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Messianic Language and the Idea of Prose: Benjamin and Agamben

The question whether there will be stories in a redeemed world, what these stories will be like and in what kind of language they will be told must seem futile to anyone for whom messianic redemption is itself nothing but a story that has outlived itself. Paradoxically, such a death certification only confirms the continuing life of this *grand récit*, in that it announces, like all messianisms, the end of an age-old story – the story of the eschatological imagination itself. If we accept, however, Walter Benjamin's dictum that every story legitimately invites the question: "How does it continue?";¹ then asking about the fate of stories after the end of times is as legitimate as wondering what follows after the *grands récits* themselves. A possible variation of this continuation can be read out of the current reception of Walter Benjamin's ideas about the relationship between language, epic forms and messianic expectations.

Giorgio Agamben – for decades the Italian editor of Benjamin's collected works and a leading figure in contemporary Continental thought – performs one of the most radical recoveries of his messianic thinking to date. In his references to Benjamin, which permeate his work from his early theoretical studies on aesthetics and language to his later juridical and political texts, Agamben forcefully wrenches Benjamin away from the views of his former *milieu*, especially from Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, as well as from his later readers, foremost among them Jacques Derrida. For Agamben, the constitutive inability of Derridean deconstruction to reach closure partakes in perpetuating the prevailing dismal condition of humanity through an attitude which he terms "a petrified or paralyzed messianism."² Agamben rejects Derrida's exhortation of an endless "expectation without expectation" and his definition of the messianic as an existential structure of infinite deferral and radical openness towards an incalculable, unpredictable future. Against Derrida, Agamben recovers aspects of Benjamin's messianic thinking that foreground the urgency to terminate deferral. This approach has significant consequences on his reading of Benjamin's reflections on messianic language.

In the years between 1982 and 1992 Giorgio Agamben wrote several essays on Benjamin's messianism with an emphasis on a redemptive reversal occurring at a "point of indifference," an empty spatial and temporal spot where beginning and end fall together and the course of history as a Hegelian "bad infinity" is brought to an end. A recurrent motif of these essays is a critique of various traditions of thought that rest on the structure of an infinite deferral. This critique becomes most concrete in the essay entitled "Language and History. Linguistic Categories and Historical Categories in Benjamin's Thought"³ originally published in Italian in 1983. In this essay, Agamben addresses Benjamin's messianic concepts of a universal history and the universal language that corresponds to it. Basing himself on Benjamin's understanding that history was born along with meaning, Agamben develops Benjamin's idea of a pure language in correlation with the end of history. In the course of his argumentation Agamben rejects various manifestations of the structure of deferral which, he believes, run counter to Benjamin's messianism. At first sight these opponents, which reach from Kabbalistic speculations to contemporary French thought, seem to have little in common, but they all imply a form of "infinite task," an *unendliche Aufgabe*.

One of the concepts of a universal language that Agamben, along with Benjamin, rejects is the attempt to artificially construct such a language as Ludwig Zamenhof did in 1887 with Esperanto. According to Agamben, Benjamin rejects this language because it maintains a conception of language as a sign system based on an infinite conservation of signification and meaning. Benjamin's rejection is mostly politically motivated: Esperanto is, in his eyes, a false construction because it prematurely claims a universality before universal justice – the only authentic manifestation of redemption – has been established. Agamben's mistrust of Esperanto is of a more linguistic-philosophical nature. Another avatar of infinite deferral negated by Agamben is a hermeneutics of infinite meaning, for which universal language is merely a regulative ideal. Agamben objects to Georg Gadamer's view that "all human speaking is finite in such a way that there is laid up within it an infinity of meaning to be explicated and laid out" (P, 56).⁴ Agamben rightly refers to Benjamin's own critique of an approach to interpretation as an "infinite task." Benjamin's idea of textual interpretation, the "mortification of the work" which ought to occur in the face of the danger of the respective historical moment, is succinctly described by Agamben as the opposite of a Gadamerian hermeneutics di-

rected towards the merging of the horizons of past and present. It remains, however, questionable whether Agamben's alternative to Gadamer, which he derives from Heidegger, namely a definitive "saying of the work" that captures its essence stripped of mediating comments and philological explanations could – and should – for Benjamin, be practiced in an unredeemed world.

The third possible interpretation of universal language rejected by Agamben stems from the tradition he sees extending from the Kabbalah via Gershom Scholem to Derrida and deconstruction. Common to them is the primacy of writing and its infinite deferral of true meaning. Instead, Agamben insists on the messianic necessity to bring the "infinite task" to an end and reach the point where language will be finally free of all presupposition and mediation, and is emptied out of all meaning, saying nothing but itself. In all these examples of Agamben's rejection of infinite deferral it remains unclear whether the correspondence between pure language and messianic redemption is one of precondition, analogy, causality or any other mode of relation (P, 57). It is likely – as is suggested in Benjamin's "Theological-Political Fragment" – that this other mode of relation will itself only come into being with the coming of the Messiah, and that his coming is this absence of relation itself.

In what follows I shall examine Agamben's reading of one passage by Benjamin and point out the correlation between Agamben's rejection of deferral – generally associated with Jewish messianism and explicitly described by Scholem as the characteristic mode of Jewish existence in a "Leben im Aufschub" (a life in deferral) – and his transformation if not outright undoing of the ethical and political dimension of Benjamin's messianism.

Preamble: Hegel's Aesthetics

Agamben's "Language and History" interprets a single passage from the paraliipomena to Benjamin's "On the Concept of History." It focuses on the link Benjamin establishes between "pure language" and "universal history" and retraces the correspondences that exist for Benjamin between genres of narration, history, and redemption. These correspondences arise out of a revision of Hegel's theory of aesthetics. In the traditional triadic scheme developed by Hegel, the epic, in which human experience is grasped in its unity and totality, stands at the beginning. The epic, the

most ancient account of history told in the form of heroic song, was later sublated into poetry, which was in turn sublated into disenchanting and no longer integral prose. In Hegel's progressive scheme, prose aims at regaining the original totality corresponding to the ancient epic, the genre in which universal history is to be told. For Benjamin, the conception of a constantly progressing and developing history, which in the end comes to itself in pure self-recognition, is just as much in crisis as continuous narration. His messianic thought is also modeled on the triad of Paradise, Fall, and still pending Redemption, but it is marked by discontinuities, which also characterize his theory of narration. But in modern times the genre of a continuously flowing, all encompassing narrative has lost its validity. From now on, narration must either signal the impossibility of its own continuity or mark its status as a mere model for the historiography of a messianic age that is yet to come.

Benjamin gave no clear answer to the question "in welcher Verfassung sich die 'erlöste Menschheit' befindet, welchen Bedingungen das Eintreten dieser Verfassung unterworfen ist und wann man mit ihm rechnen kann"⁵ ("what the situation of a 'redeemed humanity' might actually be, what conditions are required for the development of such a situation, and when this development can be expected to occur," SW 4, 402). Instead, he recovers scattered messianic fragments that point to anticipatory forms of this future state. These can be found in Benjamin's work in various experiences and figures: from Proust's *mémoire involontaire* to a *leibhaftige Geistesgegenwart* (embodied presence of mind), from the *flâneur* to the collector, from the translator to the materialist historian, from Kafka's seemingly insignificant assistants to the righteous man. This heterogeneous group includes the chronicler and his secularized alter ego, the storyteller. Benjamin's essay "Der Erzähler" (The Storyteller)⁶ contains few messianic echoes, but the note written in preparation for his "On the Concept of History" provides clues about the condition of redeemed mankind that also concern the question of narration in a messianic world:

Die messianische Welt ist die Welt allseitiger und integraler Aktualität. Erst in ihr gibt es eine Universalgeschichte. Was sich heute so bezeichnet, kann immer nur eine Sorte von Esperanto sein. Es kann ihr nichts entsprechen, eh die Verwirrung, die vom Turmbau zu Babel herrührt, geschlichtet ist. Sie setzt die Sprache voraus, in die jeder Text einer lebenden oder toten ungeschmälert zu übersetzen ist. Oder besser, sie ist diese Sprache selbst. Aber nicht als geschriebene, sondern vielmehr als die festlich begangene. Dieses Fest ist gereinigt von jeder Feier. Es kennt keine Festgesänge. Seine Sprache ist integrale Prosa,

die die Fesseln der Schrift gesprengt hat und von allen Menschen verstanden wird wie die Sprache der Vögel von Sonntagskindern. (GS 1, 1239)

The messianic world is the world of total and integral actuality. In it alone is there universal history. What goes by the name of universal history today can only be a kind of Esperanto. Nothing can correspond to it as long as the confusion originating in the Tower of Babel is not smoothed out. It presupposes the language into which every text of a living or dead language must be translated in full. Or rather, it is itself this language. Not though, as written, but as festively celebrated. This celebration is purified of every ceremony; it knows no celebratory songs. Its language is the idea of prose itself, which is understood by all men as is the language of birds by Sunday's children. (P, 48)

Other versions of this fragment in Benjamin's paralipomena to "On the Concept of History" end with the following remark: "Die Idee der Prosa fällt mit der messianischen Idee der Universalgeschichte zusammen (siehe auch Erzähleraufsatz)" (GS 1, 1235); "The idea of prose coincides with the messianic idea of universal history. (Compare the passage in 'The Storyteller')" (SW 4, 404). The most extensive variant of the note contains an additional reference to "die Arten der Kunstprosa als das Spektrum der universalhistorischen – im 'Erzähler'" (GS 1, 1238); "the types of artistic prose as the spectrum of universal historical types – in 'The Storyteller'" (SW 4, 406).⁷ It may not be an exaggeration to see in Benjamin's note a prismatic spectrum that brings together all the messianic sparks relating to history, language and narration that are scattered in his work.

Benjamin's fragment projects the condition of redeemed humankind as a comprehensive, fulfilled presence of language and history. Only in a messianic world, only at the end of time and from its end can history be recounted in its entirety. Benjamin is here criticizing the narrating historicism of the 19th century, which deludes itself in claiming that it can still tell history in an epic form.⁸ For Benjamin, this conception of history creates the illusion of an intact world that sides with the victors and does not take account of the oppression of humankind. The prerequisite of a rightful and just universal history, which only falls to redeemed humankind, is the healing of the confusion of tongues through a universal language "understood by all men," which is reminiscent of Benjamin's early essays "Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache der Menschen" (GS 2, 140-157; "On Language As Such and On the Language of Men," SW 1, 62-74) and "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" (GS 4, 9-21; "The Task of the Translator," SW 1, 253-266). Integral actuality – fulfilled concurrence of

all events – is expressed in a language freed of mediation and difference, of writing and signs, a language of immediacy that will eventually deliver nature from its dumb sorrow and reconcile it with humankind. With the concept of the “idea of prose” which refers to Benjamin’s doctoral thesis, “Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik” (GS 1, 7-123; “The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism,” SW 1, 116-200) and the reference to the Storyteller essay, this passage, in addition to the essays on language, takes up two early texts that are less about language than about epic forms. But how can the messianic hope for immediacy and “integral actuality” go together with narrative, which always also presumes tension, difference, deferral, and mediation?

White Light

Benjamin’s addendum to the note, which after mentioning the messianic “idea of prose” refers to the “Arten der Kunstprosa als das Spektrum der universalhistorischen – im ‘Erzähler’” (GS 1, 1238; “the types of artistic prose as the spectrum of universal historical types – in ‘The Storyteller’” SW 4, 406) suggests a passage in the Storyteller essay, in which Benjamin presents history as “die schöpferische Indifferenz zwischen allen Formen der Epik” (GS 2, 451) (“the creative indifference between all forms of the epic,” SW 3, 152; trans. modified). Then, Benjamin continues, “würde sich die geschriebene Geschichte zu den epischen Formen verhalten wie das weiße Licht zu den Spektralfarben” (GS 2, 451; “written history would bear the same relationship to the epic forms as white light bears to the colors of the spectrum,” SW 3, 152). The concept of “creative indifference” – the possibility of creatively reconciling polarities and contrasts – signifies in Benjamin an alternative, romantically inflected form of sublation, which evades Hegel’s idea of progress and avoids its dialectical loss of the concrete. The white light of history-writing, in which all epic forms are inherent just as all poetic forms are inherent in prose, would only seemingly be uniform. The purity of this light would not be an emptiness, no absence of colors, but instead an absolute fullness. Benjamin elucidates this figure of thought echoing Hegel’s definition of types:

Wenn nämlich [...] die Geschichtsschreibung die schöpferische Indifferenz der verschiedenen epischen Formen darstellt (wie die große Prosa die schöpferische Indifferenz zwischen

verschiedenen Massen des Verses), so schließt deren älteste Form, das Epos, kraft einer Art von Indifferenz die Erzählung und den Roman ein. (GS II, 453)

For if [...] the writing of history constitutes the creative matrix [in the original: *schöpferische Indifferenz*] of the various epic forms (just as great prose the creative matrix [ibid.] of the various metrical forms), its oldest form, the epic, by virtue of being a kind of common denominator [in the original: *eine Art von Indifferenz*], includes the story and the novel. (SW 3, 154)

In this vertical stratification, in contrast to Hegel, all the lower forms are preserved without loss in the higher ones. For Benjamin, the epic contains both the novel and the story, but in his distinction between story and novel it is clearly the story which, as a secularized form of the chronicle, points forward to a messianic, “full” prose. The “idea of prose,” which Benjamin introduces in his note as a form of universal history, appears as the last in this series of sublations. It is not reached through a Hegelian teleological advance but in messianic fulfillment. In the “idea of prose” the potentials of all the forms absorbed in it continue to have an effect. Accordingly, in the all-encompassing light of the messianic idea of universal history, which coincides with the “idea of prose,” the story is also preserved as one of the colors of its spectrum.

The metaphor of white light and spectrum, of the invisible fullness of the colors it contains, corresponds to Benjamin’s definition of the Romantic “idea of art” as “absolute medium of reflection” (*Reflexionsmedium*, GS 1, 87) in his dissertation *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik* (The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism). There, prose is called “die Idee der Poesie” (GS 1, 101; “the idea of poetry,” SW 1, 174). For the Romantics it represents the highest form of poetry, containing all its possibilities and liberating poetry from its codifications. In prose “gehen sämtliche gebundenen Rhythmen ineinander über und” “verbinden sich zu einer neuen Einheit” (GS 1, 102; “all metrical rhythms pass over into one another” and “combine in a new unity,” SW 1, 174). This is characterized by “sobriety” (*Nüchternheit*) and corresponds to a successful disenchantment of the epic and its festive songs. If in Benjamin’s dissertation prose is the “idea of poetry,” in which all poetic forms are liberated, then the messianic “idea of prose” – corresponding to this model of “creative indifference” – is its highest stage: it is “universal history,” which contains all varieties of art prose within itself, just as the “white light” of “written history” contains the spectral colors of all the epic

forms. It encompasses everything that has ever occurred and frees it from its codified bonds, indeed from its own artificiality itself. This messianic feast of freedom contains no festive songs, therefore, and does not return unchanged to the heroic songs of the epic: it is sober and “general,” like the prose described in the dissertation. This “idea of prose” encompasses all other forms of art and, as universal narrative, takes in and preserves all the experience of creation.

Scheherazade and the Dying Man

In the Storyteller essay, to which the addendum to Benjamin’s note refers, two opposing figures vouch for storytelling. One is taken from literature: Scheherazade. She is the one who thinks of a new story whenever her tale comes to a stop, and she is present, in one form or another, in each storyteller. The second, opposite figure is taken from life: the dying man. In Benjamin’s exposition, both figures take on a messianic dimension, which brings them into line with the idea of a universal history at the end of times. Scheherazade, while embodying that “unmessianic” movement of narrative which defers the end, is for Benjamin also the guardian of epic memory, who creates the web which all stories form together in the end. The narrative of the dying man, on the other hand, comes into being as retrospection. The stuff his stories are made of, Benjamin writes, are “his lived life” (*gelebtes Leben*). The gift of the storyteller, like that of the dying man, is the ability “sein ganzes Leben erzählen zu können” (GS, 2, 464; “to relate his *entire* life,” SW 3, 162). Universal history is the collective analogy to that narrative: it relates the *entire* history of all creatures on earth from its messianic end point. As with the dying man, even if he is “the poorest wretch,” the storyteller recovers the past in its totality and all hierarchical differences are dissolved. Scheherazade and the dying man together embody messianic figures who preserve in the spectrum of the “idea of prose” the double movement of deferral and retrospection, infinity and closure, “hope and memory.”⁹ In the concept of the “idea of prose” there is contained not only the pure, perfect and in itself complete *idea*, but also of *prose* as the general, the manifold and worldly story of all creation. In Benjamin’s messianic world, the *restitutio in integrum* of the past is fulfilled in the shape of a web of stories spun from the matter of “lived life” (*gelebtes Leben*). At the conclusion of the

storyteller essay Benjamin defines the storyteller as the “advocate of all creation” on the day of the Last Judgment. The integral prose he uses has the task of preserving the particularity of each individual phenomenon in its entirety and of doing justice to all creatures. It would be a language of names to the extent that it no longer denotes arbitrarily, but evokes and vivifies authentically what it names: Benjamin’s messianic ethics of narration is founded in the desire for a complete narrativity, which, with this highest form of attentiveness, calls things by their name.

The Enjambment and the Expressionless

An initial insight into the difference between the two writers’ “idea of prose” is provided by Agamben’s text of the same name in his volume of poetic-philosophical short texts which likewise bears this title.¹⁰ Like Benjamin in his early study of art criticism in the Romantic period, in this short text Agamben, too, develops the essence of prose from its relation to poetry. But whereas Benjamin, in line with Schlegel, calls prose the “idea of poetry” and with the metaphor of white light sees contained in it “all the possibilities and forms of poetry,” Agamben situates the relationship of prose and poetry at the interface *between* them. Agamben describes the specificity of poetry as the divergence between rhythm and meaning. The location of this divergence is the enjambment, the continuation of a syntactic unit from one line or couplet of a poem to the next with no pause, which Agamben calls “the distinguishing characteristic of poetic discourse” (IP, 39). It is the point where poetry and prose are at the same time most radically different and yet united to an almost indistinguishable degree. In the enjambment, verse introduces the syntax of prose and, paradoxically, becomes poetry at the very point where it disavows the metrical language of poetry. It is also at this point that the “idea of language,” which is “neither poetry nor prose, but their middle” (IP, 39), occurs. Unlike Benjamin’s metaphor of the white light which, even if invisible, contains the fullness of all spectral colors, this middle – a mere interruption in the flow of the poetic sentence, a blank space on the page – is empty.

Agamben elucidates the relationship between language and history in terms of the discrepancy between the original language of names and the historically mediated, always already transmitted and hence inauthentic, language of communication between human beings. According to

Agamben's explication of Benjamin's note, names always already precede all speech as original sign and cannot be grasped or circumvented. By contrast, thought without presuppositions is not possible in a language of signs. The mediation to which names are subject through history determines an endless chain of presuppositions, which place thought and human beings under a ban. Agamben transfers this conception of language as an imaginary prison to Benjamin's philosophy of history. Because history came into being at the same time as the Fall of language from its original unmediated state, the end of history coincides with the end of the communicative language of signs and with the restitution of the Adamic language of names. To Agamben, Benjamin's "idea of prose" aims at the messianic end of a history understood as fate and therefore as unfreedom. This corresponds in many respects to the understanding of history in Benjamin's note. Since, however, Agamben does not take into consideration the reference to the storyteller essay and the significance of prose as epic form and identifies the "idea of prose" entirely with the "idea of language," his conception of the term leads to an aesthetic of emptiness and an ethics of disconnectedness, to which Benjamin would hardly have subscribed. This can be shown in exemplary fashion by way of the difference between the conceptions of the "expressionless" (*das Ausdruckslose*) in Agamben and in Benjamin.

In his essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, Benjamin links the "expressionless" – a feature of language that has no meaning in itself, but interrupts a falsely harmonious continuity – Friedrich Hölderlin's concept of the "caesura." For Hölderlin, this hesitation in the poetic meter produces a "counter-rhythmical interruption" (*gegenrhythmische Unterbrechung*, GS 1, 181), a resistance to the flowing rhythm of the hymns. While Benjamin insists on the function of this interruption as a rupture of the illusion of wholeness, Agamben considers it as the event itself. In "Idea of the Caesura," another short text in *Idea of Prose*, Agamben refers to the same Hölderlin passage about the caesura as Benjamin and comments: "What does the interruption of the rhythmic transport in the poem reveal? [...] The rhythmic transport, which bears the momentum of the poem is empty and bears only itself. It is the caesura, which as *pure* word, thinks this emptiness – for a while [...] The poet [...] awakes and for a moment studies the inspiration which bears him; he thinks only of his voice" (IP, 27). This reading of the Hölderlin quotation, which flows into an awareness of the voice, bears the traces of Agamben's earlier book *Language and Death*,

the starting point of which is Heidegger's *Zum Wesen der Sprache* (*On the Essence of Language*).¹¹ In Agamben's book the voice plays a crucial role that reveals the origins of his own ethics implied in his understanding of the "idea of prose": "The Voice, as we know, says nothing; it does not mean or want to say any significant proposition. Rather, it indicates and means the pure taking place of language and it is as such a purely *logical* dimension [...]." In this sense, Agamben continues, language as Voice is "the original ethical dimension in which man pronounces his 'yes' to language." And it is this affirmation of language that "opens up to man the possibility for the marvel of being and the terror of nothingness."¹² This ethics also determines Agamben's later interpretation of Benjamin's "idea of prose." There, pure "saying" is not only the task of the philosopher, but becomes the ethical task as such: "It is [...] the actual construction of this relation and this region [of pure language] that constitutes the true task of the philosopher and the translator, the historian and the critic, and, in the final analysis, the ethical engagement of every speaking being" (P, 59).

Agamben's "idea of prose" calls for an integral actuality, that is, of a fulfilled now-time without tension, displacement and deferral. While Benjamin's "Jetztzeit" contains worldly splinters pointing to a messianic fulfillment, Agamben's "now" can be understood as an attempt to think a "pure" interruption, free of all mediation, conception and precondition, uninfected by a world that presents itself as one continuous catastrophe. The urgency, however, which is constantly conjured up in Agamben's thinking, stands in curious contrast to the emptiness which is simultaneously appealed to. At its center stands the absence of a word that is very much present in the sphere of Benjamin's "Concept of History": the revolution as true, "lived" interruption of catastrophe. Contrary to Benjamin's revolutionary thrust, Agamben's hypostatization and, one might say, the "de-functionalization" of the interruption itself creates a break in the bridge between Agamben's linguistic philosophy and his political thought. There is no path here that leads from "the marvel of being and the terror of nothingness" to an ethics and politics of justice. That impasse lies in the nature of a thinking that is not concerned with paths, but with cuts, thresholds and empty spaces which no longer stand in any relation to what they interrupt. Ultimately it becomes a matter of the theoretical enthronement of discontinuity itself.

The messianic forces which, for Benjamin, interrupt the time continuum and point towards a redeemed world are, for Agamben, rendered absolute

and empty to the point where they are no longer redeeming bearers of hope and signals for the cessation of a false continuity. Instead, interruption becomes an end in itself, eliding the experiential content and the worldly bearings of Benjamin's messianic figures. His sparks and splinters, poetic metaphors of a profane illumination, whose luster indicates the path of redemption, become abstract locations of discontinuity: the threshold, the limit point, the interface, "the in-between" as such. Perhaps in an increasingly complex post-revolutionary age their emptiness can be perceived as the only possible form of saving the radicalism of Benjamin's political-theological legacy, but what is in danger of being lost is the very thing that is to be saved: lived, worldly life itself.

Notes

- 1 Walter BENJAMIN, "The Storyteller," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, 1935-1938, ed. Michael Jennings, Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002, 155. Further as SW, with the number of the volume.
- 2 Giorgio AGAMBEN, *Potentialities*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, 171. Further as P.
- 3 Giorgio AGAMBEN, *Walter Benjamin: tempo storia linguaggio*, ed. Lucio Belloi and Lorenzina Lotti, Roma: Reuniti, 1983, 65-82. Quoted here from: "Language and History. Linguistic and Historical Categories in Benjamin's Thought," in AGAMBEN, *Potentialities*, 48-62.
- 4 Hans-Georg GADAMER, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Winsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, New York: Continuum, 1993, 458; the original is in *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1960, 523-34.
- 5 Walter BENJAMIN, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974, 1232. Further as GS, with the number of the volume.
- 6 Walter BENJAMIN, „Der Erzähler” (GS 2, 438-465); "The Storyteller" (SW 3, 143-166.)
- 7 For further versions see GS 1, 1234 and 1235.
- 8 Cf. Irving WOHLFARTH, "Krise der Erzählung, Krise der Erzähltheorie. Überlegungen zu Lukacs, Benjamin und Jauss," in *Erzählung und Erzählforschung im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. R. KLOPFER and G. JANETZKE-DILLNER, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1981, 278.
- 9 In the Storyteller essay Benjamin quotes these terms from Georg Lukács' *Theory of the Novel* (GS 2, 454).
- 10 Giorgio AGAMBEN, "Idea of Prose," in *Idea of Prose*, trans. by Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt, New York: State University of New York Press, 1995, 39-41. Further as IP.
- 11 Giorgio AGAMBEN, *Il Linguaggio e la morte*, Turin: Einaudi, 1982. English transla-

tion: *Language and Death*, trans. Karen Pinkus, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

12 Giorgio AGAMBEN, *Language and Death*, 86.