search for reasons and values, which can become legally valid only in the form of programmes" (2004, p. 218), i.e. in the form of principally alterable legal norms and laws based upon which an unambiguous enforcement of a lawful/unlawful binary takes place. Thus, as Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos explains, for Luhmann, justice is an *Überbegriff*, "a reference above all reference and referencing within the system" (2010, p. 91), which, yet, to begin with, "sets normativity in motion" (ibid.), whilst, itself, being what Zartaloudis calls a "*juridical* non-norm" (2017, p. 203). Consequently, Zartaloudis goes on, for Luhmann, "[j]ustice, no longer an *index sui*, is replaced by a contingency formula that *is* [operative], but that [simultaneously] remains

inaccessible to itself as to its content” (p. 204), with Luhmann, echoing Rasche and Weiskopf, failing to be open to a “non-juridical idea of justice” (p. 215).<sup>82</sup>

In this view, contrasting with much extant organisational justice literature (e.g. Cole et al. 2010; Folger and Cropanzano 1998; Fortin 2008; Jepsen and Rodwell 2012), a literature whose approach to justice, Rhodes suggests, is one of “‘me first’” (2011, p. 145) and, with that said, tends to be marked by an “obsession with individualised perceptions” (ibid.), this chapter points to pure mediacy. Concretely, as far as the extant organisational justice literature is concerned, Rhodes points to a tendency to exclusively focus on people’s desire “not to be treated unfairly by others” (2011, p. 142), a tendency which, more often than not and this dangerously, takes place at the expense of a focus on people’s desire “to treat others justly” (ibid.). In other words, in this literature, the self, Rhodes stresses, is not involved in a reflection of its own treatment of *others*, but is solely concerned with how it is treated by *Others*, with justice often simply positioned as a ‘lubricant’ that *inter alia*, if all goes to management’s plan, “promotes the acceptance of organizational change” (p. 145) and that “reinforces the sense of trustworthiness in people in positions of authority” (ibid.). As a result, these texts, Rhodes underlines, fail to approach *otherness* “in terms of ‘face’” (p. 150), with the face, Agamben’s essay ‘The Face’ suggests, marking “the irreparable being-exposed of humans and the very opening in which they hide and stay hidden” (2000, p. 91). As such, it, *otherness* in terms of face, remains irreducible to Böhme’s quest for “different, repositioned organisational futures” (2006, p. 18) – irreducible to his insistence on the futuristic production of “subjectivities in a specific social formation of time and space” (p. 3). For, and this has been underscored before, whatever is limited by structures of time and space has a possessive character, with there being, Benjamin emphasises, “no system of possession, regardless of its type, that leads to justice” (2003, p. 166). *In lieu*, justice lies in the condition of a world that can in no way be appropriated, coinciding with an opening towards the “deactivation of the law” (2005b, p. 98), so that, echoing Deleuze and Guattari, “*where one believed there was law, there is in fact desire and desire alone*” (1986, p. 49). Since “[j]ustice is desire and not law” (ibid.).

Focused on helping to liberate the ‘coming’, this chapter testifies, then, to a politics and its associated violence – a paradoxical non-violent violence that Benjamin refers to as pure or divine violence – which, in contrast to traditional politics, which, in turn, exclusively rests on a violence that founds or conserves the law (*Ge-setz*), aids manifest justice. And, notably, it aids manifest justice solely by being entirely untainted by the programming and preserving of certain (bio)political ends. It – this chapter – aids manifest justice by (being) part and parcel of what Agamben calls a

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<sup>82</sup> Similar to Derrida, justice, in Luhmann, is, then, an oscillation between signifier and signified – an oscillation Luhmann himself referred to as ‘de-paradoxification’ (see Seidl 2006). Also, while Cooper, to my knowledge, never specifically grappled with justice, his implicit theory of justice turns, too, on an oscillation between signifier and signified, absence and presence, illegibility and legibility.



“pure language” (2005a, p. 62), which, vitally, lies “beyond operativity and command” (2013a, p. 129), including zero-degree signification. On that basis, being *itself* purely mediate, this chapter supports and reflects an organisational politics that – with Agamben – realises that “law is not directed toward the establishment of justice” (1999c, p. 18). For law in its canonical, operative form is solely directed to – using an important line Whyte mints to stress the blurring of both a) linguistic *and* legal sentences (*Sätze* and *Verurteilungen*) and, intricately linked thereto, b) legal sentences *and* punishment (*Verurteilungen* and *Strafe*) in Agamben’s reflections on Kafka’s *In the Penal Colony* – “the work of sentencing” (2008, p. 66). Or, otherwise put, traditionally, Agamben hints while drawing upon Bachmann’s novel *Malina*, “language is the punishment” (1995, p. 105). And arguably, it is due to such Kafkan language-based, penal ‘sentencing work’, due to penal ‘*Satzung*’, that Benjamin, Agamben underlines, seeks to spell out “the possibility of a violence [...] that lies absolutely ‘outside’ (*außerhalb*) and ‘beyond’ (*jenseits*) the law” (2005a, p. 53). Indeed, Benjamin spells out the possibility of a “violence as ‘pure medium’” (Agamben 2005a, p. 62).<sup>83</sup>

With this in view, it is vital to point out that Agamben, following Benjamin, finds Kafka’s allegories to contain a “possibility of an about-face that completely upsets their meaning” (1998, p. 38). More concretely – chiming with a small group of scholars, such as, for instance, Camus, Snoek, Deleuze and Guattari, Rehberg and Hamacher, who all show that Kafka not only thoroughly describes the nightmarish torment in which we presently live, but also shows a way out – Agamben’s perusal of Kafka’s literary work ‘gestures’, and this time and again, to a redemptive kernel. This being so, Agamben’s perusal of Kafka’s literary work resonates particularly with Camus’s essay ‘Hope and the Absurd in the Work of Franz Kafka’, an essay in which Camus argues that “[t]he whole art of Kafka consists of forcing the reader to re-read” (1979, p. 112). Moreover, like Agamben, Camus emphasises that, as for the hu-man condition, there (is) a “hope that allows an escape from that condition” (p. 121). After all, for Camus, “when the creation ceases to be taken tragically, [...] man is concerned with hope” (p. 124). All in all, that means, countering the spectacle *constituting our present*, Agamben’s perusal of Kafka’s work points to the *possibility* of messianic ‘inversion’. In other words, his perusal of Kafka’s work points to the *possibility* of what Benjamin, in a letter to Scholem – a letter revolving around Benjamin’s and Scholem’s diverging readings of Kafka’s evocative parables – refers to as *Umkehr*, which, in turn, for Benjamin, encapsulates the direction of ‘study’.

Naturally, intent upon the *possibility* of messianic *Umkehr* (inversion) and, related thereto, on a politics of pure means, Agamben takes issue with readings of Kafka’s

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<sup>83</sup> Put with Fusco, “[d]ivine violence—in doing violence to the mythical violence of law—is capable of deposing the law, while remaining essentially alien to the actualisation and formalisation into constituted power” (2022, p. 60).

works that, reproductively, see in them “only a summation of the anguish of a guilty man before the inscrutable power of a God become estranged and remote” (1995, p. 85). More broadly, he takes issue with readings of Kafka’s work that fail to notice its calling a ‘stop’ – its calling a messianic halt. Arguably then, Agamben would also reject Sayers’s interpretation of Kafka’s *A Report to an Academy*. Since, here, Sayers takes *A Report to an Academy* to provide “avenues for theory to respond to and incorporate nonhuman Others” (2016, p. 371), in order to help address the fact that “[n]onhuman animals are marginalised subjects in organisational theory” (ibid) and to “destabilise the process of forgetting which is essential to sealing and forgetting humanities’ animal origins” (p. 378). Instead of inviting an incorporation of non-human *others* into the discourse that presently constitute organisational theory, the short story may, rather, be taken to pivot on the *possibility* of authorial escape. After all, as Red Peter, a former ape, underlines, “I had no way out [*Ausweg*] but I had to devise one, for without it I could not live” (Kafka 1971, p. 553); “I had to stop being an ape” (ibid.). Indeed, “freedom [*Freiheit*]”, Red Peter reports, “was not what I wanted. Only a way out [*Ausweg*]” (p. 554). For, sooner or later, he admits, “I should have been caught again and put in a worse cage” (p. 556), which is why he began “to imitate [...] people” (p. 558); “I imitated them because I needed a way out, and for no other reason” (p. 562). That means that neither animal freedom (freedom from language) nor human freedom (freedom through biopolitically bound language) is feasible. But language may be rendered inoperative and, in *this* way, escaped.

In this vein, instead of, helter-skelter, equating Kafka’s *In the Penal Colony* with a tragic story of *imprisonment* in presuppositional language, this chapter finds *In the Penal Colony* to – in the last analysis – point to the ‘comic’, which Agamben, when musing on Pulcinella, a classical *commedia dell’arte* character, refers to as the “impossibility of saying exposed as such in language” (2018b, p. 65) and, related therewith, as the “impossibility of acting exposed in a gesture” (ibid.). Differently put, this chapter finds *In the Penal Colony* to centre on the ‘comic’, insofar as the precept ‘Be just!’, which the colony’s officer inserts into the sentencing machine, marks a cleverly thought-out strategy to deactivate the machine, with language “ceasing to perform its penal function” (1995, p. 117) and the machine “shattering into pieces” (ibid.). For, in a nutshell, as Salzani glosses – with Agamben’s reading of Kafka’s *In the Penal Colony* – the “justice of language is [...] revealed as the breakdown of its connection to judgement and thus to signification” (2017a, p. 334), including zero-degree signification. Without question, justice – the short story can be taken to imply – resides in language’s being *de-position*, in our turning into pure means.

With Kafka’s literary work, lately, making increasing inroads into the field of organisation theory (e.g. Caygill 2019; Czarniawska 2019; Beyes 2019; Hodson et al. 2013a; Jørgensen 2012; Keenoy and Seijo 2010; Kornberger et al. 2006; McCabe 2015; Ossewaarde 2019; Rhodes and Westwood 2016; Ten Bos 2000 and Warner

2007), it comes as no surprise that, in this connection, even *In the Penal Colony* has attracted much attention, usually seen as an expedient source to help illustrate and unravel complex organisational phenomena. However, more often than not, mobilising this text has involved a perpetuation of the *virtual* state of exception, with, for instance, Huber and Munro's article on moral distance in organisations being symptomatic of a wider, reproductive tendency. Doubtless, it is symptomatic of a stubborn tendency that revolves around holding on to language's presupposition of the non-linguistic as that with which it – language – must maintain itself in a *virtual* relation so that it – later – may denote it in actual speech. After all, in lamenting that, in *In the Penal Colony*, principles overrule compassion, Huber and Munro – instead of releasing the imprisoned person – still tinker with 'bare life' – with life that, through "inclusive exclusion" (Agamben 1998, p. 12), is captured (by language as the sovereign), by what Kafka terms 'the Commandant', without yet being subjected to what Whyte, as stressed, refers to as 'the work of sentencing'. Tragically, holding onto life's 'inclusive exclusion' in the form of a prisoner (to be 'sentenced'), Huber and Munro, in a higgledy-piggledy interpretation that still presupposes guilt warranting imprisonment, merely complain about the fact that "no reform of the prisoner is intended" (2014, p. 265) and that "the prisoner cannot learn from his mistakes" (ibid.).

Consequently, as Rhodes and Kornberger's comparison between a) traditional organisation theory and b) imposing, signifying language – the awful 'machine of torture' *inter alia* containing an Inscraper and a Harrow described in *In the Penal Colony* – suggests, rather than manifesting justice, the 'Law', if applied, turns on the "inscription of order [...] on the body, into the body" (2009, p. 103). In other words, rather than being directed towards justice, towards organisational language's taking place *as such*, towards its pure *possibility* and, eventually, our moving past language's presuppositional structure, our moving into *u-topia*, the Law's being operative turns on what, with Höpfl, can be called "literal dermatography" (2003b, p. 75). Since it has 'order', including zero-degree 'order', inscribed all over and in our bodies. Therefore, the 'Law', *this* book argues, is in no way a necessary condition of organisational justice. Instead, to use a central Pauline passage, it is that which must be realised and fulfilled in the passage to justice. For, as Agamben shows when expanding on the characteristically Pauline line 'justice without law' (*dikaïosynē chōris nomou*), "[j]ustice without law is not the negation of the law, but the realisation and fulfillment, the *plērōma*, of the law" (2005b, p. 107), with the law's messianic *plērōma* – he adds – referring to "an absolutizing of *katargēsis*" (p. 108); it refers to the law's inoperativity...

# Final ideas: on Agamben and Cooper

“This zone of a-knowledge or infancy in which we hold ourselves in rapport with something without knowledge and command of it...” (Agamben 2023b, p. 181)

Caught your breath? Brilliant! Let’s continue putting a spoke in biopolitics’ wheel. In fact, let’s, once more, compare Agamben and Cooper, so as to bring the *possibility* of turning the *virtual* exception into a *real* exception to the fore. Again, *here*, I refrain from, with Cooper, positing “[c]onsciousness [...] as a moving force that advances on the unconscious, from which it gets its motive and power” (2016e, p. 261). Instead, I call, it is no wonder, attention to *a-knowledge*. In this connection, *a-knowledge* is, in line with Agamben’s elaborations, defined as a *possibility* of knowing that – completely irreducible to representational knowing (consciousness) *and*, implied therein, this knowing’s *virtual* suspension/exception in the form of representational knowing’s appropriated not-knowing (unconsciousness) – turns on maintaining oneself in ‘contact’ (*contāgiō*) with an inappropriable. Crucially, *this possibility* of knowing turns upon *il-legibility*, seen, with Agamben, as involving a life “freed from the bonds of the law” (2015a, p. 69). Obviously, holding on to *a-knowledge* and, thus, a life freed from the bonds of the ‘Law’ includes, first and foremost, countering Cooper’s reproductive belief that due to exposure to unconsciousness, “we and our systems [from *sunístēmi*, meaning ‘to emplace’] are moved by forces we cannot fully grasp” (2005a, p. xii)...<sup>84</sup>

As this chapter’s introductory quote is – root and branch – meant to underline, *this possibility* of knowing turns on a life that, *il-legibly* in rapport with something, remains without consciousness and command. Sharply contrasting with the neo-governmental biopolitics of Robert Cooper’s dynamised *dialectic* between consciousness/presence/*legibility* and unconsciousness/absence/*illegibility*, *this possibility* turns on inoperativity. Since, echoing *this book’s* core aim, *a-knowledge* resonates with turning an impasse into an exit. Reusing Agamben’s apt words, it resonates with making the *virtual* exception *real*. For I strive to provide a ‘way out’

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<sup>84</sup> Vitally, these ‘forces’ are but *legibility’s virtual* suspension in the form of (unprofaned) *illegibility*.

as far as *oikonomia* is concerned. I strive to render an impasse (‘glass and frames’) into an exit (garden).<sup>85</sup>

To bring the *possibility* of turning the *virtual* exception into a *real* exception to the fore, I, partly inspired by Sørensen’s work, rely on juxtaposition... For him, the aim of juxtaposition “is to let the collision of the two items [juxtaposed] make the reader/viewer stand back and think anew” (2014b, p. 48). Put simply, juxtaposition places two items – in this case the *virtual* exception and the *real* exception – side by side so as to contrast, compare and accentuate similarities and differences. Hopefully, in the course of this, the stakes of turning an exception *of* the ‘Law’ into an exception *to* the ‘Law’ do become much clearer. As noted, all this takes place against the background of what Attell calls a “philosophical gigantomachy between Agamben and Derrida” (2015, p. 3). Perhaps, one could say that, in *my* book, this gigantomachy is – if at much lower wattage – translated into a dispute between my *a-knowledge*-based view on organisation and Cooper’s social philosophy of organisation, with Cooper’s work echoing assumptions more ubiquitous and diehard than citations suggest...

Proceeding in this manner does *not* mean that I consider Derrida and Cooper, as far as their work is concerned, to be two peas in a pod. *Nor* does it mean that I regard Derrida and Cooper to be the clear-cut intellectual wellsprings of neo-governmental biopolitics. Rather, I recognise their partly differing foci *and* view both scholars as intricately enmeshed in this ongoing socio-political and -economic development. In this light, to me, both scholars’ work, reproductive of *oikonomia*, encapsulates and has helped paved the way for this development, a critical engagement with their respective, if connected, theoretical edifices being long overdue in the field of organisation studies. Zooming in on Cooper, I seek to help confront this lack of attention.

In this spirit, fleshing out the main features of *a-knowledge* by way of distinguishing it from Cooper’s social philosophy of organisation and, more or less obliquely, from Derridean deconstruction, I call attention to the *possibility* of “*know[ing]* each other in the sense of knowing that there is nothing to be known about each other” (Prozorov 2014, p. 168). I call attention to the *possibility* of *a-lētheia*. On that account, unlike Cooper, I call attention *not* to knowledge as this or that appropriating *legibility*, as this or that biopolitical-cum-*oikonomic* ‘articulation’ of the ‘Law’ regardless of how ephemeral and unstable its sense may be. Rather – clarified in some detail below – I call attention to the *idea* of knowledge and, by implication,

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<sup>85</sup> Here, neo-governmental thought is defined as a type of governance that, more or less explicitly, winds up incorporating ‘rupture’, ‘uncertainty’, ‘disorganisation’, ‘non-sense’ or ‘noise’ – in short, the *virtual* state of exception – as a central pillar of governance. Usually, this goes hand in hand with what Derrida, for Agamben a key proponent of such thought, calls a “waiting without horizon of expectation” (2006, p. 211; e.g. De Cock 2009; see Zartaloudis 2010 for a splendid critique).

the *idea* of law... At this juncture, suffice it to say that doing so means two tightly interconnected things. On the one hand, it means understanding organisers as what Agamben refers to as “prisoners of representation” (1995, p. 37). Doubtlessly, it means understanding organisers as overwhelmingly being subject to what, before, has been introduced as ‘giant spectacles’. But, on the other hand, it also means pointing out a *possibility* for these ‘prisoners’ “to make their way out” (p. 99). In the teeth of biopolitics, it means testifying to an *hors d’œuvre*; quintessentially, considering the dogged identification of the ‘work of man *qua* man’ with ‘life according to the *logos*’, it means testifying to the *possibility* of remaining entirely outside (*hors*) of any *oikonomic* work (*œuvre*). It means turning the *virtual* exception that Cooper and many of his sources of inspiration – not least Derrida, Bataille or Luhmann – endorse, and fall victim to, into a *real/actual* state of exception. It means exiting meaning, including, it bears repeating, meaning’s self-presupposition in non-meaning. At base, it means to *ex-pose*.

As a corollary thereof, boiling down to *il-legibility*, “the being-*such* of each thing is the idea” (Agamben 1993c, p. 101). Crucially, idea does not refer to an idealist conception of the law (or *legibility*). Nor, does it refer to some abstract, theoretical engagement with the question of the law (or *legibility*). Rather, as Zartaloudis, summing up Agamben’s reflections on the term idea, stresses, idea refers to the “law’s existence *as such*, the law in its profanity” (2010, p. 283). As for *nomos*, it refers to “the experience of its use(s)” (2020, p. xv), with ‘use(s)’, as noted, tied to *neg-ligence*. To put it bluntly, that means that – rather than pointing towards the *operation* of representation, to, in short, *oikonomia* – idea or, synonymous herewith, *a-knowledge* involves *inoperativity*. Idea involves the neutralisation of any sort of representation.<sup>86</sup>

In consequence, when writing about ideas, *this* book does *not*, for example, follow Vandenbosch et al.’s conceptualisation, which approaches ideas as “plan[s] formed by mental effort” (2006, p. 259), often, in the context of innovation research, defined as “plans to be implemented” (p. 260). And, likewise, within *this* book, idea also differs from Mueller and Whittle’s kindred definition, which, in relation to lean production, total quality management or business process re-engineering, centres on the “imagined” (2011, p. 187), generally seen – Mueller and Whittle underline – to remain “meaningless without the work involved in translating the idea into practice”

<sup>86</sup> Here, it is worth stressing that I concur with Zartaloudis’s suggestion that “words do not have ‘core’ meanings, but rather uses” (2020, p. xxi). In *this* context, the initial sense expressed by the *nêmein* family, to which the term *nomos* belongs, may, Zartaloudis notes, be “the use (*chrēsis*) of a ‘rule’, rather than one of the ‘application’ of an external authority or principle or some kind of ‘law’” (p. xxxviii). Hence, insofar as it is still possible to speak of ‘rule’ in this connection, “this rule [...] is not separable from the life to which it applies” (ibid.). Put differently, with ‘use’, there is no *virtual* exception and, thus, no *oikonomia*/biopolitics; there, is no longer a “production of bare life” (Agamben 1998, p. 181), of *illegibly* ‘written’, ‘noisy’ life. There is, instead, a ‘way out’ (see Agamben 2024b; Attell 2015; Fusco 2022; Richards 2019; Zartaloudis 2010, 2015, 2017).

(ibid.). As noted, *here*, idea alludes to the profanity or, tantamount hereto, deactivation of the ‘Law,’ with the subsequent juxtaposing micro-essays on, for instance, criticism, God, humanity and love – all in their specific ways – gesturing to the *possibility* of *a-knowledge*... Or – put with reference to Kafka’s utterly ‘playful’ *Description of a Struggle* – idea and *a-knowledge* no longer involve a narrator who “leapt onto the shoulders of his acquaintance and, by digging his fists into the back of the acquaintance, urged him into a trot” (1971, p. 54). Rather, they involve a ‘fall’ and a ‘riderless’ horse, both of which, as highlighted above, remain ‘without meaning (*ohne Bedeutung*)’.

## The idea of knowledge

To get straight to the nitty-gritty, for Cooper, knowledge is far from being an idea. Instead, knowledge springs from a “dialectic between primary and secondary thinking” (2016c, p. 253). In that context, ‘primary thinking’, he suggests, hinges on viewing the indeterminate, negative and irrational as necessarily immanent in human action, whilst ‘secondary thinking’, Cooper argues, is said to view the social and cultural world in determinate, positive and rational terms. Based upon this distinction, Cooper claims that “the primary-secondary dualism of the conscious-unconscious is a dynamic dialectic in which both terms actively create each other” (p. 260). This in turn forces us to grasp “knowledge as always incomplete and unfinished” (p. 261). Thus, “[k]nowledge of the world [...] appears less as secondary commodity or possession and more as a vehicle for moving about and exploring socio-cultural mindscapes” (ibid.). Indeed, “it is not the product that is significant but the *movement* of reproduction itself” (1998, p. 101). Significant is “not a state of being but an always ongoing [becoming] that never arrives anywhere, never completes itself” (p. 103).

In this vein, “[n]o longer a repository of incomprehensible, unwelcome or menacing spectra, the unconscious functions as a missing presence whose absence or lack continually provokes [us] to complete it” (Cooper 2016c, p. 286). Concerning organisation scholarship, this means that “the accumulation of knowledge is not its goal” (2001c, p. 325). Since “once it thinks it knows something, it turns this knowledge into yet another question” (ibid.). Linked thereto, Cooper argues that the dynamic dialectic between conscious and unconscious he promotes implies the view “that the world does not naturally offer itself to human comprehension, that it’s intrinsically unreadable and that we have to convert its inarticulation into meaningful signs and symbols” (p. 322). By extension, “‘understanding’ loses its sense of revealing a permanent truth that lies *under* and, instead, reveals a forever open-ended, ambivalent and shifting process that can’t be known in any formal sense” (cited in Chia and Kallinikos 1998, p. 132). That is, for Cooper – falling,

slapdash, into his own biopolitical trap – understanding reveals “open and fluid fields of knowing” (p. 133).<sup>87</sup>

In contrast, Agamben’s work implies that Cooper falls prey to, and reproduces, *oikonomic* conceptions, following which the “unknown is that which knowledge presupposes” (2011b, p. 114), so that “the unconscious is the darkness into which consciousness will have to carry its light” (ibid.). That means that Cooper, overlooking the *possibility* of the idea of knowledge, fails to maintain himself in ‘contact’ (*contāgiō*) with an inappropriable. Equating organisation and, in tandem herewith, the work of man *qua* man, with representation, he fails to know and understand what Agamben calls an “an opacity that resists every interpretation and hermeneutics” (2017c, p. 78). In conclusion, he does not *a-knowledge*, failing to grasp that, with the idea of knowledge, “there is nothing more to understand” (2023b11). There is but *il-legibility*. Or, put slightly differently, for Agamben “[t]o know [*conoscere*] means to be born [*nascere*] together, to be generated or regenerated by the thing known. This, and nothing but this, is the meaning of loving” (2024b, p. 8). Therefore, “it is best to expunge from the verb ‘to know’ all merely cognitive claims (*cognitio* in Latin is originally a legal term meaning the procedures for a judge’s inquiry)” (ibid.).

## The idea of humanity

Intricately intertwined with questions regarding knowledge, a definition of the human being taking its cue from the dynamic conscious-unconscious dialectic touched on above looms large in Cooper’s work. Needless to say, that means that – in Cooper’s view – there is no idea of humanity, inasmuch as the idea of humanity revolves around human beings’ *il-legibility*. Rather, in his social philosophy of organisation, the human remains *legible*, albeit in terms of “vague and hazy forms that will always remain vague and hazy” (Cooper 2016c, p. 288). That is to say, anchoring the human in an absence conceived as a missing presence or, as he writes, “a *missing presence* whose absence literally makes possible the multiple presences that constitute the being of everyday life” (p. 282), causes Cooper to posit an “essential incompleteness of being human” (p. 288). Using deconstructionist terms, he posits man as ‘deferred’, supposing “an innate human compulsion to seek the open and unknown, the vague and indeterminate” (2001c, p. 329).

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<sup>87</sup> That Cooper focuses on open and fluid fields of knowing means that, for him, “[c]omprehension requires the apprehension of undivided wholeness in a specific space or location” (2001a, p. 187). As a result, “science is fiction, the creation of transient and tentative images out of raw, dynamic matter” (p. 190), so that “[m]odern knowledge does not seek permanence and truth; it is ephemeral, mutable, dispersed in [...] non-local, non-causal space” (ibid.).



Correspondingly, for Cooper, the “[h]uman being is the autopoiesis or making over of the forever absent primary space of being” (2016c, p. 285). Here, Cooper highlights, “[p]rimary being is absent in a special sense: it withdraws from every attempt to re-present it” (ibid.). As a consequence, “[w]hat we make present or re-present in human culture simply echoes this more pervasive absence” (ibid.). Obviously, however, this does not amount to a departure from representation – from biopolitics. Rather, it means that Cooper conceives “human being as *re-presentation* or the production of presence out of absence” (p. 294). It means that he still *oikonomises* man.

Contrasting herewith, Agamben’s idea of humanity no longer views the human in terms of a dynamic conscious/unconscious or, if you wish, human/not-human dialectic. Instead, Agamben grasps the human being as completely *il-legible*. Therefore, rather than grounding the human in ‘the state of *virtual* exception’, i.e. in a *legibility* that, while suspending putatively given or fixed identities, still remains valid, Agamben’s idea of humanity pivots on “the suspension of the suspension” (2004b, p. 92). It pivots on turning imperfect nihilism (a *virtual* suspension) into perfect nihilism. In a nutshell, it turns on a *real* suspension, suspending the *virtual* suspension. Thus, avoiding viewing the human in terms of a “struggle of a power to be against a power to not-be” (1993c, p. 32), Agamben grasps the human in terms of the *possibility* to “not not-be” (ibid.). In other words, *a-knowledging* the human, Agamben, using a line coined by Benjamin, points to the *possibility* of “a new in-humanity” (2004b, p. 83). Incessantly, he points towards inoperativity. After all, in this ‘new in-humanity’, *potential* and *act*, the living being and the speaking being, are “neither separated nor united into a new more noble compound: they are, rather, in contact, in the sense that between them there is no possible representation” (2023b, p. 182).

## The idea of showing

Similarly, Cooper’s concept of ‘showing’ (*mōnstrātiō*) can be said to heavily reflect Derrida’s *oikonomic* references to ‘monsters’ (*mōnstra*). For, as Derrida underlines, “it shows itself [*il se montre*] – that is what the word monster means” (1995, p. 386). More specifically, the ‘monster’, as “that which is absolutely foreign or strange” (p. 387), Derrida writes, “frightens precisely because no anticipation had prepared one to identify this figure” (p. 386). Yet, “as soon as one perceives a monster in a monster, one begins to domesticate it” (ibid.). That means, while ‘monsters’, in Derrida’s reading, tend to “provoke, at the outset, reactions of rejection” (p. 387), “monstrosities are often [...] appropriated, assimilated, acculturated, [so as to] transform the nature of the field of reception, [so as to] transform the nature of social and cultural experience, historical experience” (ibid.). To keep it short and sweet, as for the ‘monster’, Derrida concludes, we tend to “make it part of the household

and have it assume the habits, to make us assume new habits.” (ibid.; see also Bloom 2014; Linstead and Westwood 2001; Nyberg and De Cock 2022; Rasche 2011b).<sup>88</sup>

Differing therefrom, Agamben’s idea of showing (*mōnstrātiō*) pivots on the advent of “a singular object that presents itself as such, that *shows* [*mostra*] its singularity” (1993c, p. 10). No longer subject to representation, the idea of ‘showing’ pivots upon what Hamacher calls “a monstrum without monstratum” (2011, p. 302), pointing to a showing without an *oikonomic* shown. Hence, whilst, as Thanem and Wallenberg note, the ‘monster’, i.e. the absolutely foreign or strange, has “traditionally [been] associated with the excessively horrifying, vicious and unruly” (2015, p. 433), the idea of *mōnstrātiō*, Bay leaves no doubt, refers to “monsters that resist, even defy, [...] logic and reason” (1998, p. 167). And *as such*, as Ten Bos, if perhaps unwittingly, ends up ‘showing’, “monsters [...] are everywhere, that is, not only outside us, but also inside us” (2004, p. 23); *pace* Cooper and Derrida, pure, non-representational *il-legibility* resides in ourselves and others, with ‘monstrously’ *il-legible* singularities neutralising life’s entrapment in signification. Such ‘monsters’ *are* the ‘way out’...

## The idea of criticism

Concerned with a certain notion of ‘the good life’, the role of criticism, for Cooper, is, on the one hand, to caution against what he refers to as “the constraint of full and explicit presence” (2016c, p. 289). More concretely, following Derrida, Cooper cautions against “the suppression of *différance* and the substitution of ‘presence’” (2016d, p. 103), arguing that “the undecidable can only become decidable through the practice of power and ‘violence’” (p. 100).<sup>89</sup> Thus, for Cooper, “[t]o appropriate the undecidable is to claim a certainty on ‘information’, which is to say that knowledge is power” (p. 103). Put differently, to appropriate the undecidable is to reproduce “a socially instituted, socially controlled way of fixing the mobile, aberrant tendencies of the texture of the text” (Cooper and Fox 1990, p. 578). Ultimately, this woeful fixing, we are told, goes hand in hand with “the historical privileging, especially in the development of modern sciences, of order over disorder, as if order were the degradation of a pristine and originary state of harmony” (Parker and Cooper 2016, p. 238).

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<sup>88</sup> For Cooper, reproduction, for him the crux of human organisation, necessarily mixes “the normal and the monstrous in a way that recalls the ancient origin of the word *product*: both prodigal, prodigious, monstrous, uncontrollable (from the Latin *prodigere*, *prodigus*, *prodigiosus*) and predictable, knowable efficient, workable ([from the] Latin *producere*, *productio*)” (1998, p. 103).

<sup>89</sup> *Pace* Cooper, undecidability, too, entails violence/power, casting life as ‘written’ but not read.

On the other hand, however, Cooper also cautions against sticking with undecidability; indeed, he fears “the existential shock that would accompany the disappearance of the constitutive forms and meanings of the human world” (2005a, p. ix). As a result, what is bemoaned is “the general bias to think order [the decidable or *legible*] and disorder [the undecidable or *illegible*] as separate forces in opposition to each other” (Parker and Cooper, 2016, p. 238). For “[w]ithout the constant work of reproduction and repetition by our systems, the human world would dissolve and disappear and so would its human habitants since we can only know and maintain ourselves as reflections of the objects and structures that serve as props for our daily living” (Cooper 2005a, p. ix). Against this background, we are called on to recognise that “stability/order and instability/disorder are mutually constituting forces” (Parker and Cooper 2016, p. 238). Doing so, Cooper raves, would, for the human being, entail a “sense of becoming” (2016c, p. 289), an “anticipation of possibilities” (*ibid.*) and the “freedom to re-create its world” (*ibid.*). In addition to this, it would also open up the possibility “to overcome the view of managerial competence as readership or authorship of ‘managerial ideologies’ assumed as the justifications of the manager’s authority” (Malavé and Cooper 1991, p. 54). For competence, too, echoes ‘becoming’...

Contrasting herewith, relying on Benjamin, criticism, for me, centres on liberating ‘the coming’ – a term referring to Benjamin’s idea of the messianic and, thus, the deactivation of the ‘Law’ – from its ‘deformed’/‘imaged’ (*verbildeten*) form in the present. It means liberating the messianic from its current capture in the *virtual* state of exception by way of a *real* state of exception. It means to *a-knowledge* and, hence, to neutralise representation. It is in this very sense that one ought to understand Agamben’s suggestion that “criticism consists not in discovering its object but in assuring the conditions of its inaccessibility” (1993b, p. xvi).

## The idea of comedy

In like fashion, it is only due to *a-knowledge* that we are able to experience the idea of comedy. After all – following Agamben – “[t]o show, within language, an impossibility of communicating and to show that it is funny—this is the essence of comedy” (2018b, p. 15). Viewed this way, comedy, one might say, turns on “joke[s] in which there is precisely nothing to understand” (2023b, p. 23). Concretely, it turns upon the neutralisation of signification, which, unsurprisingly, means that comedy, grasped this way, contrasts with Cooper’s postulations, according to which “we are essentially transmitters of messages” (2001c, p. 338). It, the idea of comedy, contrasts with his dyed-in-the-wool *presupposition* that “life is a dynamic stream of communication in which we as individuals are forever caught up and moved along” (*ibid.*).

Of course, in this context, for Cooper, “the control mode [i.e. secondary thinking], through joking, is actively beset by the nomadic mode [i.e. primary thinking]; the former’s orderings and hierarchies are momentarily upset” (Cooper and Fox 1989, p. 253). That means that organisational sense-making is never settled. Since, “the nomadic process of non-sense [contained in joking] does not permit any ‘natural’ condition of organization” (ibid.). Rather, smacking of ‘undecidability’, the nomadic process of non-sense, we are told, “points freely in all directions” (ibid.), with Cooper remaining trapped in zero-degree signification; instead of neutralising the ‘Law’, he grounds it in the form of its *virtual* exception, equating life, as suggested before, with capture in, notionally, alterable streams of communication, while the idea of comedy, as mentioned, revolves around an impossibility of communicating.

For this reason, the comic at stake in this thesis differs also from Butler’s concept of comedy – a concept following which “humour is inextricably linked to a socially normative mechanism” (2015, p. 51). Consequently, I refrain from, with Butler, linking humour and, more broadly, the comic to inveterate processes in which “behaviour that deviates from acceptable standards within a particular milieu is singled out for ridicule [...] and brought back into line with the normal flow of organizational life, whether seen from the perspective of a marginalized group [...] or a dominant group” (p. 53). Since, once *a-knowledged*, the comic emerges as involving the neutralisation of socially normative mechanisms. *Pace* Butler, it emerges as involving the neutralisation of linguistic appropriation, of *oikonomia*.

It is therefore that – echoing Agamben’s musings on Dante’s *Divine Comedy* – *this* thesis is written as a “‘comic’ poem” (1999d, p. 1), inasmuch as a comic poem seeks but “rhetorical opportunities to express its own silence” (2019b, p. 1054). Put slightly differently, comic poems centre on what Moriceau calls “a silence within words” (2017, p. 298), being completely at odds with Derrida’s *oikonomic* approach to silence. After all, for Derrida, “the praise [*éloge*] of silence always takes place within *logos*, the language of objectification” (2001, p. 44), while, with Agamben, silence, “not [as] the simple suspension of discourse, but [as] the silence of the word itself” (2012a, p. 97), neutralises the *logos*/‘Law’. In sum, that means that the idea of comedy, *contra* Butler and Cooper, entails suspending what Agamben refers to as the heinous “doctrine [that] a speaking being cannot in any way avoid communication” (1999c, p. 64).<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Vitally, *this* is echoed by Kafka: “the world, the semblance of the world which hitherto I had seen before me, dissolved completely, and I burst into loud and uninhibited laughter” (2016, pp. 147–8).

## The idea of love

Resonating with comedy's neutralisation of communication/signification, the idea of love is at odds with what Vachhani, rightly, deplores as "narrow definitions of love that construct love as an ideology, condition or interior state that suggest a denial of politics or an aura of sentimentality or naiveté" (2015, p. 159). And, simultaneously, it – love approached as an idea – resists positions following which, Vachhani adds, "[b]eing anti-love is translated as a sign of being realistic or strong" (p. 150). For the idea of love, Agamben stresses, refers to living "in intimacy with a stranger, not in order to draw him closer or make him known, but rather to keep him strange, remote" (1995, p. 61). As such, love differs also from Cooper's Heidegger-inspired musing on 'a-partness' (*Ent-fernung*). For, according to Cooper, "a-partness is the making of presence out of absence; it is also the recognition that the *missingness* of absence is also a *missing* presence in which absence is a *felt* and *implicit* presence that always haunts human beings like the shadowing of the visible by the invisible" (2016c, p. 293). That is, a-partness frustrates the *possibility* of love as, with a-partness, the stranger, the *il-legible* monstrum, is subjected to representation – to *oikonomia*.

## The idea of God

Expectably, the idea of God also reflects *a-knowledge*. However, for Cooper, there is no such idea. There is no *il-legibility*. Instead, God is reduced as an illegible absence that motivates *religion's* attempts to render God *legible*. More specifically, inspired by Bataille, Cooper holds that "[t]he Christian Mass reveals 'meaningless infinity' and inarticulation [or what we call God] as that aboriginal absence that, despite its inexpressibility, [the] human being feels compelled to make present in some way" (2016e, p. 267). That means "[t]he *missive* communicated by the Mass points not only to a radical absence – a profound unfoundedness – but also to a generative need of the human being to express this absence" (ibid.). Put differently, for Cooper, the "Church recognizes [...] an invisible power in the general conduct of human affairs and assumes the responsibility for translating and interpreting this ultra-human presence into a language and symbolism that makes it somehow readily readable" (2007, p. 1565). Thus, in Cooper's view, despite 'his' unrepresentability, "'he' demands to be made present as an existential necessity in the living of everyday life" (ibid.).

Seen this way, Cooper adds, "the primal vagueness of the holy is the ultimate source of all human creation and re-creation" (2016e, pp. 266–7), so that "a felt absence mystically conveys a demand to be made present" (p. 267). Furthermore, "[t]he Mass itself offers no clear meaning and at best only intimates and suggests" (ibid.).

Stated differently, “Mass [...] can never come to rest in a finite concept or finished product but is always in the process of ‘becoming’” (p. 269). All that means that, in Cooper’s trademark grammatological view, “religion coincides with [...] [the] rejection of ‘full presence’ as the ideal of formal thinking” (p. 265), urging us to embrace “vagueness as the preconceptual and prelinguistic origin of secondary thinking” (ibid.).

Simultaneously, the idea of God also differs from what Ashforth and Vaidyanath refer to as “secular religion” (2002, p. 365). For, unlike secular *religions*, a concept used to describe organisations found to be pervaded by “existential desires for transcendence” (ibid.) and to exhibit related “motives of identity, meaning, control, and belonging” (ibid.), the idea of God resides in pure *il-legibility*. It resides in profane(d) play/non-meaning. And, as such, it neutralises biopolitics. Likewise, the idea of God is also at odds with appraisals that call for a return to God as a seat of power. Correspondingly, it is, for instance, incompatible with Sandelands’s proposition that “[o]ur power belongs under Divine authority” (2008, p. 141). For, according to Sandelands, “[p]ower sundered from the Divine is a cataclysm for man” (ibid.).

Evidently, the idea of God is completely incommensurate with what Sandelands delineates as “faithful obedience to God’s law” (2012, p. 1006) and as “a secure grounding in the physical, temporal, and social world” (p. 1008). After all, for Sandelands, “[o]nly [the law of] a transcendent God can provide the unitary and absolute commonality in which persons of every stripe and background can abandon their differences to join productively with others in markets and organizations” (p. 1009). Thus, while I agree with Sandelands, insofar as he singles out “God as the (too-often) neglected first term in organization studies” (2003, p. 169), *this* book remains incommensurate with his position. Since Sandelands espouses the operation of “a higher law: the law of God” (p. 170)...

Now, approaching God as an idea means being alive to “another God, [...] stripped of the faculty of accusation [related to *cosa*, meaning ‘thing’] and judgement” (Agamben 2018a, p. 8). It means being fully alive to our “birth in God of love” (1993c, p. 32). It means indwelling divine violence, insofar as, Agamben shows, “divine violence neither posits nor conserves violence, but deposes it” (1998, p. 65). Therefore, at odds with *oikonomia*, the idea of God amounts to “an experience of language as such, in its pure self-reference” (1993a, p. 5) – “[not] as this or that signifying proposition, but as the pure fact that one speaks, that language exists” (ibid.). Completely coinciding with inoperativity, *in-fancy* or the *monstrosity* afforded by (the idea of) ‘comedy’, “[t]he world—insofar as it is absolutely, irreparably profane—is God” (1993c, p. 90). Or, in other words, for Cooper, there are “no positive forms of God but we produce and reproduce him all the time in a thousand different religions, so yes, we are relating the latent all the time, and religion is a good example of this” (cited in Cavalcanti and Parker 2023, p. 152). In

contrast hereto, with Agamben, we indwell a profane God: “God but without the comforts of religion” (2024b, p. 55).

## The idea of organisation

Lastly, there is, strictly speaking, also no idea of work in Cooper’s myriad writings, inasmuch as, for him, “the work of organization is focused upon transforming an intrinsically ambiguous condition into one that is ordered, so that organization as a process is constantly bound up with its contrary state of disorganization” (2016d, pp. 83–4). Aimed at bringing about *legibility*, work or organisation (from *ergon*, mean-ing ‘work’) are, thus, seen to rest on a “condition of no meaning, no form, of absolute disorder which one might call the primary source of form or organization” (p. 97). Work or organisation are seen to rest on “a state [...] of no specific order, organization or direction, a process of undecidability” (p. 93), so that “organization loses its rationalistic and monolithic presence” (Cooper and Fox 1990, p. 579). That is to say that, following Cooper, “[t]he disorder of the zero-degree is that which is essentially undecidable and it is this feature which energizes or motivates the call to order or organization” (2016d, p. 97). Another way of putting this is that – with Cooper – “the ‘natural’ is not just unknown, unplanned and unrealized” (2001a, p. 164). In addition, “it is also a source of possibilities that have to be made over in order to realize human culture” (p. 164). Accordingly – in his way of thinking – “[t]he work of culture is to articulate the muted mutterings of matter, to make them speak clearly” (ibid.). To call a spade a spade, reproductive of the *virtual* state of exception, it is to render the grammatologically presupposed *illegible* ‘written’ said to be in the voice *legible*.

By contrast, the idea of organisation/work turns on *il-legibility*, rendering inoperative all *oikonomia*. It turns on the *possibility* of non-representationality contained in *a-knowledge*. Put with Agamben, the idea of work implies that man is “the being whose work is the use of the body” (2015b, p. 4), insofar as, apropos *physis* and *nomos*, *potentiality* and *act*, ‘use’ springs from the non-appropriation of ‘contact’ (*contāgiō*). It springs from ending grammatology’s ‘relation’ between *phoné* and *logos*...

# Contribution: on a way out

“*Extra* is the place of thought.” (Agamben 2024b, p. 55)

Of course, with *this* book being dedicated to inoperativity, its overall contribution is a testimonial of the *possibility* of *u-topian* language. Put differently, *here*, potentiality and actuality, *physis* and *nomos*, matter and form, are shown to be in ‘contact’ (*contāgiō*), revealed in their non-relation and suspended, which amounts to rendering *oikonomia* inoperative. Below, I discuss how this testimonial plays out regarding changing management literature’s current appraisal of Agamben’s, Kafka’s, as well as Cooper’s work. Doing so means helping to turn a horrid impasse into ‘a way out’.

## Contribution *vis-à-vis* Agamben’s work

With a view to organisation theory, which, like many other research areas, has come to take note of Agamben’s work (e.g. Antonelli et al. 2022; Banerjee 2008; Bar-Lev and Vitner 2012; Beltramini 2020, 2021; Clegg 2013; Cunha et al. 2012; Ek et al. 2007; Funnell et al. 2022; Huber 2020; Huber and Scheytt 2013; Jagannathan and Rai 2015; Johnsen et al. 2017; Johnson 2010; Jones and Munro 2005; Le Theule et al. 2020; Letiche 2008; Martí and Fernández 2013; Miller and Stovall 2019; Styhre 2010, 2012; Mir et al. 2015; Ortmann 2011; Quattrone 2006; Schellmann 2018; Stavrakakis 2014; Stevens 2017; Sørensen 2014a; Tedmanson 2008; Ten Bos 2005a,b; Thorne 2009; Twyford 2021; Twyford and Funnell 2023), *this* thesis provides further clarification of key terms of Agamben’s increasingly widely used, evermore influential philosophy. In this context, it focuses not least on inoperativity and pure play as important, interrelated building blocks or cornerstones. Hence, in the face of biopolitics, by way of further clarifying terminology, *this* thesis seeks to help pave the way to exit from *oikonomic* organisation (theory), noting, with Agamben, that his work “should not be confused with a sociological investigation” (cited in Raulff 2004, p. 610).

That sociological investigation differs from inoperative organisation (theory) can be illustrated by means of contrasting Agambenian philosophy with Luhmann’s *propositions* in the essay ‘Meaning as Sociology’s Basic Concept’; for Luhmann, inasmuch as sociology “is willing to face up to the assumption of a contingent



world" (1990, p. 22), it proceeds "no longer from the point of view of the accurate reproduction of what is simply pregiven and waiting to be discovered, but from that of grasping and reducing this contingency of possible worlds" (ibid.). Consequently, sociology recognises, Andersen notes, that "social systems create themselves through *meaning*" (2003, p. 72), so that "social systems [...] are [...] unable to operate outside of meaning" (ibid.). Here, sticking with Luhmann, as the *sine qua non* for modern sociology, "meaning refers to the way human experience is ordered" (1990, p. 25) and, for this very reason, "always appears within some delimitable context and yet at the same time always points beyond this context and lets us see other possibilities" (ibid.), with Luhmann, Andersen explains, ultimately defining "meaning [...] as the unity of the distinction *actuality/potentiality*" (2003, p. 73). Specifically, that means that, when "something appears central to [...] thought or to [...] communication, [this] something is actualised, but this always happens in relation to a horizon of possible actualisations (that is, potentiality)" (ibid.). After all, all things sociological can be different. There can be different actualisations. This chimes with Cooper, for whom we should recognise "the social as the presence of convenient fictions grounded in the non-presence of meaningless infinity" (2001c, p. 344).

Obviously, however, this differs from Agamben's focus on language prior to signification/meaning, from his focus on human life beyond the *virtual* state of exception. Put differently, for Luhmann – as expressed, for instance, in *Social Systems* – something is contingent insofar as it is neither necessary nor impossible; it is just what it is (or was or will be), though it could also be otherwise. Yet, for Agamben "[c]ontingency is [...] the way in which a potentiality exists as such" (1999c, p. 146). Or, put yet another way, while (Luhmannian) sociology focuses upon diverse articulations of biopolitical positioning/emplacement, Agamben points to 'exposition'. Henceforth, while (Luhmannian) sociology submits organisation to *oikonomia*, Agamben adverts to inoperativity.

Distinctively, through further elaboration, I seek, then, to unlock what, before, has been called *in-fancy*. That is, focused on what Agamben, already early on in his career, points out as his sole philosophical concern, viz., "what is the meaning of 'there is language'; what is the meaning of 'I speak'?" (1993a, p. 5), *this* thesis seeks to testify to language in its suchness. Hardly surprising at this point, on several occasions, Agamben intimates that, for him, the meaning of 'I speak' turns on being "capable of *not having* language" (1999c, p. 146). As for the living being, it turns on being "capable of its own in-fancy" (ibid.), so that speaking – unlike what sociologists like Luhmann claim – no longer means perpetuating, and submitting to, the Law, which, in turn, Agamben stresses, "is made of nothing but what it manages to capture inside itself through the inclusive exclusion of the *exceptio*" (1998, p. 27). All that means, that, as distinguished from those who only attend to the Law, i.e. to 'the written', the *in-fant*, Agamben suggests, finds himself in the condition of "being able to pay attention precisely to what has not been written, to somatic

possibilities that are arbitrary and uncoded” (1995, p. 96). Seen *this* way, the *infant* is “cast out of himself” (ibid.), whilst “whoever believes in a specific destiny cannot truly speak” (p. 97), in-fancy being what Fusco calls “a strategic resource towards thinking against the tragedies of our present” (2022, p. viii).

### *Tying in with others*

For one thing, providing further clarification of key terms of Agamben’s philosophy with a view to providing an exit from *oikonomic* organisation (theory) means tying in with, and further spelling out, important *ideas* turned to by a handful of attentive management scholars. Faced with myriad biopolitical positionings, these scholars incorporate vital Agambenian terminology, such as love, exemplarity, play, profanation, study and pure mediality. And more or less explicitly, they highlight, and testify to, the immanent *possibility* of hope, optimism and redemption: the *possibility* of a ‘real state of exception’ (e.g. Bay and Schinckus 2012; Beverungen and Dunne 2007; Beyes 2009; Murtola 2010; Śliwa et al. 2013; Sørensen 2004; Spoelstra 2024; Ten Bos 2005b; Ten Bos and Rhodes 2003). Plainly, based on unremitting elaboration, *this* thesis sets out, then, to both advance and disseminate Agambenian *ideas*, so as to allow for inoperativity: for a way out.

Or, *in nuce*, intent on clarifying Agambenian terminology with a view to providing an exit from *oikonomic* organisation theory, *this* thesis ties in with the aforementioned pioneering, if oftentimes unconnected and in part unduly tentative, studies. It does so by, in the light of Agamben’s above-mentioned prominently *infantile* philosophical concern, firmly contextualising Agambenian criticism as fundamentally concerned with the neutralisation of linguistic imposition. Aimed at justice, it throws inoperativity into relief as fundamentally concerned with the neutralisation of signification. In sum, providing crucial clarification of central terms of Agamben’s work, it offers a critical context for, and helps to stimulate, a non-appropriating use of his *ideas* among organisation scholars.<sup>91</sup>

### *Countering the dominant reception*

For another thing, providing further clarification of central terms of Agamben’s philosophy also means countering the mistaken, yet arguably dominant, mode of reception of his work. Concretely, it means countering what Frost calls the “‘negative’ reading of Agamben” (2016, p. 125). It means countering a reading which – partly prompted by Agamben’s allusions to a dismaying politics secretly working towards the ‘production of emergencies’, ‘indefinite detention’ or the ‘camp as the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West’ – sees him as a decidedly pessimistic Cassandra. Therefore, in *this* thesis, I hope to correct a reading that reduces Agamben’s work to startling, disturbingly accurate portrayals of an

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<sup>91</sup> Importantly, while highlighting hope and optimism, not all of the scholars referenced here succeed in rendering *oikonomia* inoperative, which makes further clarification all the more vital.

altogether gloomy human existence inexorably marked by political despotism and extreme legal/bureaucratic violence.

Crucially, in addition to viewing Agamben as a present-day Cassandra, at least two further readings that, too, might be referred to as 'negative' can be discerned. One deems Agamben's suggestions impracticable, the other finding his texts exaggeratedly one-sided; a representative of the former view, Ten Bos describes Agamben's work as "too philosophical or, perhaps better, too cerebral" (2005a, p. 23). Since Ten Bos "do[es] not see how [...] [human beings] can emancipate themselves from [...] identity" (ibid.). Specifically, he does not see how one can, insofar as one follows Agamben, be "willing to live the life of a refugee" (ibid.). This reading, however, is based on a grave misunderstanding; for Ten Bos takes Agamben to simply maintain "that the normal and civil order in which we, as average citizens of our late-capitalistic society, might feel so protected and secure might easily turn into a perverted order where the law is suspended and where we lose our civil status and become, indeed, less-than-human" (p. 18). What Ten Bos fails to understand is that, in Agamben, the refugee/bare life, referring to life under the *virtual* state of exception, is ultimately meant to help pave the way for the *real* state of exception. In other words, exemplifying life under 'imperfect nihilism', the refugee/bare life is meant to pave the way for perfect nihilism. Indeed, for Agamben, "the refugee [...] makes it possible to clear the way for a long-overdue renewal of categories in the service of a poli-tics in which bare life is no longer separated and excepted, either in the state order or in the figure of human rights" (1998, p. 134). The refugee/bare life makes it possible to wrest life from linguistic appropriation and make language the "*refugium* (refuge) of the singular" (2000, p. 24).

Similarly, finding, as mentioned, Agamben's work too one-sided, Costas claims that, inasmuch as Agamben equates the law with violence, "more positive aspects of the law remain excluded from his theory" (2019, p. 133). Hence, like Ten Bos, she overlooks that, for Agamben, what is at stake is unfolding the *possibility* of neutralising representation. For him, what is at stake is an "experience of abandonment [which] is freed from every idea of law and destiny" (1998, p. 60). As a result, Costas remains stuck in, and reproduces, the *virtual* state of exception. She submits life to a floating signifier, to the mute zero-degree of organisation, failing to get Agamben's point. As a result, she ends up positing that, concerning the 'refugee', "it is the law that determines his or her status, that also ensures his or her new life, security and safety once he or she is granted asylum" (2019, p. 133).

No doubt, providing further 'clarification' of central terms of Agamben's philosophy means countering a trend that, in sociologising his work, *conceptualises*, i.e. *positions* as "a condensation and generalisation of a multiplicity of meanings and expectations" (Andersen 2011, p. 254), that which is meant to be inappropriate: human life. It means countering modes of reading that completely overlook that his analysis of the refugee/bare life or the *virtual* state of exception gesture not towards pessimism and biopolitical appropriation. Instead, as Agamben

emphasises himself, ultimately his work gestures towards “a care of self that should lead to a letting go of self” (cited in Smith 2004, p. 117). It gestures *not* towards this or that *dystopian topic*, but to *u-topia*. Now, in order to exemplify, within management research, at least four emerging streams of research that, too, mistake Agamben for a pessimistic philosopher and, thus, falsely reproduce, and fall prey to, Cassandra-like conceptions can be discerned.

First, Agamben’s work is used to show how increasingly ruthless government and management elites – in the context of capitalist resource accumulation, financial risk management, health crises or natural disasters – tend to augment or challenge conventional forms of management control. This, it is argued, allows these elites to, in their own interest, avail themselves of, justify or permanentise so-called exceptional measures (e.g. Andreasson et al. 2021; Antonelli et al. 2022; Banerjee 2008; Huber and Scheytt 2013; Sargiacomo 2015). Second, Agamben’s work is used to illuminate the persistence of brutal state- or police-based suppression of, and control over, ethnic and religious minorities (e.g. Jagannathan and Rai 2015; Tedmanson 2008). Third, his work is found to help explain the appalling violence and dehumanisation underpinning markets, marketing and exclusionary consumer culture (theory) (e.g. Ayrosa and de Oliveira 2019; Miller and Stovall 2019; Varman 2018). And finally, fourth, historical examinations focusing on accounting practices’ implication in contributing to the spread of enforced labour and the mass extermination of Jews during the Second World War draw on Agamben (e.g. Funnell et al. 2022; Twyford 2021).

As indicated, however, whilst such research may offer penetrating descriptions of the past and of the present, inasmuch as it mirrors, and is driven by, historiographical or sociological concerns only, it forecloses an exit from biopolitics. It does foreclose the liberation of the ‘coming’ as it – as Prozorov underlines – fails to see that Agamben’s numerous analyses are “not intended as tragic ruminations of the inaccessibility of redemption, but rather as the proper pathway towards it” (2014, p. 3). Differently put, this research tends to overlook that – using Primera’s words – Agamben’s work “is a critique of metaphysics that aims at its suspension” (2019, p. 1). Indeed, returning to Prozorov, one must stress that Agamben is concerned with “tracing the possibilities of rendering inoperative the structures of power that capture and confine human existence” (2014, p. 4). Or, as Zartaloudis explains, “throughout his work, Agamben searches for an escape route from the realm of law’s triumphant self-consecration” (2010, p. 4). He points to the possibility of life outside of biopolitics. He points to and, in his work, unfurls, “pure exteriority” (Agamben 2010, p. 27).

## Contribution *vis-à-vis* Kafka's work

Here, Kafka's literary work is sought to be unlocked as a means to think of work/organisation as severed from *oikonomia*. Going about in this way means, among other things, siding with Benjamin, who convincingly suggests that Kafka's literary work, and that strikingly, centres on the question of how life and work are organised in the human community. Yet, as Hamacher underscores, if, following Barthes, "literature is the communication or even constitution of meaning" (2011, p. 304), including the meaning of the organisation of life and work in the human community, then, and this felicitously, "Kafka's texts miss the meaning of literature" (ibid.). Indeed, as far as Kafka's literary texts are concerned, "missing is for them the medium of another success" (ibid.). Since these texts neutralise *positioning*, inasmuch as they, Hamacher leaves no doubt, revolve around, and are indicative of, an "interpretation [*Deutung*] that slips away from itself" (p. 305), giving way to "Entdeutung" (ibid.), to *de-construal/de-interpretation*.

In like fashion, Agamben, in 'Kafka Defended against His Interpreters', stresses that, as for the legends concerning 'the inexplicable', the most notorious of them "claims that, being inexplicable, it remains so in all the explanations which have been given and that will continue to be given through the centuries" (1995, p. 137). Crucially, according to this *legend*, a *legend* espoused by, for instance, Derrida and Luhmann, "[t]he only content of the inexplicable, and in this lies the subtlety of the doctrine, consists in the command—truly inexplicable: 'Explain!'" (ibid.). Luckily, however, on "the 'day of Glory'" (ibid.), to which Kafka's work is *here* found to unfalteringly bear witness, Agamben argues, "explanations would end their dance around the inexplicable" (p. 138). On that day, "[w]hat was not to be explained is perfectly contained in what no longer explains anything" (ibid.).

In line with *this*, *this* thesis also resonates with Śliwa et al.'s attempt to unfold literary fiction as an expedient resource informing, and underpinning, profanation as a highly expedient tool in organization studies. Patently, like Śliwa et al., it attempts to unfold literary fiction as a resource to 'expose' any 'position'. More broadly then, *this* thesis chimes, to some extent at least, with Beverungen and Dunne's approach regarding literature, inasmuch as it, my book, turning to Kafka, too, bears witness to a "moment where the machine of managerialism fails to assimilate that which resists it" (2007, p. 178). That is to say, in keeping with Beverungen and Dunne, it foregrounds literature's involvement in "completely expung[ing] the very possibility of being infiltrated by the social" (p. 179), its "affirmation of possibility as such" (ibid.).

### *Tying in with others*

For one thing, seeking to unlock Kafka's literary work as a means to help neutralise biopolitics means, here, tying in with the elaborations of numerous contemporary

philosophers and literary theorists. It means tying in with elaborations which, as for Kafka's stories, focus on, and accentuate, the neutralisation of metaphysics at work in these texts, so as to help underline their inherent testimony to hope and optimism; Sloterdijk, for instance, spotlights that "Kafka's experiment [...] reveal[s] what remains of metaphysical desire when its transcendent goal is eliminated" (2013, p. 71), so that "Kafka experiments with leaving out religion" (ibid.).

Similarly, Schuller, while referring to Kafka's *Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk*, suggests that Josephine "sings without having recourse to an actualisable potency" (2019, p. 427). As a result, as for her singing, the "referential and representational function of language is suspended" (p. 428). Equally concerned with Kafka's neutralisation of biopolitics, Salzani zooms in on the protagonist of Kafka's short story *The New Advocate*. He zooms in on Bucephalus, i.e. Alexander of Macedon's battle charger, stressing that Bucephalus "outlives his master and, free from the burden of a rider and from the clamor of the battle, delves into the study of law books" (2019, p. 403). According to Salzani, "[i]t is this emancipation and new freedom that is, for us, the matter" (ibid.).

Perhaps even more emphatically, Benjamin writes that Kafka "was neither a mantic nor a founder of a religion" (1999, p. 806), highlighting that, with regard to *The New Advocate*, Bucephalus is the figure in which "[t]he law [...] is studied but no longer practiced" (p. 815). Finally, Hamacher underlines that Kafka's stories gesture towards "a history that releases itself from history as a normative continuum in which meaning is mediated and transmitted" (2011, p. 289). Correspondingly, within these stories, Hamacher's study reveals, names such as, for instance, Gregor Samsa, Odradek or the outlandish Cat-Lamb, i.e. the protagonist of *A Crossbreed*, point to "a distortion [*Entstellung*] that escapes fixity in any civil or literary order, in any order whatsoever" (p. 302). Against this background, it is completely unsurprising that, as Hamacher shows, "Odradek is the leap from the series of rationality's normative positionings; he is nothing but ex-position" (pp. 308–9).

Of course, even Agamben draws on Kafka's work, pointing out that "Kafka's characters—and this is why they interest us—have to do with the state of exception; they seek, each one following his or her own strategy to study and deactivate it, to 'play' with it" (2005a, p. 64). Snoek, in particular, has concentrated on Agamben's numerous references to Kafka, rightly arguing that "Agamben uses Kafka [...] to show a way out, an exit strategy, from the present political situation" (2012, p. 2). Indeed, Snoek underscores that, within Agamben's philosophy, "Kafka's work plays an important role in [the] [...] formulation of a theory of freedom" (p. 4). However, here, the focus lies not so much on Agamben's engagement of Kafka's literary work alone. Rather, it lies on unlocking Kafka's work as a means to help testify to inoperativity. It lies on pointing to a way out.

### *Countering the dominant reception*

For another thing, seeking to unlock Kafka's literary work as a means to help neutralise biopolitics also means countering the dominant reception of Kafka's literature in organisation scholarship. It means countering a reception which, quite maddeningly, reduces this literature to portrayals of an inescapably dystopian, contradictory and complex lived experience of marginalised people; Warner, for instance, when arguing that "Kafka insightfully explores a number of themes that are highly germane to a deeper understanding of organization theory" (2007, p. 1032) – themes "such as bureaucracy, power and authority, rationality and lastly, alienation" (p. 1019) – maintains that Kafka was a representative of "deep 'cultural pessimism'" (p. 1020). In fact, he takes Kafka to be marked by "'Oedipal' struggles" (ibid.), with his stories said to point to the "*estranged employee*" (p. 1031) as well as to "the perils of *organizational dystopia*" (p. 1032). That is, for Warner, "Kafka [...] does identify with the 'underdog' rather than the 'top-dog'" (p. 1028), thereby calling attention to "the dysfunctions of [...] loneliness and marginalization" (p. 1032).

Pretty much taking the same line, Yang asserts that "Kafka provides us with a lived experience from a bottom-up lens, looking at the bureaucratic phenomenon through persons who are often marginalized" (2022, p. 9). Kafka, for Yang, assumes the perspective of people who are "helpless in the face of cage-like qualities of the bureaucratic forms" (p. 18). In line with this, for Yang, "Kafka's vision of bureaucracy is a form of 'soft' determinism in the sense that Kafka still tends to emphasize how bureaucratic processes are shaped by Weberian forces that reinforce conformity while allowing nonconformity as long as it does not overthrow the iron cage" (p. 4). Also comparing Kafka to Weber, in particular to the latter's ideal type of bureaucracy, Jørgensen argues that Kafka provides "a counter-punctual ideal type" (2012, p. 194). Kafka's work, Jørgensen holds, centres on "excessive worship of rankings, endless hierarchies, hierarchical contradictions and cracks in the hierarchy" (p. 198), while Boland and Griffin turn to Kafka to highlight "the impenetrable obscurity and implacable absurdity that can arise in dealings with bureaucratic systems" (2015, p. 100). Similarly, for Pelzer, "Kafka achieves a much deeper look behind the shiny façade of [...] organization" (2002, p. 855). For Pelzer, "[i]t is to Kafka's lasting credit that he makes us realize that [...] organization usually is disgusting" (p. 859), properly disclosing "the world we live in" (ibid.).

Sticking to the most commonplace interpretations, Parker, too, pulls out biopolitical chestnuts, professing that "Kafka's books have become a powerful metaphor for the cultural consequences of bureaucratization" (2002, p. 138). Since, as Parker holds, his stories "capture a more general sense of organizational nightmares" (ibid.) and revolve around "labyrinths of mysterious conspiracies, helpless individuals endlessly attempting to understand the reasons for their circumstances, and bureaucrats who defer to rulebooks and superiors that are nowhere to be found" (ibid). In addition to this, Parker writes that, "[i]n Kafka's world, cruelty is a

bureaucratic matter, and the affairs for little people [...] are of no consequence for those who merely carry out orders” (2005, p. 160). But it, Kafka’s work, is also identified with “critique through representation” (p. 153) – critique meant “to reframe sanitized versions of a brave new world” (ibid.). Now, what Parker seems to completely overlook is that Kafka is a poet and that, as Hamacher intimates, “the poem is the place where all tropes and metaphors want to be made non-sense of—and just like tropes, even *topoi*” (2019, p. 122).

Finally, Huber also – annoyingly, for he bases his interpretation partly on a blatant misreading of Agamben’s essay ‘K.’, an essay whose end is overlooked – draws on Kafka. Specifically, Huber hopes to address “how people deal with being subjected to power and participate in their own subjectification” (2019, p. 1823), so as to provide “a corrective to approaches that overemphasize either the possibilities of resistance [...] or the impotence of the subject in the face of power” (p. 1823). In so doing he leaves *oikonomia* intact. In a way then, *this* thesis continues Agamben’s work, defending Kafka against the dominant, biopolitical reception of his literary work in organisation research.<sup>92</sup>

## Contribution *vis-à-vis* Cooper’s work

Finally, as has already been shown, *this* thesis is also concerned with stimulating a critical and, thus, profanation-based (re-)evaluation of Cooper’s important, philosophically underpinned work. In this connection, *this* thesis focuses, above all, on reappraising unreadability beyond its subjugation to *oikonomia*. It focuses upon reappraising unreadability beyond Cooper’s above-mentioned, action-centred elaboration and corollary appropriation of this pivotal term. To be clear, *pace* Cooper, it, *this* thesis, focuses, then, on reappraising unreadability purely immanently. Simply put, offering a long-overdue critique of Cooper, it focuses on reappraising unreadability/*il-legibility as such*. It focuses on reappraising unreadability/*il-legibility* as being untethered from this or that transcendent reference.<sup>93</sup> After all, heretofore, scholarly focus concerning Cooper and his work has – and this almost exclusively – rested on explicating, promoting and applying (certain parts of) Cooper’s conceptual apparatus (e.g. Chia and Kallinikos 1998;

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<sup>92</sup> Interestingly, Cooper provides a ‘positive’ reading of Kafka, but unsurprisingly remains entrapped in deconstructionist biopolitics. Indeed, for Cooper, “Kafka [...] saw himself not as an author who created fictional objects but as part of an ongoing, generalized process [...] that constituted both himself and his products” (1998, p. 115). Accordingly, Kafka’s work, Cooper suggests “refuses the sense of a finished whole closed upon itself” (p. 113).

<sup>93</sup> Another way of saying this is that I am *not* concerned with *imposition*, no matter how hazy and unstable. Instead, I am concerned with *exposition*.



Hassard et al. 2008; Knox et al. 2015; Land 2001; Parker 2016; Plotnikof et al. 2022; Rasche 2011b; Weiskopf 2002).

Unsurprisingly, this has coincided with, and resulted in, a palpable dearth of genuinely critical engagements with Cooper's work. Indeed – and this is the lynchpin of this thesis's critique – has left unchallenged Cooper's patent indebtedness to semiology – to the metaphysical signifier/signified duality. Vitality, it has left unchallenged Cooper's semiological reduction of unreadability/*il-legibility*. More broadly, with Cooper, not unlike Derrida, time and again, negatively grounding organisation in mute zero-degree signification, i.e. in the biopolitics of the floating signifier or what Agamben, infamously, calls the *virtual* state of exception, it has left unchallenged and unexamined Cooper's blatant indebtedness to *oikonomia*, foreclosing an appreciation of human life that is couched in terms of pure *possibility*. In short, it leaves unchallenged Cooper's participation in the reproduction of the 'Law'.

In this context, Böhmer's engagement with Cooper – at least at first blush – stands out as a notable exception as it explicitly takes issue with Cooper's work, associating it with "organization theory discourses that continuously celebrate movement and process" (2006, p. 3). Indeed, it associates Cooper's work with what Böhmer, disapprovingly, refers to as "the 'depositioning project'" (ibid.). More concretely, for Böhmer, "by fetishizing processes of depositioning these organization theory discourses are not able to politically engage with the important questions and challenges faced by today's society and organizations" (ibid.), with Cooper's work said to lack a "political project of pointing towards the production of new subjectivities and a new social" (p. 137). As for this thesis's focus on unreadability/*il-legibility* as revolving around the opening of an inoperative *u-topia*, this means, however, that Böhmer, too – his critique of Cooper's approach notwithstanding – remains trapped in biopolitics. No doubt, he, too, concerned with and adamantly calling for repositioning, relegates organisation to the realm of semiology. Therefore, like Cooper, he grounds life negatively in a transcendently anchored zero-degree (see Böhmer 2005). Or, and this boils down to the same thing, he grounds life in Derridean 'undecidables', relegating organisation to the realm *oikonomia*.

Suffice it to say here that, for Agamben, what Derridean "deconstruction does [is] positing undecidables that are infinitely in excess of every possibility of signification" (1998, p. 25). As such, 'undecidables' point to a situation "in which language can maintain itself in relation to its *denotata* by abandoning them and withdrawing from them into a pure *langue*" (ibid.), with pure *langue* referring to "a discourse whose actual denotation is maintained in infinite suspension" (p. 20). As Agamben underlines, that means "'undecidables' [...] call into question the primacy of presence and signification [...], yet they do not truly call into question signification in general" (2005b, p. 103). For "radicalizing the notion of [...] zero degree, [...] ['undecidables'] presuppose both the exclusion of presence and the

impossibility of an extinguishing of the sign” (ibid.). Thus, for Agamben, Derrida leaves intact the very differentiating structures through which biopolitics operates.

To be sure, from an Agambenian angle, Cooper’s eventually insufficient theorisation of unreadability, *this* thesis suggests, has to do with his strict reliance on philosophers such as Derrida or Heidegger. It has to do with his reliance on philosophers who, explicitly, give up on overcoming metaphysics and thus eclipse the possible profanity of unreadability/*il-legibility*. After all, for Derrida, “it is more necessary, from within semiology, to transform concepts, to displace them, to turn them against their presuppositions, to reinscribe them in other chains, and little by little to modify the terrain of our work and thereby produce new configurations” (1981, p. 24). For he “do[es] not believe in decisive ruptures, in an unequivocal ‘epistemological break’” (ibid.). In like fashion, for Heidegger, “metaphysics still prevails even in the intention to overcome metaphysics” (1972, p. 23), so that one has to “cease all overcoming, and leave metaphysics to itself” (ibid.). Thus, like Cooper, Derrida and Heidegger appear to make do with positioning, overlooking expositioning. Indeed, the persistent prominence of biopolitical influences in Cooper’s work, I argue, makes him blind to the irreparable profanity of inoperativity. It makes Cooper blind to his own being irreducibly other to himself.

All that means that Cooper, despite the indisputable merits of his work, remains a “social philosopher” (Burrell and Parker 2016, p. 9). Here, the stress is on social rather than on philosopher, with society, following Seidl, being “the system that encompasses all communications” (2006, p. 28), so that “all communications that are produced are part of society and as such reproduce it” (ibid.). In other words, Cooper ultimately remains committed to a biopolitical, imposing philosophy that continues to reduce language to its communicative or semantic function and, as a result, overlooks the possibility of *in-fancy*. He, Cooper, remains committed to a position that overlooks the *possibility* of human beings being inoperative/‘without work’. Or, put differently, he remains committed to a position that, negatively grounding speech in ‘muteness’, overlooks the poetics of *in-fantile* ‘silence’. Thus, at the end of the day, he still inspires organisation theorists to think of human life in terms of what, drawing on the poet Keats, can be called ‘negative capability’.

Let there be no mistake, profanity fully differs from what Cooper, in referring to Keats’s famous line, defines as “the putting of oneself among uncertainties and staying there” (2016g, p. 43). In like manner, it differs also from Chia and Nayak’s rendering of this line, according to which negative capability involves “learning to live with the creative anxiety of not knowing and not being in control” (2016, p. 130) and thus being “able to be content with ‘uncertainties, mysteries, doubts’ without the ‘irritable tendency to reach after fact and reason’ prematurely” (ibid.). And, finally, profanity differs also from Parker’s version of Keats’s line, which turns on “the capacity to think in a way that contradicts the formative contexts that we find ourselves in, that imaginatively posits new ways of thinking about ourselves

and our social relations” (2018, p. 177), with Parker, too, perpetuating, and submitting to, the biopolitics of semiology.

Interestingly, in this context, Spoelstra, perhaps unwittingly, in an essay on Cooper that also draws upon Agamben’s work, offers some openings that, while taking their point of departure in Cooper, help to venture beyond Cooper’s action-centred representations. In a sense, by taking Cooper seriously, Spoelstra offers openings that help to undo *oikonomia*. More specifically, for Spoelstra, insofar as Cooper’s chief concern turns upon “the question of the beyond” (2016, p. 18), this inevitably involves an experience of “potentiality not tied to actuality” (p. 15)... That is to say, if genuinely concerned with the ‘beyond’, Cooper, too, despite his stance that “action [...] [is] a means of revealing the latent in himself and the world” (2016g, pp. 35–36) so that “action makes visible what is invisible” (p. 36), should eventually, with Agamben, concede that the ‘beyond’, as for being, concerns “its pure non-latency, its pure exteriority” (1993c, pp. 98–9). He, too, should move beyond the position of the human being as an *oikonomic*, positing being. He, too, should neutralise and escape from this or that biopolitical apparatus. He, too, should neutralise, and escape from, the chains of inclusively excluding, representational language... He, too, should find a way out.

# Postilla: *I am now going to shut it!*

“[T]he Messiah will be able to enter only after the door is closed, which is to say, after the Law’s being in force without significance is at an end.” (Agamben 1998, p. 57)

Meriting reflection, a true postilla is, in many respects, very similar to, if not somehow congruent with, a true proem; for a true proem’s profane-cum-messianic task, Agamben underscores, pivots upon the “attempt to purify the law from commandment” (2018d, p. 94). That is to say that – concerned with God, inasmuch as “inoperativity is the name of what is most proper to God” (2011d, p. 239) – the proem seeks to “bring back every discourse to the proem” (2018d, p. 94). Indeed, by dint of ‘contact’ between *potentiality* (the living being) and *act* (the speaking being), it seeks to neutralise *oikonomia*. As such, the proem seeks, unrelentingly, to untie the representational ‘relation’ between *phoné* and *logos* and is, therefore, dedicated to “pull[ing] it [i.e. the word] out of the flux of meaning, to exhibit it as such” (2002, p. 317). Or, in brief, the proem seeks to *expose imposition*. It seeks to short-circuit language’s reduction to this or that *dispositif* (cf. Raffnsøe et al. 2016a,b; Villadsen 2021) and, in this way, allows us to be “writing a book that [...] [is] only the proem or postlude of a missing book” (Agamben 2024b, p. 74), shedding grammatological self-*presupposition*.

Bearing *this* in mind, a true postilla, for what it’s worth, can only be a text that shows (*mostra*) how an author – by way of *in-fantile* gesturing – has absolutely nothing to add to his ‘proemical book’. Like such a ‘silent’, ‘comical’ book, the postilla, too, engages in “studious play” (Agamben 2005a, p. 64). In virtue thereof, a true postilla is primarily concerned with repetition, given that to “repeat something is to make it possible anew” (2002, p. 316). Vitally, it is concerned with ‘use’, ‘truth’ and ‘justice’. Messianically wresting language from biopolitical incarceration, the “postilla is, in this sense, the paradigm of the end of time” (2001, p. 1) as it, once again, testifies to the *possibility* of turning an impasse into an exit. Exploding Wittgenstein’s treacherous ‘fly-bottle’ or, synonymous herewith, Westerberg’s irksome ‘glass and frames’, it, too, *is* the ‘garden’. Appreciably, it, too, *is* the ‘way out’.

As a result, akin to *this* book’s previous pages, *this* postilla, too, chimes with Kafka’s allusive work. For as Benjamin explains, Kafka’s texts turn on the “Entstellung des Daseins” (1981, p. 41); they, Kafka’s texts, turn on the ‘*deposition* of Being’, so that, as Jones and Ten Bos stress, “[t]he world depicted in Kafka’s stories is one of

[...] meanings continuously breaking down” (2007, p. 15). In fact, within Kafka’s exquisite work, meaning fully evaporates. That said, it, *this* postilla, must become what Jones and Ten Bos, inspired by Gilles Deleuze’s pertinent deliberations on Kafka, call “a stammering and stuttering” (ibid.). It must become – and certainly *is* – what Agamben, in the Italian version of *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, calls ‘*un inguaribile difetto di parola*’; happily, *this* postilla merges into ‘an incurable speech defect’ (from the Latin *de*, meaning ‘removal’, and the Proto-Indo-European *d<sup>h</sup>eh*, meaning ‘position’, and, thus, together pointing towards, and effectuating, ‘deposition’).<sup>94</sup>

By implication, *this* postilla, too, defies traditional readings of Kafka and Agamben, readings that, curiously enough, treat their work as a plain reservoir of resources for displaying, and becoming sensitised to, the nightmarishly fatal ‘dark side’ of organisation(s). Decidedly, it defies readings that end up participating in casting organisation as pervaded by disciplinary and sovereign power (e.g. Costas 2019; Cunha et al. 2012; Hodson et al. 2013a,b; Huber and Munro 2014; Jagannathan and Rai 2015). Instead, *this* postilla testifies to the *possibility* of, with Agamben, like Kafka’s ‘studious’ man from the country in the parable *Before the Law* – a *parable* found in the novel *The Trial* – being “able to live to the very end outside the trial” (2011b, p. 31).<sup>95</sup> No doubt, writing *and*, hopefully, also reading *this* postilla become here tantamount to neutralising life’s submission to the ambit of the ‘Law’. Writing *and* reading – in testifying, *pace* Derrida *and* Cooper, to the *possibility* of ‘unwrittenness’ *and*, wedded thereto, *il-legibility* – become indispensable organs of profanation...

As Agamben underlines, in traditional renderings of the parable *Before the Law*, the “man from the country is delivered over to the potentiality of the law because [the] law demands nothing of him and commands nothing other than its own openness” (1998, p. 50). That means, within such renderings, the man from the country – encountering the Law’s doorkeeper and exposed to zero-degree signification – finds himself in the ‘(virtual) state of exception’, so that the “[law’s] open door destined only for him includes him in excluding him” (ibid.; see Attell 2015 for a brilliant juxtaposition of Agamben’s and Derrida’s rivalling readings of *Before the Law*).<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> This ‘speech defect’ can be illustrated by referring to Gregor Samsa, the monstrous vermin (*Ungeziefer*) in *The Metamorphosis*. For, while no longer emplacing life, his *monstrous* words were clearer than ever before: “[t]he words he uttered were no longer understandable [...] although they seemed clear enough to him, even clearer than before” (Kafka 1971, p. 184, emphasis added).

<sup>95</sup> My argument is *not* that these readings are mistaken in diagnosing our present as thoroughly biopolitical. My argument *is* that these readings overlook that Agamben and Kafka offer a ‘way out’.

<sup>96</sup> Crucially, Agamben sees the doorkeeper as an angel, as an intermediary that, grammatologically, ‘relates’ God and man. Accordingly, in this parable, man comes face to face with his own being

Notwithstanding all this, in the field of organisation scholarship, other interpretations of the iconic parable have been *proposed*. Burrell, for instance, maintains that we ought to pass “through the door” (1997, p. 30) guarded by the “doorkeeper in The Trial” (ibid.), so as to “enter Pandemonium” (ibid.) – an expression Burrell uses for that “which lies under the rim of modern organizations and modern organized life” (p. 46). Pandemonium, he notes, involves *inter alia* “the visceral, the carnal, the bodily [...] [and] the unclean” (p. 47). McCabe, by contrast, wants us to see “the doorkeeper as representing management or those in positions of authority more generally, and the man as representative of employees” (2014, p. 262). This, in turn, causes McCabe to argue that the parable can be taken to suggest that it is “our belief that others are powerful, and that we are powerless, which inhibits us from [...] going through the door ourselves” (ibid.). Offering yet another interpretation, Nasir claims that “the man from the country in ‘Before the Law’ [...] holds the Law in awe [and] submits to its workings without compulsion” (2012, p. 54). But, at the same time, Nasir offers consolation, at least insofar as he suggests that “[w]hat has emerged through one historical process can be replaced through another” (p. 55).

Agamben, however, emphasises that “the behaviour of the man from the country is nothing other than a complicated and patient strategy to have the door [of the law] closed in order to interrupt the Law’s being in force” (1998, p. 54). That is to say – for Agamben – the man is dedicated to “the long study of its doorkeeper (*dem jahrelangen Studium des Türhüters*)” (2011b, p. 31), so that, via ‘studying’, he unhinges the ‘hinge’ (i.e. the doorkeeper) that, grammatologically, links (i.e. ‘relates’) *physis* and *nomos*, man and God. And, in so doing, he “succeeds in having the door of the Law closed forever” (1998, p. 54). Because *this parable*, effectively rendering inoperative any parable, finishes by having the doorkeeper-angel say: ‘I am now going to shut it’.

In *this* light, what can be gleaned from *my* book concerns any *oikonomic* ‘lawbook’. It is – due to a speech defect that, funnily involving ‘clarity’ (i.e. non-signifying language), safeguards me from being *understood* – a stammered and stuttered *exclamation*: ‘Shut!’

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an act of government. For “each act of government is an angel” (Agamben 2011a, p. 119). In this spirit, for Derrida, “the words spoken by the law [its doorkeeper] do not say ‘no’ but ‘not yet’, indefinitely” (2018, p. 53), with the man from the country “[s]ubject to the law” (ibid.). After all, as for doorkeepers, Derrida holds, “[t]heir power is the *différance*, an unending *différance*, since it lasts days, years, and finally until the man’s end” (ibid.) For, in Derrida’s reading of *Before the Law*, “[t]hat which is forever deferred, even until death, is entry into the law itself” (ibid.).

“Speak loudly now, unspoken word.”  
(Agamben 2021, p. 99)

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