AGAMBEN'S UNDERSTANDING OF TIME AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTOLOGY

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

WORKS BY AGAMBEN:

Creation and Anarchy	CA		
Homo Sacer	HS		
Infancy and History	IH		
Means Without End	MWE		
Nudities	Nu		
Nymphs	Ny		
Opus Dei	OD	*Opus Dei: Archeologia Dell'ufficio*	AD
Pilate and Jesus	PJ		
Profanations	Pro		
Pulcinella	P	*Pulcinella ovvero Divertimento*	PD
Remnants of Auschwitz	RA		
Stasis	S		
State of Exception	SE		
Studiolo	St		
The Church and the Kingdom	CK	*La Chiesa e il Regno*	CR
The Coming Community	CC		
The End of the Poem	EP		
The Fire and the Tale	FT		
The Highest Poverty	HP		
The Kingdom and the Garden	KGn	*Il Regno e il Giardino*	RG
The Kingdom and the Glory	KGy		
The Man Without Content	MC		
The Mystery of Evil	ME		
The Sacrament of Language	SL		
The Signature of All Things	SAT		
The Time That Remains	TR	*Il Tempo Che Resta*	ITCR
The Unspeakable Girl	UG		
The Use of Bodies	UB		
When the House Burns Down	W		

WORKS BY OTHER AUTHORS:

Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.1	CDII.i
———, *Church Dogmatics* III.2	CDIII.ii
Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', in *Selected Writings: Volume 4 1938-1940* 389–411	CH
Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*	CPS
———, *The Way of Jesus Christ*	WJC

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary Italian writer Giorgio Agamben (b1942), like his greatest influence Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), writes with a bewildering range of subjects. Most often recognised for his political philosophy,[1] his writing includes philology, cultural and literary criticism, political theory, and jurisprudence. His well-known series *Homo Sacer* (finally collected together in 2017[2]), deals with the questions of the status of human life in the present, sovereign power, and laws creating states of exception. In his most recent and intriguing publications (such as *Pulcinella*, *The Kingdom and the Garden*, and *The Fire and the Tale*), however, those questions are freshly inflected. In order to assist an answer to the question of what it is to live in the present, there is an apparent predilection towards theological resources, leading to theological conclusions. This trend towards the theological follows earlier more isolated works – most famously his 'Commentary on the Letter to the Romans' *The Time That Remains*, and the 'Theological Genealogy' of *The Kingdom and the Glory*. Whilst the contemporary reception of Agamben tends to treat these earlier theological discussions as anomalies, it is clear from the relative silence which has greeted the more recent works that a consistent force of theological thinking has not yet been perceived.

The facet of "time" that I will investigate is limited to Agamben's focus, namely time as it is experienced by human life in the present. This limited focus, what is sometimes called temporality, is not new to theology, or indeed philosophy. Book XI of Augustine's *Confessions* often lies close to the surface of Agamben's writing.[3] More explicit influences on Agamben's understanding of time are Heidegger (1889-1976), whose classes Agamben attended as a young student, and

[1] Gaining Agamben some public notoriety for his articulations of an anti-lockdown position in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic: Agamben 2021.
[2] Comprising nine volumes: I HS, II.1 SE, II.2 S, II.3 SL, II.4 KGy, II.5 OD, III RA, IV.1 HP, IV.2 UB.
[3] Augustine 2008.

Benjamin (particularly his Theses 'On the Concept of History'[4]), for the Italian translation of whose complete works Agamben acted as editor. But in the case of Agamben's work, the discussion of temporality finds a new form of textual presentation: Agamben seeks to orchestrate other 'texts' (St Paul's letters, Franciscan Rules of Life, poetry, art) to create an experience in *his* reader of his understanding of time. The success of Agamben's project, therefore, depends on this new textual quality. It represents a qualitative alteration to the philosophical tradition bequeathed to him, a tradition going back to Kant, and 'time' as an *a priori* structure of the intuition on which, it is assumed, empirical data is linearly to be plotted.[5] The temporality for which Agamben argues, therefore, needs to be understood both from its constituent metaphysical parts, but more importantly from within the performance of that understanding. Agamben's 'performance', and particularly the performance of liturgy, is the principal original analysis of this dissertation. With a theological performance of temporality, Agamben stands closer alongside the likes of Jean-Yves Lacoste, Jean-Luc Marion and Jean-Louis Chrétien than he does with his more usually recognised contemporaries Žižek and Badiou.[6]

The use of the word "understanding" in my title also requires definition. I do not approach Agamben assuming that the question of time can be the subject of knowledge accrual. Rather, as with the likes of Heidegger's reading of St Paul,[7] and Gadamer's hermeneutics, understanding must shape our existence and represent a "genuine experience – an encounter".[8] Successful understanding in this context is not a quantitative accumulation of knowledge; it is, rather, an affectual, qualitative *response*. What Agamben seeks, and how we are drawn to respond, is much closer to the ancient definition of the word *theoretikos* – that is, an understanding which involves personal transformation, not, merely, 'theoretical'.[9] What Agamben adds is the necessity of performance. This, I argue, is the best way to find a systematic focus underlying Agamben's diverse treatments of the understanding of time.

Whilst the main focus of this dissertation is critically to examine Agamben's understanding of time (as I have defined my approach to those terms above), in each Chapter, I will point towards the theological **i**mplications of that examination, particularly the questions of Agamben's 'Messiah', inaugurated eschatology's 'now and not yet', '*parousia*', and 'Recapitulation'. These implications are not only

[4] Benjamin 2006, 389–411.
[5] For instance: Kant 2007, 65.
[6] Welborn, grouping Agamben together with Žižek and Badiou, confidently asserts: 'none of them [are] Christian'. They are 'secular, indeed irreligious'. Welborn 2015, xi.
[7] Heidegger 2010, 73.
[8] Gadamer 2021, 504.
[9] For instance: Louth 2007, 214.

eschatological but are Christological. Ephesians 1.10, an important text for Agamben, and indeed how he views the entire Western Philosophical tradition, assumes that Christ has summed up all things, including all times, in him *already*. In order to situate the implications of this for modern Christology, I will introduce the voices of Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Jürgen Moltmann (b1926) alongside Agamben. The aim in doing so is to provide a future basis for rethinking Christology, prompted by Agamben's work. There is not space in this dissertation for a comprehensive outworking of this rethinking, beyond establishing that basis by pointing to the implications raised.

This, then, is the way I read the key terms of the question. It is a question, though, that needs answering today, both because of the distinctiveness of Agamben's position, but also because of an increasing awareness of Agamben in modern theology, and – more naturally, perhaps – in philosophy. This growing awareness, however, misplaces Agamben and Agamben's distinctive contribution. In the way mainstream theology has appropriated Agamben thus far (with voices as diverse as: Catherine Keller, N.T. Wright, Graham Ward, and Alexandra Brown[10]), one would imagine Agamben provides an abstract phenomenology of time with which to support a not entirely clear eschatology. The wider context for his arguments relating to time and its qualitative experience are lost. In the way contemporary political philosophy has appropriated Agamben, Agamben's extensive use of theological resources has either been ignored,[11] or subsumed within a wider philosophical framework.[12] In these philosophical readings, even when an attempt is made to understand Agamben's 'theology', there is an inadequate definition for 'theology', and how Agamben's contribution furthers that project.[13] Agamben has been seen as just one of an emerging trend of philosophers in the Continental tradition to turn to St Paul – Agamben alongside Badiou, Žižek and Taubes, for instance.[14] I will demonstrate that the New Testament and the Christian theological tradition (for instance Irenaeus, Augustine, Kierkegaard (1813-1855)), has a more constructive role within Agamben's emerging philosophical ideas than in Agamben's contemporaries. Finally, what is significantly distinctive in Agamben's reaction against a Hegelian view of history, and distinctive even when compared with his two largest influences, Heidegger and Benjamin, is the way that Agamben

[10] Keller 2018, 3–5; Wright adopts without hesitation 'the remarkable, indeed explosive proposals of Agamben': Wright 2013, 556; Wright 2015, 315–23; Ward 2022, 122-126 (footnotes); Brown 2018, 43–55.
[11] Even whilst recognising the importance of certain theological categories: Durantaye 2009.
[12] Dickinson and Kotsko 2015.
[13] See: Dickinson 2011, and Dickinson's lament four years later that Agamben's 'theological claims [have] almost escaped notice by the discipline of modern theology proper.' Dickinson and Kotsko 2015, 88.
[14] Milbank, Žižek, and Davis, 2010.

sources his philosophical arguments *from* theology – as opposed to using theological resources for his own philosophical ends.

Whilst the question of the reception within *philosophy* of Agamben's distinctive theological readings is an important one, I will focus here on a realignment of Agamben's contribution to and alongside Christian *theology*. This is not just more clearly to read Agamben; it is to explore a more significant contribution at work in Agamben's understanding of time. Agamben's understanding of time does not come as an abstract phenomenology, but through the revivifying by him of different texts to create a performance. The experience of human life in the present is something which can be performed to and altered by these texts. The *method* of Agamben's understanding of time, then, just as much as its substance, is less quantitative, more qualitative. The 'time' which we experience in the present is something which can be inflected by being brought into relation with these texts, forming (as I will show) Benjaminian 'constellations'. It is not surprising, then, that the texts to which he is drawn, and to which he himself is drawn to write, are distinctive in quality as well as merely in content – Paul's Letter to the Romans, the rules of life of Franciscan spirituality, the dramatic Neapolitan figure of Pulcinella, and Christian liturgy.

In order to 'understand' Agamben's contribution, and its implications for Christology, therefore, this dissertation makes three qualitative steps in three Chapters. Chapter one is governed by Agamben's statement that "the paradigm for understanding life in the present is Messianic time" (quoted in CK59). In order to understand life in the present, then – 'Agamben's Understanding of Time' – we must grasp: (i) Agamben's perception of the qualities of "time", (ii) what is distinctively "Messianic" about it, and (iii) the function of the "paradigm". The result will be an understanding of life in the present which is as much theological as it is philosophical. This Chapter is principally exegetical: Agamben returns to the question of Messianic time repeatedly in different guises and with different qualitative assessments. Nevertheless, even in the exegesis of this Chapter, several critical points about Agamben's approach will become clear. Agamben apparently appropriates Benjamin's 'messiah' into the context of Christian theology, indeed appropriates Benjamin as a reader of St Paul. Agamben develops several New Testament texts to argue for a Messianic influence on the experience of time. And Agamben's interest as a philologist is drawn to an important word-group – words with the Greek prefix '*para*', which themselves convey the idea of the nature of life in the present.

The exegetical findings of Chapter one have theological consequences. For instance, there is a theological moniker which already seeks to perform the role of

Agamben's query about the nature of Messianic time and life in the present: "living in the now and not yet". The "now and not yet" is a shorthand for a Pauline 'inaugurated eschatology', whereby Christ's achievement (incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension) is already full and total for all times ("now"), but human life in the present is simultaneously characterised by unfulfillment and incompleteness ("not yet"). There is an apparent "paradoxical tension" here which, for Agamben, is not in fact evenly matched. From the perspective of life in the present, inevitably the incompleteness has precedence. Agamben's understanding of time, to the contrary, accords precedence to the complete, to the "now". This is the same precedence which Agamben reads in Paul. Agamben calls this: "now is the time", "*ho nyn kairos*", Paul's "technical term for the messianic event" (TR61, CK26, ME14). Temporality – the experience of life in the present – ought, for Agamben, to be characterised by a quality of fulfilment and urgency.

Chapter two makes a qualitative step with respect to the design of Chapter one. For Agamben, without the *experience* of such a time, even the *possibility* of understanding is lost. As he writes, "the possibility of understanding coincides fully [*integralmente*] with the experience of such a time" (TR2/ITCR9). So the qualitative step in my argument is that I am no longer asking '*what* is Messianic time', but rather '*how* can Messianic time produce that effect' and in particular '*how* can a text – such as St Paul's letters and indeed Agamben's writing itself – produce that effect'. This move, from *what* to *how*, is one which Heidegger made in the context of reading Pauline eschatology, and stands alongside Gadamer's hermeneutical method as including an "entire experience". To appreciate Agamben's understanding of time and its implications for Christology, we must appreciate that the texts he investigates – and indeed his own texts – seek to create such an experience; otherwise the very "possibility of understanding" is lost.

Agamben's word for the way a text can produce such an experience is "performance": "*la categoria del performativo*" (ITCR122). These are texts that suspend the normal denotative capacity of words in favour of words which themselves alter the experience of space, time, and matter in the present. The oral contract (such as a marital oath) is a classic example. So, Chapter two considers three 'texts' which Agamben reads as performative (Franciscan rules, the poem, and art), before considering two of Agamben's texts which, imitating their subject matter, themselves display performative elements (the *sestina* of *The Time that Remains*, and the drama of *Pulcinella*).

If the experience of Agamben's understanding of time is essential to the very possibility of understanding, then an important theological consequence is that the doctrinal question of *parousia*, often thought of in modern Christian doctrine as 'the

second coming', is in fact not something to be awaited along a linear timeline. *Parousia* literally means, for Agamben, presence alongside. It is graspable in the present through performance, something to be experienced in *ho nyn kairos*. Agamben shares a vocabulary with Moltmann here. Both speak of this 'presence alongside' as an '*advent*', always "in the act of coming, always *ad-venting*" (KGn150). Agamben's linguistic alignment with Moltmann on the question of *parousia*, and its impact on the experience of the present by a community, deals a blow to Christologies (such as Cullmann's[15]) which plot a linear history with Christ's second coming appearing at 'an end of time'. More categorically, it also excludes as "simply unthinkable" (KGn150) and "blasphemous" (CK4), even, the idea (which appeared most famously in Schweitzer, but has had various significant outworkings in the last century) of 'the delay of the *parousia*'. *Parousia* for Agamben, always entails a performance alongside, a presence to be grasped (TR71, KGn150).

Chapter three then makes a qualitative step with respect to the design of Chapter two. If (as I argued in Chapter two) the performance of texts and Agamben's own performances are crucial to the very possibility of understanding time, then Christian liturgy and Agamben's idea of a secular liturgy are both forms of textuality which, for Agamben, perform in this way *par excellence*. The liturgical act, Agamben writes, "acts… *ex opere operato*… it is itself the event… in which the salvific action… of Christ is rendered effectively present" (CA10, OD30). Of performative texts, therefore, for Agamben, liturgies promise to affect the experience of time in the present most profoundly. So Chapter three asks firstly, what does Agamben consider a 'liturgical' text? Agamben's interest in this question stems from two preceding issues which also need to be addressed, namely: what, in theological terms, is 'mystery'; and is it possible for *any* text to reflect this 'mystery'. Put simply, for Agamben, to the extent that they perform this 'mystery', novels, as much as Christian liturgy, are performances of Messianic time to the present experience. Then, following the structure of Chapter two, I discuss Agamben's reading of texts which he considers (on that definition) 'liturgical'; followed by an assessment of liturgical elements in Agamben's own writing, most particularly in *The Fire and the Tale* and *Pulcinella*.

A key implication for modern theology and particularly Christology, is that Agamben's focus on liturgy as best carrying the experience of Messianic time sheds a forensic light on the nature and quality of today's Christian liturgy and the liturgical more generally. In the concluding section of Chapter three, I will therefore begin to ask whether eucharistic liturgy, in a form of religious 'parody' (as Agamben describes it), effectively performs the sacred mystery of Christ's life, death and

[15] Cullman 1962, 43, 53.

resurrection. The doctrinal aspect that lies closest to this question, one to which Agamben repeatedly returns, is 'Recapitulation'. Recapitulation is not a simple repeat, recalling to mind the past; but initiates something new in its every prayerful repetition (as Kierkegaard knew). Hence, for Agamben, Recapitulation, like Christian liturgy, ought always to be an eschatological performance, and perhaps is to be preferred to *anamnesis*. For Agamben, Ephesians 1.10 is critical – for Christian doctrine, for the present experience of the Church, and, indeed, for Western Philosophy. I will reintroduce, here, the voices of Barth and Moltmann in a critical comparison with Agamben on the question of the understanding of time in Ephesians 1.10, and the eschatological nature of the liturgy.

Agamben's understanding of time is that the experience of the present is ineluctably Messianic. But it is only in the *experience* of that Messianic time, through the performance of particular texts, and most particularly, the performance of liturgy, that that understanding – perceived as "genuine experience – an encounter" – reaches its fullest expression.

ONE

TIME AND EXPERIENCE

Even before the last decade's output, the theme of Messianic time was central to Agamben's thinking.[16] "What does it mean to live in the Messiah," Agamben asks in *The Time that Remains*, "and what is the messianic life? What is the structure of messianic time? These questions, meaning Paul's questions, must also be ours" (TR18). My focus in this Chapter, therefore, is on Agamben's statement that "the paradigm for understanding life in the present is Messianic time" (CK59). In order to understand the temporality of Messianic life in the present, I will take the quote in stages: in section one, Agamben's perception of the qualities of "time"; in section two, what is distinctively and theologically "Messianic" about it; and, in section three, the status and function of the "paradigm". The Chapter then concludes with a section addressing the first preliminary theological implication: a challenge to the too abstract notion of 'living in the now and not yet'; and a concomitant challenge to the approach to Christology which underlies such a position.

THE QUALITIES OF TIME

Agamben often alights upon qualitative features of time which, he determines, express 'Messianic time'. Together, these features represent an inescapable alteration of experience. It is "the *time of the end*, the internal transformation of time that the messianic event has produced once and for all, and the consequent transformation of the life of the faithful" (ME14 emphasis original; CK4-5, KGn148). I critically assess four features in this section: contraction, *caesurae*,

[16] For example: Durantaye 2009, 389.

parabasis, and constellations. This leaves two (*parousia* and recapitulation) to be addressed more fully as theological implications in Chapters two and three.[17]

The wider significance of these qualities, however, can immediately be discerned in three ways. First, they represent distortions of what might be considered linear time, what Hegel (1770-1831) evocatively described as the necessary supplanting of one state by its successor in an infinite succession – the bud, to the blossom, to the fruit.[18] "The question at issue" Hegel argued in his *Philosophy of World History* "is therefore the ultimate end of mankind, the end which the spirit sets itself in the world", the end towards which history inevitably and ineluctably draws.[19] Second, these four qualitative features of Agamben's construal of time reject the subjective focus of temporality in Heidegger's *Dasein*, but also apparently twist beyond all recognition *Dasein's* "taking-care", where authentic being projects ('is thrown') forwards and back in time.[20] Third, Agamben's qualitative features stand more clearly alongside Kierkegaard and Benjamin, and can be seen as elaborations (which I will explain in more detail below) of a dramatic moment of comedic stasis to which Haufniensis in *The Concept of Anxiety* alludes,[21] and of Benjamin's explosion of the "continuum of history" (CH395). Like both Kierkegaard and Benjamin before him, therefore, the qualities of Agamben's 'time' are always partially characterised by anti-Hegelian polemic.

Contraction

The first key distortion to the continuum of time is that it has been "contracted". For Agamben, Jesus as the Messiah has not in fact ushered in "the final day, the moment when time ends", but a time in which every moment stands in "relation… to the end of time and to eternity. Consequently" what is at stake is not the end of time, "but the time that contracts and begins to end" (CK8). What is this 'contraction'? Its provenance is Pauline. The eponymous 'Time that Remains', whilst used to govern its subtitle 'A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans', is in fact more like a fragment from 1 Corinthians 7.29:

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[17] I have omitted the more familiar question concerning a qualitative distinction between the New Testament's *kairos* and *chronos*. The debate is well ventilated, from Moltmann's enthusiasm towards *kairos*, to Barr's critique of any opposition between the two terms. Eikelboom addresses Agamben's more elaborate approach, and Welborn undertakes a rather selectively read critique of it. But in fact, in Agamben's brief treatment (TR68-69), *kairos* only acts to 'contract and abridge' *chronos* (TR69). Barr 2005; Moltmann 1985, 122; Eikelboom 2018, 98–99; Welborn 2015, 14–17.

[18] Hegel 2018, 2.

[19] Hegel 1975, 63.

[20] Heidegger 2010, §79.406.

[21] Kierkegaard 1980, 88fn.

> ὁ καιρὸς συβεσταλμένος ἐστιν
> time contracted itself (Agamben, TR68,166)
> the appointed time has grown short (NRSV)

Subestalmenos, in Agamben's definition, refers to the "act of brailing up sails as well as the way in which an animal gathers himself before lunging" (TR68, CK13). This is no quantitative measure of shortening, then, but a dramatic action of gathered potentiality – contraction as 'concentration' or 'intensity'.[22]

Agamben's contracted time, therefore, alters the aspect of temporality. Time's 'contraction' is characterised by potentiality, rather than actuality. This represents a reversal by Agamben of Aristotle's priority to actuality over potentiality, *energeia* over *dynamis*. In Book Θ of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle accords this priority to actuality both ontologically and (less obviously) temporally.[23] But Agamben disagrees (at least with that reading of *Metaphysics*). Potentiality includes the possibility not to pass into actuality. In other words, potentiality includes the potential *not* to do or be something: *adynamia* (HS45). So, time's 'contraction', whilst it involves the concentration and intensification ready for dramatic action, in fact also includes this *adynamia*, an ability to procure nothing.

In the way Agamben's 'contraction' changes the aspect of temporality from actuality to potentiality, what is striking in Agamben's account is his argument *from* theology. Agamben has sourced his terminology from Paul, consonantly with modern Biblical commentators. Not only that, but Agamben does not downplay the Christian Messianic significance which underlies this distortion of the flow of time: the locus for the cause of the distortion is Jesus Christ and in particular (as I will show in the next section), his resurrection (TR63). The reversal of temporality's aspect in 'contraction', has further theological outworkings: Agamben's precedence to 'potentiality' and 'impotentiality' figures within an account of the nature of the resurrected body (Nu91-103), and the nature of Sabbath inoperativity (Nu104-112).

This same contraction of time is evident in other forms of textuality: photography, and the text of *The Time That Remains* itself. An ordinary gesture captured in a photograph, such as shoe-shining in '*Boulevard du Temple*' by Daguerre, carries with it an eternal significance, a 'condensing' of an "entire existence" (Pro24). The text of *The Time That Remains* itself performs a contraction by treating the first ten words of Romans as containing the entire meaning of the letter itself (TR6). The

[22] Thiselton 2000, 580–85; Caird 2002, 270–71.
[23] Aristotle 2020, 1049b18–19.

Messianic contraction of time is seen through the lens of a camera, and indeed in the nature of a text, such that the reader is forced qualitatively to slow and intensify his or her reading. In each case, significant for their different media and the different posture of the audience/reader, Agamben asserts the ability for the work itself to distort the experience of time.

Caesurae

Agamben argues against the Hegelian notion of time for a quality of time which contains *caesurae* – a gap, a hesitation, or an undecided zone between two forces. Agamben's distinctive claim is that the experience of Messianic time in the present can be enhanced by *caesurae* encountered as much through the artefacts of contemporary culture, as in the realm of apocalyptic theology.

Messianic time, for Agamben, like Benjamin before him, "blasts" apart quantitative (linear) time by creating static 'shocks' in linear time's continuum. Quantitative time – what both Agamben and Benjamin perceive in Hegel – becomes, for Agamben, 'profane'. By contrast, the experience of 'sacred' time and its *caesurae* can be encountered through art, music, and poetry. Standing before a painting, "we perceive a stop in time… an interruption in the incessant flow of instants… the *continuum* of linear time is broken" (MC99,102; similarly sculpture: St77). Musical rhythm "although it is somehow in time," is perceived as "something that escapes the incessant flight of instants and appears almost as the presence of an atemporal dimension in time" (MC99). A poem, with its own rhythmic scheme, creates a tension between sound and semantics. Instinctively, we feel that the sense of the poem should follow its sounds. When that feeling is frustrated, what is left is a "hesitation", a gap of semantic sense (EP109-110). In each case, the "hesitation" exemplifies Agamben's Messianic time. The *caesura* does not eradicate chronology, but secures its qualitative transformation (TR82-3).

Agamben also perceives a *caesura* inherent in Jewish and Christian theology. Agamben writes of the *caesura* between the two ages of Jewish apocalyptic thought – between this world/eon (*ho kosmos outos* / *ho aion touto*) and the world/age to come (*ho aion mellon*). Messianic time, initiated by Jesus Christ, lies in between the two Jewish 'ages'. Paul still applies the Jewish apocalyptic framework, albeit with a new temporal element: "the time that remains between these two times, when the division of time is itself divided, whether it be divided by a messianic caesura or Apelles' cut" (TR62). 1 Corinthians 10, in Agamben's translation, refers to these two ages coming face to face.

> The two ends of the *olam hazzeh* and the *olam [h]abba* contract into each other [omitted from the translation here: *fino a fronteggiarsi* – 'until facing each other'] without coinciding… the messianic time 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, a zone of undecidability, in which the past is dislocated [*viene dislocato* – 'comes dislocated'] into the present and the present is extended [*disteso* – 'lying down' or 'outspread'] into the past (TR74/ITCR74, also CK8-9).

The distortion of time simultaneously involves the contraction of two ages, but then their movement towards one another without ever coinciding – always leaving a gap.

There are two intertextual sources for Agamben's *caesura* which can be 'heard', here: the appearance of Augustine's *distende*, and an echo of a scene of street-theatre which Kierkegaard observed as having metaphysical implications. Agamben's *caesura* comprises a "dislocation" of the past into the present, and the present's "extension" – "*disteso*" – into the past. Three pages earlier, Agamben referred to the *parousia* as being stretched – "*distende*" (TR71/ITCR71[24]). In *Confessions* book XI, Augustine sonically developed a meaning for *distende* in the context of his discussions on time and temporality. *Distende* entails something physical – a literal dislocation. There is then a poetic application of this physical term to the metaphysical, to temporality. First, the poem is an agent of this quality of temporality, an example of "*distensio*". Augustine then recognises the same in St. Paul: "time is some kind of extension [*distentionem*]… my life is a distention [*distensio*] in several directions… not stretched out in distraction [*distentus*] but extended in reach, not by being pulled apart [*distentionem*] but by concentration".[25] Agamben has made the same move in this passage. He spells out that *distende* implies a dislocation – "*viene dislocato*". And there appears to be a similar word-play on the term itself: the present is stretched "*disteso*" into the past, yet the *parousia* is stretched alongside the present – "*distende*". The role of the poem together with reading St. Paul is just as crucial to Agamben, as I shall show in more detail in Chapter two.

Second, Kierkegaard is in view in Agamben's description of *caesura*'s 'coming face to face' but always leaving a gap – "without coinciding". Haufniensis (Kierkegaard's pseudonym), in *The Concept of Anxiety*, is just as critical of Hegel's account of time's eternal succession as Agamben. This criticism is dramatized in a

[24] Also KGn149-50: "*kairos* represents all time contracted into one… and… *chronos*, in which time stretches out [*distende*] as if beside itself".
[25] Augustine 2008, XI.xxiii.30, XI.xxiv.33, XI.xxix.39.

scene of comic street-theatre. Two actors, oblivious to the metaphysical musings of one of their spectators, mime a passionate conflict. When the spectators' expectations are most set on how the conflict physically will proceed, the actors "suddenly stop and remain motionless as though petrified… the moment in an accidental way becomes commensurable with the eternal."[26] The *caesura* of the action performs the intervention of the eternal into time. Whilst Agamben's *caesurae* is also in the form of a "*fino a fronteggiarsi*", what is secured is an indistinct "zone of undecidability", comprising the pain of dislocation. There is no intervention of the eternal; rather the *caesura*'s ongoing effect on the experience of time in the present is to bleed past and present and future together.

Parabasis

Parabasis describes a moment in Ancient Greek comedy when the actors move forward and remove their masks, transgressing the drama by implicating the audience in what has just enfolded (Pro50). Pulcinella represents an intensification of this dramatic reversal.

> *The parabasis was not merely an interruption or deviation; it was an interruption in which the origin appeared – or, if you like, an origin showed itself shattering* [infrangendo] *and breaking up* [scompaginando] *(the first part of the parabasis was called kommation, which meant 'cut') the usual unfolding of the action.* (P41/PD45, italics original).

In *parabasis*, the quality of time is characterised by transgression: the progress of a dramatic action, and the expectations that progress has created, are interrupted by the appearance of 'the original' state of the actors. Pulcinella, for Agamben, transgresses the experience of time in this way *par excellence*. His dramatic life is *only* transgression, always querying the dramatic action – and hence time's – progress (P43). The quality of time in Pulcinella's *parabasis* therefore is always to be undermining the continuum of history, and always to be undermining the subjective expectations of its participants.

How is this affected in *parabasis*? By the juxtaposition of "an origin" within the drama itself. This 'shatters' quantitative time ("the usual unfolding of the action"). The text is self-consciously revealing Benjamin's influence, here. Benjamin's 'Theses', as they begin to reach their final terse utterances, delight in revolutionary

[26] Kierkegaard 1980, 88fn.

action's interruption of time: "[Thesis XV] What characterises revolutionary classes at their moment of action is the awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode [*das Kontinuum der Geschichte aufzusprengen* – 'blast open']" (CH395). With similar explosive effect, the present, "[Thesis A] *Jetztzeit*" is "shot through with splinters of messianic time [*in welcher Splitter der messianischen eingesprengt sind*]" (CH397). The explosive *textual* qualities of Agamben's Italian, imitating Benjamin's German, together with a *textural* explosiveness of revealing Benjamin's terminology from behind the 'mask' of Agamben's writing, itself achieves this shattering. It is not the actor's "origin" appearing mask-less on stage, but Benjamin stepping forward from within Agamben's text. *Parabasis*, by exploding the usual unfolding of quantitative time, exposes the usual unfolding of texts themselves.

Constellations

The distinctive quality of time represented by Agamben's reference to 'constellations' leads on from the discussion of *parabasis*. In *parabasis*, the dramatic action is transgressed by the revelation of an "origin". A constellation is the term Benjamin uses to describe the existence side by side of different historical moments, including such an "origin". Time in the present, on this argument, is not experienced as passing Hegelian moments, but experienced as a continual juxtaposition with memories of the past, and anticipations of the future.[27]

The constellation, therefore, represents a polemical philosophy of history, intimately connected to the question of what it is to experience time in the present. Benjamin and Agamben both perceive the mutual reinforcement between a philosophy of history and temporality. Benjamin refers in his 'Theses', to how revolutionary movements introduced new calendars, and were even known to shoot at clocks to stop time (Thesis XV, CH395). Benjamin's new proposal in the 'Theses', then, is the "constellation". A constellation is a multiplicity of historical ideas which coexist with the present within a system. First, this affects our perception of history. "History", Benjamin writes in Thesis A, is not a "sequence of events like the beads of a rosary" but a "constellation into which [the present] has entered, along with a very specific earlier one." Second, this affects our experience of the present, including the diachronicity of our thoughts:

[27] Mosès 2009, 72–83.

> [Thesis XVII] Thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts, but their arrest [*Stillstellung*] as well. Where thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions, it gives that constellation [*Konstellation*] a shock [*Chock*], by which thinking is crystallized as a monad (CH396).[28]

The constellation holds together the past and present moments. There is an interruption or 'shock' in the normal course of history where the constellation itself is shaken. History is not about the inevitable movement towards the Hegelian end, but about continuing violent stops in time caused by the memory of the past being held together with the present. It is also conveyed by the striking contrast with the reference to the rosary beads – contemplative, slow, and representing organised religion in opposition to revolutionary time.

Similarly, for Agamben, the mutually reinforcing connection between a philosophy of history and the experience of time in the present is a perennial concern (for instance in *Infancy and History*, originally published in 1978: IH99). But whereas for Benjamin, this mutually reinforcing connection is designed intellectually to underpin revolutionary action, in Agamben's account of constellations, as with the other qualities of time in this section, the focus is on the distortive quality of time already perceptible in three ways: cultural artefacts, theology, and texts themselves.

Immersing himself in a collection of frescoes including the Pulcinella sequence by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804), Agamben recognises a "surprising correspondence" between the Pulcinella frescoes and earlier frescoes of satyrs and nymphs (P26). This invites a dialectical reading between the depictions of 'historical life' in or around Venice into which Tiepolo inserts Pulcinella, and the metahistorical and mythic. They are *"not distinct in time: they both take place – albeit in different ways – here and now, in the rooms of the villa in Zianigo*". Then, referring directly to Benjamin, Agamben recognises "a constellation, in the Benjaminian sense, between the satyrs and the Pulcinellas: they contain a secret index that refers them to each other and makes them inseparable… [T]he frescoes at Zianigo entail… a very special philosophy of history which… recapitulates and puts into relation two very distant epochs" (P29-32 italics original).

Agamben's constellations, again unlike Benjamin's, are also a theological idea. 1 Corinthians 10 includes the idea of past generations acting as *types* for the present community. "In these things they became figures [*typoi*] to us… Now these things happened unto them by way of figure [*typicos*]; and they were written for us, for our

[28] "*Stillstellung*" and "*Konstellation*", both play on the more familiar "*Darstellung*" – representation: Krauß 2011.

admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come to face each other" (TR73, Agamben's translation). Agamben, like Erich Auerbach before him,[29] is drawn to this holding together of past and present, type with anti-type, the completed past with the incomplete present. For Agamben, however, more than a simple dialectic of reading between two disparate times, the essential aspect is the relationship between the two, a Benjaminian "secret index". Agamben recognises in the "tension that clasps together and transforms past and future" of Paul's ethical instructions "an inseparable constellation. The messianic is not just one of the terms in this typological relation, *it is the relation itself*…" The "face to face" of the type and anti-type being held together "is messianic time, and" – rather hyperbolically – "nothing else" (TR74, emphasis original).

Finally, constellations also operate for Agamben at the level of texts and textuality. There is a form of constellation in the citation by one author of another. Agamben perceives a Pauline influence on Benjamin. In fact this constellation is the principal subject of the conclusion to *The Time That Remains*.[30] He writes: "there is no reason to doubt that these two fundamental messianic texts of our tradition, separated by almost two thousand years, both written in a situation of radical crisis," *themselves* "form a constellation whose time of legibility has finally come today, for reasons that invite further reflection" (TR145). So, Agamben's perception of constellations and their operation extends beyond artefacts and theology to texts themselves. In each secret index, the effect of the holding together of the two disparate texts has reversed their aspect: the older text has been re-actualised, and the present text has been fulfilled.

In this section, I have provided an exegesis of four qualities of Messianic time which Agamben perceives in the experience of the present: contraction, with its concentration and intensification of experience, and its reversal of the Aristotelian aspect in preference to potentiality; *caesurae*, arguing that the experience of time is of gaps and hesitations, like Augustine's *distende* and Kierkegaard's comic street actors; *parabasis*, an ancient comedic action, transgressing the stage and the course of the drama by revealing something which uncomfortably involves the audience in the action; and finally constellations, with their power to hold together disparate times, and Agamben's perceptions of constellations in art, theology, and the textuality of citation. For Agamben, each of these qualities are 'Messianic' and constitute

[29] Auerbach, 'Figura', in Auerbach 1984, 11–76.

[30] The conclusion of Wright's theology of Paul opens - apparently independently of Agamben - with this same intimate connection between Paul and Benjamin. Both sought not only a 'transformation *in* time, but *of* time itself.' Wright 2013, 1473. Jacob Taubes, an inspiration for Agamben's *The Time That Remains* (TR2-3), also saw a Pauline and Benjaminian connection, this time in Romans 8 and Benjamin's 'Theologico-Political Fragment'. Taubes 2004, 70–76.

'Messianic time'. But what is the significance of the Messiah in this terminology and what role does the Messiah play in Agamben's understanding of time?

THE THEOLOGY OF AGAMBEN'S MESSIAH

The notion of the 'Messiah' in the Continental philosophy of the last century is contested. Touching (in the previous section) on Benjamin's 'messiah' raises the spectre of Derrida and the influence of Benjamin on Derrida's deconstruction.[31] Agamben, whether he is in dialogue or debate with either writer, has forged his own path. Leland de la Durantaye has already provided a detailed account of the role of the Messiah in Agamben's early work, including Benjamin's influence on it.[32] The issue with Durantaye's assessment, from 2009, is that it now needs updating. Agamben's 'Messiah' has emerged more frequently ever since *The Time That Remains*, and, I argue in this section, it is a distinctive contribution for the apparent theological assumptions it makes. Uncovering Agamben's theological assumptions contributes to our understanding of his 'Messianic time'. How does 'the Messiah' cause a qualitative alteration of temporality – in other words what is 'Messianic' about Agamben's 'time' – and how does it relate to an event and/or to the person of Jesus Christ?

More than any of his Continental contemporaries, Agamben's Messiah is an attempt faithfully to construe Paul's Messiah.[33] First and foremost, Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the expectations of the Hebrew Scriptures for such a figure, and (for Agamben) how this fulfilment is then described in the New Testament. The Messiah is to be read and understood from the Scriptures. Second, there is an assumption made about that event which would most confound Jewish expectations of the Messiah, resurrection within time. Third, there is the theological notion familiar both to Kierkegaard and Barth of the Incarnation representing the eternal's entrance into time. Before critically assessing each of these, it is important to recognise that, despite Agamben's theological engagement, the precise contours of his 'Messiah' remains elusive. Like with time itself, he is not so interested to undertake a systematic or phenomenological account of 'Messiah', as he is to convey its effect on the experience of the present.

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[31] See for instance 'Messianic Time' in: Caputo 2006, 77–88.

[32] 'The Messiah, or On the Sacred and the Profane', in: Durantaye 2009, 366–82.

[33] This is rarely noted in the secondary literature. Dickinson and Kotsko do assert it: their work invites further reflection. Dickinson and Kotsko 2015, 10–11.

Encountering the Messiah in Agamben's Scripture

The first distinctive theological quality which 'Messianic' gives to Agamben's understanding of time, is that the Messiah is to be perceived and encountered in the Scriptures. Agamben's close Scriptural readings themselves affect the qualitative distortion of time which he calls 'Messianic'. There are three scriptural fragments which Agamben examines which give us some purchase on his 'Messiah': the discussion of '*christos*' in Romans 1.1 in *The Time That Remains*; the role of the Messiah in the drama of 2 Thessalonians 2 in *The Mystery of Evil*; and the quasi-judicial role of the Messiah *vis a vis* the Jewish law across several of his works.

The word '*Christo[s]*' in Romans 1.1 occasions an extended theological reflection by Agamben in the opening of *The Time That Remains*. It is one of the words of the first verse which will contain within it the meaning of the entire letter (TR6), and indeed assist in recovering Romans, and Paul's other letters, as "the fundamental messianic text[s] for the Western tradition" (TR1,3). In accordance with modern Biblical scholarship, Agamben dismisses those of a previous generation who read "*Christos*" solely as a proper name. It is, rather, denotive of a role: '*Mashiach*' – "the anointed" from the Hebrew scriptures (TR15) ("eschatological king" (KGy24)). And this role (as opposed to name), coincides fully, for Agamben, with the question of Christology. "Admitting that one can talk of a Christology in Paul, it coincides fully with the doctrine of the Messiah" (TR16). The object of the entirety of *The Time That Remains*, as it is arguably of Romans itself, is an examination of what "*christos*, that is, 'Messiah'" means (TR18). Having set the issue up, however, Agamben then leaves the reader to discern the Messiah within the text itself. The surface interest remains on the qualitatively altered experience of life in the present. Nevertheless, from this fragment, it is clear that a subterranean theology of the Messiah is at work – in this case, a role which coheres with Jewish Messianic expectations.[34]

The second scriptural fragment which illuminates Agamben's perception of the Messiah within Scripture is 2 Thessalonians 2.1-11 (ME19-39, also TR108-11), a Scriptural passage whose obscurity has been noted from Augustine (*The City of God* XX,19) to the present.[35] Carl Schmitt, the subject of Agamben's doctoral dissertation, had opined on it in the context of his *Political Theology*, claiming that the Empire acted as 'the restrainer' (2Ths2.6-7: KGy6-16). Heidegger himself treats the Thessalonian correspondence in the early lectures *The Phenomenology of Religious*

[34] Although those expectations themselves, Agamben does not note, were hardly homogenous: Novenson 2012, 34–63.

[35] '[A] hotbed of every imaginable eschatological movement': Fee 2009, 296.

Life.[36] Unlike Schmitt and Heidegger, however, Agamben focusses on the role of the Messiah in the eschatological drama. It is a drama of Messianic time, already ("always") underway, but whose decisive dramatic denouement has not yet occurred (ME35,37). The Messiah is not identified by name, family, Jewish lineage, but by his controlling influence over dramatic events. He/it is a dramatic operation or event, rather than a name or a person, even (ME35). And the effect of that event is to alter the "structure of eschatological time":

> [T]here is… a slowing element (the *katechon*, whether it is identified with the Empire or with the Church, in any case an institution), and… a decisive element (the messiah)… The messiah… inaugurates a zone of lawlessness that coincides with messianic time (ME33).

The Messiah is the decisive element whose role brings messianic time to a conclusion, but somehow is also the inaugurating element that releases the lawless one. For the question of experience in the present, the inaugurating element has already taken place: "the mystery of lawlessness [*mysterion tes anomias* which the Vulgate translates as *mysterium iniquitatis*] is already at work" (ME20, Agamben's translation and comment). And if that mystery of lawlessness is already at work, only to be fully revealed in the 'lawless one' when the 'messiah' ends the 'restraining one', then "[g]rasping what the *mysterium iniquitatis* is means nothing less than understanding the Pauline conception of messianic time" (ME27). Messianic time is characterised then by the Messiah playing a dramatic and decisive role within an eschatological drama, the effect of which is already playing out.

The third scriptural aspect with which to discern Agamben's 'Messiah' is those texts concerning the effect of the Messiah on the Jewish Torah. For Agamben, the Messiah performs a quasi-judicial capacity in the field of Torah. Experiencing Agamben's 'Messianic Time' in the present has legal consequences.[37] For Agamben, "the Messiah is the figure in which religion confronts the problem of the law, in which religion and the law come to the decisive day of reckoning" (MWE134). Reading texts like Romans 13.8-9 (the law's fulfilment/recapitulation in the law of love), and Matthew 5.15 ("I have come not to abolish but to fulfil"), Agamben identifies the Messiah as the one who renders the law inoperative, its aspect changed

[36] Heidegger 2010, 61–82.

[37] Paul's relationship with the Torah has been a source of constant debate amongst Pauline scholarship. The sort of supersessionism to which Agamben moves rather unguardedly close has often had damaging consequences.

from actuality to potentiality (TR97). It is a decisive *judicial* action, and one which renders the status of existence in the present irrevocably altered.

So, unlike both Benjamin and Derrida, Agamben's Messiah can be encountered through Scripture. The Messiah that emerges from Scripture qualifies Agamben's 'time' by performing a decisive role in an eschatological drama. On the question of time, at least, Agamben is less interested in the person of 'Jesus the Messiah' as he is in his dramatic role.

Resurrection

The second theological element of Agamben's Messiah, that which qualifies his understanding of 'time' as being 'Messianic', is that it concerns the event of the resurrection. Here is the apparent paradox between the role of the Messiah representing a fulfilment of the Hebrew Scriptures, whilst also involving an event which would most confound Jewish (including Benjamin's) eschatological expectation. The Messiah has been raised bodily from the dead within time, and this, for Agamben, is the quintessential Messianic event (TR43,63,71,126). Apparently without argument, then, the significance of the Incarnation is not equivalent – in the context of Agamben's understanding of time – to the Messianic event.[38] Agamben is less concerned with Christology as such, but rather with the question of living in the present in Messianic time (TR18). But I need hardly enumerate here the Christological implications of this suggestion: at best, the risk is of subordinating the Incarnation, the earthly ministry, the cross even.

Also, and apparently without argument, there is a positive theological assertion concerning the *nature* of Jesus' resurrected body: that Jesus was resurrected in flesh and blood has consequences for the anticipation of our own resurrected state.[39] That anticipation then serves "as a paradigm for" the question of "the ethical and political status of corporeal life" in the present ('The Glorious Body' Nu91). Indeed the whole of the apparently disparate collection *Nudities* can be seen as building towards a conclusion concerning the political and existential status of the body in the present as it is seen from the question of its 'embodied' status in the new creation.

The Messiah as the eternal in time

[38] *Contra*: Dickinson 2011, 33; Eikelboom 2018, 107n.72.

[39] If that is the nature of the resurrected body, then that assumes that before death Jesus the Messiah had once been flesh and blood also.

The third way in which Agamben's Messiah causes a qualitative alteration of temporality – in other words what is 'Messianic' about Agamben's time – is that Agamben dramatizes Kierkegaard's notion of the effect of the eternal entering into time.[40] This can be seen in two ways: the drama of the trial of Jesus before Pontius Pilate, and in the comedic features of Pulcinella and his enacted parody of the eternal's entry into time.

In his examination of Pontius Pilate, Agamben sees the moment of Jesus' interrogation as being of decisive metaphysical importance for the nature of the Messiah. "The trial of Jesus," he writes, "is therefore one of the key moments of human history, in which eternity has crossed into history at a decisive point" (PJ2). Whilst the two human forces – Pilate and Jesus – coming face to face is important in the drama, he also discerns behind that human drama two metaphysical forces: the temporal and the eternal. Here, firstly, are the basic parameters for an account of time which Kierkegaard would endorse. But, secondly, in the trial, the powers appear to be reversed – itself a kind of inversion in which Kierkegaard would have delighted.[41] In the trial, it is "the temporal kingdom which must pronounce a judgment on the eternal kingdom… this historical *krisis*… in a certain way, is always under way" (PJ14-15). Contrary to the traditional judicial role of the Messiah, in the judgment of Pilate, that role is nullified, characterised by silence, or even inoperativity – the very reverse of 'role'. This, for Agamben, is the messianic vocation, and hence is the decisive influence on time which the Messiah affects. "From the point of view of law [Jesus'] testimony can only fail and end in a farce… He – who has not come to judge the world but to save it – finds himself, perhaps precisely for this reason, having to respond in a trial, to submit to a judgment, which his *alter ego*, Pilate, in the end… cannot pronounce" (PJ44).

The Messiah's alteration of time through the entrance of the eternal into temporality can also be seen through parody.[42] In the comedic features of the 'timeless' Pulcinella character of Neapolitan folk theatre, Agamben demonstrates

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[40] Generally, the Jewish notion of the Messiah does not stretch to such metaphysical manipulations. Rather, the question of the infinite qualitative difference between the eternal and the temporal – for Kierkegaard and for Agamben – only becomes obvious as a result of the resurrection. As Agamben defines the resurrection as the Messianic event *par excellence*, this more modern theological posture towards the Messianic therefore has already departed from its Jewish roots. Putting the 'Messiah' to one side, however, the Jewish faith does regularly celebrate the interruption of God's eternal time into the embodied present in the weekly celebration of the Sabbath. See TR71 and Nu111. In that sense, the Jewish faith is a religion of time itself: Heschel 2005.

[41] The main argument of Johannes Climacus's *Philosophical Fragments* ends, in typically perplexing fashion, with praise of '"that great thinker and sage Pontius Pilate, *executor Novi Testamenti*," who in his own way merits a good deal of gratitude from Christianity and philosophy'. Kierkegaard 1985, 109–10.

[42] 'Parody' will be more closely defined in Chapter 3.

that the *ongoing human experience* of the eternal's entering into time, a facet of what is distinctively 'Messianic' about Agamben's time, does not depend on explicit Christological content. In the opening dialogue of *Pulcinella*, Tiepolo is imagined entering into a metaphysical discourse with Pulcinella, the painter addressing the painted:

> GIANDOMENICO. *What do I want from my past? Memory is the art of not letting the past end… I wanted more than life. I wanted the indestructible, and that is why I painted. … Maybe you're right – I want you now… I want to see the indestructible with those eyes of yours which see only gnocchi and maccheroni.*
>
> PULCINELLA. *I understand. You want the eternal and you know that that is what I am. This is why you once depicted me as Christ.*
>
> GIANDOMENICO. *Exactly. You are the eternal that does not come before or after time but within it, when everything is or seems to be finished. This is why everything that is within time becomes so light in you, so light.*
>
> PULCINELLA. *Light like a plate of maccheroni before it gets eaten* (P5-9, italics original).

Pulcinella self-identifies as a Christ-figure, the eternal which comes within time. What is being performed in the dramatic dialogue, therefore, is an inversion of the Messiah's 'eternity entering into time'. Rather than perceiving the Messiah and his juridical combat with temporal powers and authority (as in the trial before Pilate), the painter here entertains an experience of the 'timeless existing within time' seen in the profane features of Pulcinella, and reasons 'backwards' to a Messiah-like status. A qualitative distortion to the experience of time then occurs. 'Time' becomes almost 'weightless', "so light in you… like a plate of maccheroni" before consumption (note the reversal, even here, of Aristotelian aspect – the potential of the food before it is eaten, rather than the actuality).

So, the third and final theological feature of the Messiah which affects a qualitative alteration of time is the entrance of the eternal into time, and the effect of the ongoing conflict ("always under way" (PJ14-15)) between those infinitely qualitatively different metaphysical aspects on existence in the present. Agamben reads this dramatic conflict within the trial before Pilate, all the more notable because of Christian theology's usual attribution of the critical conflict occurring a few hours later on the cross. Agamben also parodically dramatizes the metaphysical conflict in the comedic features of Pulcinella. By reasserting the likeness to Christ of Pulcinella, the experience of standing before a work of art such as Tiepolo's

'Pulcinella' frescoes, a constellation is created between the life of Christ and the life of Pulcinella which has the effect of reasserting the experience of this 'historical *krisis*' in the present. The entry of the eternal within time has already created the conditions for Messianic time – *ho nyn kairos*.

I have shown three theological characteristics of Agamben's Messiah each of which determine Agamben's 'time' as "Messianic": scripture, resurrection, and the eternal in time. I now turn, then, to examine how Agamben's 'Messianic time' can operate as a "paradigm" for life in the present.

PARADIGM

In this Chapter – 'Time and Experience' – I have adopted, as a governing principle, Agamben's comment that "[t]he paradigm for understanding the present is Messianic time" (CK59). Having already investigated 'time' and 'Messiah', what remains to 'understand the present', therefore, is to explore what Agamben means by "paradigm".

Agamben first ventures a definition of 'paradigm' in *The Coming Community*. Paradigm – "*para-deigma*" is: "that which is shown alongside (like the German *Beispiel*, that which plays alongside). The proper place of the example is always beside itself, in the empty space in which its undefinable and unforgettable life unfolds" (CC10). In that sense, a paradigm is pure linguistic "life". It holds an ontology of its own, related 'alongside' the ontology of that to which the paradigm points.

It becomes apparent in *The Signature of All Things*, however, that this 'relation alongside' is of crucial methodological importance for Agamben. There are three salient features for this discussion: Agamben's assessment of Aristotle's understanding of the paradigm in *Prior Analytics*; the status of the paradigm as an exemplar of life in the monastic orders; and finally, in the question of critical method, the relation of a paradigm to the philosophy of history.

For Aristotle, "the paradigm does not function [1] as a part with respect to the whole, nor [2] as a whole with respect to the part, but [3] as a part with respect to the part, if both are under the same but one is better known than the other" (quoted in SAT19). Aristotle, in Agamben's subsequent rereading, calls "into question the dichotomous opposition between the particular and the universal" which appears to be at stake in the paradigm. Instead, the paradigm is more akin to an analogy (SAT18): the two "present… a singularity irreducible to any of the dichotomy's two terms" (SAT19). The paradigm does not have an ontologically inferior status to that

of which it is a paradigm. Rather, "by exhibiting its own singularity… [the paradigm] makes intelligible a new ensemble, whose homogeneity it itself constitutes" (SAT18).

Secondly, in the case of monastic orders (an interest of Agamben's which I will examine in more detail in subsequent Chapters), Agamben treats the 'rule' of life as a paradigm for the life of the order which is to be adopted. The rule – *regula* – "is often identified with the founder's way of living envisaged as a *forma vitae*… an example to be followed" (SAT21). But the rule is not indicative of a "general norm but the living community… that results from an example" (SAT22). So, the rule is a prime example of Aristotle's third case, the particular moving to the particular. In forming a 'life', "each monk" himself "tends at the limit to become paradigmatic – that is, to constitute itself as a *forma vitae*" (SAT22). What is paradigmatic is able to move from a life-giving-rule (the text) to the newly-formed ruled-life (existence). It is in this sense that the ontology of the paradigm can stand alongside the ontology of its subject.

When it comes to the question of how the use of paradigms relates to historical method, this analogous 'holding alongside' of paradigm-part to subject-part bears striking relation to Benjamin's constellations. Agamben's investigations, he admits

> require an attention to documents and diachrony that cannot but follow the laws of historical philology. Nevertheless, the *arche* they reach… is not an origin presupposed in time. Rather, locating itself at the crossing of diachrony and synchrony, it makes the inquirer's present intelligible as much as the past of his or her object. Archaeology, then, is always a paradigmatology… [T]he paradigm determines the very possibility of producing in the midst of the chronological archive… that alone [which] makes it legible (SAT31-32).

Pursuing "paradigmatology" means pursuing Benjamin's 'materialist historiography'. But, characterised as it is by constellations, this "paradigmatology" is also none other than Agamben's 'Messianic time' itself. So the statement which has governed this Chapter thus far – "[t]he paradigm for understanding the present is Messianic time" (CK59) – is now revealed as containing a critical doubling: "paradigm" and "Messianic time" mean much the same thing. In fact, it is only through the use of the paradigm that it is possible to make the present "legible… in the midst of the chronological archive". The paradigm is simultaneously the method of discourse to avoid chronological diachrony; and it is also the means by which

existence can be understood in the constellation formed with the past. Messianic time is both the quality and the means by which we can understand the time of the present. And if texts, and indeed art, can perform paradigmatically, then in the explication of temporality, the performance of their paradigmatic status becomes all the more important. I shall return to this in Chapters two and three.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS: 'NOW AND NOT YET'

In this Chapter, I have critically examined four qualities of Agamben's time (contraction, *caesurae*, *parabasis*, and constellations), the three theological characteristics of the Messiah which hold a controlling effect on that notion of time (Scripture, resurrection, and the eternal entering into time), and the Messianic nature of the meaning of 'paradigm' itself. These exegetical findings have theological consequences. My investigation has progressed thus far in order to "understand the present" on Agamben's terms, in other words using the "paradigm" of "Messianic time". But Agamben's Messianic time can be heard as a challenge to an already existent moniker of Christian theology to describe the eschatological nature of life in the present: "living in the now and not yet".

The "now and not yet" tries to convey what is sometimes understood from St Paul as an inaugurated eschatology, whereby Christ's achievement (incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension) is already full and total for all times ("now"), but human life in the present is simultaneously characterised by unfulfillment and incompleteness ("not yet"). To conclude Chapter one, I will begin to draw out the Christological implications of Agamben's work in this area by making a critical comparison between Agamben and Karl Barth on this question. I will demonstrate that their accounts are remarkably close: both rely on a qualitative description for the life of the community in the present; both articulate the experience of that life as being qualitatively altered as a result of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and both adopt a 'two age' typology to locate the experience of time in the present. However, the significant distinction is in the nature of the qualitative character of life in the present. For Barth, the community is always in the movement of 'turning' [*Wende*] from one age to the other, following Jesus Christ's decisive 'turning'; for Agamben, however, the gap between the two ages is characterised instead by stasis – *caesurae* and the potentiality of contraction.

Agamben understands the perplexity of those who puzzle over the *ho nyn kairos* of Romans, coupled with the sense that fulfilment has *not* been reached. It is a paradox which issues from Paul's apparent emphasis on two 'times' – resurrection

and *parousia*. Agamben then goes on to mimic the doctrinal position which this has evoked, a

> paradoxical tension… The messianic event has already happened, salvation has already been achieved according to believers, but, nevertheless, in order to truly be fulfilled, this implies an additional time. How should we interpret this unusual scission, since it seems to introduce a constitutive delay or deferment into the messianic? The problem is crucial (TR69).

The issue with the normal account of the "now and not yet" is that in its apparent dialectical tension, actually "the Kingdom loses its reality and is transformed into a kind of transition [*transizione*] phase in a process whose fulfilment tends to be infinitely deferred" (KGn148).[43] Transitions tend implicitly to contain delay, "for, as with every transition, it tends to be prolonged into infinity and renders unreachable the end that it supposedly produces" (TR70).

The Christologically-orientated solution of Karl Barth in Volume II/1 of *The Church Dogmatics* to this apparent *aporia* is distinctive. For Barth, the problem of the 'now and not yet' needs to be addressed at a more fundamental level. Firstly, the *eternal* God embraces and includes the form of creation – time itself. God is "the *nunc*, the pure present" (CDII.i,611). Thus, as "this *nunc*… there is… [only] peace between origin, movement and goal, between present, past and future, between "not yet," "now" and "no more," between rest and movement, potentiality and actuality" (CDII.i,612). It is not that these distinctions do not exist, but that there is a reconciliation between their apparent oppositions, a reconciliation, even, between the Aristotelian *dynamis* / *energeia* opposition.

Second, having understood the eternal nature more appropriately, Barth can then construe the nature of the impact of the entering of that eternal nature into time. It is a "real fellowship between God and the creature… between eternity and time… In Jesus Christ it comes about that God takes time to Himself, that He Himself, the eternal One, becomes temporal" (CDII.i,616). A new temporality is thereby forged which newly renders "past" and "future" in its mutual relation to Christ. The old *aeon* was destroyed on the cross; the new *aeon* was brought to light and life in the resurrection (CDII.i,626). Thus, Jesus Christ is the one who has always and already 'turned' the old *aeon* towards the new *aeon*. "[A]s [Jesus Christ] comes between the two spheres He makes the one really past and the other no less really future,

[43] 'Transition' is the word Haufniensis uses ["*overgangen*"] in derogatory fashion to characterise Hegel's philosophy of history. Kierkegaard 1980, 81–82.

constituting time itself the way from this past to this future" (CDII.i,627). After the resurrection, therefore, the experience of time in the present is no less than "the way" – the journey, time's journey from past to future.

This is not a matter of mere 'understanding', but a question of the experience of time itself. Barth continues, "[Jesus] has not merely explained and interpreted it as the way from this past to this future, from the old to the new *aeon*, but has really made it this way" (CDII.i,627). The way involves a "turning" [*Wende*] – from one *aeon* to the next. This "turning" is no transition, but a quality – movement – of present experience. Jesus "is the way from the one to the other [sphere] and the way is irreversible. He is the turning" (CDII.i,628). And, just as Jesus "is the turning", so the right understanding of time involves alignment with that same experience of "turning" between *aeons*, "to live in this turning [*Wende*]" (CDII.i,629). Indeed, "[i]t always involves the relapse into a heathen point of view if we understand the past and the future, and ourselves between them, as anything else but our living in this turning" (CDII.i,627).

Agamben too, is critical of the too abstract "endless dialectic" implied by 'now and not yet' eschatology. His thinking – like Barth's – is that such a position inevitably posits the 'not yet' on a timeline; and that such an approach denudes the already occurred Messianic event of its power. In *Mystery of Evil*, Agamben emphasises the *dramatis personae* of 2 Thessalonians 2, namely the *katechon* – the restrainer (as he translates it) – and the Messiah. "From this [dramatic] perspective," he continues, the inherent contradiction in the "already" and "not yet" becomes more apparent. "It is not a matter of an abstract temporal structure, but of a drama or a conflict in which absolutely concrete historical forces act. The "not yet" defines the action of [2Ths2's] *katechon*, of the force that restrains; the "already" refers to the urgency of the decisive element [– the Messiah]" (ME35).

This drama is also evident in the coming face to face of two ages, and the Jewish notion of the day of rest, the seventh day, the Sabbath. Whereas Barth refers to Paul's Greek "*aeon*", Agamben prefers the Jewish apocalyptic tradition's *'olam hazzeh* and *'olam habba*. The first, for Agamben, "designates the duration of the world from creation to its end" and the second, "the world to come, the atemporal eternity that comes after the end of the world" (TR62). For Agamben, living in Messianic time operates within a gap. In Paul, the Greek versions of the Jewish notions – "*ho aion touto, ho kosmos outos* ('this eon, this world,') and *ho aion mellon* ('the coming eon')" both "appear in the Pauline text but messianic time, the time in which the apostle lives, the only time that concerns him, is neither the *'olam hazzeh* nor the *'olam habba*, neither chronological time nor the apocalyptic *eschaton*" (TR62). The qualitative effect of the resurrection for Agamben has been not to initiate a Barthian

"turning", but to open up a cut in time "when the division of time is itself divided" (TR62,CK8-9).

The theological implications of Agamben's position are clear. The experience of time in the present is not a "paradoxical tension" of being stretched between two temporal poles, but the tension of being involved in an eschatological drama which is always and already underway. The qualitative experience of living in that time, however, is of the inoperativity of the *caesura*, of an intensified contraction, or the transgressive exposure of *parabasis* and its appeal to an origin, and finally of the past and the present being held together in a static shock of a constellation. This experience of time is inescapable because it refers to a Messianic event – the resurrection – which has occurred within time. And its encounter is Scriptural – through the close reading of Scripture, and its own creation of a constellation with other texts and indeed our own experience.

There are also specifically Christological implications. First, the eschatology of Christ's resurrection is not proleptic (like Pannenberg,[44] who on one view has lapsed into linear time even here), but full and total, graspable in the present of the community, as Barth would agree. The endless dialectic of waiting for fulfilment in the 'not yet' degrades the resurrection. Second, there is however a crucial Christological difference between Barth and Agamben, which lies in the experience of time in the present. For Barth, the Community *follows* Christ in 'turning' decisively between the two ages. For Agamben, by contrast, such decisive movement is reversed to an intensified *stasis*. The 'in Christ' inherent in Barth's account is lost in Agamben's. Instead, for Agamben, the eschatological achievement of the resurrection is graspable through paradigmatology, and performance. How performance secures this 'graspability' is the subject of Chapter two.

[44] 'Christian eschatology... rests on an event of fulfilment that has already taken place. Nevertheless, this event is not yet complete.' The consummation of human life 'does not meet the reality of individual or social life as a totally different reality because present life itself is to be seen as a form of manifestation and a process of becoming'. Pannenberg 1997, 550, 605-6.

TWO

TIME AND PERFORMANCE

In Chapter one, I gave a critical account of Agamben's Messianic time, governed by Agamben's statement that "the paradigm for understanding life in the present is Messianic time". I examined four qualities of Agamben's construal of time and three theological contours of what makes that understanding 'Messianic'. I demonstrated how Agamben's 'paradigm' performs a critical doubling with 'Messianic time' itself. These findings have theological implications for the doctrinal phrase 'living in the now and not yet'. For those purposes, I made a critical comparison between Agamben and Barth's account of temporality in *Dogmatics* II/2. Finding both commonality and also decisive differences (particularly for their Christological assumptions), both voices dispute the inherent paradox of the 'now and not yet', offering instead either the qualitative experience of "turning", or a graspable performance in the present.

However, when it comes to the relationship between Messianic time and historical existence, Agamben is clear that it is insufficient to achieve intellectual understanding alone. One must also *experience* the new understanding secured. In fact, without such experience, understanding has been missed. As he writes in the programmatic opening of *The Time That Remains*: "the possibility of understanding… coincides fully [*integralmente*] with the experience of such a time; without this, it runs the risk of remaining a dead letter" (TR2/ITCR9). Without an experience, the possibility, let alone the actuality, of understanding is lost. Therefore, this Chapter makes a qualitative step with respect to the design of Chapter one. I am no longer asking Chapter one's exegetical question – '*What* is Messianic time?'. Instead, the question for this Chapter becomes: '*How* can Messianic time be experienced?', and in

particular '*How* can it be experienced through a text such as St Paul's letters, and indeed Agamben's writing itself?'

Agamben's proposal, an aspect of his work which is underappreciated,[45] is that for such a transformation of experience, a text itself must 'perform'. The purpose of this Chapter is critically to examine that 'performance': an assessment of Agamben's reading of 'performative' texts, and indeed Agamben's own 'performance', through poetic and dramatic forms. The Chapter then concludes with the second Christological implication raised by this dissertation. The doctrine of the *parousia* is directly engaged by the analysis of the performative in this Chapter. For these purposes, I will critically compare Agamben and Jürgen Moltmann. Once again, striking similarities as well as distinctions can be drawn, as both writers criticise a postponement of *parousia* along a linear timeframe. But first, I ask the preliminary question: 'Why is experience necessary in understanding at all?' To answer this, I will briefly treat the critical background for Agamben's hermeneutical position. Heidegger, reading Paul's Thessalonian correspondence, understands temporality as being less about the 'what' (*Wass*), as asking 'how' (*Wie*): how should life be lived in this new temporal experience?[46] There is a critical similarity between Heidegger and Gadamer, who speaks of the need for an entire experience in the understanding of a text.[47] Finally, I turn to the father of the modern appreciation of 'performance' in texts, J.L. Austin.[48]

TRUTH AND PERFORMANCE

Heidegger's early lectures *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* begin with the well-known distinction between a scientific 'concept' – something to be fixed within a material complex; and a philosophical 'concept' – "vacillating, vague, manifold, and fluctuating".[49] This raises the question of hermeneutical method. For philosophy to elucidate the phenomenon of concepts (in one of Heidegger's key departures from Husserl), the question to be answered is 'how', not the 'what' of science.[50]

Then, in a move which is clearly influential for Agamben, Heidegger turns this programmatic finding to readings of Pauline letters. In the eschatological

[45] The only critical treatment of 'performance' in Agamben I have yet found is: Zeillinger, 'Disillusioning Reason - Rethinking Faith', in: Heiden 2019, 95–114.
[46] Heidegger 2010
[47] Gadamer 2021.
[48] Austin 2018.
[49] Heidegger 2010, 3.
[50] As Heidegger develops more fully in *Being and Time*. Scerri 2022, 18–19.

messages to his interlocutors in the Thessalonian correspondence, Heidegger reads Paul as moving in this same hermeneutical direction: the concern is not the 'When' (*Wenn*) of future hope, but the 'How' (*Wie*) – 'How' to live in the present. When Paul writes "for you yourselves know very well" (1Ths5.2; also 2Ths3.7), Heidegger concludes that what is in question is not "attitudinal 'objective' time", but a "question [which] is decided in dependence upon their own life".[51] Similarly, "keeping awake" and "being children of the light" (1Ths5.5-6[52]), inevitably leads the questions of 'when' or indeed 'what' back to "comportment". Whilst temporality is at stake in this investigation,

> the meaning of the "When" [*das Wenn*] of the time in which the Christian lives, has an entirely special character... the kind and mode of Paul's answer… is a time without its own order and demarcations. One cannot encounter this temporality in some sort of objective concept of time… The How of grasping [*das Wie der Erfassung*] reality, the How of understanding events is not to be carried out objective-attitudinally from out of the 'reasonable human understanding.' Rather, understanding the entire situation is necessary for understanding the phenomena.[53]

Objective understandings of the eschatological time which Paul attempts to convey to his Thessalonian interlocutors are misleading and elusive. Rather, the understanding of time becomes a matter of grasping [*Erfassung*] the present reality. A consistent line of thought can be perceived from these early Lectures to *Being and Time*.

For Gadamer, this same grasping of reality, "the entire situation," should be the objective of hermeneutics itself. There are two attitudes of 'understanding' to be avoided: "understanding… as the immanent effort of a philological consciousness"; and "understanding [as] enjoying one's own superior knowledge of the object", a "technical virtuosity". Instead, hermeneutics for Gadamer should include a "genuine experience [*Erfahrung* – roughly 'the entirety of human experience of understanding'] – ie. an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth".[54] Such a hermeneutical posture, seeking such an experience (Gadamer), or grasping it

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[51] Heidegger 2010, 72.

[52] There is similar language in Romans 13 and Ephesians 4-5 which I discuss in Chapter three.

[53] Heidegger 2010, 72–73.

[54] Gadamer 2021, 504. Earlier, Gadamer offered a definition of 'experience', being something "that experiences reality and is itself real", before then despairing of any clarity over the term: "the concept of experience seems to me one of the most obscure we have": Gadamer 2021, 355. 'Experience' is a concept that Lacoste considers in the context of Liturgy: Lacoste 2004.

(Heidegger), opens the possibility of truth within a text. Agamben's word – *integralmente* – more than describing the "full" coincidence of understanding and experience, also suggests the necessary 'integrity' between knowledge, experience, and representation: a truth.

Is there a particular kind of text where the experience of the understanding entirely encompasses its meaning, without remainder? Since Austin's study of the performativity of words,[55] a new class of text, whose meaning is entirely bound up with its experience, has become illuminated for critical study. Words which do things – like the marital oath or any other kind of oral contract, for instance, which themselves alter the experience of time and space – are not new phenomena; but it is the analysis and deliberate use of such texts which is now more prevalent as a result of Austin's work. I will explain more fully how Agamben defines a text that 'performs' in the next section. But for now, the significance of adding Austin to the preceding genealogy, is that to Heidegger and Gadamer's methodological requirement of a totality of experience surrounding interpretation, without which understanding – truth, even – has been 'deflected', Austin highlights a form of text where that methodological requirement is intrinsic to the text itself.

AGAMBEN'S DEFINITIONS OF PERFORMANCE

I have established a governing comment by Agamben for this Chapter, namely that "the possibility of understanding… coincides fully [*integralmente*] with the experience of such a time" (TR2/ITCR9). The integral holding together of understanding and experience leads Agamben to argue for a broader role for performative language than Austin. He offers two distinctive definitions, one characterised by the erection of a stage, and the other a primordial "struggle" (Agamben's word) within the nature of language. I address each in turn.[56]

> The performative is a linguistic enunciation that does not describe a state of affairs but immediately produces a fact, actualizes its meaning… [It] represents in language a remnant of a stage (or, rather, the co-originality of a structure) in which the connection between words and things is not of a semantico-denotative

[55] Austin 2018.

[56] There is only space for exegesis of Agamben's contribution to this linguistic phenomenon. Critical comments could be pursued further, both on Agamben's development of Austin and Émile Benveniste, but also querying the necessary link between a text that "performs" and the experience of the reader: Lash 1988, 5.

> type but performative, in the sense that, as in the oath, the verbal act brings being into truth. This is not… a magico-religious stage but a structure antecedent to (or contemporaneous with) the distinction between sense and denotation…
>
> How in fact does the performative function?... [T]he performative substitutes for the denotative relationship between speech and fact a self-referential relation that, putting the former out of play, puts itself forward as the decisive fact. The model of truth here is not that of the adequation between words and things but the performative one in which speech unfailingly actualises its meaning… [I]n the performative, language suspends its denotative… to found its existential connection with things (SL54-6; similarly TR131-3).

There are several aspects to highlight. First, the performative suspends the denotative. Words stop referring to things. Second, the performative enters a new semiotic zone where existence itself is altered by the word. The verbal act brings being into truth. This zone is at least as old as the denotative nature of language. The use of the performative thus hints at a relationship with history which goes beyond denotation. Intriguingly, this historical relationship involves the recall of a "remnant of a stage"; the performative is a semiotic-dramatic enactment which partially re-erects such a stage.

Agamben offers a different definition of performance in *Opus Dei*. Here, there is an ontological role for the performative that counterbalances the denotative. There is a historical "struggle" between the two. As it comes first in Agamben's treatment of that struggle, the performative is implied to be the more originary state:

> There are… two distinct and connected ontologies in the tradition of the West: the first, the ontology of the command, proper to the juridical-religious sphere, which is expressed in the imperative and has a performative character; the second, proper to the philosophical-scientific tradition, which is expressed in the form of the indicative… Clearly distinct and in many ways opposed, the two ontologies live together, struggle with each other, and nevertheless never cease to intersect [*incrociarsi* – literally 'cross each other', with the potential play on words of *croce*], to hybridize, and to prevail over one another by turns in the history of the West (OD120/AD138).

A primordial "struggle" between two linguistic forces is posited, the jurido-religious 'performative' against the philosophical-scientific 'indicative'. This bears both similarity and contrast to Heidegger's programmatic opening of *Phenomenology*.

Whereas Heidegger sought to recover philosophy from the defined 'what' of science, for Agamben, rather, what is at stake is language itself. And for Agamben, philosophy is casually joined with science in opposition to law and religion.

These two definitions already open a far wider vista than Austin's rather cautious foray. Anything which seeks to erect this quasi-religious stage in opposition to denotation can be perceived as performative – text, art, music even. And the loss of denotation does not render the performative text of any less value. Quite the opposite. It might be, for Agamben, that the use of the performative is precisely the way – as Heidegger perceived before him – to understand other texts (such as Paul's letters), and to provoke better experience of the knowledge of Messianic time in the present. As Agamben tries to recover Paul's texts as the quintessential messianic texts of the Ancient world, that recovery – Agamben's texts themselves – must also act in altering conditions in time and space, severing a denotative link, and inhabiting the different semantic zone of the performative where words speak into being, and become actual. Otherwise understanding without experience will entail only partial understanding at best.

PERFORMING TEXTS

I now turn to consider texts which Agamben reads as performative of what they seek to accomplish. Most notable in this category are the monastic rules and form-of-life of Franciscan spirituality, but also poetry, and indeed art (as a form of 'text').

In the Franciscan rule-of-life, Agamben sees not the proliferation of law, but the formation of a new form of existence. "The specific eschatological character of the Franciscan message" he writes towards the end of *The Highest Poverty*, "is not expressed in a new doctrine, but in a form of life through which the very life of Christ is made newly present in the world" (HP143). How the rules have achieved this remarkable performative result is one of the main arguments of the book. There is one key point to draw out in this Chapter (leaving two other points for Chapter three): the ambivalence of the border between the oral and the written.

In order to be effective in establishing an indistinguishability between rule and life, the texts of the rule must themselves be performative as they "seem to realize the life that they must regulate" (HP69). The particular facet of performativity manifest in the rules is an indistinguishability between orality and writing. For instance, Agamben considers one rule which demands that it be spoken: "'You,

therefore, who hear me speaking, listen through what is written here to what is being said to you not by my mouth but by God'" (HP76). In fulfilling this rule's command, the "reader performatively executes the rule *ipso facto*… the observance… is rendered indiscernible from the command that it obeys" (HP77). The rule has a "special status",

> which is not only a written text or simply an oral discourse… The rule… *stages* something that is not exhausted in either of these dimensions, but finds its truth precisely and solely in the tension that it installs between them" (HP75, emphasis added).

The significant aspect of the performance of the rules, then, is not merely in how the performative displaces the denotative relation between text and being, but in the tension between the two ontologies, the "struggle" of Agamben's definition in *Opus Dei*. This "struggle" then equates to an experience of the understanding of time. The human experience engaged by such a text demonstrates awareness of both "poles" of language – the written text, and oral discourse. The very effectiveness of the rule – its contribution as text and as performance, lies in the ongoing and simultaneous awareness of both.

In the title essay of *The End of the Poem*, Agamben assumes without comment that the poetic form is itself performative in the way its most basic features instils emotions or experiences in its readers/hearers. The effect of enjambment, rhythm and rhyme is to create "tension", a *literary* tension first of all "between sound and sense, between the semiotic sphere and the semantic sphere" (EP109). That tension, however, exists through the reader/hearer's expectation for sense to prevail through (if not over) sound. As that expectation is upended, there is "a disjunction that brings the mind to expect a meaningful analogy where it can find only homophony" (EP110), like a "hesitation" (EP109). Whose hesitation is this, and where does the tension lie? It can only exist in the temporality of the reader/hearer. Thus, the poem's existence itself performs a kind of messianic time for the reader/hearer.

Can art perform Agamben's messianic time just as clearly as a performative written text? In *Man Without Content*, Agamben, comparing the experience of art with religious festivals, enfolds the experience of the latter into the former:

> Just as all other mythic-traditional systems celebrate rituals and festivals to interrupt the homogeneity of profane time and, reactualising the original mythic

> time, to allow man to become again the contemporary of the gods and to reattain the primordial dimension of creation, so in the work of art the continuum of linear time is broken, and man recovers, between past and future, his present space (MC101-2).

The extended syntax of this one long sentence is telling. The implication is that art not only breaks "the continuum of linear time" (Benjamin's phrase, once again), allowing man to recover "his present space"; but it is also that art performs in the space alongside – a paradigm of – "other mythic-traditional systems". In the elision of the sentence, there is a suggestion that art can itself interrupt "profane time" and 'reactualise' "original mythic time… to reattain the primordial dimension of creation".

In the experience of time, therefore, art is a vehicle for Agamben's Messianic time just as clearly as a performative written text such as the Franciscan rules and a poem. In *Nymphs*, Agamben describes an art installation charged with time "almost to the point of exploding". There is a "kairological saturation", such that, for every viewer, a "constellation" between past and present "comes together in a flash" (Ny4,26). Similarly, Cy Twombly's *Untitled* (1984) is able to represent the apparently unrepresentable – the *caesura* of Messianic time (St76-77).

AGAMBEN'S PERFORMANCES

So, I have shown how Agamben is not only drawn to texts which 'perform' – *what* their constitutive performative aspects are; but, by inhabiting them and highlighting their performance, Agamben himself re-orchestrates them for his readers – demonstrating his awareness of *how* they perform. I now argue, however, that Agamben's performance is not only secondary – bringing to the light the performance of another. It is also primary. In places, Agamben's texts themselves contain the same suspension of denotative faculty in favour of seeking to actualise that which they examine. I focus in this section on two: *The Time That Remains*, and the significance of the *sestina* poem to its structure; and *Pulcinella*, with its drama in four scenes.

The sestina of The Time That Remains

In the conclusion of Agamben's discussion of Paul's Messianic time in 'Day 4' of *The Time That Remains*, Agamben addresses the 'time' of poetry, and in particular a description of the *sestina* form. In the growing theological reception of this work – and this central chapter in particular – it is perhaps unsurprising that the *sestina* passage is largely passed over.[57] But there lies here an unperceived clue to the performative form and nature of *The Time That Remains* as a whole.[58] Before making that argument, however, it is necessary to understand the particular features of the *sestina* genre itself, for which purpose I use the assessment by Marianne Shapiro in *The Hieroglyph of Time*.[59]

As I showed in the previous section, for Agamben *any* poem contains an aspect of performance, and in particular a sense of Messianic time within it. But this is especially true of the *sestina* and its use by its most famous exponents such as Petrarch and Dante. Through its conventions of length and rhyme, the *sestina* creates a new experience of time. The Petrarchan *sestina* contains thirty-nine lines, structured into six strophes of six lines each, and a seventh strophe of three lines – the *tornada*. Of its many potential structural devices, the most basic is that the rhyming word of the last line of each strophe is repeated as the rhyming word of the first line of the next strophe. The *tornada*, in conclusion, manifests all the rhyme-words, sonically to affect the sense of closure and repose.[60] Through this play of rhyming words, a new experience of time is created for the hearer: the sounds of the rhymes, more than the 'narrow lexical meanings' of the words themselves, predominate. The structure of the *sestina* is "a play of homonymic equivalences with a concomitant prevalence of semantic significance over narrow lexical meaning."[61] And thus, the 'hybrid concept' of clock time, is mitigated through the "power of memory, which can confer simultaneously on events of past and present, and it is on this simultaneity that poetry depends for the effect of duration."[62] The new experience of time, therefore, is that it is governed by the performance of sound rather than denotative meaning. And in its compression of the familiar rhyming

[57] Paul Griffiths is an exception: Griffiths, 'The Cross as the Fulcrum of Politics', in: Harink 2010, 186. Eikelboom's study as a whole integrates poetic insights with the theological, but the particular significance of the *sestina* form is eroded to become a reference to 'poetry'. Eikelboom 2018, 210fn30.
[58] Harink recognises that something performative is occurring in the work as a whole, but only considers the fact of it being a commentary of the first ten words of Romans. Harink, 'Time and Politics in Four Commentaries on Romans', in: Harink 2010, 310.
[59] Shapiro 1980.
[60] Shapiro 1980, 8.
[61] Shapiro 1980, 7.
[62] Shapiro 1980, 8–9.

words of the entire *sestina*, the *tornada* performs "an eschatological orientation… it recapitulates the ages [of the *sestina*] including the last".[63]

This "eschatological orientation" is what draws Agamben to the *sestina*. "[F]or the brief time that the poem lasts, it has a specific and unmistakable temporality; it has its own *time*" (TR79, emphasis original). Through the *sestina*'s rhyming

> to-and-fro directed both forward and backward, the chronological sequence of linear homogeneous time is completely transformed into rhythmic *constellations* themselves in movement (TR82, emphasis added).

There are two theological observations to draw before I identify Agamben's own performance. Firstly, because of its 'six+one' structure, the *sestina* is often recognised as a model of the time of creation (as described in Genesis 1-2). The *tornada*, as 'the Sabbath' element of the poem when God comes to reside with his people – the messianic fulfilment, perhaps – is "a cipher of the messianic fulfilment of time" (TR83). So, then, *The Time That Remains* is itself structured with 'Six Days' for chapters, and a concluding *Tornada*. At this level, it exists alongside the *sestina* in its relatedness to the days of creation. For instance, on the fourth day, when (in the Genesis account) God created time through the separation of night from the day, letting them be "for signs and for seasons and for days and years…" (Gen 1.14), so too Agamben concerns himself with the question of temporality. The second observation is that Agamben perceives in Paul an inner poetic exigency and "an epochal motivation" (TR86). Paul is compelled by his subject matter, particularly when it comes to the eschatology of 1 Corinthians 7 and 15, to write with "an unprecedented play of inner rhymes, of alliterations and end words (TR85-86).

But *The Time That Remains* is not simply related to the days of creation in a similar way to the *sestina*; nor does it merely describe the features of Pauline poetic register as an interesting comment on Paul's conversion of the eschatological imaginations of his interlocutors. *The Time That Remains* is itself a *sestina*. The 'six days' ('chapters') are the six stanzas of the poem, with their own interrelatedness and rhythmic progress. The concluding *Tornada*, whose entire concern is the discovery by Agamben of Benjamin's clandestine allusion to Paul, provides the new grounding on which the entire project of Messianic time has been founded. The very final breath of the *Tornada* – an extended quote from Benjamin's *Arcades*,[64] draws attention precisely to the notion of the constellation, of history, and of the imagistic

[63] Shapiro 1980, 12.

[64] Quoting: Benjamin 2002, 463. Agamben also quotes this passage in Ny26.

dialectic between past and present which is the experience of 'now' (TR145). Of course, Benjamin has been just under the surface as *The Time That Remains* has progressed; but now, in its conclusion, do we not only see, but *experience* (in the resounding 'rhyme' of the conclusion of the *Tornada*) the influence of Benjamin on Agamben, of Paul on Benjamin, and now too of all three on 'us' the reader.

So, when writing in an eschatological mode, it is not only Paul's compulsion to write in a heightened register of rhythm and rhyme. Agamben too, as he responds to the same subject matter both through Paul's text and *de novo*, is similarly compelled. Just as "a kind of eschatology" (TR79) occurs within the *sestina* poem itself, just as "a kind of eschatology" therefore can be observed in Paul's "inner exigency" (TR86) to write poetically, so too there is "a kind of eschatology" in Agamben's own endeavour, straining towards its end, and operating within a time of its own into which the reader is drawn. The reader therefore becomes 'the-one-performed-to'. The normal denotative capacity of semiotics is suspended, in favour of an experience which changes the nature of eschatological engagement. It is surely no accident that Agamben's 'sixth' (and final) 'day' (chapter) concludes with a section considering the performativity of words, including J.L.Austin (TR131-7).

The drama of Pulcinella

The performance of *Pulcinella* is multifaceted and multi-sensory. The reader is led through imagined conversations, overhears archaic languages, learns about macaroni and acting styles, is invited to a gallery of 'Pulcinella' frescoes, participates in what is designed to be an 'entertainment' for kids, and, lastly, gets sucked in with Agamben to the mirror-like indistinctiveness of Pulcinella. Just as the life of Pulcinella displayed merges with and becomes indistinguishable from the life of the artist (P122), Pulcinella's life also operates as a mirror for Agamben as a contemporary onlooker, and further, by extension, his readers.

The performance of Agamben's *Pulcinella* is, first, in the mirror held up to Agamben's readers. Pulcinella is ideally suited to perform this mirror-like function. A stock-character within the Commedia dell'Arte, known for his lewd and indulgent outbursts, Pulcinella gained theatrical and civic importance.[65] As the civic and national importance grew, however, Pulcinella became more of an Everyman, a collection of characters, with various guises, devices, and employments. He

[65] McGehee, 'The Pre-Eminence of the Actor in Renaissance Context', in: Chaffee and Crick 2017, 15.

"experiences life as we do. He is no longer merely a ridiculous and obnoxious buffoon. He is a mirror of us and the world."[66] A voice in Agamben's text reflects:

> *To meditate on Pulcinella does not merely mean to ask… 'What man am I? What is my character?' but also and above all, 'Have I truly lived my life? Or is there still something left in it that I have not been able to live?' This unlived is like a faceless stowaway* [*clandestino senza volto*] *who accompanies me day after day who I am never able to catch and speak to* (P106, italics original).

In its multivalence and multivocality, the figure of Pulcinella becomes insubstantial ("faceless") and elusive ("I am never able to catch"). What remains is the image of one's self, as if seen in a mirror; and an awareness of a gap between self and image, between perceived clarity and insubstantiality (Pro57).

Second, Agamben's performance in *Pulcinella*, as well as being an "entertainment", is dramatic: there are 'four scenes'. There is no clear discernible linear progression through these scenes, as if there were a dramatic conflict to be resolved, or relationships to untangle. Rather the 'scenes' – like the Evangelists, perhaps – provide different reflections on the Pulcinella figure: the philosophical role of comedy, the actors who play Pulcinella, the history of the Neapolitan street-theatre, a study of macaroni, Christological and Benjaminian reflections, dialogues between a proliferating range of *dramatis personae*, and so on.

One of the crucial dramatic aspects of Agamben's presentation of Pulcinella is the archaic Neapolitan dialect with which Pulcinella himself speaks in the *Entertainment*. In 'The Dream of Language' (EP43-61), Agamben 'reads' a 15th Century text *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, but encounters a resistance to reading. Polifilo writes in a hybrid form of archaic language, merging the high registers of Latin and Greek with the common Tuscan and even vernacular, and perhaps other languages (EP44-45). This is a conscious device of the author; an attempt at syntactico-grammatical understanding is resisted, in favour of a purely lexical element. "It is this play," Agamben goes on, "between the lexical and the syntactico-grammatical elements that, in Polifilo, produces the effect of immobility and almost pictorial rigidity… And it is this very play that the work's illustrations, like mirrors seem to multiply" (EP46). But the experience is not one of dead lexical sterility, because the language itself creates "life". How?

[66] Porter, 'The Naples Pulcinella: Mask and Mirror', in: Carr 2010, 56.

The answer lies in the performance of language *as speech*. The inheritance of Christian theology, such as Schleiermacher, perhaps, is that "[l]ife is what is made in speech and what remains indistinguishable from it and close to it." (EP79). Dead language, or even an indiscernible language such as the *glossolalia* in 1 Corinthians 14 (EP65-66), can be brought to life through dramatic speech.

In Agamben's *Entertainment*, Pulcinella only appears 'in the present' as a dialogue partner, speaking in the 'dead' Neapolitan dialect, which causes the same immobility as Polifilo's hybrid language (here, reading in translation loses the effect of resistance). And, just as the illustrations in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* "like mirrors seem to multiply" the "almost pictorial rigidity" (EP46) created by the dead language, so too the reproductions of Tiepolo's Pulcinella etchings and frescoes in Agamben's *Entertainment* like mirrors multiply the rigidity of Pulcinella's Neapolitan dialect. The tension between orality and writing which Agamben considered in the *Highest Poverty* is here given a third dimension: a tension between orality, writing, and being a spectator before a work of art.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS: *PAROUSIA*

In this Chapter, 'Time and Performance', I have made a qualitative step in respect to the design of Chapter one. I no longer focussed on the question '*What* is, for Agamben, Messianic time', but rather, in a Heideggerian move, '*How* can Messianic time be experienced'. Agamben, like Heidegger and Gadamer before him, appreciates that without an experience of Messianic time, understanding has been missed. "[T]he possibility of understanding… coincides fully [*integralmente*] with the experience of such a time" (TR2/ITCR9). I first showed how Agamben's "*integralmente*", here, stands together with Heidegger's *Erfassung* and Gadamer's *Erfahrung*, to convey the need for hermeneutics to embrace an entire experience. Then, I critically assessed Agamben's own definitions of 'performative' language, demonstrating how it has moved beyond Austin's more limited scope. I subsequently examined three forms of 'text' which Agamben seeks to orchestrate as performative. Then, lastly, I argued that Agamben's work can itself be seen as performative. I focussed on two: the eschatological *sestina* of *The Time That Remains*, and the drama of *Pulcinella*, with its mirroring, entertainment, and resistance to reading. Through performance, Agamben engages an 'understanding' of his readers which relentlessly and ineluctably engages their experience.

The argument of this Chapter has theological – particularly Christological – consequences. Taking my cue from Heidegger, whose early hermeneutical move

from *Wass* to *Wie* came in the context of Paul's eschatology and the meaning of *parousia*,[67] I will focus on Agamben's own response to *parousia*. He addresses this in several works. I offer a critical comparison between the approach to *parousia* of Agamben and Jürgen Moltmann. There is a strong resemblance between the two. For both, there is polemical attitude towards the Church's collusion with a Hegelian view of history, resulting in linear Christologies, or indeed 'the delay of the *parousia*'. There is an emphasis on the full, once and for all achievement of the Messiah. There is an appreciation that we are *now* living in end times, not the end of time. And there is even a shared vocabulary to do with the qualitative experience of the present, "*adventus*". For all those strong similarities, there are also distinctive differences. Whereas for Moltmann, there must remain space for an 'end' – if not a time, then a 'moment' of justice and judgment; for Agamben, by contrast, that end disappears in the effort to emphasise the once and for all nature of Christ's 'first' *parousia*. This, then, leads to a further distinction in the account of the experience of time in the present: for Moltmann, it is characterised by anticipation; for Agamben, the present is always able to 'grasp' at the *parousia*, a 'grasping' which implies performative action even in a text.

Parousia is often thought of as the reappearance of Christ at his Second Coming.[68] This seems warranted, for instance, by 1 Corinthians 15.23-24, where Paul appears to be explaining an eschatological 'sequence of events': "each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming [παρουσίᾳ] those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end".[69] For Oscar Cullmann, for instance, attempting to rebut Rudolf Bultmann's existential "de-mythologising" of the Gospels, a modern linear conception of time is posited over the Biblical material.[70] Eschatology is transposed into time, with time progressing towards that eschatological end.[71] One of the problems with this account is it represents a failure of the imagination to overcome the modern temptation (rooted in the structure of Kant's intuition) to think of time and its experience as being on a homogeneous line, with events happening consecutively across that line.

After outlining a thoroughgoing 'kairological' account of time in his 1985 Gifford Lectures,[72] Jürgen Moltmann went on to apply this understanding of time in his books on Christology (WJC) and Eschatology (*The Coming of God*[73]). Moltmann

[67] Heidegger 2010, 71–72.
[68] The Index to the *Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* reads: 'Parousia. *See* Second Coming'. Walls 2008, 713.
[69] Other relevant NT texts with '*parousia*' include 1Ths2.19, 3.13, 4.15; 2Ths2.1, 2.8.
[70] Cullman 1962, 42,53.
[71] Cullman 1962, 32.
[72] Published as: Moltmann 1985. See Chapter V.
[73] Moltmann 1996.

focusses – at times polemically (WJC313) – on asserting the doctrine of the *parousia* as being qualitatively characterised by its expectation in the present, an expectation of hope. He makes three doctrinal developments.

First, *parousia* is not an ending of triumph or vindication, either for the currently oppressed, or even to confirm the status of the current privileged classes. It is "only the hope that was born of Christ's resurrection and is alive in the power of his Spirit which finds its completion in the expectation of Christ and the prayer for his coming" (WJC314). The emphasis of *parousia* is on Christ's already achieved work, and of the presence of that work in the experience of the present, a presence qualitatively characterised by hope, expectation and *Marana tha* prayers.

Second, *parousia* is not a Christological appendage added to the end of time. Rather, it ought to be the "keystone supporting the whole of christology… Christ's messianic mission, his apocalyptic suffering and his eschatological resurrection from the dead would remain incomprehensible fragments if we were not to take into account the future 'Day of the Messiah'… which is to say Jesus' parousia" (WJC316). Speaking and praying in expectation for the coming of Jesus ought to be indistinguishable from an acknowledgement of what Christ has achieved on earth. It should also be indistinguishable from the reflection on the 'eschatological' nature of the resurrection – the breaking in of God's future into temporality. The *parousia* is as much a Christological subject as it is an eschatological one.

Third, *parousia* should be translated from Latin's *adventus* and German's *Zukunft*, not Latin's *futurum*.[74] It represents Moltmann's counter-proposal to a temporalized account of the *parousia* (for instance Schweitzer's 'delay') that "allotted a place" for the *parousia* "in the general 'flow of time'" (WJC316). *Parousia*, for Moltmann, means 'coming', or 'presence'. Events which are described as 'coming' are not those which develop out of the past and present in a linear fashion.[75] Rather, the present is confronted by something arriving from the future, something which will be a new presence.[76] The definition of the present, therefore, is taken not from what has come before, but what is to come – the future.[77] But Moltmann also rails against an 'eternalisation' of *parousia* – always arriving, supra-temporal, and every atom of time being an eternal moment. "There is" on that basis, Moltmann continues "no future end of time – nothing but the limitation of all the times of human history through God's eternal moment" (WJC318).

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[74] WJC317. Moltmann repeats this claim in many places: Moltmann 1979, 29; Moltmann 1985, 133–34; Moltmann 1996, 23–25; Moltmann 2003, 101.
[75] Moltmann 1985, 133.
[76] Moltmann 1985, 133; Moltmann 1996, 25.
[77] Moltmann 1985, 123.

Taking these three arguments into account, the experience of time in the present is qualitatively altered by *adventus*/*Zukunft*. Temporality is not directed towards a Hegelian "an end of history", but about living in "an End-time process, which the resurrection of the crucified One has irrevocably set going" (WJC319). How does one speak in the present of eschatological events of the future, however? For Moltmann, the quality of present temporality is a "dynamic of the provisional in the experience of Christ's history" (WJC320). The Messiah's mission, his sufferings, and his resurrection "point beyond themselves… [L]egitimate statements about Christ's parousia… are founded on the historical revelation of God, which points beyond itself" (WJC320). The correct place and posture in the present for such pointing beyond itself is in praxis – in the eucharistic and parenetic spheres (WJC338). So, the *parousia* – the coming one, not a moment of future temporality – actively shapes life. "It is *life in anticipation*… The expectation of the future of Christ sets the present in the light of the One who will come, and makes bodily life in the power of the resurrection experienceable" (WJC340, emphasis original).

Agamben's various discussions of the *parousia* hold both striking similarities and dissimilarities to Moltmann's. First, Agamben offers a bold redefinition of the word itself, building on his interest in the '*para*' word group (the first example of which I addressed in Chapter one – 'Paradigm'). With Heidegger[78] and Moltmann, he dismisses the definition of *parousia* being collapsed into the 'second coming'. It "does not mean the 'second coming' of Jesus, a second messianic event that would follow and" in a Hegelian way "subsume the first" (TR70). Nor, perhaps deliberately contradicting Moltmann, should *parousia* be translated "*venuta* (*adventus*)" (RG118). Rather, "[i]n Greek, *parousia* simply means presence (*par-ousia* literally signifies to be next to; in this way, being is beside itself in the present)" (TR70,KGn149).[79] Agamben is rather on his own in this translation.[80] The "being alongside" of Agamben's *parousia* means that in the experience of the present, there is always a graspable presence. It is in fact a fifth qualitative feature of Messianic time (in addition to the four I discussed in Chapter one). For Agamben, the Messianic *ousia* which stands alongside (*para*) time itself means that it becomes graspable. "What [is] in question", Agamben writes, is "a messianic transformation of time: it is a matter, in every case, of grasping [*afferabile*] a presence, but this is such as to entail a radical alteration of

[78] Heidegger 2010, 71.

[79] "*Par-ousia* literally signifies: *essere accanto; nel presente, l'essere sta, per così dire, accanto a se stesso*" (ITCR70). More literally translated: "being alongside; in the present, being is, so to speak, alongside itself".

[80] Even Heidegger, arguing a similar case, recognises that *parousia* in classical Greek "means arrival (presence) [*Ankunft (Anwesenheit)*]." Heidegger 2010, 71.

the experience of time, which prevents us from locating it merely in a determinate chronological point" (KGn150).

Second, like Moltmann, Agamben's account of *parousia* is premised on the already complete nature of the achievement of Christ. "The Messiah has already arrived, the messianic event has already happened" (TR71). There is not a second Messianic event, for Agamben. The Kingdom itself is already "entirely complete… not a period of time between two events" (KGn150). It is something with which we experience "daily intimacy" (W37). It is not a "complement that is added to something in order to complete it, nor a supplement, added on afterward, that never reaches fulfilment." But rather, *parousia* has secured a qualitative amendment to time itself, none other than the

> uni-dual structure of the messianic event, inasmuch as it is comprised of two heterogeneous times, one *kairos* and the other *chronos*, one an operational time and the other a represented time, which are coextensive but cannot be added together. Messianic presence lies beside itself, since, without ever coinciding with a chronological instant, and without ever adding itself onto it, it seizes hold of this instant and brings it forth to fulfilment (TR70-71).

This elusive argument places Agamben's notion of *parousia* within his schema for temporality. *Parousia* itself performs the *kairos*/*chronos* admixture. It comprises a "uni-dual" structure where *parousia* can be understood from within heterogeneous *kairos*/operational time, and *chronos*/represented time.

Third, despite having previously contradicted Moltmann's *adventus* as a translation for *parousia*, Agamben does expressly use the same *advent* language in relation to the coming of the Kingdom. Agamben decries different forms of eschatology which appear to have read the New Testament in chronological terms. There is a "disappointing… lack of imagination" in postponing to a future, possibly spiritual reality the coming of the kingdom (KGn141); or indeed claiming either an overrealized eschatology or a 'now and not yet' (KGn148). All of these renditions of the temporal status of the Kingdom "lose their reality" (KGn148). Perhaps most radically, the influential early 20th Century notion of the 'delay of the *parousia*' is also to be disregarded as a chronological misreading. "The so-called 'delay of the

parousia', of which modern theologians incautiously speak, is for Paul simply unthinkable" (KGn150), "blasphemous", even (CK4).[81]

> The time of the messiah cannot designate a chronological period or duration but, instead, must represent nothing less than a qualitative change in how time is experienced [*una transformazione qualitativa del tempo vissuto*]… Because there is no place in messianic time for a fixed and final habitation, *there is no time for delay*" (CK4-5/CR7, emphasis added).

Here, Agamben offers instead his own *adventus* terminology. If the *parousia* is graspable in the present, represents an already completed once and for all event, and therefore has inescapably affected a qualitative alteration in the experience of time, then that temporality can also be characterised by the "coming" of the Kingdom. The Kingdom "is present here and now, but is, at the same time, always in the act of coming, always ad-venting [*sempre in atto di venire, sempre ad-veniente*], without this being able to imply a deferral" (KGn150/RG118).

So, the implications for Christology of this critical comparison between Agamben and Moltmann on the question of *parousia*, at least problematises the notion of an ending *in time* of justice and judgment. Agamben's account seeks to claim that both the Messiah and the Kingdom are in reach in any moment. And it is the performance, the drama, and the action of that moment which are the crucial qualities of experience in the present. Both the Messiah and the Kingdom are "graspable" – for Agamben '*afferabile*', like Heidegger's '*Erfassung*'. They are not coming (*adventus*) from the future, but coming (*adveniente*) from "alongside itself" (TR71,KGn150).

In a highly charged two sentence conclusion to the discussion of *parousia* in *The Time That Remains*, Agamben uses many of the performative techniques I have discussed in this Chapter to demonstrate both his intended meaning of *parousia*, but also to create – or rather, *by creating* – an exposure of it. Having just explained the 'graspability' of the Messiah in a 'stretched' [*distende*[82]] *parousia*, Agamben first quotes a famous saying by Benjamin as if he is repeating its sense, whereas in fact the notion of the 'Messiah' is quite differently understood. Then, in the second sentence, a rolling play on words causes a homophonous rhyme without clear semantic sense ensuing.

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[81] Welborn assumes that Agamben, like his philosophical contemporaries, assumes a 'delay of the *parousia*' position: Welborn 2015, xvi.

[82] The Augustinian echo which I discussed more fully in Chapter one – '*Caesurae*', above.

> For this reason, each instant may be, to use Benjamin's words, the "small door through which the Messiah enters."[83] The Messiah always already had his time, meaning he simultaneously makes time his and brings it to fulfilment.
>
> [*Il messia fa già*
> *sempre il suo tempo –*
> *cioè, insieme,*
> *fa suo il tempo*
> *e lo compie.*] (TR71/ITCR71[84])

As I argued in Chapter one, the Messiah for Agamben refers to an already completed event, an event with theological contours. Conversely, Benjamin's emphasis (like Moltmann's) is anticipation. In Benjamin's worldview, the Messiah is still awaited, there is no already completed Messianic event. In Agamben's citation, then, there is a simultaneous approval and resistance. It is adopted as if being entirely consonant; but, at the same time, it highlights the distinctive difference between Benjamin and Agamben's Messiah – bringing the two ideas together in their own constellation. In the second sentence, there is a play on words which relies on the Italian *fare suo tempo* – something "has its own time". The Messiah's 'having his own time', means that he both makes his own time, and completes it. And bound up in that one sentence are multiple 'half-line' and 'end-line' (in my own transcription) rhymes, which sonically create the sense of this Messiah's time: *messia/fa già*, *tempo/tempo*, *cioè/insieme*, *il suo tempo/suo il tempo*, *insieme/compie*.

It is not sufficient, as Agamben would say, for our *understanding* of parousia to be re-shaped if our *experience* in the present is left unaffected. "[T]he possibility of understanding", as I argued throughout this Chapter governed Agamben's approach to performance, "coincides fully [*integralmente*] with the experience of such a time" (TR2). Messianic time "is not some other time located in an improbably present or future time. On the contrary, it is the only real time, the only time we will ever have. To experience this time implies an *integral* transformation [*transformazione integrale*] of ourselves and of our ways of living" (CK12-13/CR11, emphasis added). *Parousia* must be *dramatic*. Agamben's prescription for the Church is "to find again

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[83] CH397,400. '*Die kleine Pforte*', translated here 'small door', might allude to Christ's prescription to his followers: 'Enter through the narrow gate... For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life' (Mt7.13-14). Luther's translation has '*die enge Pforte*'. In any event, for Benjamin, the aspect of the Biblical allusion is reversed: it is not a prescription to the Messiah's followers, but the Messiah himself who might enter through. In the case of Agamben, the Messianic event already having taken place, the question of who is to enter through the narrow gateway is more equivocal.

[84] This is my reconstruction to highlight the poetic form, not in the original.

the eschatological experience of its historical action – of all historical action – as a drama in which the decisive conflict is always underway" (ME37).

So, I have shown in this Chapter that the implications of Agamben's approach to time and the performance of Messianic time through his texts imply that temporality is characterised by the graspability of the Messiah in "any moment". I have focussed in this Chapter on the 'How' – defining the performativity of texts, critically assessing Agamben's reading of performing texts, and newly highlighting Agamben's own performances. Yet, when it comes to 'Agamben's understanding of time', the question of 'How' can be qualitatively refined one step further. Is there a particular kind of text which for Agamben performs Messianic time *par excellence*? Is there even evidence that Agamben himself attempts to write in the same mode as this kind of text? The answer can be found in liturgy. The performance of liturgy and Agamben's own 'liturgies' are therefore the subject of Chapter three.

THREE

TIME AND LITURGY

This Chapter makes a further qualitative step in the analysis of Agamben's understanding of time, and its implications for Christology. Chapter one began by asking the exegetical: 'What?'. Mere understanding, however, is insufficient. Understanding, for Agamben, "coincides fully [*integralmente*]" with experience, without which the very possibility of understanding is lost. Chapter two, therefore, made a qualitative step with respect to the design of Chapter one, by asking not 'What?', but 'How?'. *How* is Agamben's Messianic time experienced in the present? I showed that this nexus between understanding and experience in Agamben builds on Heidegger, and the need to grasp (*Erfassung*) reality; Gadamer, and the need for understanding to be of an entire existence (*Erfahrung*); and J.L.Austin's study of performative words, whose nature unavoidably affects experience. I then evaluated Agamben's reading of texts he considers performative, followed by performative elements in Agamben's own writing. The performance of texts holds implications for the doctrine of *parousia*, which I drew out in conclusion, making a critical comparison between Agamben and Moltmann.

Chapter three makes a qualitative step with respect to the argument of Chapter two. Following Chapter two's account of *how* performative texts ineluctably affect the experience of time in the present, this Chapter asks if there is a *particular* kind of text which performs that role at the nexus between understanding and experience most profoundly. For Agamben, there is such a text: the liturgy. The Christian liturgy, Agamben writes, "acts… *ex opere operato*… it is itself the event… we are not dealing with a representation in a mimetic sense, but with a (re)presentation in which the salvific action… of Christ is rendered effectively present" (CA10, OD30). There is no need to have recourse to complex theological

paradigms for the effectiveness of words in, for instance, the sacraments. "[I]n the *sacramentum*, there was implied a performative experience of language, in which the utterance of the formula… had the force of actualizing what it said" (SL63). Scrutinising Agamben's understanding of time, therefore, involves asking not only 'what?' (Chapter one), and, in the nexus between understanding experience, not only 'how?' (Chapter two), but also (in this Chapter): 'how, particularly?'. Agamben's understanding of time, I argue, is most particularly experienced and therefore understood through the liturgy.

The structure of this Chapter follows the pattern of Chapter two. First, I assess Agamben's definition of liturgy. Second, I give an account of Agamben's readings of texts which he considers 'liturgical'. Third, I argue that in texts such as *The Fire and the Tale* and *Pulcinella*, Agamben's own writing falls within his definition of the liturgical. The Chapter then concludes with the final Christological implication of this dissertation, Agamben's reading of Christ's 'Recapitulation' from Ephesians 1.10. Agamben sees the text as being critical – for Christian doctrine (KGy31-34), for the present experience of the Church, and, indeed, for Western Philosophy (Agamben refers to Origen, Leibniz, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger (TR75)). The implications for Christology rest both in Ephesians 1.10's eschatology, but also for its *liturgical* genre. I will critically compare Agamben with Barth's reading of the same text,[85] and Moltmann's prescription for an eschatologically-oriented liturgical theology.[86] The key implication is that 'recapitulation' rather than '*anamnesis*' should be the hallmark of the Church's Christ-centred sacramental worship. First, however, I address an essential precursor to Agamben's notion of liturgy, namely the idea of 'Mystery'.

'MYSTERY'

Christian worship, for Agamben, "is by nature essentially a 'mystery'" (OD33). By 'mystery', however, Agamben means quite the opposite of the modern understanding of the word. 'Mystery', for Agamben, is not something 'mysterious' or 'hidden', but "designates praxis" (OD32). The 'mystery rite' of ancient religious practice referred to specific cultic action and drama. This argument is commonplace in Agamben's writing of the last decade: ever present, yet seemingly ignored in

[85] Barth 2017.
[86] CPS.

critical appraisals.[87] There are four points for present purposes: the influence on Agamben of the (disputed) arguments of Odo Casel; Agamben's reading of the New Testament's '*mysterion*'; the status of literature more widely as containing 'mystery'; and Agamben's understanding of 'parody' (within the same '*para*' word group as 'paradigm' and '*parousia*') in this context.

The writings of the Benedictine Odo Casel (1886-1948) played an influential role in the liturgical reform of the Catholic church in the 20th Century, culminating in Vatican II (1962-1965). In Agamben's repeated definition of 'mystery as praxis', Casel appears as the unquestioned witness in support. Casel's 1918 dissertation *De philosophorum Graecorum silentio mystico*, and subsequent works, argue that ancient pagan mysteries were not "secret doctrine", but "*mysterium* means first of all a deed of God's, the execution of an everlasting plan of his through an act which proceeds from his eternity, realized in time and the world".[88] Agamben offers a paraphrase of this in several places: "*mystery* designates praxis… the gestures and acts by means of which a divine action is accomplished in time and in the world for human salvation" (OD32, UG31). Casel's contribution has been the subject of some criticism, of which Agamben is dismissive.[89] Schmemann criticises Casel's basic premise of a continuity between the pagan cult and early Christian worship. The faith of its participants, less the cultic enactment, sets the pagan and Christian decisively apart.[90] Louth is less interested in recovering an ancient meaning of *mysterion* than he is in tracing its diachronic development towards 'mysticism'.[91] Pickstock, whilst mounting a defence of Casel against Bouyer and others, does little more than Agamben by reasserting Casel's basic historical and philological findings.[92] In Agamben's unquestioned reiteration of Casel's position, it is as if the impetus for liturgical reform is being reactualised in the present. Not only that, but by locating – with Casel – the roots of the New Testament's 'mystery' in ancient ritual predating the New Testament, Agamben opens the possibility that the same ancient 'mystery' could be at work in non-theological sources, such as literature.

Second, Agamben sources this understanding of 'mystery' from the New Testament: 'the economy of the mystery' in Ephesians, the mystery of the drama of Pilate's interrogation of Jesus in the Gospels, and the implication of 'mystery' in Paul's eschatological message of 2 Thessalonians. In *The Kingdom and the Glory*,

[87] For instance: KGy, UG, OD, PJ, ME, FT. I have yet to find any secondary criticism which considers this aspect.
[88] Casel 2016, 9, underlining added.
[89] It "has given rise to interminable discussions among theologians and historians of liturgy" (OD33).
[90] Schmemann 2003, 104–9.
[91] 'Afterword (2006)', in: Louth 2007, 200–214, especially 204–5.
[92] Pickstock, 'Liturgy and the Senses', in: Milbank, Žižek, and Davis 2010, 126–27, especially 127n1.

Agamben argues that in Ephesians 3.9 (and, more distantly, 1.9-10), what became known as the "mystery of the economy" actually represents a reversal of Paul's original meaning, namely "*οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου*" – "the economy of the mystery". What is at stake is not a mysterious "plan of salvation", but the realisation or administration of the soteriological mystery which is now fully revealed (KGy23, OD17). 'Mystery' as "'sacred drama'" is evident in Agamben's portrayal of the (Johannine) trial of Jesus before Pilate – a drama in seven scenes (PJ15-26). The drama of the trial narratives lies in how "the life of the divine had entered the temporal". In terms of the spectators of that drama, their "human experience had been made the vehicle of a divine happening… their life itself had become, for this reason, a mystery" (PJ54). Finally, in *Mystery of Evil*, in order to interpret the notorious *mysterium iniquitatis* in the Vulgate's translation of 2 Thessalonians 2, Agamben goes further into a definition of *mystery*, drawing out the dramatic conditions created by the text of the epistle. "'[*M*]*ysterion*' indicates a praxis, an action or a drama in the theatrical sense of the term as well, that is, a set of gestures, acts, and words through which a divine action or passion is efficaciously actualized in the world and time for the salvation of those who participate in it" (ME28). This specifies both the dramatic implication of the word 'mystery', but also the performative 'efficacious actualisation' in space and time for its participants. Mystery is "not a secret," but "something that is said and manifested… by means of which this wisdom is expressed and revealed" (ME29-30). Mystery is thus correlated to history as well as liturgy, a once and for all happening which goes on decisively affecting human experience in time. In fact, "mystery and history correspond without remainder" (ME30). Agamben's 'mystery' therefore is a key qualitative feature of the experience of time and its understanding.

Third, for Agamben, the 'mystery' of ancient pagan rite can be observed in contemporary secular literature. If 'mystery' is the principal animating concept that defines Agamben's 'liturgy', then the presence and influence of 'mystery' within other non-theological literature implies that liturgy need not as a concept be restricted to Christian worship. Indeed, the novel, not Christian liturgy, may "best convey the meaning of the mystery" (UG33).[93] Agamben offers this somewhat elusive explanation:

> The novel presents the human and earthly element as the vehicle, even if in *parodic form*, of divine incident in such a manner that the anxieties and qualms,

[93] Williams calls this sort of treatment 'indirect', considering the parody of Christ in texts such as Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. Williams, 'Imagining Christ in Literature', in: Murphy 2018, 491.

> the hopes and the strivings of the initiatory practice correspond exactly to the adventures and misadventures of the protagonist. The interweaving of situation and event, relation and circumstance, that the novel rings round a character is that which makes the character's life like a mystical experience which we are meant not to explain so much as to contemplate, as one would an initiation. If there is somewhere today where an echo of the ancient mysteries can then be heard, it is not in the liturgical splendour of the Catholic Church but in the extreme life resolutions offered by the novel form… the novel places us before a *mysterion* in which life itself is at once that which initiates us and that into which we are initiated (UG33-34, emphasis added).

What, fourth, does Agamben mean by "parodic form"? There is an "intimate solidarity that binds mystery to parody" (Pro41). Parody, like the definition of 'mystery' itself, is somewhat limited in its modern comedic sense (Pro38-9). For Aristotle, *para ten oiden* referred to an emerging performance practice whereby words and music, previously held recitative-like together, were now separated (Pro39). There was comedic effect in this separation, but, more profoundly, the separation witnessed to a "rupture" of "the 'natural' bond between music and language" (Pro40). Viewed diachronically, contemporary literature still bears the marks of that rupture, still "carries in itself the mark of its separation from song" (Pro40). Parody then operates by the rupture inherent within it. Certain events or facts are unnarratable, like the scission between words and music. Parody exists by pointing to a "space beside" itself; the tension in the narrated event lies in its reference beyond itself to that which it parodies. The "intimate solidarity" between mystery and parody (Pro41) lies, similarly, in the fact that a sacred mystery can never be represented, other than through parody. Even in the Christian Eucharistic liturgy, the presentation of a mystery-as-sacred-action can only be 'alongside' the original mystery, respectfully distant from the mystery itself. "[A]ny other attempt to evoke [the mystery] falls into bad taste and bombast. In this sense, we can call the liturgy of the mass, the representation par excellence of the modern mystery, parodic" (Pro41-42).

Such is the content, therefore, of Agamben's 'mystery'. It is defined through its predecessors in ancient sacred rite, a definition which Agamben argues is consistent with the meaning of the New Testament writers. Secular literature, too, shares that common root. There is a serious 'parody' at work, both in the Eucharist and in the novel, of the representation respectfully 'alongside' of the original mystery. Nevertheless, 'mystery' – and its parodic representation – affects the understanding and experience of time in the present *particularly*.

WHAT IS LITURGY?

With less detailed eloquence than the like of Jean-Yves Lacoste, for Agamben 'mystery' simply is the content of liturgy; or rather, liturgy is the performance in parodic form of the sacred mystery to which it refers. Mystery and liturgy become for Agamben virtual synonyms (OD35). If "'mystery' simply meant gestures, acts and words through which divine action was effectively realized in time and in the world for the salvation of mankind", then, "[i]n the same manner, the Christian liturgy is also a 'mystery celebration' in which the redemptive work of Christ is *rendered present* in and through the Church" (UG31, emphasis added). Schmemann, criticising Casel's work, demonstrates the reductiveness of such a position.[94] The nature of this 'rendering present' is crucial to Agamben's understanding of time: it represents the form *par excellence* of *how* a 'text' might qualitatively affect the experience of time in the present, where the nexus between understanding and experience is most keenly perceived.

> The liturgy is, in truth, not very mysterious at all, to the point that one can say that, on the contrary, it coincides with perhaps the most radical attempt to think a praxis that would be absolutely and wholly effective. The mystery of the liturgy is, in this sense, the mystery of effectiveness (ODxii).

But there is a twist. As I argued in the previous section, for Agamben, 'liturgy' is not confined to Christian ritual, but can also be encountered in the novel. This represents a 'secular liturgy'. I treat both below.

The Christian liturgy, for Agamben, entails effective performance in the present. It is where the "mystery of the trinitarian economy reaches its actualisation"; the liturgy "is the mystery of this praxis and this operativity" (OD28). What makes Christian liturgy the example *par excellence* of a performative text, qualitatively altering the experience of time in the present, is its soteriological affect: the being it brings about is purely effective (OD49). Christ's salvific action is not only presented as a "liturgy" (Heb8.2,6), but he himself is considered the high priest of the action in which he is the sacrifice (9.14) (OD8). "Christ coincides without remainder with his liturgy – he is essentially liturgy – and precisely this coincidence confers on his liturgy its incomparable efficacy" (OD8). Through its re-presentation of Christ, liturgy, somewhat controversially, is the very means of salvation.

[94] By referring to baptism: Schmemann 2003, 108–9.

Agamben uses "*integralmente*" again to describe this 'integral/full' connection between the two: "The liturgical mystery is not limited to representing the passion of Christ, but in representing it ["in that moment and in that place" (CA10)], it realises its effects, so that one can say that the presence of Christ in the liturgy coincides totally [*integralmente*] with its effectiveness" (OD40/AD54). So, just as mystery is synonymous with liturgy, and just as liturgy is synonymous with actualisation – qualitatively affecting the experience of the present – so, then, mystery, too, is synonymous with that performance. "*The mystery of the liturgy coincides totally* [integralmente] *with the mystery of operativity*" (OD55/AD69 italics original).

However, *any* text which operates as a serious 'parody' of a sacred 'mystery' might in fact have a greater effect on our experience of time in the present than Christian liturgy. For Agamben, in a novel's dramatization of the divine/human, eternal/temporal encounter via the parody of an earthly protagonist, the reader is initiated into "life itself". The role of the reader is "not to explain" the instantiation in the novel of "the character's life like a mystical experience… so much as to contemplate, as one would an initiation." The *mysterion* is both "that which initiates us, and that into which we are initiated" (UG33-34, FT3). As the character of the novel experiences the 'mystery' of the divine/human interaction in the machinations and events of its story, and hence itself is an initiate, so too the reader, contemplating those events, also becomes an initiate, witnessing *and experiencing* the initiation which is the subject of the mystery. The experience of this secular liturgy – the novel which presents something alongside the original *mystery* – initiates 'real life', just as much as baptism initiates new life in Christian liturgy. The experience of time, as well as its understanding, is qualitatively altered through that initiation.

So, Agamben's (reductionist) understanding of liturgy – whether Christian or secular – is its ability both to initiate us and to present that into which we are to be initiated. The qualitative experience of time is not only altered intrinsically by the performative nature of these texts, but altered *par excellence* through a new status being conferred on the participant: whether as forgiven – a juridical pronouncement of grace, the soteriological effect being entirely coincident with the pronouncement itself; or as initiate, an ontology qualitatively altered by new "life" within a new group.

PERFORMING LITURGIES

In Chapter two, I argued for the ability of texts to 'perform' in the present experience of those that encounter them. As "understanding" is not a matter of static

concepts, but "an entire experience" that must be grasped, performative texts intrinsically involve that experience. Thus far in Chapter three, I have argued that a particular kind of text, Agamben's 'liturgy', is an example of such a text *par excellence*. Agamben's definitions of mystery and liturgy emphasise sacred drama, a praxis which affects the present just as the originating action itself represented the divine/human encounter. So, in this section I return to the Franciscan rules of life for their liturgical performance; before, in the next section, assessing aspects of Agamben's writing which are – on his definition – themselves liturgical.

In the Franciscan rules-of-life, there is a nexus between time and worship such that the two interrelate. And there is also an intrinsic connection made between worship and Gadamer's "entire experience", life itself. First, the rule of life instils in the Cenobite an entirely different experience of time which is not filled with homogenous chronological instants, but with worship. The *horologium* ('clock') was originally a book "that contains the order of the canonical Offices according to the hours of the day and night" (HP19). It constituted in that way a *horologium vitae* – clock of life. But due to the primitive nature of the instruments at their disposal, in reality the book of hours represents "a total hourly scansion of existence, in which every moment has its corresponding Office or duty" (HP21), and thus "the whole of life [is transformed] into an Office by way of temporal scansion" (HP22). "[T]he cenobitic project can be defined", by contrast to the claim of Christian liturgy's 'sanctification of time', "as a sanctification of life by means of 'time'" (HP24). Time, here, is nothing more nor less than worship: it is not a case of time governing the 'when' of worship, but rather worship governing the '*nunc*' of time. Indeed, the only experience of time is through worship.

Second, there is a close nexus between the notion of the rule, and the life which they form. "[O]bservance of these rules, entails not so much a doctrinal, theological or juridical implication, as simply forming a life" (HP94). The rules themselves do not regulate the life: rather, they create a form of life governed by liturgy. This life-formation has a "relation" which is "at once antithetical and tightly entangled" (HP116-7). One side of the relation is the transformation of life into liturgy. The 'hours' have no significance as chronological time, but only as delineators of worship. The other side of the relation, paradoxically, is that liturgy itself is transformed into life. As Agamben says "*to the liturgicisation of life, there corresponds here a total vivification of the liturgy*" (HP116-7, emphasis original). Liturgy is not denotative, an *anamnetic* representation. Rather, liturgy is fully embodied as effective mystery-as-sacred-action. Hence, the monk who is the subject of these rules is "a being who is defined solely by his form of life" (HP117), a form of life which is pure liturgy. A liturgy performed with regard to its purest performative ontology is

nothing other than an expression of life itself. Agamben's understanding of time is that it can be subsumed within the act of worship.

AGAMBEN'S LITURGIES

Agamben's writing not only revivifies texts with liturgical aspects to them; there are also liturgical elements inscribed within Agamben's own work. He not only mandates an understanding of time which requires an entire experience, without which the very possibility of understanding is lost. He also adopts a form – the liturgical – where that entire experience of time is engaged *par excellence*. If there were not such an inscription – if there were not an *experience* in time of the effectiveness of liturgy, and of the formation of a life through liturgy, then our 'understanding' of time would be impoverished. I focus in this section on two works which display this liturgical performance: Agamben's self-conscious reactivation of the liturgical ending of Gershom Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*[95] in *The Fire and the Tale*; and *Pulcinella*, which parodically holds Christological and particularly soteriological implications.

The Fire and the Tale

Liturgy and its performance is a key concern of *The Fire and the Tale*. I will analyse two liturgical aspects here: the "breaking out" in a new guise of Scholem's Jewish liturgical mysticism; and liturgical phrases from Christian advent liturgies which appear in an essay dealing with the proximity of the Kingdom.

The first essay of Agamben's *The Fire and the Tale*, its title essay, opens with the tale with which Scholem concludes his *Jewish Mysticism*. The tale concerns liturgical action. A Rabbi, faced with a "difficult task… go[es] to a certain place in the woods, light[s] a fire and meditate[s] in prayer". Those actions together effect what "*he had set out to perform*" – it "*was done*". Yet the liturgical performance of subsequent generations of Rabbis, despite the precise actions of the first Rabbi no longer being available, are similarly efficacious. In the second generation, the fire can no longer be lit. In the third generation, the meditations are no longer known. In the fourth generation, not even the place in the woods is known. In that final generation,

[95] Scholem 1995.

then, all that remains is the telling of the story. "And, the story-teller adds, *the story which he told had the same effect as the actions of the other three*."[96]

The regular liturgical action – going somewhere, performing an action, and praying – just like performative language, is efficacious: "what [the Rabbi] set out to perform was done". The precise action is unimportant, however. Rather, the effectiveness of the performance appears to consist in the constant 'relating-alongside' to the original action. Either it is related-alongside by the regressive imitative steps; or, finally, merely the telling of the story itself is sufficient. And, of course, if the mere telling of the story is sufficient – like a 'parody' – then *Scholem's own recounting* of this story is "sufficient": what Scholem himself "set out to perform" by this retelling "was done".

There is a paradox in Scholem's retelling. As the final words of his lecture series, it is, on the one hand, Scholem's 'closure' of Jewish Mysticism. It "symbolizes the decay of a great movement". On the other hand, it represents a performance of a liturgical transformation, a transformation from action to the tale. Scholem continues: "[t]he story is not ended, it has not yet become history, and the secret life it holds can break out tomorrow in you or in me. Under what aspects this invisible stream of Jewish mysticism will again come to the surface we cannot tell."[97]

The tale is what Agamben would term a serious parody. By citing it in the opening of *The Fire and the Tale*, therefore, Agamben is self-consciously seeking to "break out" the "secret life" of the tale – its performativity – in another guise. Agamben's essay, and indeed the whole collection which shares its title, is therefore already set apart, not as an appreciation or intellectual understanding of Scholem's tale, but as a new performance of it, one which alters the experience of time in the present of the reader. For Agamben, the breaking out of the tale relates directly to the question of existence – what I termed in Chapter one: 'understanding the present'. "Existence", he concludes the title essay,

> little by little loses its mystery… It is, in the end, only a story… Until one day – perhaps not the last, but the second to last – existence finds again for an instant its enchantment and all of a sudden atones for its disappointment. What has lost its mystery is now truly and irreparably mysterious (FT10).

[96] Scholem 1995, 349–50, emphasis added. Agamben's translation has the more abbreviated ending: "once again, this was sufficient" (FT2).
[97] Scholem 1995, 350.

The aspect of time in question here, crucially, is that it is "perhaps not the last, but the second to last". Recall from Chapter one that for Agamben, 'the time that remains', *ho nyn kairos*, is penultimate: it is the "penultimate [realities] which make up our everyday human and social condition" (CK18,ME14). So, living in this penultimate time is the very time when the tale and the mystery have their relationship re-established, when the parody and the mystery to which it relates are established in their mutual relation once more. The guise of Agamben's resurfacing of Scholem's "invisible stream" is the parodic representation of the experience of Messianic time, the penultimate time, *ho nyn kairos*.

The whole collection *The Fire and the Tale*, then, becomes a performance of the recovery of Scholem's liturgical tale in the new guise of Messianic time. In the essay 'Parable and Kingdom', Agamben treats Jesus' parables (another of the '*para*' word-group) within his definition of 'parody'. The parables draw attention to the nearness of that which they are a parody. In the recognition of the nearness of the language of the parable to the Kingdom itself, phrases from the Christian observance of Advent emerge liturgically from the text of the essay.

First, then, the structure of the parable as being 'parodic'. There is an "implicit link between the structure of parable and the Messianic kingdom" (TR42). The parables are parables of language as much as they are of the kingdom.

> [N]ot only are the kingdom and the terms of the parable placed next to one another (*para-ballo*), but the discourse on the kingdom and the kingdom itself is also placed side by side, so that the understanding of the parable coincides with the *logos tes basileias*." (TR42-43).

In that sense, Agamben demonstrates that Jesus' parables are themselves quintessentially 'Kingdom-bringing' language at three levels. Just like the parody, the parable *creates* a likeness between the Kingdom and grain/mustard seed (and so on), such that without that similarity the Kingdom's presence would not be understood (FT20). Thus, second, the Kingdom first and foremost is perceived *as a similarity* (FT20). Finally, they also assert and create that proximity of Kingdom to the time and space of the present (W36). As such they are vital texts for the new Messianic era (TR53).[98] Each parable reasserts a fresh tension between itself and the heart of the ''mystery'-as-revealed-action-in-Christ'. And with that fresh tension, the

[98] Agamben does not discuss the discrepancy here that on his own basis the *ho nyn kairos* is only launched and completed with Jesus' resurrection.

language of the parable itself creates its own new reality in the language of Jesus' hearers.

There is a liturgical performance even as Agamben presents his findings of the parabolic nearness of language to the Messianic kingdom. Agamben invokes Christian Advent liturgy. Those who understand – and thus experience – the proximity of parable and Kingdom, possess, in the words of one of the Advent 'O' Antiphons, the key of David, "that openeth, and none shall shut, and that shutteth, and none openeth" (FT25). Similarly, the correct response to understanding this proximity of the Kingdom through language is to utter the Adventine prayer: *marana tha*, the Hebrew word which Paul uses in the letter closing of 1 Corinthians. "To speak in parables [*parabolare*] is simply to speak [*parlare*]: *Marana tha*, "Come, Lord!" (FT32). Without such an instinctive response ("experience"), the very possibility of understanding is revealed to have been lost. In the reading of Agamben's essay, as much as the reading of the parables themselves, the proximity of language to the Messianic kingdom is being performed. The essay's argument is to recover the Messianic importance of the parables, that is, the way they convey the proximity of the Kingdom in the present, and even the Messianic potential of the word 'parable' itself. In that recovery, a liturgy is created so that the reader of the essay, and the words 'on the lips' of the writer, become themselves invocation of the proximity of the Kingdom.

Pulcinella

I argued in Chapter two that Agamben's *Pulcinella* can be read as seeking not just understanding, but to affect the experience of time in the present through its drama of mirrors, and of the resistance to reading of Pulcinella's archaic Neapolitan dialect. Now, in the context of liturgies, I argue for three liturgical aspects of the drama which affect the experience of time in the present *par excellence*: the relationship between *parabasis* and parody; the "re-presentation" of Christ through the Pulcinella drawings and frescoes; and Pulcinella's parodic "rendering effective of Christ's salvific action" (CA10,OD30).

Parabasis, as I showed in Chapter 1, is a qualitative feature of Agamben's Messianic time – an interruption or transgression in time experienced by the spectator/reader, which explodes the continuum of history. I have argued in this Chapter about the importance of the figure of 'parody' to the nature of secular liturgy: how songless literature draws attention to its own rupture from melody; and how it stands alongside the mystery itself, modestly presented so as not to describe the mystery directly. *Parabasis* and parody can and do coexist, and do so in

Pulcinella. "[T]he tension between stage and reality" which Agamben's 'parody' creates "is relaxed" in *parabasis* "and parody encounters what is perhaps its only resolution" (Pro50). *Parabasis*, like a moment in literature when the reader is directly addressed by the narrator, alters the situation of the reader/spectator. In that altered state,

> the reader accedes not to the place of the author but to a sort of space between worlds. If parody, the split between song and speech and between language and world, commemorates in reality the absence of a proper place for human speech, in parabasis this heart-wrenching atopia becomes, for a moment, less painful and is cancelled out into a homeland, as it were (Pro51).

Pulcinella is full of its own *parabasis*. The reader is regularly addressed by a voice which appears to be the narrator. It is rendered in italics, from the very opening "*Lying on the grass under the Janiculum Hill*" where the narrator's "*last labour*" is described as having been "*nearly reached*" (P3-4); to the discovery of the two worlds – the historical and the mythical – in correspondence (P29); to the description of *parabasis* itself (P41-43); to the conclusion of the *Entertainment*, when the voice in italics gives the profession of 'faith' "'*I am Pulcinella*' *is his – and every person's, mine as well – extreme profession of faith*" (P125). In each of the 'Four Scenes', at significant junctures, the narrator steps out from the stage. The parody of which Pulcinella is both the chief protagonist and the subject, is "completed" in the *parabasis* of the narrator's italicised interjections. In those moments, the mask is removed, and the audience/Agamben's-reader experiences the only "resolution" of the tension created by the parody. So, *Pulcinella* involves both the standing-alongside of parody, and parody's "resolution" through *parabasis*, a textual 'movement' which continually alters its relationship with the reader such that the reader's experience of time in the present, as in liturgy, is constantly manipulated.

Within that drama of constantly altering relations between reader/spectator and narrator/Pulcinella, the figure of Christ is "re-presented". In Tiepolo's 18th Century drawings and frescoes, Pulcinella takes the place of – effaces, even – Christ. In Agamben's *Entertainment*, by contrast, the Christ-image, of which Pulcinella is a parody, is reasserted. The front cover of Tiepolo's *Divertimento per li Regazzi* (*Entertainment for Kids*) (1797) shows the hunched-back aspect of a Pulcinella figure. He stares melancholically at a sepulchre, with the title of the book inscribed thereupon. On the sepulchre rests a ladder, and at its foot are some firewood, wine in vessels, and a plate of gnocchi. The scene evokes, in Agamben's assessment, an engraving Tiepolo undertook fifty years earlier: *Via Crucis*. In that engraving, the

sepulchre is in the same position, but instead of 'Divertimento' engraved on it, there is the title 'Via Crucis'. A cross and a crown of thorns lie on the ground where Pulcinella stands in the later drawing, and in the far distance is a hill, upon which stand two other crosses (P72-77).

"The Christological references in [Tiepolo's] *Entertainment* can easily increase", Agamben surmises. "Pulcinella triumphant on a donkey among watching companions certainly recalls the entrance of Jesus at Jerusalem; *The Burial of Pulcinella* (drawing 103) resembles a deposition… even the gnocchi and wine that are always laid out evoke the species of the Eucharistic sacrifice in which the body of Christ is present" (P78). Pulcinella – for Agamben as much as for Tiepolo – is a buffoon, but he is also a parody of Christ. Whereas Tiepolo may have consciously effaced the image of Christ and its symbolism in the figure of Pulcinella, Agamben's reassertion of the preceding Christ-related images, and drawing of Christological associations, reasserts – reactualises in the present, even – the sacred mystery of which Pulcinella, it is thereby revealed, is a secular parody.[99]

Third, in the parody of Pulcinella, the "salvific action… of Christ is rendered effectively present" (CA10, OD30). Agamben describes Pulcinella as experiencing a parody of salvation. Through that parody, together with the correspondences to Christ, the reader's understanding of salvation embraces an experience of salvation.[100] Agamben erects a judicial scenario. Human beings are "responsible for all of [our] actions", and therefore subject to rightful trial and conviction. In the case of Pulcinella, however, a mystery of freedom "explodes": Pulcinella's body and will "separate their fates and wander away from each other" (P115). The body and the will are divested of responsibility. Pulcinella's body expresses "the absolute lack of all will and all character, being caught at every instant in flagrant, intransigent, blameless abulia." The will, on the other hand, abnegates its 'willing' – "'I might have been able to want to, but I didn't dare want to.'" The judicial "*actio*" therefore lies in the liberation of the "empirical character from any reference to an intelligible character, and of the intelligible character from any function of moral or legal imputation" (P115). This is the parodic soteriology in Pulcinella. Not only do Tiepolo's engravings and frescoes become 'texts' within the meaning of the performativity of art (Chapter two); not only can Tiepolo's art create a secular liturgy of its own through the parodic recollection of the mystery of Christ's passion; but

[99] The nearness of the two figures in Agamben's mind is evident by his recently published reflection on Gauguin's *Self-portrait Near Golgotha*. Agamben asks: "if every self-portrait harbours a testimony about oneself, what does this painting bear witness to? What has been seen by this man, reminiscent of Christ or Pulcinella, who looks at us from Golgotha?" (St115-6).

[100] Pulcinella is 'everyone's saviour, saved by no one.' Antonio Fava, "Official Recognition of Pulcinella," in Chaffee and Crick 2017, 111.

also, Agamben's *Pulcinella* text itself, presenting the 'mystery' of the effectiveness of Pulcinella's shedding of culpability, can present itself as a parody on which we are "meant not to explain so much as to contemplate, as one would an initiation". We are placed, in the mirrors of *Pulcinella*, "before a *mysterion* in which life itself is at once that which initiates us and that into which we are initiated" (UG33-34).

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS: RECAPITULATION

In this Chapter, 'Time and Liturgy', I made a qualitative step with respect to the argument of Chapter two. Without an experience of an account of time, the very possibility of understanding is missed. Instead of asking '*how*' Agamben's understanding of time is experienced, however, I asked in this Chapter: '*how, particularly*?'. The answer is Agamben's 'liturgy'. Liturgy is the mode through which the understanding of Messianic time is most particularly conveyed and therefore experienced. I showed first the symbiotic relationship between Agamben's understanding of 'mystery' and 'liturgy', following the work of Odo Casel. By regrounding the definition of 'mystery' in ancient cultic practice, Agamben sheds interpretative light both on the New Testament's '*mysterion*', but also implies a separate extant genealogy from those same ancient rites to their modern parodic form – the novel. I then assessed Agamben's notion of 'parody'. 'Mystery', 'parody', and of course 'liturgy' itself, can be filled with theological *or* profane content, meaning that the experience of Agamben's understanding of time is not limited to Christian liturgy. As was the case in Chapter two, Agamben is drawn to liturgical texts not just as a philosopher and literary critic, but also as a creator of liturgy in his own right. I demonstrated this with two examples. First, Agamben's new use for Scholem's 'end' of *Jewish Mysticism*. And second, Agamben's profane liturgy of *Pulcinella*, in which the readers are implicated by *parabasis*, the "re-presentation" of Christ, and the parodic account of salvation in Pulcinella's shedding of culpability.

The findings of this Chapter have Christological implications which build upon the implications I raised in Chapters one and two. I gather together both Barth and Moltmann alongside Agamben to begin a challenge to Christian liturgical theology, in particular Eucharistic theology as it pertains in the Western Christian Church. Arising from the analysis of this Chapter, that challenge is particularly heard through Agamben's emphasis of Christ's 'Recapitulation' over and against *anamnesis* as the principal animating feature of Eucharistic practice.

Anamnesis (as a term of Christian liturgical theology) is drawn from Christ's instruction at the Last Supper to "do this" (the action/eating together) "in

remembrance [ἀνάμνησιν] of me" (Luke 22.19, 1 Corinthians 11.24-25). The quality of this *anamnesis* as an experience of time in the present has inspired many and varied debates across different Christian traditions of the East and West. Agamben makes the rather novel intervention, however, that *anamnesis* should be accorded less significance than the notion (from Ephesians 1.10 and Irenaeus) of Christ's 'Recapitulation'. Agamben's reading of 'Recapitulation' entails a completed summation of all things – including all times – already achieved in Christ. The Eucharist should, if animated by this Christological assertion, always have an eschatological completion as the touchstone of its quality.[101] By according precedence to 'Recapitulation' (understood in this way) as the quality of time experienced in the Eucharist, *anamnesis* is cast in the role of a memorial only, a backward-looking representation. In this light, Recapitulation is the qualitative exemplar *par excellence* of Agamben's understanding of Messianic time, whereas *anamnesis* becomes likened to secular quantitative time. Before considering the eschatological ecclesiology prescribed by Moltmann, the eschatology that looked for a sacramental ecclesiology in Barth, and the drama of Recapitulation in Agamben's *Pulcinella*, I begin with an analysis of 'Recapitulation' as it appears in its principal source, Ephesians 1.10.

Ephesians 1.10 and Recapitulation

> [H]e has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time[s] [*καιρῶν*], to gather up/recapitulate [*ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι*] all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph1.9-10 NRSV, emphasis added).[102]

Many different synonyms have been suggested for *ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι*. Martin Kitchen suggests six: "1.'to re-enact, to repeat', 2.'to sum up', 3.'to rule', 4.'to unite', 5.'to bring to a conclusion, to crown', 6.'to start again'."[103] To focus on a plurality of interpretative possibilities, however, rather misses the Messianic and performative aspect of Ephesians. The opening of Ephesians represents a song of worship – a *berakah* – designed for the present expression of thanks to God. One of its distinctive features is the inclusion, within that Jewish genre, of Jesus the Messiah as the object of worship, Israel's God and Messiah. There is an urgency and a

[101] Agamben is intriguingly close to writers from the modern Eastern Orthodox tradition, such as Zizioulas and Schmemann, who speak of *anamnesis* as the '*memory of the future*', or of the eucharist being not an *anamnesis* but itself Christ's *parousia* - a repetition of a completing event. Zizioulas 2004, 180 (emphasis original); Schmemann 2003, 72–73.
[102] For present purposes, I will make Agamben's assumption that Paul is the author of Ephesians.
[103] Kitchen 1994, 41.

significance conferred on the present moment – on the '*nunc*'. "[I]n the Messiah" every spiritual blessing has *already* been received (1.3), "in the Messiah" we are already 'the chosen people' (1.4), "in" Christ that his grace has been bestowed (1.5), "in him" we have received redemption (1.7), and "in Christ" that the mystery of his will *has been made* known (1.9). This urgency of 'now' is just as keenly felt elsewhere in Ephesians (2.13, 3.6, 3.10), and elsewhere in Paul (the *ho nyn* of Romans, and indeed 2Co5.16-17). There is no deferment to the "fullness of times", and certainly no warrant, as per the NIV, of transposing τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν into a future perfect tense: "to be put into effect *when the times will have reached* their fulfilment…"[104]

So to the word 'recapitulation' itself, and its implication for the understanding of time – especially the *experience* of that understanding. Outside of the Biblical canon, the term is rhetorical in nature. It entails, for Aristotle, Quintillius, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a summarising of potentially disparate material in a concluding statement.[105] By contrast, Paul's use of the word in Romans and Ephesians, the only usages in the New Testament, are eschatological.[106] Romans 13.9 argues that the *Torah* can be summed up (*ἀνακεφαλαιοῦται*) in the commandment "'Love your neighbour as yourself.'… love is the fulfilling [*πλήρωμα*] of the law." That the meaning of *ἀνακεφαλαιοῦται* here can be seen as closely connected to Ephesians 1.10 is evidenced by the similar close correspondence in the passages of πλήρωμα,[107] and indeed καιρος (Ro13.11). In Ephesians, then, like Romans, ἀνακεφαλαιοῦται and πλήρωμα work together: the fullness of time is the time when Christ's summing up occurs; the presence of the one who sums all things up indicates that the fullness of time has occurred.

In terms of the nexus between that understanding and its experience, the understanding of time is conveyed through the experience of the community. Just like Heidegger's reading of 2 Thessalonians, eschatology lends an impetus to right living. Recapitulation is not best answered by *Wass*, but *Wie*. The understanding of time and the altered experience in the present go hand in hand.

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[104] 'The Church is that part of the universe where the summing up of all things in Christ (1.10) has happened already': Muddiman 2001, 96. '[In] 1.10, the unification of the universe in Christ, the restoration of the divine rule of the universe has already taken place. If this were not so, talk of the "fulfilment of the fullness of the times" would be meaningless': Schnackenburg 1991, 61. Lincoln 2005, 34. Torrance 1998, 86. *Contra*: Hoehner 2002, 224–25; Cohick 2020, 106.

[105] Aristotle, 'Fragment 123' and *De Mundo* quoted in: Gibbs 1971, 119. Aristotle 2014, 362–63. Dionysius quoted in: Grant 1997, 37. Quintilianus 1995, VI.I.1 (382-3).

[106] For Lacoste, 'Recapitulation' and his Augustinian reading of '*distentio*' are closely linked. Lacoste 2018, 162.

[107] A point Agamben makes but no other Biblical commentator that I can presently discern (TR76).

Paul's eschatological thrust transforms the lexical examples of ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι in Paul's contemporaries and Classical predecessors. Those examples describe an *anamnetic* summing up of past in the present moment. In Ephesians 1.10 and Romans 13.9, by contrast, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι combined with the force of τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, not only refers to the drawing together of the past of creation into the present of the Messiah, but all 'times' (in the plural), future as well as past. A rhetorical 'summing up' has been introduced into a context of Christological praise. Ephesians 1.3-14's *berakah* can be seen itself as rhetorical persuasion, seeking to convince its listeners of a new understanding of time. But, through the experience of the performance of that song of worship, the completed work of Christ is actualised in the 'liturgical' experience of the community. "[R]ecapitulation", as Lacoste says, "is, in fact, more than a word. In the "living" we do in the present we already have a blueprint for it".[108]

Recapitulation in Moltmann, Barth and Agamben

In order to situate Agamben's reading of this passage within modern Christian theology, and its implications for Eucharistic theology and the understanding of time experienced within it, I gather together Moltmann and Barth with Agamben for the final critical comparison of this Dissertation. All three share a criticism of 'backward-looking only' *anamnesis*. Moltmann's solution, close to Agamben's, is the infusion of eschatology within the experience of the present, the blending of history and eschatology. Barth's work famously is left incomplete when it comes to sacramental theology, but there are fragments which point towards an understanding of the life of the Community in the power of the Spirit characterised by a double *parousia*, a tangible presence. Agamben, most strikingly, likens 'backward-looking only' *anamnesis* to the *non*-Pauline category of recapitulation (a rhetorical summing up), before expounding a view of Paul's Recapitulation which holds closest similarities with Moltmann's, whilst making some notable and dramatic departures of his own.

For Moltmann, just as eschatology should infuse the experience of time in the present, that infusion should happen most particularly in the life of the Church and its sacraments. *Anamnesis* without hope, without the *parousia* as "future made present… decays into a powerless historical recollection of a founder at the beginning of things" (CPS75). Rather, the Church should conceive of its liturgy and the experience of its time in the present Christologically, by perceiving the "openness of [Christ's] future. [The Church's] main problem", Moltmann continues,

[108] Lacoste 2018, 165.

is not Augustine and Kierkegaard's focus of "the relationship between time and eternity, or between" a Heideggerian relationship of "the present and the origin;" Rather, for Moltmann, with Bultmann in his sights, "it is the relationship between history and eschatology" (CPS75).

What is the solution to that problem? For Moltmann, the theological expression of time *par excellence* is found in the sacraments. They are "signs of the messianic era" (CPS243). The repeated observance of "the Lord's supper" is no ordinary *anamnetic* representation, "it is not the historical remembrance as such" (CPS250), but includes the eschatological orientation of doing so "until he comes" (1Co11.26, CPS250). The animating feature of the Lord's supper for Moltmann is therefore not remembrance, but "an eschatological *sign of history*":

> In the coincidence of remembrance and hope, history and eschatology… his past and his future are simultaneously made present… The Christian experience of time and the corresponding theological understanding of time will consequently take their bearings from the Lord's supper (CPS243, emphasis original).

Whilst "take their bearings from…" is a vague notation of relationship between the understanding of time and the Lord's supper, it nevertheless is precisely the relation which Agamben himself wants to draw with 'Liturgy' more widely. So, for Moltmann, the Church's understanding of time should most particularly be found in the sacraments, and in their blending of history and eschatology.

Barth can immediately be contrasted with this Sacramental account for an apparent lack of ecclesiology. It is too hasty to say he had no time for the sacraments. When asked about the Eucharist and intercommunion, he replied: "Well, do it! … What is said of the Communion in the Eucharist and so on: do it—without asking questions!"[109] I want to suggest a contrast between, on the one hand, two early views of Barth as they pertain to this question – namely the Göttingen lectures on Ephesians (1921-22) and the opening volume of *Church Dogmatics*; and, on the other, a suggestion, when it comes to *parousia* and volume III.2 of *Dogmatics*, of a more constructive eucharistic approach.

In the Ephesians lectures, Barth appears reluctant to create any 'opening' of Christ's future (per Moltmann) to the present experience of the community. Christ's

[109] Busch 2019, 226.

achievement, for Barth, is undoubtedly complete; it represents "fulfilled time, in the sea of incomplete".[110] But that completed 'recapitulation' of Christ in Ephesians 1.10 is something which is uniquely Christ's. Other than through revelation, it is beyond human knowing, "any human ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι is an illusion."[111] When it comes to 'The Word of God' in Volume I.1 of *Dogmatics*, whilst the sacraments are held together with preaching as the content of "Church Proclamation", it is clear as that early section proceeds that Barth's focus is on preaching – "the Word as the enacted divine event" (059) – and on rebutting 'Roman' views of the Mass.[112]

Coming to volume III.2 of *Dogmatics*, however, there is a reading of *parousia* from which a cashing out of sacramental theology might have been funded. The situation of the community is that "it is really the community of the last time" experiencing simultaneously, in the Spirit, the resurrection's inaugurated completion, and *parousia*'s consummation. The resurrection is not merely an event of history; similarly, "the Christ of the *parousia* cannot yield before" history, what would otherwise leave "only a profane and empty future not determined by him". The double proximity of Christ's resurrection and *parousia*, therefore, "is actual presence" (CDIII.ii.508-9). The precedent for this "actual presence" in the life of the community is the meals shared between the disciples and the resurrected Jesus. The disciples' experience was of "completion; not in a re-presentation and repetition,[113] as in the Romanist doctrine of the Mass, but in a simple and full enjoyment of its benefits" (CDIII.ii.502).

For Agamben, the significance of Ephesians 1.10, and the right appropriation of it both for our eschatological doctrine, and indeed for the philosophy of history, could hardly be greater. "This short verse is laden with meaning to the point that one could say that several fundamental texts in Western culture – such as the doctrine of apocastasis in Origen and Leibniz; repetition or retrieval [*Gjentagelse*] in Kierkegaard; the eternal return in Nietzsche; and repetition [*Wiederholung*] in Heidegger – are the consequences of an explosion of the meaning harboured within" (TR75).[114]

Agamben see in Recapitulation the perfect exemplar of the Benjaminian "secret index", and the operation of the Messiah on the qualitative experience of time. Recapitulation defines, even, the relationship between chronological and Messianic time (TR73). There is however an apparent disparity between Agamben's

[110] Barth 2010a, 116.
[111] Barth 2017, 114.
[112] Barth 2010a.
[113] Barth may well have sought to revise this rather brusque formulation in due course. Hunsinger 2008, 15-16.
[114] Agamben is not ignorant of the significance of Irenaeus to Recapitulation (KGy31-34).

reading of St Paul's 'recapitulation', and the 'recapitulation' in Pulcinella. As he reads Ephesians 1.10, Agamben's 'recapitulation' is characterised by fulfilment ('*pleroma*'), a summation, a "saturation [*riempimento*]" of times, even (TR75-76). It is so intrinsically connected to Messianic time itself, that with some familiar hyperbole, Agamben can say that the definition of 'Messianic time' "is a summary recapitulation of the past… The entire past is summarily contained, so to speak, in the present" (TR76-77).

In *Pulcinella*, however, the 'recapitulation' with which the reader is confronted in Tiepolo's 'Pulcinella' paintings is more Heideggerian: not as much characterised by "*pleroma*", as the perception of one's own time, and pure experience.

> Pulcinella is … the figure that something assumes when it has seen its time. In Christian theology, this figure is recapitulation: 'For the economy of the fullness of time, all things are recapitulated ["*ricapitolano* [*anakephalaiosasthai*]"] in Christ' (Eph1:10). It is only through a recapitulation that something – a certain time – can be the 'last', can be said to be completed (P11/PD17).

Nevertheless, it is in this transformation of personal experience that the contrast between recapitulation and *anamnesis* is most clear. The contrast is not only eschatological. It even works to invert 'remembrance' altogether, such that recapitulation becomes a 'forgetting'.

> *In what way do Venice and the life of Tiepolo recapitulate themselves in the 104 drawings in which the Entertainment describe the life of Pulcinella? This is not simply a question for memory. In classical rhetorical treatises, recapitulation is defined as a 'compendious anamnesis of that which has been widely said'. But, on close examination, Giandomenico's Pulcinellan anamnesis resembles more a forgetting tha[n] a remembering; it has more to do with laughing and crying than with the archives and registers of consciousness. For him, the fact that in the economy of the end of time all things are recapitulated in Pulcinella implies a new and different experience of history, of life and of time, one that is worth trying to understand* (P11-12, italics original).

Whereas recapitulation in Ephesians 1.10 is focussed on a single object – the work ('economy') of Christ, and the 'summing up' of all times in him, 'recapitulation' in *Pulcinella* seems to perpetuate an empty 'forgetfulness'. The 'fulfilment' of Ephesians' "fullness of times", the experience of the present has, apparently, been 'emptied', "a forgetting", not a "compendious… remembering".

What is the understanding of time which characterises this recapitulation? Agamben sees in Pulcinella a profane reversal of the 'recapitulation' of Quintillian (and others). It is not an *anamnetic* 'summing up', a compendious feat of memory. But the 'profane reversal' is precisely the point. This is the function of Agamben's parody. Recapitulation, here, is accorded characteristics which paint the contrast between it and *anamnesis* at its starkest. Recapitulation, in fact, becomes entirely about visceral *experience*, about emotion ("laughing and crying"), and about the experience of time as *caesurae*, as opposed to quantitative accumulation ("registers of consciousness"). Understanding has entirely become experience; in fact *the understanding of time* has entirely become experience, to the extent that understanding equates to *not knowing* – to forgetting.

There is a consensus, therefore, between Moltmann and Agamben that the understanding of time as experienced in the Eucharist should not be an *anamnesis* only, but a fulfilment. Moltmann refers to this as the 'making present' of the *parousia*. Barth too, when it comes to volume III.2 of *Dogmatics*, refers to an experience of time in the present which is, by the Spirit, "actual presence" of the double *parousia*. Agamben seeks to inscribe that performance more viscerally, however. Ephesians 1.10's 'Recapitulation', with its *pleroma*, its *kairos*, and its "saturation" of times even, is a figure of completed eschatology, which can be grasped in the present. It speaks of a 'now', the *ho nyn kairos* of Agamben's Romans. In fact, in the experience of time which 'Recapitulation' secures *par excellence*, the experience outweighs the understanding to the point that understanding is solely visceral experience – of laughing, or crying, or forgetting, even. What is left, as in Pulcinella, is pure *parabasis*, or *caesurae*, such that the liturgy is less about the content and remembrance, as it is an experience of salvation itself. The Eucharist, in that way "acts… *ex opere operato*… it is itself the event… we are not dealing with a representation in a mimetic sense, but with a (re)presentation in which the salvific action… of Christ is rendered effectively present" (CA10, OD30). Agamben's understanding of time is that it can be experienced most particularly in the Eucharist, but that experience dissolves any forensic understanding into visceral experience. Like his reversal of Aristotle's aspect – from actuality to potentiality – recapitulation, as an experience of the understanding of time, represents less a remembrance of things past than a forgetting.

CONCLUSION

I now offer a recapitulation of the argument of this Dissertation. Agamben's understanding of time is focussed on temporality: the experience of time in the present. Whilst there are phenomenological elements to that understanding, to appropriate them into theology (as, increasingly, many are) without perceiving Agamben's more systematic arguments, fails to recognise his wider contribution to theology and philosophy. Agamben's wider contribution is that the very possibility of understanding time depends upon there being an experience of that time conveyed from the text to the reader/viewer. The "possibility of understanding… coincides fully [*integralmente*]" – integrally, truthfully, filled in a *pleroma* of Gadamer's 'entire experience' – "with the experience of such a time" (TR2). Indeed, the coincidence of the understanding of time and its experience is most "fully [*integralmente*]" expressed in the liturgy (OD40,55).

Chapter one focussed on *qualities* of Agamben's understanding of time: contraction, *caesurae*, *parabasis*, and constellations. The Messiah, whose theological contours I then demonstrated Agamben plots, is the Judeo-Christian figure – as much as an event – who decisively affects this qualitative change, "*una transformazione qualitativa del tempo vissuto*" (CR7). In both these early sections, I indicated how best *within theology* to situate Agamben's thought on the question of time and its experience. He uses scripture as a resource for the qualitative features of time and for his notion of the Messiah. He establishes intertextual connections with Augustine and Kierkegaard's approaches to temporality. And he builds on, yet decisively develops, Benjamin's philosophy of history, in order to demonstrate the same anti-Hegelian polemic, whilst appropriating Benjamin's 'constellations' within a different framework, one where the Messiah has already entered time and is no longer awaited.

Chapter two then made a decisive qualitative step. Agamben's thinking is, if anything, more extensive when it comes to answering the question *how*, than the

question *what*. If experience is essential to the understanding of time, *how* is that experience secured? In order, first, to understand why the question of experience is necessary for understanding at all, I located Agamben within a hermeneutical genealogy of Heidegger (whose own move from *Wass* to *Wie* came in the context of reading Paul's eschatology), Gadamer, and Austin. If hermeneutics is the art of engaging an "entire experience of understanding" (per Gadamer), then 'performative' texts, on Agamben's definition, secure this unavoidably. So, there are texts that 'perform' – St Paul's letters, the Franciscan monastic rules, poetry, art, and the drama of Pulcinella. But the attempt to convey the understanding of time which emerges from these texts – in particular Paul's letter to the Romans – itself depends on the secondary writer's own performance. Agamben is not just an orchestrator, but a performer. I argued that Agamben adopts the eschatological poetic form of the *sestina* in *The Time That Remains* for this very purpose, as well as the insistence on speech over reading found in *Pulcinella*.

Chapter three then made a further qualitative adjustment. I no longer asked, simply, '*how?*', but: '*how, particularly?*'. Agamben's understanding of time is experienced *par excellence* in liturgy, as he defines it, and as he himself performs it. Agamben's 'liturgy', sourced from an ancient (if contested) notion of 'mystery', is both Christian and secular. It is 'parodic', held alongside a sacred mystery, neither seeking to replace that mystery nor repeating it, but nevertheless drawing attention to it as a drama. In liturgy, Messianic time is experienced and causes an interruption to a homogenous linear philosophy of history. Agamben dramatizes the liturgical experience of Messianic time through the new use he makes of the end of Scholem's *Jewish Mysticism* in *The Fire and the Tale*, rendering existence itself in its penultimate – *ho nyn kairos* – state. That dramatization incorrigibly invokes Christian liturgical phrases: the experience of writing and reading liturgically draws attention to the nearness of the Kingdom. Similarly, in *Pulcinella*, a parody of salvation occurs through the eponymous anti-hero's shrugging off of culpability. Agamben's understanding of time is dramatized *par excellence* through Christian liturgy, and through secular 'liturgy', which he sees as parodically carrying the flame of the ancient mystery.

The work of Agamben has doctrinal and methodological implications for Christology which I have been able briefly to indicate within my argument. With Chapter one's focus on the quality of the experience of Messianic time in the present, a challenge was made to the paradoxical 'living in the now and not yet'. The normal precedence given to the "not yet" over the "now" in the experience of the present is reversed by Agamben. Messianic time, for Agamben, is none other than *ho nyn kairos*, like Benjamin's *Jetztzeit*, "the now". With similar force against the apparent paradox of 'the now and not yet', I showed Barth's own qualitative response to the

problem of experience in the present between two *aeons*, namely Christ's and, 'in Christ', the Community's "turning [*Wende*]". Chapter two, with its focus on performance, and *how* Agamben's understanding of time is experienced, considered the *parousia*. A linear conception of time (with its roots in Kant's intuition and Hegel's necessity), whether it is adopted, like Schweitzer, to imply the earliest expectations for an imminent *parousia* were delayed, or, like Cullmann, to imply an awaited chronological point, should be rejected. *Parousia* is not something to be awaited to an end point, or indeed something whose non-appearance was a cause of disappointment to the earliest Christians, but, for Agamben, is graspable alongside the present at all times, the *kairos* which runs alongside and is interwoven with *chronos*. Moltmann and Agamben appear to share an *adventus* vocabulary to describe the qualitative experience of this nearness. But whereas for Moltmann there remains a role for a final moment of justice and renewal, when God will be all in all, for Agamben, that second '*parousia*', controversially, disappears. Chapter three, with its focus on liturgy, and how, *particularly*, Agamben's understanding of time is experienced, began a challenge to *anamnesis*, by providing a more eschatological reading of Recapitulation and its application to sacramental liturgy. On *this* question, for reasons that can be explored in further depth, Agamben moves closest both to his contemporaries in the Eastern Christian tradition, for instance Zizioulas and Schmemann, but also stands alongside Jean-Yves Lacoste, who closed his book *The Appearing of God* in typically lapidary fashion: "we must still have the courage to say that the experience of worship can anticipate the resurrection of the flesh".[115] Moltmann's vibrant eschatologically-oriented ecclesiology provided the grounding for further doctrinal comparison between Agamben and modern liturgical theology, whilst Barth's tentative forays into the sacraments at least indicated a willingness to entertain an ontology for the *parousia* as "actual presence" alongside the community.

Many accounts have been given of temporality in Christian theology, from Augustine to Kierkegaard to Moltmann. But Agamben's contribution to that discussion, although increasingly recognised and adopted into Christian theology, is most often misappropriated, by fileting too severely from one text from twenty years ago – *The Time that Remains*. Agamben's interest in time, and particularly the Christian theological expression of it, has continued throughout the last twenty years, and can be discerned (as recently as the new publications of 2022 (W and St)) in his writing about art, about drama, and of course as he writes about Christian theology – Scripture, or Tradition, itself. I have shown that the main governing attribute of Agamben's understanding of time is that 'understanding' is not a modern forensic compendious *anamnesis*, but an *experience*, something which

[115] Lacoste 2018, 198.

Agamben has gained from Heidegger and Gadamer, and developed far beyond those bounds. *How* that experience is affected, therefore, is crucial to understanding Agamben's understanding of time, and its implications for Christian doctrine more widely. My contribution, therefore, has not only been to introduce a wider perspective on Agamben's thinking than is typically received in Modern Theology; nor, simply, to introduce Agamben's theological work to a philosophical readership disinclined to notice it; nor, even, to point out the significance of Agamben's more systematic purpose on this question, namely performance. More significantly, the implications of my contribution are that liturgy, the experience *par excellence* of Messianic time in the present, holds promise for both the methodology and the doctrine of theology and philosophy, even if one were to pursue a less hyperbolic goal than Agamben's: "it is certain that the political philosophy of modernity will not be able to emerge out of its contradictions except by recovering more of its theological roots" (S69).

The Christological implications of Agamben's work in this area, therefore, go wider than simply the question of time and its doctrinal outworkings, such as 'the now and not yet', *parousia*, and *anamnesis*. If an experience is integral to understanding, then Christology more widely – both in methodology and in doctrine – could be rethought as a performative, liturgical exercise. It is that wider rethinking of Christology alongside Agamben's work of which this Dissertation has been the beginning.

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