the use of ears: agamben overhearing derrida overhearing heidegger

naomi waltham-smith

UNHEARD ECHOES

In a pivotal chapter of *The Use of Bodies*, Giorgio Agamben makes a claim that pricks up the ears:

> Being does not preexist the modes but constitutes itself in being modified, is nothing other than its *modifications*. One can then understand why Leibniz could write . . . that the bond is something like an *echo*, "which once posited *demands* the monads." (*U*, 170; my emphases)[1]

This is an important passage that gets to the heart of Agamben's philosophical project in which he attempts to reformulate, via a triad of concepts, the relation between essence and existence, between Being and beings. What he is proposing here is nothing short of a new ontology that breaks with metaphysics' relation to the transcendental: this is what goes under the name of a modal ontology or, more broadly, under the concept of use. There is much in this coincidence of echo, mode, and demand to unpick and we shall return at the end of this essay to the concept of modifiability. Let us start, though, with Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's echo. What is the significance of this sonic metaphor? And in what ways does the sonorous open up the possibility of rethinking the ontological relation? What

does it meant to think use as aurality—as *the use of ears*?

It is necessary to go back to the beginning of the chapter to understand why Agamben seizes upon this figure of the echo to describe the relation between Being and being. Leibniz's echo is introduced within the context of his debate with Bartholomew Des Bosses over the nature of the bond that joins multiple beings into a composite substance. What exactly is the nature of the relation that allows a composite body to be perceived as a substantial unity rather than as an aggregate of monads? Des Bosses insists that this relation is a *mode* of the monads, while Leibniz rejects this suggestion because the bond does not modify the monads. For Leibniz, the bond introduces a new principle, still of the order of substance, but which is neither straightforwardly mode nor substance.[2] But what is the nature of this relation between bond and monads if it does not alter the latter in any way?

Close readers of Agamben's work will recognize why he homes in on the character of the relation in this debate. If there is one driving force in his philosophical project, it is arguably to develop a new theory of the relation between Being and beings—in short, the problem of the transcendental. That is what links his thinking on sovereignty to his early work on language. In *Homo Sacer* he shows that the structure of sovereignty in the state of exception corresponds to the linguistic presupposition (*HS*, 21),[3] and *The Use of Bodies* shows beyond doubt that the central animating idea of Agamben's thought has consistently been the *presuppositional* character of metaphysics. Metaphysics, he argues, is "the ontological apparatus [that] always divides being into existence and essence, into a presupposed subject on the basis of which something is said and a predication that is said of it" (*U*, 125). Metaphysics, insofar as it is onto-logy, imagines a non-linguistic essence that lies underneath—or, in Heideggerian terms, that withdraws—while still founding its existence in language. What is obscured in this presuppositional relation is the pure potential of language. "We imagine the non-linguistic as something unsayable and non-relational that we seek in some way to grasp as such, without noticing that what we seek to grasp in this way is only the shadow of language" (*U*, 119).

Likewise, the relation between actual and potential that Agamben analyzes in his reading of Aristotle takes the same presuppositional form. In a passage from the beginning of the *Homo Sacer* series, the significance of which has now been confirmed in its final installment, Agamben called for philosophy to abandon the metaphysical structure of presupposition.

Instead one must think the existence of potentiality without any relation to Being in the form of actuality—not even in the extreme form of the ban and the potentiality not to be, and of actuality as the fulfillment and manifestation of potentiality—and think the existence of potentiality even without any relation to being in the form of the gift of the self and of letting be. This, however, implies nothing less than thinking ontology and politics beyond every figure of relation, beyond even the limit relation that is the sovereign ban. Yet it is this very task that many, today, refuse to assume at any cost. (*HS*, 47)

Agamben devotes time to explaining why the concepts of mode and demand are central to this task, but he says very little about the role of the echo except to make two observations. First, the concept, he notes, is appropriate insofar as the bond relates to the monads in the same way that the Leibnizian soul is an echo of them. Leibniz reaches for this "acoustico-musical image" to express a "curious intimacy" that is "at the same time" an "exteriority" between bond and the monads it unites (*U*, 149). In adopting this concept of echo, Agamben thus seeks to conceptualize a relation that is neither absolute difference ("a different substance and not their bond") nor absolute identity ("if it were something inherent to them, it would be one of their accidents"). "The mode," explains Agamben, setting aside Leibniz's terminological quibbles about the word, "is at once identical and different—or, rather, it entails the coincidence, which is to say the falling together, of the two" (*U*, 164). The concept of echo thus names a form of relation that collapses the opposition between identity and difference.

Second, Agamben recognizes the paradox that confronts Leibniz, who seeks to think something originary (a source of the modifications) via a figure that seems to be anything but substantial: "if it is possible to conceive of sounds (monads) without an echo, we cannot see how it is possible to think an echo without the sounds that precede it" (*U*, 149). It is precisely the echo's ambivalent relation to substance that presents a challenge to metaphysics. For Leibniz, this echo is also a *demand*. By demand, though, he does not seem to have in mind a necessity or obligation. The echo demands (*exigit*) the monads without implying them essentially (*essentialiter involvit*) or depending (*pendet*) upon them, for it can exist without the monads and the monads without it.[4] So long as one continues to think in terms of substance this remains paradoxical: how can something be the same substance and another one at the same time? But modality challenges one to think Being *adverbially*: mode is not *what* being is but *how* it is (*U*, 164). This

notion of a demand that is "neither a logical entailment nor a moral imperative" (*U*, 170) dissolves the distinction between inside and outside and allows one to think "Being itself, declined in the middle voice"—that is, without distinction between active and passive, agent and patient. This deactivates the metaphysical structure of presupposition by transforming the relation between potential and act. In the traditional conception, the possible is what demands to exist in actuality. Modal ontology reverses this, such that the actual demands its possibility. What it demands is not something else—neither its other nor its outside. Rather, it is a modification of *how* actuality can be. Being is nothing other than its modifications, its *uses*—its *echoes*.

Agamben, though, still does not tell us why ontological difference should be rethought as aurality. And I say *re*thought to suggest that Agamben's effort to think ontology anew is at the same time an echo of Martin Heidegger. What does it mean to think ontological difference *yet again* in the guise of the sonorous when for Heidegger—and for French deconstruction echoing him—philosophy's relation to Being is figured as *listening*? And what consequences does this resounding have for Agamben's efforts to delineate a politics beyond the supposed paralysis and powerlessness of deconstruction? This echo of Heidegger and of Jacques Derrida is precisely what goes unheard in Agamben's discussion of Leibniz, even (or exactly) when he is confronting head on the Heideggerian theme of the relation between Being and beings. Commentators have repeatedly remarked upon—and strongly criticized—Agamben's persistent Heideggerianism[5] and indeed Heidegger is not so much excluded from the discussion of modal ontology as he is pushed to its margins as a kind of frame for this chapter. At its end, Agamben observes that in *Being and Time*, Dasein is not an essence as such but only "its own proper mode of being [*seine eigene Weise zu sein*]." Agamben, however, laments the fact that Heidegger was constrained by his Aristotelianism from making explicit the modal character of his ontology and that he did not "understand the ontological difference must be completely resolved into the being-mode relation" (*U*, 175).

Agamben had also evoked Heidegger at the end of the previous chapter entitled "Theory of Hypostases," which culminates in a note on Heidegger's characterization of ontological difference as a withdrawal of Being from beings (*U*, 144–45). As Agamben observes, Heidegger defines metaphysics as the forgetting of this "retreat from and abandonment by being" or what Derrida describes as "the withdrawal of the withdrawal" (*RM*, 80).[6] What goes completely unheard, though, in Agamben's confrontation with Heidegger is Derrida's own confrontation with

this very question. *The Use of Bodies* is entirely silent on Derrida's notion of an alternative withdrawal of metaphysics—not the withdrawal that characterizes metaphysics (subjective genitive) but deconstruction's withdrawal *of* this withdrawal (objective genitive) which is also to say its withdrawal *from* metaphysics. What is more, not only Derrida but also Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe have persisted after Heidegger in thinking ontological difference and philosophy's own relation to the transcendental as a form of listening. If, as Agamben notes, "Leibniz is constrained to hypothesize something like an 'originary echo'" (*U*, 149), is it not this resonant condition of possibility that Derrida and Nancy are attempting to think when they reflect upon (*s'*)*entendre* (hearing[-oneself]) and *écouter* (listening)?

This omission is all the more striking in a book devoted to the concept of *use*. As we shall see, Derrida thinks the problem of metaphysical withdrawal via the concept of *retrait*, meaning both retreat and retracing. Though, at the same time he describes metaphysics and its retreat as metaphor, as a process whereby the particular meaning of specific beings gives way to the abstract figures of Being. Metaphysics, Derrida observes, has always thought metaphor as a wearing-out, an erasure, an exhaustion of particularity. The metaphysical withdrawal of Being, its *retrait*, is thus also an *usure* of beings. If the relation to the transcendental is at once both hearing and *usure*, I propose to capture this coincidence by speaking—in an echo of the title of Agamben's book—of *the use of ears*.

With this syntagm, I also aim to expose two unheards in *The Use of Bodies*: namely deconstruction and hearing itself. Nothing could surely be more appropriate for a thinker of the presupposed, the unthought, the unsaid, the unheard.[7] Agamben, much to Derrida's chagrin, is always the first one to hear what has been previously gone unheard.[8] If metaphysics consists in leaving something unheard (which Derrida would not dispute), Agamben's critique of deconstruction is that it, at worst, perpetuates the structure of presupposition through the interminable supplementarity of the trace and, at best, radicalizes the presuppositional structure, making the unheard audible without relinquishing it. There can be no doubt that Derrida has been an important interlocutor for Agamben throughout his career, but the critique that has appeared ever since his earliest writings goes completely unheard in *The Use of Bodies*. There is not even a single mention of Derrida or deconstruction despite the fact that Derrida has treated the same Heideggerian theme that features so prominently in this book.

Agamben's relation to Derrida has always been fraught. In an interview Nancy confessed that, as a friend of both, the tensions between them were "a rather difficult and painful subject" for him, and Peter Szendy recounts Derrida's rather dismissive marginalia in his copy of *The Time That Remains*.[9] The final book in the *Homo Sacer* series settles many areas of ambiguity or contention in Agamben's corpus, but it does not expressly settle the score with Derrida. As I hope to show over the following pages, there are several points of implicit contact, a few allusions here and there, that point to a (final) confrontation with deconstruction. Kevin Attell has already traced the complex interweaving of these two thinkers and their often silent tracking of one another in Agamben's writings up to *Profanations*.[10] To my knowledge, however, no-one has yet focused on the path that Agamben's critique of deconstruction takes in the series' final book. If the Heideggerian thematic of being and saying is omnipresent, it is not so much of a leap to imagine that Agamben might at the same time be silently tracking one of the closest readers of the withdrawal of being even if he does not put it into words.

There are, I suggest, a number of telltale signs that indicate that, despite extensive explicit treatments of deconstruction in earlier writings, Agamben still has Derrida in mind. For instance, shortly after the final reference to the Leibnizian "echo" (*U*, 170), Agamben invokes Emile Benveniste's attempts to sever pre-Socratic *rhythmos* from its schematic interpretation as a paradigm for the fluidity of being as mode. Derrida had cited exactly the same definition of rhythm from Benveniste's *Problems in General Linguistics* to describe the "measure and order of dissemination, the law of spacing" that characterizes arche-writing (*D*, 178n4).[11] Even if this overhearing might be no more than coincidence, the silent engagement with Derrida's reflections on writing is also hinted at when Agamben characterizes the relation between substances and modes as a *ductus*, that is, "in the vocabulary of graphology . . . the tension that guides the hand's gesture in the formation of letters" (*U*, 171). It is difficult not to hear in this passage a veiled reference to Derrida's contemplation of a new "cultural graphology" in 1967 (*G*, 87).[12] This reference is important because, even if Derrida later insisted that he had demonstrated the impossibility of founding any new science of writing bearing the name "grammatology" (*R*, 52)[13] and Agamben likewise observes that "grammatology was forced to become deconstruction" to avoid its aporias (*P*, 213), Agamben seems here to be retrieving—no doubt with a rhythmic modulation—the project that Derrida once contemplated during the late 1960s and early 1970s, not of a generalized writing—of arche-writing as transcendental condition of possibility—but a "regional science . . . renewed and fertilized by sociology,

history, ethnography, psychoanalysis" (*G*, 86–87).[14] Hence Agamben appears to be thinking modifiability in proximity to Derrida's notion of generalizability which, as David Cunningham has illustrated, can only take place in more specific, conditions levels and modes of generality.[15]

And it is on the question of the generalizable, of transcendentalism, and its relation to specific, conditioned forms of existence that Agamben, I would argue, still feels the need to mark out his difference from Derrida. Meticulous readers of Derrida, such as Geoffrey Bennington and Alexander García Düttmann,[16] point out that *différance* can never be absolute or infinite, but is, on account of its auto-immune character, always self-limiting, which is to say that it only ever takes place in specific material, conditioned differences. It is, *pace* Agamben's objections to a thwarted messianism, not a Kantian ideal or any other unsullied telos or pure norm. As Derrida wryly puts it, "infinite *différance* is finite" (*V*, 87).[17] "If it became infinite—which its essence excludes a priori—life itself would be returned to an impassive, intangible, and eternal presence: infinite *différance*, God or death" (*G*, 131; using Bennington's modified translation). This is precisely, in fact, the charge that Derrideans level at Agamben: that his notion of being as pure impotentiality, with its reification of indetermination, reinstates a fictional purity which from other perspectives has been described as a "voluntarism" without subjective volition or a "linguistic vitalism"[18] and which relegates politics to a solipsistic escape into an albeit profane otherworldliness.

From the Derridean standpoint, Agamben, by making impotentiality ontological, commits the error of reducing the power of *différance* to a presentist category—it seeks to make the power to become other present—and hence to the category of the proper insofar as it thereby makes it something graspable. The attention that Agamben pays to the inappropriable in this text may be read not merely as a Heideggerian echo but as an attempt to fend off this line of attack which, though not exclusive to the Derridean camp, is perhaps most sorely contested there precisely because Derrida is, for Agamben, "the thinker who has identified with the greatest rigor" (*L*, 39)[19] not only the aporias of self-reference but also the difficulty of thinking potentiality without its possibilization and appropriation, as a life-*puissance* that precedes and subverts all ontological reductions. For Derrida the subjunctive *puisse*, which he takes from Hélène Cixous, is "the quasi-underivable trace that one must presuppose so that the other instances (for example, power, *posse*, *dynamis*, dynasty, potentiality, then act and effectiveness) *might* [*puissent*], precisely, appear" (*HC*, 71).[20] This potentiality is neither a being-for-life nor a be-

ing-for-death. Rather, it is necessary to surrender not only to the subjunctive but also to the presupposition, to the "for" on account of which every potentiality is substitutable by another: "this *for* that, this one *in place of* the other" (*HC*, 87). If Agamben is getting at something like this substitutability when he speaks of the "modal oscillations" of being, he also appears too ready to imagine a rhythmic modulation that "takes itself up," an echo that hears itself in a "music of being" (*U*, 173).

This is all to say that Agamben is, I believe, silently lending an ear to Derrida in this book. He is *overhearing* Derrida in the sense of secretly eavesdropping on him. At the same time, it is precisely *hearing* that goes unthought in Agamben's writings. Notwithstanding the theory of signification that he develops as early as *Stanzas* and *Language and Death,* and the reflections on the Museic that are taken up in the recent *What is Philosophy?*, Agamben does not develop a theory of listening or hearing as such.[21] And yet one can trace a set of mutual overhearings between Agamben and Nancy from which one may tease out something like an Agambenian concept of the ear. Agamben's appropriation of Leibniz's echo suggests that Being's relation to itself, its *use* of itself, is something sonorous, or—in terminology far more reminiscent of Nancy—the self set into vibration, Being as resonance. Even if it goes unacknowledged, I think it is important not to overlook this resonance between Agamben and Nancy, no less than Agamben's ambivalent relation with Derrida. I thus attempt to discern what they share in their thought of resonance—what might therefore be described as the as yet unheard resonance of their resonances.

Aware of the irony of declaring myself the first to hear what has hitherto gone unheard, I nonetheless aim to track this silent tracking, to follow the animal that is (following) and to follow what survives in *The Use of Bodies* of the confrontation between Agamben and deconstruction. Particularly challenging for Nancy and other friends of Derrida has been the way in which Agamben's radical rejection of deconstruction coincided with his appropriating some of the central themes in Derrida's œuvre, often without any explicit mention of his name. I suggest that *The Use of Bodies* likewise enters into the closest proximity with Derrida precisely at the moment that this intimacy is disavowed. When Agamben proposes the concept of use as a means to evade the Heideggerian withdrawal of Being, it is perhaps not too much of a stretch to hear a certain resonance between this pure *usage* and the notion that Derrida describes under the heading of *usure* in the double sense of usury and wearing-out, and at which we shall eventually

arrive.[22] This essay asks what it would mean to think the two alongside one another: in what ways would this transform Agamben's notion of use and would it reveal more precisely the stakes of his critique of deconstruction? This essay also seeks to show that approaching this juxtaposition from the perspective of aurality—as a use of *ears*—can add to what we have already heard about the dissonant resonance between these two thinkers and can help to specify more precisely the political stakes of this dissonance.

(IM)POSSIBILITY OF HEARING

If hearing is a prominent Heideggerian theme echoed in French deconstruction, it is not expressly thematized as such in Agamben's writings. Some might argue that the ear is ever-present. There is no doubt that the opposition between *phōnē* and *logos*, between sound and sense, is a recurring theme in Agamben's work from *Stanzas* onwards. It underpins his critique of Derrida's grammatology in *Language and Death* and also, via the temporality of rhyme in the poem, of his allegedly "thwarted messianism" in *The Time That Remains* (*TR*, 78–87, 103).[23] *The Use of Bodies* recapitulates this concern with signification. In its claim that the philosophy of Being is an onto-logy—that Being *is* only insofar as it is said (*U*, 131)—it realizes Agamben's early intuition that "presence be always already caught in a signification" (*S*, 156).[24] If we take the presuppositional power of language as the organizing figure of Agamben's entire philosophical project, then at its center lies the transformation of what metaphysics posits as the purely sonorous outside of language into sayability, use, form-of-life, inoperativity, and so forth. The sonorous has thus always been at stake in Agamben's critique of metaphysics and of deconstruction.

And, of course, when I say that hearing as such goes unsaid, it could be objected that hearing is implied whenever there is a sound. It perhaps goes without saying that Agamben's thinking about the voice is always already a thought of the ear. This is the position of deconstruction. For Derrida, the ear is always a carrying of the voice, an idea to which we shall return.[25] Peter Szendy, following Derrida, questions even more strongly: "does [sound] even exist, by the way, without ears to hear it?"[26] The ear of the other is sound's condition of (im)possibility of the sonorous.[27] For his part, Agamben reverses Heidegger's oft-repeated claim that we have ears because we hear, arguing instead that the organ precedes its use and its habitual function (*U*, 51). For Nancy, meanwhile, sound and listening cannot be disentangled insofar as they share the same structure of resonant referral (*renvoi*)

(*E,* 7).[28] For deconstruction, then, there's no sound without hearing and hearing itself is a resonant spacing.

This is why Szendy speaks of "overhearing [*surécoute*]" as the condition of (im) possibility of the sonorous. I am always already overheard. This aural espionage is not only one form of listening among others but is what makes listening in general possible. At the same, this overhearing marks an impossibility of hearing. One of Szendy's chief examples of the intrinsic failure of overhearing is Orpheus, who, "all ears," dreams of hearing everything—but then, distracted by an off-stage noise, he ruins music's panacoustic power.[29] As Szendy has it, "when we try to hear everything, we do not hear anything."[30] It is perhaps Kafka's "The Burrow," though, that presents an even more elegant example of the structural impossibility that he analyzes.[31] The more exhaustive and exhausting its efforts to track down the noise, what the "mole" fails to hear is its own being overheard. Which is to say that overhearing is deaf to the ear of the other, or that when two ears meet, each straining to hear, they miss (one another's) hearing.

Derrida observes a similar aporia at the beginning of *On Touching*, where he imagines approaching his friend Nancy so closely that their eyelashes touch (*T,* 2–3).[32] In this moment, he wonders, do two eyes meet or two gazes? Does each see the vision of the other, that he sees, or does one see only what is visible, that is the eye of the other? Is it possible to see the other seeing me or is there always a certain blindness where one can see the eye or the gaze of the other, but not both at once? And what about the possibility of seeing my own gaze or my own eye reflected in that of the other, their gaze or their eye?

Szendy, translating Derrida's meditations into the auditory realm, attempts to capture this multiplicity of possibilities with the expression *ils s'écoutent*.[33] This could be that each hears oneself without hearing the other, that each spies on the other, or that each misses the hearing of the other. But this is where the gap between the visual and the auditory opens up. If for optics there is eye, gaze, and seeing, for acoustics there is ear and hearing, but no distinct word for the aural gaze before Szendy's invention of *surécoute* in French. Since in typical English usage overhearing refers to a hearing that goes unnoticed, the retranslation of *surécoute* back into English introduces a novel meaning and an aporia. We can recognize a gaze if we see one, but what does the other's hearing even sound like? Perhaps it is possible to exchange gazes and see the other seeing me as I see them, although this is always an oscillation between seeing them and seeing their gaze, blind to

one or the other at any given moment. But is it really the case that I could hear overhearing if only I were deaf for a moment to sound? Can overhearing itself be audible in the same way that the gaze is visible? Or is it perhaps the case (and for seeing as well) that overhearing is only audible insofar as I can hear the sound of myself as it is overheard by the other? Which is to say that my experience of myself is always already an experience of the other, and my experience of the other is always already an experience of myself. I cannot hear without borrowing the ears of the other and without also being overheard by the other in my overhearing.

It could be said that exposing this structural (im)possibility is the task of deconstruction. Hence Szendy, overhearing Derrida, describes overhearing as a "quasi-transcendental."[34] Overhearing excludes itself from the field of the overheard. It thereby introduces a deaf point. What overhearing cannot overhear is overhearing itself. Overhearing mishears—and misses hearing—overhearing itself. For this reason, there is always a certain moment of failure when overhearing tries to fulfill its totalizing ambitions. Later, as I argue for developing Szendy's concept explicitly as an *usure* of the ear, I suggest that overhearing by its very nature overextends itself, becomes over-hearing, hearing too much and, in so doing, exhausts itself, wears out the ear's capacity to hear. *Overhearing is always already over-hearing, which is to say mis(sing) hearing.*

There's no sound without (mis[sing]) hearing. The irreducibility of overhearing makes sense if you consider how hard (impossible, perhaps) it is to contain sound.[35] Sound is on the point of escaping, leaking out of its inadequate enclosures. And ears have no ear lids. So sound is always spacing itself out and retreating, but we cannot retreat from sound. This no-sound-without-(mis[sing])-hearing, though, does not just mean that sound depends on the possibility that it be (over)heard. It also depends on the possibility that it be over-heard—which is to say heard *too much*, to the point where it is misheard or even not heard altogether. In other words, if there is no sound without the possibility that it be heard, there is no sound without also the possibility that it not be heard.

Some will already recognize how this analysis moves into a certain proximity with Agamben's idiosyncratic reading of Aristotelian (im)potentiality, even though, as I shall demonstrate, there is a crucial difference that separates the quasi-transcendental from Agamben's ontological reduction of impotentiality.[36] This has already been discussed widely in the literature and so it is not my intention to go over this terrain in detail once again,[37] except to show how hearing appears in

Agamben only in the guise of its impotentiality and, later, to argue that over-hearing (in the multiple senses elaborated here) is the guise in which this potential of potentiality is experienced as a use of the ear.

Any attempt to reconstruct an Agambenian notion of hearing is usefully situated against the backdrop of Derrida's insistence that when it comes to the metaphysical transcendental "indefatigably at issue is the ear" (*M*, xvii) and the risk of deafness. Not once but twice "indefatigably" there is the possibility of an ear that might survive its wears and tears, that might exceed its *usure*. Hearing is the way in which philosophy relates to its outside, to a condition of possibility it excludes so as to preserve its own self-identity. This ear creates an impression of absolute proximity and properness, producing the "idealizing erasure of organic difference . . . the pacifying lure of organic indifference." It hears *its* other, which is to say the other as its own, and also the other as its own own, as another proper (*M*, xi). Derrida speculates whether this metaphysical ear could take a beating. If philosophizing is to "tympanize" (*M*, x)—to strike its outside with a hammer in an echo of Nietzsche's idol-bashing—is it possible to rupture this hearing without making philosophy deaf? If philosophy's eardrum were to be punctuated from the outside, could it still hear?

> If philosophy has always intended, from its point of view, to maintain its relation with the nonphilosophical . . . if it has constituted itself according to this purposive *entente* with its outside, if it has always intended to hear itself speak [*entendue à parler*], in the same language, of itself and of something else, can one, strictly speaking, determine a nonphilosophical place, a place of exteriority or alterity from which one might still treat [*trait*] of *philosophy*? Is there any ruse not belonging to reason to prevent philosophy from still speaking of itself, from borrowing its categories from the logos of the other, by affecting itself [*s'affectant*] without delay, on the domestic page of its own tympanum (still the muffled drum, the *tympanon*, the cloth stretched taut in order to take its beating, to amortize impressions, to make the *types* [*typoi*] resonate, to balance the striking pressure of the *typtein*, between the inside and the outside), with heterogeneous percussion? Can one violently penetrate philosophy's field of listening without its immediately . . . making the penetration resonate within itself, appropriating the emission for itself, familiarly communicating it to itself between the inner and middle ear. . . . In other words, can one puncture the tympanum of a philosopher and still be heard and understood? (*M*, xii)

Let us follow Derrida's virtuosic attack blow by blow. First, he describes philosophy's relation to the transcendental as an "*entente*". This word in French, meaning agreement, is derived from *entendre*, the word used not only for understanding but also specifically for hearing. In turn, it comes from the Latin *intendere*, meaning to strain or stretch out toward, to direct one's attention to. Latin *tendere* also has the sense of tightening, as Nancy suggests in his gloss on the expression *tendre l'oreille*, typically translated as to prick up an ear, and literally meaning to stretch it (*E, 5*). This implies that there is "a more tense, attentive, or anxious state" of hearing, a state of being "all ears [à l'écoute]" (*E, 4*), like an aural sentry who is "on the lookout [*sur le qui-vive*]" (*E, 69n4*).[38]

The word *entente* in Derrida's text is attentive to all these resonances. It starts with the idea that metaphysics has reached some kind of understanding or accord with its outside, that its relation to it is settled even if that relation is potentially strained. And so it is that Derrida describes philosophy's eardrum as a drum skin "stretched *taut* to receive the blows [*tendue, tenue à recevoir les coups*]" (*M*, xii; my translation and emphasis). The intensive also suggests a certain force in this relation, an insatiable curiosity perhaps, even a compulsion on philosophy's part to keep worrying over its outside again and again, even—and I now am straining my ear for something that may not be in Derrida's ears—an overintensification and overuse by which philosophy risks wearing itself out. Nancy (in what is surely an overhearing of Derrida) uses the word *entente* to describe a certain deafness of philosophy (*E, 1*). For Nancy, it is not *entendre* (hearing) that is the more attentive but *écouter* (listening) that intensifies the former. It is this stretching out of the ear that philosophy, for all its straining, misses hearing. And so, at the risk of over-hearing Nancy, of hearing his saying too much, *écouter* is at once an excess of hearing and what emerges once hearing exhausts itself in its efforts.[39] *Écouter* is an over-stretched *entendre*, extended beyond its limits—in short, an *usure* of the ear.

It is the risk of philosophy's deafness—of over-tiring the ear, or more precisely, or over-hammering it—that vexes Derrida in this passage. This possibility is the measure of philosophy's relinquishing the proper, of philosophy's relinquishing— for this amounts to the same thing—the transcendental. For anyone familiar with Derrida's deconstruction of Edmund Husserl's transcendental *veçu*, it comes as no surprise that he links the transcendental to a certain kind of metaphysical hearing. In fact, he explicitly describes this *entente* as an *entendre à parler,* immediately echoing the deconstruction of phenomenology's silent *parler s'entendre*. At stake is whether philosophy can break free of the circularity of its pure auto-

affection. Is there another kind of hearing whereby philosophy would not affect itself (*s'affectant*) without temporal delay? Temporalization, as Derrida's famous over-hearing of Husserl goes, makes the voice ideal and seemingly eliminates any limits or outside, but the temporal stretching-out of retention disrupts its illusion of absolute intimacy. Without wanting to rehearse again this familiar argument, note that, insofar as self-presence is divided by between now and not-now, there intervenes a minimal exteriority, a minimal spacing.

Nancy targets precisely this self-enclosed intentionality in distinguishing *entendre* from *écouter*.

> Is philosophy capable of listening? Or . . . hasn't philosophy superimposed upon listening (*l'écoute*), beforehand and of necessity, or else substituted for listening, something else that might be on the order of *understanding* (*l'entente*)? Isn't the philosopher someone who always hears (and who hears everything), but who cannot listen, or who, more precisely neutralizes listening within himself, so that he can philosophize? (*E,* 1)

The difference hinges on *tension*. Between these two kinds of hearing lies the difference between tension and balance (*adéquation*)—an overhearing, possibly, of Derrida's reference to balancing (*équilibrer*) the beatings between inside and out. If écouter involves stretching the ear toward the tension, in *entendre* tension wins over and overwhelms (*gagne*) the ear (*E,* 69n5). Nancy overhears a certain "intension" in this tension, and, by extension, an "inten*t*ion," a *vouloir dire* (*E,* 69–70n6).[40]

Entendre attends to sense-as-signification but overlooks—dare we say, in an English neologism and translation of the German *überhören*, overhears?—sense-as-sensation, the pure resonance of sound, that is, sound as it spaces itself out. This is what Nancy means when he describes écouter as a tending *toward*. Listening is a mode of being that is always already moving outside itself. Listening is extensionality rather than in-tentionality. This resonant referral (*renvoi*), moreover, is the imperceptible condition of possibility of signifying sense (*E,* 29). Nancy also suggests that listening is "nothing but" this resonant spacing (*E,* 30, 77n7). Noting sound's tendency to be inside-out and outside-in all at once, Nancy thus describes another kind of philosophical hearing that, to answer Derrida's question, does allow itself to be penetrated (*E,* 13–14).

RETRAIT

The question is whether philosophy's ruptured tympanum is battered beyond repair, whether philosophical hearing is necessarily deaf to listening—to its own condition of possibility. This brings us to the issue of *retreat (retrait)*. Although Derrida will treat this theme more prominently in "The *Retrait* of Metaphor" and *Memoirs of the Blind*, in "Tympan"—and this is the final observation I will make about this richly resonant passage—it is explicitly implicated in the question of hearing. If philosophy constitutes itself through its *entente* with its outside, through its *s'entendre parler*, is there a place of exteriority, asks Derrida, from which one might still *treat (traiter)* of philosophy (*M,* xii)?

What, though, does it mean to *treat* of philosophy? In the context of an essay devoted—in its argumentation and form—to the margin, let us first observe that the *trait* marks an in-between. The *trait* joins and separates inside and outside. The tympanum of the ear, then, is a *trait*. It traces a division between inside and outside to open up a relation between them. But the *trait* is both tympanum and beating. Like a brush stroke that divides the space on either side of it, it creates a margin, but it also tends toward striking. Cloth and hammer, it strikes its own "domestic page." As Derrida observes of the printing press, however, there are multiple tympans (*M,* xxvi). In a similar way, and notwithstanding that Derrida has been taken to task for failing to discard Heidegger's metonymic reduction of ears to the single ear, deconstruction necessarily insists upon a multiplicity of ears.[41] So too is the *trait* always plural, always redoubled, always therefore *retraits* (*RM,* 80).

We saw earlier that an ear always already presupposes the ear of the other. The *trait* likewise always presupposes another *trait*. Just as the margin does not precede or exist independently of the two columns of text it separates, the *trait* is nothing before or without the relation it creates (*RM ,* 75). It therefore cannot refer to itself, affect itself, only erase itself (*s'effacer*). Derrida thus says that the *trait* is always a *re-trait* in the double sense that it both retreats and also retraces. Or, to be more precise, the *trait* cannot retreat without at the same time re-treating, treating again. If I cannot hear myself without borrowing another's ears, so too can the *trait* not withdraw itself without presupposing another supplementary *trait* that would open up the relation between the first *trait* and "itself " (*RM,* 66). The *trait* is thus what traces a margin between the *trait* and its withdrawal, and—because the *trait* is always a *retrait*—between the withdrawal and *its* withdrawal,

between the *retrait* and the *retrait* of the *retrait.*

Derrida's question turns out to be a very condensed overhearing of Heidegger, specifically his claim that the concept of metaphor belongs to metaphysics. The word *retrait* retraces the Heideggerian thematic of the *Entziehung* (withdrawal) of Being (*RM*, 64–65). For Heidegger, metaphysics is the tradition in which Being retreats under the cover of beings, but, as we saw earlier, it conceals this withdrawal, papering over this absence with a veil of presence. The *trait* opens up a margin between Being and beings, between the figurative and the proper—which is why metaphysics coincides with metaphor. It then hides this withdrawal of Being by making it appear in the guise of its second term, in the form of a proper, substantive reality, masking its fundamental negativity. That is why the *retrait* of Being is always also a *retrait* of the *retrait*. Moreover—and importantly, for our focus on aurality—this withdrawal of the withdrawal coincides, for Heidegger, with *listening* to (*hören auf*) Being.

For Derrida, there is first a metaphorical withdrawal of Being, and then a withdrawing of this metaphorical withdrawal. In calling for a withdrawal of the withdrawal, he thus merely radicalizes Heidegger without abandoning metaphysics. At stake—and this is the crux of Agamben's critique of Derrida—is whether Derrida succeeds in over-hearing Heidegger to the point of effacing metaphysics. Derrida's answer—to which shall return when we come to consider the issue of *usure*—is that deconstruction is a "quasi-cataechresis," an "abuse" of metaphysics (*RM*, 67). There is a difference, he insists, between the retreat *of* metaphor understood as subjective and objective genitives: between the withdrawing that characterizes metaphor and withdrawing metaphor, between the withdrawal that constitutes metaphysics and a withdrawal *from* metaphysics. To retrace this difference, however, would require another *trait*.

That is the difficulty: how to hear Being in its withdrawal if it is always already withdrawing from the ear? The *retrait* thus comes up against the problem confronted in "Tympan": how to find an exterior vantage point from which to "treat" philosophy's withdrawal? Otherwise put, the withdrawal of Being opens up space for the metaphysical concept of metaphor, but that withdrawal is itself not strictly metaphorical. It is like the ear trying to hear something inaudible or that is retreating into inaudibility. Because the *trait* always requires another to refer to itself, philosophy can only think the withdrawal of metaphor by recourse to another *trait*, whose withdrawal can in turn be thought only by borrowing yet an-

other metaphor. This leads to a "generalization" of metaphoricity, a "metaphor of metaphor," or what Derrida will also call an "invagination," a refolding of borders (*RM*, 66). In a similar way he will refer to the labyrinthine folds of the ear (*M*, xviii).

Derrida's addresses this problem of the infinite regress—without absolving it in Hegelian fashion—by making the *trait* (trace) a quasi-transcendental.

> Habitually, usually, a metaphor claims to procure access to the unknown and indeterminate by the detour of something recognizably familiar. . . . According to this common schema, we would know in a familiar way what *withdrawal* means, and we would try to think the withdrawal of Being or of metaphor by way of it. But what comes about here is that for once we can think the trait of *re-trait* only starting from the thought of this ontico-ontological difference, on the withdrawal of which has been traced, with the borders of metaphysics, the common structure of metaphoric usage. (*RT*, 68)

It is impossible to access Being in its withdrawal via metaphor. Deconstruction therefore does not think Being or metaphor but, Agamben contends, only this withdrawal as such, only *différance*. *Différance*, which takes the form of the trace and hence always a retreat, is revealed, on Agamben's reading, as the negative ground of Being.

In this way deconstruction does not so much mark a retreat *from* the transcendental as a retracing of its long retreat in the history of Continental philosophy.[42] As Catherine Malabou argues, deconstruction is one of several ways to confront the problem of the transcendental without entirely relinquishing it.[43] The Hegelian critique incorporates the excluded transcendental, as Derrida explains in *Glas*—a text preoccupied with sound and hearing:

> The transcendental or the repressed . . . the unthought or the excluded . . . organizes the ground to which it does not belong. What speculative dialectics means (to say) is that the crypt can still be incorporated to the system. The transcendental or the repressed, the unthought or the excluded must be assimilated by the corpus, interiorized as moments, idealized in the very negativity of their labor. (*Gl*, 166a)[44]

The second, deconstructive approach of supplementarity and dissemination seeks to avoid the transcendental by denying anything in its chain of substitutions a privileged position. But is it really so easy to avoid reference to the transcendental? The danger is that

> each time a discourse contra the transcendental is held, a matrix . . . constrains the discourse to place the non-transcendental, the outside of the transcendental field, the excluded, in the structuring position. The matrix in question constitutes the excluded as transcendental of the transcendental, as imitation transcendental, transcendental contra-band. (*Gl,* 244a)

Derrida himself thus appears to concede the impossibility, allowing Agamben to claim that *différance* exposes the structure of withdrawal as such without withdrawing from it (*L,* 39).

This is the crux of the critique that Agamben, like Malabou, launches against deconstruction. And it is precisely at this point that listening emerges in Agamben's thought. Agamben's concept of Voice developed in *Language and Death* has remarkable similarities to the *retrait* of Being. For Agamben, Voice consists in presupposing the animal voice that withdraws in order to open up the possibility of signifying human speech. Voice, then, is the *trait* that opens up a space and creates a relation of inclusive exclusion between sound and sense. Voice is also a *retrait* insofar as it is a withdrawal of the animal *phōnē* and a withdrawal of that very withdrawal. Hot on the heels of a devastating dismissal of Derridean grammatology, Agamben wonders:

> Isn't it precisely the self-withdrawal of the origin (its structure as trace— that is, as negative and temporal) that should be thought (absolved) in the Absolute (that is only at the end, as a result, that which truly is the turning in on itself of the trace) and in the *Ereignis* (in which difference as such comes into thought; no longer simply the forgetting of being, but the forgetting and the self-withdrawal of being in itself?) (*L* 39)

Derrida errs, to Agamben's mind, in failing to deconstruct the fundamental negativity of metaphysics. Deconstruction, as much as Hegel or Heidegger, retains the negativity of metaphysics. If the dialectical negativity redoubles itself without re-

mainder to form a solution, deconstructive negativity consists in a retracing that displaces and differentiates itself. Like Malabou, though, he is concerned less to distinguish between different "economies of negativity" than to highlight what they share.[45]

In response to the "phoneme as the 'phenomenon of the labyrinth,'" Derrida poses the question of writing. Agamben argues that, for deconstruction as for Greek grammatical thought, the *gramma* serves as a transcendental to halt the infinite regress of signification: "as a sign the *gramma* presupposes both the voice and its removal, but as an element, it has the structure of a purely negative self-affection, of a trace of itself" (*L,* 39). Otherwise put, what troubles Agamben is that the *retrait* of the *retrait* has the structure of a "sovereign autoconstitution" (*U,* 267), the pure movement of the trace relating to itself. The human speaking voice presupposes Voice (which might be understood as another name for arche-writing or *différance*) as a pure capacity (for speaking) that withdraws itself from every act (of speaking). Because all potential is always also impotential (it can *not* speak), when this potential for speaking affects itself, it realizes itself as actual speech (it can not not speak).

With this indistinction of necessity and contingency, "act is only a conservation and a 'salvation'—in other words, an *Aufhebung*—of potential." Derrida, of course, is eager to distance the self-withdrawal of the trace from the self-identical auto-affection of the Hegelian absolute.

> It withdraws/redraws itself [*se retire*], but the ipseity of the itself by which it would be related to itself in a single stroke does not precede it and already supposes a supplementary trait in order to be traced, signed, withdrawn, retraced in its turn. *Retraits* is thus written in the plural, it is singularly plural in itself, divides itself, and gathers up in the withdrawal of the withdrawal, the retracing of the retracing. (*RM,* 80)

In Agamben's contentious over(-)hearing, though, the Hegelian *relève* and the Derridean *retrait* still share the logic of presupposition. Derrida merely exposes it without overturning it.

If Voice has the structure of presupposition, what about listening? The closest Agamben comes to a thought of listening as such is probably is the epilogue to *Language and Death*, a passage to which Nancy refers in *Listening* (22). Here Agam-

ben is arguing that the human being has no voice to call its own (*L,* 107).[46]

> When we walk through the woods at night, with every step we hear the rustle of invisible animals among the bushes flanking our path. Perhaps they are lizards or hedgehogs, thrushes or snakes. So it is when we think: the path of words that we follow is of no importance. What matters is the indistinct patter that we sometimes hear moving to the side, the sound of an animal in flight or something that is suddenly aroused by the sound of our steps. The animal in flight that we seem to hear rustling away in our words is—we are told—our own voice. . . . We walk through the woods: suddenly we hear the flapping of wings or the wind in the grass. A pheasant lifts off and then disappears instantly among the trees, a porcupine buries in the thick underbrush, the dry leaves crackle as a snake slithers away. Not the encounter, but this flight of invisible animals is thought. Not, it was not our voice. (*L,* 107–108)

We are only ever hunting down the retreating animal voice. This is not a silent withdrawal but a flight that becomes barely audible as it rubs against the undergrowth—the *usure* of *retrait.*

Hearing emerges in this passage as a relation to the *retrait* of Voice. To that extent, it is consistent with the conception of hearing we find in Heidegger and deconstruction. Indeed, the footpath, the footsteps, the entire scene of a country path with a menagerie of escaping woodland animals, is unmistakably Heideggerian.[47] At the same time, this idea of hearing resonates with Nancy's conception of listening to the extent that it locates hearing in the interval between sound and sense. In fact, Nancy cites Agamben in a footnote when he refers to the resonance by which a voice is modulated in which the singular of a cry, a call, or a song vibrates by *retreating* [*se retirant*] from it (a "voice": we have to understand what sounds from a human throat without being language, which emerges from an animal gullet or from any kind of instrument, even from the wind in the branches: the rustling [*bruissement*] toward which we strain or lend an ear [*tendons ou prêtons l'oreille*]. (*E,* 22)[48]

In aligning listening-as-resonance with Voice, Nancy's overhearing suggests that there exists a pure potential for signifying whose withdrawal opens up not only a relation between sound and sense but also that between voice and ear, between listening and hearing, between hearing and touching—and so forth, in an infinite

spacing out of resonance. Nancy's ontologization of resonance aims to put a stop to this infinite regress but does so only by setting aside the Derridean point that the attempt isolate something like a pure resonance ("nothing but" resonance) is a fiction or phantasm, the effect of thinking being as something that resonates and hence overflows in the direction of the other. What would it mean, though, to theorize philosophical hearing beyond every figure of *retrait* if such a thing could be said to be anything more than a phantasm? In what follows, I attempt to reconstruct out of Agamben's recent work another kind of hearing that I dub a "use of ears."

USED-UP USE

Use has emerged as a distinct and central concept in Agamben's recent work, but it has its origins in a critique of commodity fetishism that goes back to his writings of the 1970s. In the intervening period, the idea of use has appeared under the guise first of play and then of profanation—terms that are conspicuously absent from *The Use of Bodies*. There is a clear continuity between Agamben's early reflections on playing with disused objects in the essay "In Playland: Reflections on History and Play" in *Infancy and History* (*I,* 75–96)[49] and the proposal in *State of Exception* that we play with or study the law. Referring to Kafka's characters who "study" and "deactivate" the law in order to "'play' with it," Agamben speculates:

> One day humanity will play with law just as children play with disused objects, not in order to restore them to their canonical use but to free them from it for good. What is found after the law it is not a more proper and original use value that precedes the law, but a new use that is born only after it. And, use, which has been contaminated by law, must also be freed from its own value. This liberation is the task of study, or of play. (*SE* 64)[50]

From about 2000 with the publication of *The Time That Remains*, this notion of play gradually comes into close proximity with, though is disguised from the ultimately failed strategy of the Franciscan *usus pauper*, all the while with an eye on a critique of the commodity. In *Profanations* (from 2005)—in a passage that he tracks closely six years later in *The Highest Poverty*—Agamben argues that in "the extreme phase of capitalism in which we are now living . . . spectacle and consumption are the two sides of a single impossibility of using" (*Prof,* 82).[51]

At this point he introduces the thirteenth-century dispute between the Franciscans and the Roman Curia over the possibility of a pure *de facto* use removed from the sphere of law and rights (explained in greater detail in *AP*, 129–34).[52] Pope John XXII, as resolute in his opposition to the order as he was subtle in his legal argument, contends that, in the case of consumable things, it is impossible to separate use from ownership. This is because usufruct is a use so long as it does not use up, a use that is precisely not *usure*. Recall that, if I lend my ears, I probably expect to get them all back in one piece. In consumption, by contrast, use coincides with abuse and destruction. In this case, argues the papal bull, use is inseparable from ownership, which grants the right to exhaust and wear out, a right to *usure*. Mere use, on the other hands, requires that the object be left intact. Furthermore, there exists no use that one can actually "have". The use in consumption, insofar as a part is always passed and another yet to come, is instantaneous and transient. It exists therefore only in memory or anticipation and hence cannot be possessed—with radical consequences.

> By radically opposing use and consumption, John XXII, in an unconscious prophecy, furnishes the paradigm of an impossibility of using that was to find its full realization many centuries later in consumer society. A use that it is never possible to have and an abuse that always implies a right of ownership and is moreover always one's own indeed define the very canon of mass consumption. In this way, however, perhaps without taking account of it, the pope also lays bare the very nature of ownership, which is affirmed with the maximum intensity precisely at the point where it coincides with the consumption of the thing. (*AP*, 131)

There is a use that one cannot have and a having that one cannot use, a fracture between possession and use. The Franciscans ended up losing the battle because they succumbed to the Curia's terms of debate. As Agamben argues in a reference to this passage in *The Use of Bodies*, their mistake was to conceive of use as a renunciation of property (*U*, 80). This negation of ownership, operating within the horizon of the will, leaves the fundamental relation of appropriation intact. What is required—following a note jotted down by Walter Benjamin that "justice . . . lies in the condition of a good that cannot be a possession"[53]—is an object that is completely *inappropriable* and that can only be *used*.

The Use of Bodies thus returns to a very early and lengthy analysis, first published in 1972, of use-value in Marx.[54] In that text Agamben is already searching for a

"particular kind of use-value, which cannot be grasped or defined in utilitarian terms" (*S*, 53). On the one hand, Agamben criticizes Marx for failing to surpass the utilitarian horizon because he adheres to the idea that "the enjoyment of use-value is the original and natural relation of man to objects" (*S*, 48). He targets the abstraction of capitalist accumulation on behalf of the concrete particularity of use. On the other hand, Agamben concedes that Marx's position on use-value is hardly consistent, citing a passage that implies that use-value is as much an artificial result of the property relation as exchange-value:

> Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* when we have it—when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc.—in short, when it is *used* by us.[55]

This discussion of Marx permits comparison with Derrida's analysis of use-value in *Specters of Marx*, where we also find an echo of Derrida's concept of *usure* first developed in the early 1970s in the context of a theory of metaphor.[56] *Pace* Paul Ricœur's mishearing,[57] Derrida there insists that *usure* is not reducible to the wear and erosion of proper meaning, as the traditional continuist interpretation of metaphor would have it, but also consists in *usury*—in "the supplementary product of a capital, the exchange which far from losing original investment would fructify its initial wealth, would increase its return in the interest, linguistic surplus value" (*M*, 210). Some twenty years after "White Mythology" Derrida invokes the idea of a "wearing down beyond wear" (*usure au-delà usure*) to launch a deconstruction of Marx (*SM*, 100). A chapter entitled "Wears and Tears" (*usures* now in the plural) opens with the claim that "the world is going badly. It is worn [*usé*] but its wear [*son usure*] no longer counts" (*SM*, 96). Citing a line from the painter's speech at the beginning of *Timon of Athens*—"How goes the world?—It wears, sir, as it grows" (*SM*, 97)—Derrida announces a litany of evils that characterize neoliberalism (unemployment, social exclusion, foreign debt, inter-ethnic wars and so forth).

If the *usure* of metaphor is a discoloration, a bleaching, even a white-washing,[58] this wearing beyond this wear is an unmistakable "blackening" (*noircissons*) of the world (*SM*, 100). This *usure* beyond *usure*, this overuse, this exhaustion of *usure*, this *usure* of *usure* is thus a withdrawal of *usure*'s whitening, the *retrait* of *usure*. Or, observing the logic of spectrality that haunts Marx's analysis of capitalism, we might say that use is always already shadowed by its capitalist commodification.

Use-value is always "in advance contaminated, that is, pre-occupied, inhabited, haunted by its other" (*SM,* 201), by exchange-value. Even if it is not actually present, the commodity-form "affects and bereaves" use-value "in advance" (*SM,* 201). Significantly for a comparison with Agamben's theory of use, Derrida describes exchange-value as a separation from use-value that is not simply its negation:

> Just as there is no pure use, there is no use-value which the possibility of exchange and commerce . . . has not in advance inscribed in an *out-of-use* (*hors d'usage*)—an excessive signification that cannot be reduced to the useless (*l'inutile*). (*SM,* 200–201)

The commodity, then, may be "out-of-use," but it is not entirely useless, not entirely *without* or beyond use. Just as "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" aims to relinquish the transcendental, use is not constituted by the exclusion of its other. But, as Malabou would point out, it is impossible to abandon the transcendental without relinquishing this *irreducibility* of the *hors d'usage* to an outside of use, to uselessness.[59] Otherwise put, in Derrida's commodity there remains a certain trace of the "discontinued," "out-of-order," the "temporally out-of-service," which is to say that, from an Agambenian standpoint, it therefore consists in a falling short of full usefulness, a *suspension* of use. It is the irreducibility of this out-of-use to uselessness—because it is always already contaminated by its possible use—that again gives the structure of presupposition Agamben consistently exposes in grammatology, in the trace, in messianism without messianism, and so forth. To discern this structure of presupposition in Marx is surely an over-hearing, even a mishearing, for, as Daniel Bensaïd argues,

> the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* present themselves as labor of mourning for ontology, a radical deontologization. . . . There is no longer any founding contrast between Being and existence, nothing behind which there lies concealed some other thing that does not come to light.[60]

By contrast, Derrida's commodity—at least to Agamben's ears—sounds like a use without use, a use from which use is withdrawn, the *retrait* of use, a use that withdraws itself, erases itself, wears itself out—in short, usury as *usure*. The Derridean retort, meanwhile, is that there is no pristine use that has not already been worn down. Like any other quasi-transcendental, Agamben's use is produced through a "fabulous retroactivity," the phantasmic effect of an *usure* that ensures the transcendental position, far from being eroded through the empirical, is always al-

ready exhausted, worn out, over-used.

But what of Agamben's use? *The Use of Bodies* makes it clear, if anyone was ever in doubt, that Agamben is no Marxist,[61] but how close is he to Derrida? In his early analysis of capital, Agamben overhears Baudelaire reject every utilitarian reduction of the artwork and instead work towards an "absolute commodity" in which use and value at their limits enter into a zone of indistinction (*S,* 42). Value coincides with pure uselessness and use with pure intangibility—a possibility that Derrida explicitly rejects (recall that *hors d'usage* is irreducible to inutility and use to utility). When Agamben returns forty years later to use-value in *The Use of Bodies*, he repeats his anxiety about reducing use-value to utilizability (*U,* 41). Even if production is oriented toward use-value, however, it is the surplus of use-values over demand that allows their transformation into commodities. At this point he exposes the deconstructive impulse in Marx—and this is where I do not think it is over-hearing to suggest that Agamben is (silently) overhearing Derrida.

> Now it is obvious that at the moment when an object is brought to market to sell it one cannot use it, which implies that use value in some way constitutively exceeds effective utilization. Exchange value is founded on a possibility or surplus contained in use value itself. (*U,* 41–42)

Agamben goes on to reach the conclusion that exchange-value, founded on the excess of potential over actual utilization—or utilizability—is "suspended" use-value, "maintained in the potential state" (*U,* 42). But Agamben wants to reach beyond this deconstructive impasse—to stretch the ear a little further, to overhear Derrida. Instead of this aporetic presupposition of use—that is, a *retrait* of use, a use that uses itself up—Agamben wants to think an excess of use over utilizability immanent to use itself, independent of that over exchangeability. Following Agamben's analysis of potentiality, this turns out to be a potential *not* to use, an inoperativity. If consumption is an impossibility of use, Agamben's free use is an impotentiality of use. It is a surplus immanent to the object that allows it to be inappropriable. The use of the ear, then, is the potential for philosophy's outside not to be appropriated, incorporated, swallowed up. There is an impotential immanent to use that exceeds its actualization. Use, though, is also

> a principle internal to potential, which prevents it from being simply consumed in the act and drives it to turn once more to itself, to make itself a potential of potential, to be capable of its own potential (and therefore its

own impotential). (*U, 93*)

Use is the potential to be used without being used up and the use of potential without using it up—the potential for use without *usure* and the use of potential without its *usure*.

Still, does Agamben really overhear Derrida when not even a word is whispered of *usure*, of wear, or of usury? Can we say that Agamben is over-hearing in the sense of mis(sing)hearing when his concept of use seems to rub away any trace of *usure*'s "proper" Derridean meaning? Notwithstanding this deafening silence, it is perhaps not too much of a stretch to hear an echo of Derrida's catachresis in Agamben's definition of use as *chrēsis*. While this may be nothing more than a fortuitous symptom of etymology, what is striking is that both arrive at a kind of *chrēsis*, a kind of use—whether that be a pure use or an abuse—as a solution to the same philosophical problem, to the problem of the transcendental. Catachresis is mobilized in "White Mythology" precisely as a way to put an end to this meta-phorical *retrait* of Being by affirming the ruin of the transcendental. Catachresis is a deconstructive withdrawal of the withdrawal. Agamben, meanwhile, identi-fies a chapter in the history of relinquishing the transcendental in which thinkers shifted the *a priori* to language as such, to the pure fact of language before any semantic content (*U, 113*), and even though his name is not on the list, it is hard to imagine that he is not in fact thinking of Derrida's *différance* (or, perhaps, of Nancy's écouter).[62]

If *The Use of Bodies* shows beyond doubt that the central organizing idea behind Agamben's project has consistently been language's *presuppositional* character, we can say that the sayability is the *trait* that divides Being from what is said of it. Every *trait* is a *retrait*, though, and what initially appears as the non-linguistic turns out to be nothing other than language itself which retreats in actual speech. The outside that philosophy strives to hear is nothing but the shadow of its own hearing—that is, the scarcely audible rustling of philosophy in its retreat, trying to catch its own tail.

Agamben's notion of use-as-*chrēsis* proposes "a way out of the transcendental" (*U, 113*) by dissolving the distinction between inside and outside, specifically in the form of the relation between subject and object, agent and patient, activity and passivity. Agamben's argument relies on the fact that the Greek *chresthai* is in the middle voice, a form of the verb that is neither active nor passive. Regardless

of how convincing the philological discovery is (and philosophy is always over-hearing) this move claims to have the effect of deconstructing deconstruction. Overhearing Benveniste's formulation of the middle voice as "effecting while be-ing affected [*il effectue en s'affectant*]," Agamben defines use as "the relation that one has with oneself, the affection that one receives insofar as one is in relation with a determinate being" (*U*, 28). The use of ears is thus the affection one re-ceives insofar as one is in relation with one or more ears. This use of ears is at once overhearing and being overheard, overhearing one's being overheard, over-hearing overhearing.

By comparison, cata-chresis is a misuse, a violent abuse of metaphor. The prefix *cata-* has the sense of the kind of perversion and unsanctioned desire, perhaps, that Agamben mentions approvingly in *Nudities* and that "uses the organs of the nutritive and reproductive functions and turns them—in the very act of using them—away from their physiological meaning, toward a new and more human operation".[63] A sign is already affected by an idea—already has a use—but cata-chresis then imposes upon it another idea that has no sign of its own (*M*, 255). That is, it imposes a new, improper use. Derrida argues that philosophy is not metaphorical, as Heidegger thinks. Rather, insofar as its founding concepts (such as *logos*) withdraw their relation to any proper meaning, philosophy is catachres-tic.[64] But philosophy's defining trope—the one at the end of a chain of metaphors excluded from its field—the one that "subtracts itself as a metaphor less" (*M*, 220), is metaphorical precisely insofar as it withdraws itself. Catachresis—as the metaphor *of* metaphor, as the "extra" metaphor—is therefore an *usure* of meta-phor, the exhaustion of metaphor's canonical use. In other words, catachresis is over-extended, used-up metaphor.

Much of this is already included in the metaphysical tradition of metaphor that Heidegger identifies and therefore does not necessarily come from overhearing Derrida's overhearing. A passage in *Stanzas*, however, where Agamben addresses metaphor in relation to use and commodity fetishism suggests that he does have Derrida in mind. In a novel reading of the story of Oedipus and the Sphinx, Agam-ben argues that "metaphor becomes in the realm of language what the fetish is in the realm of things" (*S*, 148). What they share is a structure of disavowal (Freud's *Verleugnung*), of "eclipse" and "shadowing over." In contrast to the traditional interpretation of metaphor, "there is not simply a 'transport' from a proper to an improper signified" (*S*, 149) or, translating this into the language of commodifica-tion, between exchange- and use-value. Rather, in what sounds like a reference

to deconstruction, there is only "the purely negative and insubstantial space of a process of difference and . . . of never-substantializable negation between an absence and a presence."

More precisely, the fetish is the presence of an absence that "alludes continuously beyond itself to something that cannot be possessed" (*S, 33*). Metaphor points towards the "barrier resistant to signification in which is guarded the original enigma of every signifying act" (*S, 149*). There is not first an opposition between proper and improper, between the inside and outside of signification, that metaphor traverses. Instead, it is the disavowal of signification's condition of possibility that, like the Derridean *trait*, draws a line between them. Moreover, Agamben here explicitly connects metaphor with sound and listening: "In contrast to the Sphinx and its metaphorical discourse, Oedipus appears like Nietzsche's deaf man, who . . . pretends to know what it is that is called sound." Just as the commodity consists in the separation of use- and exchange-value, signification is split between the Sphinx's concealment and Oedipus's revelation. Agamben instead prefers to find the point of their indifference. Hence many years later, he will seize upon Leibniz's echo as a figure of indistinction between inside and outside.

Does Agamben, though, also overhear the idea introduced by Derrida that metaphor is not reducible to *usure* but is also usury? At the risk of a stretch too far, we might recall that *chrēsis* is related to chrematistics. The Greek *chrēma*, meaning wealth or riches, is literally a thing that one uses; both words come from *chraomai*. Marx, lending his ear to Aristotle, opposes chrematistics to economics.[65] Unlike economics, which is governed by use-value, chrematistics is a science in which circulation becomes the source of an unlimited monetary accumulation. Aristotle argues that the quantity of possessions valued for their use in making life pleasant is not unlimited. There is, however, a second mode of acquiring things in which there is no limit to possessions. Agamben stands accused of neglecting precisely this second, endless spiral of self-valorizing capital in his exclusive focus on *oikonomia* in *The Kingdom and the Glory*.[66] Chrematistics is the sphere of the financialization of debt, of derivatives, of futures, options, and swaps—those instruments that Randy Martin has analyzed as a progressive erosion of metaphor.[67]

So, on the one hand, there is a *chrēsis* and, on the other, chrematistics. At the risk of an overly dialectical schema, imagine for a moment, on the one side, an usury so completely withdrawn from use that it coincides with—is nothing other than—this withdrawal. Insofar as withdrawal is a wearing away, this pure usury

inverts into a pure *usure*. Meanwhile, on the other side, imagine an *usure* that uses itself up, wears itself out, effacing even itself and polishing itself into a frictionless usury untethered from use. This is a withdrawal from metaphor into "banking on words,"[68] which is why, in this age of financialization, Szendy calls use the "fundamental figure of our time."[69] So, there is a withdrawal that pulls away *from*, spacing itself out, and then there is a withdrawal that withdraws *into* itself, contracting itself into a point. But is there anything between chrematistic accumulation and the catachrestic movement of *différance*? Derrida would, of course, insist upon their noncoincidence, but, from Agamben's standpoint, this merely shifts the *a priori* back to *usure*, thus, rather like the society of spectacle, radicalizing and exposes the chrematistic accumulation of metaphysics without deactivating it. From an Agambenian perspective, only if alterity—the difference between *usure* and usury, between potential and act—is thought as *immanent* to use and potential is it possible to put an end to endless capitalist accumulation.

This immanent other is precisely what withdraws and goes unheard as it opens up the gap between *usure* and usury. It is nothing other than the pure potential for use—which is to say its impotentiality, a potentiality that is not used up. *Usure* and usury are contaminated not by the traces of the other as it withdraws but by an excess immanent to both on account of which neither category coincides with itself. This is what it means to describe hearing as *the use of ears*. The tympanum is not a limit *between* philosophy and its outside. Rather, over-hearing is the excess on account of which neither philosophy nor its other are self-identical, and on account of which each opens onto the other. This use of philosophy's ears is the immanent threshold between philosophy and itself that renders philosophy as inappropriable to itself as its outside.

But what is this immanent negativity if it is not simply determinate negation or deconstructive negativity? This is where the idea of the echo as the relation between Being and its modifications comes into play. The unheard is not the other of hearing but simply its modifiability—what we might, after Malabou, call the *plasticity* of our ears.[70] The problem with grammatology, as Malabou sees it, is that[71] it is unable to imagine its own exhaustion, that it might ever be used up. And when Derrida tells us that deconstruction is always a beating and wearing-out of the tympanum, it is "indefatigably" so (*M*, xvii). Agamben's echo instead invites us to think—beyond the mutual contamination of *usure* and usury—a new use of ears that is at once completely useless. To which a Derridean can but plead that any such unconditional listening only ever takes places in the empirical, condi-

tioned, limited uses of our ears that are made in the name of a use which they never quite are—not because some failing belatedly befalls our listening but because listening is constitutively a mis(sing)hearing.

This has several consequences—philosophical and political. In the first instance, it keeps the rebounding echo back and forth between Agamben and Derrida alive not in the hope of one day gaining complete purchase on (and triumph over) the other's ideas but because, insofar as philosophy is listening to the other, an irreducible mis(sing)-hearing animates it from the start. More significantly, it also means that we should continue, as many have done, to question the political stakes of Agamben's thought. If use is presented at the end of the *Homo Sacer* series as an affirmative politics of sorts, it comes at the expense, I would argue, of reiterating a certain dogmatizing moralism, prevalent on the left, that forces a choice between, on the one hand, denouncing the workings of politics as they are with indignant righteousness and in the hope that some radical event or decision will break with the status quo and, on the other, pragmatically renouncing that ideal. As Christian Haines argues, Agamben's use-as-contemplation pays the price of a radical break with relationality as such and with it the empirical, materials conditions of our world.[72] Derrida, for his part, would insist that the arrival of the unconditional cannot be cleanly separated from the messy business of life as it is lived with all its limitations and lapses. Characterizing the finitude of infinite *différance* as "scatter," Bennington argues:

> Scatter is thinkable only as relatively gathered. The right measure (the right rhythm) of this scatter and gather is never given—not given here and now, not given in advance, not even in the form of a regulative Idea, but has to be invented each time, singularly, necessarily playing with chance, as it comes.[73]

The right use of our ears, if there is any, can only be invented each time we listen and try to find, at the risk of their exhaustion and multiplication, the right rhythm of the echo between them.

NAOMI WALTHAM-SMITH is Associate Professor in the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies at the University of Warwick. She is author of *Music and Belonging Between Revolution and Restoration* (Oxford Univer-

sity Press, 2017) and *Shattering Biopolitics: Militant Listening and the Sound of Life*, forthcoming in spring 2021 with Fordham University Press. Sitting at the intersection of recent European philosophy and sound studies, her work appears in journals including *boundary 2*, T*he Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, *CR: The New Centennial Review*, *diacritics*, *Journal of Musicology*, *Music Theory Spectrum*, and *Sound Studies*. In 2019–20 she is a fellow at Akademie Schloss Solitude.

NOTES

1. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *U* are taken from Agamben, *The Use of Bodies,* trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015). Originally published as *L'uso dei corpi* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2014).

2. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *The Leibniz–Des Bosses Correspondence*, eds and trans. Brandon C. Look and Donald Rutherford (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 366–69.

3. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *HS* are taken from Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). Originally published as *Homo sacer: Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995).

4. Leibniz, *The Leibniz–Des Bosses Correspondence, 366-369.*

5. Complaints about Agamben's Heideggerianism abound from both Marxist and deconstructionist corners especially. For particularly astute observations on Agamben's relation to Heidegger, see Alberto Toscano, "Divine Management," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 16, no. 3 (2011): 125–36; Lorenzo Chiesa and Frank Ruda, "The Event of Language as Force of Life: Agamben's Linguistic Vitalism," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 16, no. 3 (2011): 163–80; Laurent Dubreuil, "Leaving Politics: Bios, Zōē, Life," trans. Clarissa C. Eagle, *diacritics* 36, no. 2 (2006): 83–98. The preference for Spinoza over Heidegger has always been a part of Toni Negri's critique of Agamben: see his review of *The Use of Bodies* "Giorgio Agamben, quando l'inoperosità è sovrana," *Il Manifesto*, November 19, 2014, accessed January 3, 2016, https://ilmanifesto.it/giorgio-agamben-quando-linoperosita-e-sovrana. For a defense of Agamben's 'left Heideggerianism' see Matthew Abbott, "No Life is Bare, the Ordinary is Exceptional: Giorgio Agamben and the Question of Political Ontology," *Parrhesia* 14 (2012): 23–36.

6. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *RM* are taken from Jacques Derrida, "The *Retrait* of Metaphor," trans. Peggy Kamuf, in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume I* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 48–80. Originally published as «Le retrait—de la métaphore», *Psyché. Inventions de l'autre* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1987).

7. Alberto Toscano, "Giorgio Agamben's Political Paradigm: Notes on *Stasis*," *Stanford University Press Blog*, July 7, 2016, accessed July 10, 2016, http://stanfordpress.typepad.com/blog/2016/07/giorgio-agambens-political-paradigm.html.

8. Jacques Derrida, *BS1*, 92.

9. Jean-Luc Nancy and Lorenzo Fabbri, "Philosophy as Chance: An Interview with Jean-Luc Nancy," trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 2 (2007): 427–40; and Peter Szendy, "Katechon," *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon* 3.5 (Fall 2016), accessed February 3, 2017, https://www.politicalconcepts.org/katechon-peter-szendy/.

10. Kevin Attell, *Giorgio Agamben: Beyond the Threshold of Deconstruction* (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2014). *Profanations* was originally published as *Profanazioni* in 2005, and in translation two years later, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007). Leland de la Durantaye also gives a brief yet incisive account of Agamben's confrontation with Derrida in *Giorgio Agamben: A Critical Introduction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 184–91; this primarily restricts itself to the issues of self-reference and the trace raised in the essay "*Pardes*: The Writing of Potentiality," in Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy,* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 205–19. All parenthetical references denoted by *P* are taken from Agamben's *Potentialities*.

11. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *D* are taken from Jaques Derrida, *Dissemina-*

tion, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981). Originally published as *La Dissémination* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1972).

12. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *G* are taken from Jaques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974). Originally published as *De la grammatologie.* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967).

13. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *R* are taken from Jaques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason,* trans. Pascale-Anne Bault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). Originally published as *Voyous; deux essais sur la raison* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2003).

14. Juliet Fleming has recently taken up this suggestion in *Cultural Graphology: Writing After Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

15. David Cunningham, "Logics of Generalization: Derrida, Grammatology and Transdisciplinarity," *Theory, Culture & Society* 32, no. 5–6 (2015): 79–107.

16. Geoffrey Bennington, *Scatter 1 The Politics of Politics in Foucault, Heidegger, and Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); Alexander García Düttmann, "Ellipses of Grammatology," Keynote, Derrida Today, Montreal, May 25, 2018.

17. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *V* are taken from Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon,* trans. Leonard Lawlor (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011). Originally published as *La voix et le phénomène* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1967).

18. Lorenzo Chiesa and Frank Ruda, "The Event of Language as Force of Life: Agamben's Linguistic Vitalism," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 16, no. 3 (2011): 163–80; Christian Haines, "A Lyric Intensity of Thought: On the Potentiality and Limits of Giorgio Agamben's 'Homo Sacer' Project," *b2o: an online journal*, accessed August 29, 2016, https://www.boundary2.org/2016/08/christian-haines-a-lyric-intensity-of-thought-on-the-potentiality-and-limits-of-giorgio-agambens-homo-sacer-project/#_ednref11.

19. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *L* are taken from Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity,* trans. Karen E. Pinkus (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). Originally published as *Il linguaggio e la morte: Un seminario sul luogo della negatività* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978).

20. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *HC* are taken from Jacques Derrida, *H. C. for Life, That Is to Say . . .* trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrechter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). Originally published as *H. C. pour vie, c'est à dire . . .* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2000).

21. Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture,* trans. Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). Originally published as *Stanze: La parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977); Agamben, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Lorenzo Chiesa, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018). Originally published as *Che cos'è la filosofia?* (Quodlibet Srl.: Macerata, 2016).

22. The canonical account of metaphor as *usure* is in Derrida's "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," which first appeared in English trans. F. C. T. Moore, *New Literary History* 6, no. 1 (1974): 5–74; republished in Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). Originally published as *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972), 207–71. All parenthetical references denoted by *M* are taken from Derrida's *Margins of Philosophy*. Also see the later text *RM*.

23. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *TR* are taken from Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Daily (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). Originally published as *Il tempo che resta. Un comment alla Lettera ai romani* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000).

24. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *S* are taken from Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture.*

25. The canonical text on this is Derrida's "Heidegger's Ear: Philopolemology (*Geschlecht* IV)," trans. John P. Leavey, in *Reading Heidegger: Commemorations*, ed. John Sallis, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 163–218; but also see, for example, *BS1*, 23.

26. Peter Szendy, *All Ears: The Aesthetics of Espionage*, trans. Roland Végső (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 5.

27. Ibid., xi.

28. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *E* are taken from Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007). Originally published as *À l'écoute* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2002).

29. Szendy, *All Ears,* 67–74 for the main discussion of *L'Orfeo,* and 115–16 for some additional remarks.

30. Ibid., xi.

31. Ibid., 51–8.

32. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *T* are taken from Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy,* trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). Originally published as *Le toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2000).

33. Szendy, *All Ears,* 116–17. Szendy's point of reference is not the opening of *On Touching*, but a passage on *se regarder* in Derrida and Marie-Françoise Plissart, *Right of Inspection* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999), 129. While this text emphasizes the "general theory" of panopticism that Szendy (also overhearing Foucault here) translates into panacouticism, I highlight Derrida's book on Nancy because it foregrounds the issues of contact and affectability that arise in Agamben's theory of use (to be discussed later).

34. Szendy, *All Ears*, xi.

35. Ibid., 63.

36. Agamben advances this reading in a number of places, but a canonical statement of his interpretation is given in in "On Potentiality," in *P*, 177–84.

37. See Attell's excellent discussion ("Potentiality, Actuality, Constituent Power," *diacritics* 39, no. 3, [2009]: 35–53), which, unlike other secondary literature, also considers the substantially revised and longer Italian version of Agamben's text, *La potenza del pensiero: Saggi e conferenze* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2005), henceforth denoted parenthetically as *PP*, including an extended discussion of modal negation that retrospectively provides crucial background for the chapter "On Modal Ontology" in *The Use of Bodies*.

38. On the relation between listening and hearing, also see David Wills, "Positive Feedback: Listening Behind Hearing," in *Thresholds of Listening: Sound, Technics, Space*, ed. Sander van Maas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 70–88.

39. Nancy, for his part, takes the distinction in a different direction, as discussed later, but I do not believe that this reading, however much of a stretch, is incompatible with his thought.

40. See also page 113 in Nancy's, "The Necessity of Sense," trans. Leslie Hill, in *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 109–117. All parenthetical references denoted by *NS* are taken from Nancy's "The Necessity of Sense".

41. See Peggy Kamuf, "The Ear, Who?" *Discourse* 30, nos. 1–2 (2008): 181–82; and Peter Szendy, "The Auditory Re-Turn (The Point of Listening)," in *Thresholds of Listening: Sound, Technics, Space*, ed. Sander vas Maas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 27–29. Derrida's attack focuses on the way in which the logocentric Heideggerian ear *gathers* difference into a unity, and it is true

that he acknowledges the plurality of ears both in a brief reference to "the passage from plural to singular" (*HE*, 187–88) and also in a footnote (*HH, 196n38*) to another essay in the *Geschlecht series* (Derrida, "*Geschlecht* II: Heidegger's Hand," trans. John P. Leavey, in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida*, ed. John Sallis [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987], 161–96. All parenthetical references denoted by *HH* are taken from this text). And yet, as Szendy demonstrates, he holds back in his deconstruction of Heideggerian monoaurality, especially in a parenthetical remark added to the French version of the text where Derrida suggests that the two ears cannot be disassociated in the act of listening to the same extent as the two hands (Derrida, "L'Oreille de Heidegger: Philpolémologie (*Geschlecht* IV)," in *Politiques de l'amitié* [Paris: Galilée, 1994], 377–78. All parenthetical references denoted by *OH* are taken from this text). This leads Szendy to call for a deconstruction of hearing that recognizes interaural difference, as exemplified by echolocation.

42. Catherine Malabou, "Can We Relinquish the Transcendental?" *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 28, no. 3 (2014): 245.

43. See Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, trans. Carolyn Shread (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 11; "Is Retreat a Metaphor?" *Public* 25, no. 50 (2014): 35–42; and "Philosophy in Erection," *Paragraph* 39, no. 2 (2016): 244.

44. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *Gl* are taken from Derrida, *Glas,* trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986). Originally published as *Glas* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1974).

45. This is Malabou's phrase (*Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 21). Instead of staging a confrontation between the three modes of negation she identifies (dialectic, destruction, deconstruction), she focuses on their malleability, and hence on the underlying plasticity of the concept of negativity.

46. Derrida gives what might be considered an overhearing of sorts in *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II,* trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). Originally published as *Séminaire: La bête et le souverain, Volume II (2002–2003),* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2010), 218–22; where, even if Agamben goes unmentioned, he discusses Heidegger's analysis of the distinction between voice and animal *phōnē*. This text is parenthetically denoted as *BS2*.

47. It is hard not to overhear in this epilogue an allusion to the Heideggerian "path" (*Weg*) toward Being as a whole and specifically to the "step back" (*Schritt zurück*), a theme that Derrida discusses in the second year of his seminar on animality and sovereignty where it clear that "step back" is another way to say *retrait* (*BS2,* 215). Writing about Maurice Blanchot many years earlier, Derrida mobilizes the concept *pas*, meaning both "step" and "not" in French, to dislocate the opposition between affirmation and negation and to suggest a detour from the Heideggerian *retrait*. "Borne as a labyrinth," every *pas* is a double *pas* without being a dialectical negation of the negation, without interiorization or idealization (Derrida, *Parages,* trans. Tom Conley, James Hulbert, John P. Leavey, and Avital Ronell [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010]. Originally published as *Parages* [Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1984], 37, 52. This text is parenthetically denoted as *Par*). Hence at the end of "The *Retrait* of Metaphor," in seeking to mark a difference between a metaphysical withdrawal of the withdrawal and a deconstructive one, Derrida revives this theme of what steps on or off the path. "It is what I have elsewhere tried to name according to the stepping movement of a certain *pas*. Here again, it is a matter of the path [*chemin*], of what passes there, of what passes it by, of what goes on there, or not—ou *pas*" (*RM,* 80). Whether Agamben is also silently overhearing Derrida overhearing Heidegger or Derrida silently overhearing Agamben (overhearing Derrida) overhearing Heidegger is unclear. Perhaps, each on his path, the other simply passes him by. And, from this passage alone, it is difficult to tell if Agamben's path leads back to deconstruction

or succeeds in swerving away.

48. 75n44 refers to the bilingual edition *La fine del pensiero/La fin de la pensée*, trans. Gérard Macé (Paris: Le Nouveau Commerce, 1982).

49. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *I* are taken from Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (New York: Verso, 1993). Originally published as *Infanzia e storia: Distruzione dell'esperienza e origine della storia,* (Turin: Einaudi, 1978).

50. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *SE* are taken from Agamben, *State of Exception,* trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). Originally published as *Stato di eccezione* (Bollati Boringhieri, 2008).

51. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *Prof* are taken from Agamben, *Profanations,* trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books), 2007. Originally published as *Profanazioni* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2005).

52. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *AP* are taken from Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life,* trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013). Originally published as *Altissima povertà. Regole monastiche e forme di vita* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2011).

53. Walter Benjamin, "Notes Toward a Work on the Category of Justice," trans. Peter Fenves, in *The Messianic Reduction: Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 257.

54. Originally published as "Il dandy e il feticcio," in *I problemi di Ulisse* 71 (February 1972): 9–23; it was reproduced in expanded form as the central section of *Stanzas*.

55. Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (New York: International Publishers, 1964), 139; quoted in *S,* 53.

56. This, and all parenthetical references denoted by *SM* are taken from Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf. Originally published as *Spectres de Marx* (Éditions Galilée, 1993).

57. Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies in the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

58. Szendy highlights this blanching (*blanchir*) in "L'usure de la deconstruction," *Rue Descartes* 82 (2014): 137.

59. Malabou, "Can We Relinquish the Transcendental?" 253.

60. Daniel Bensaïd, *Marx for Our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique*, trans. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2002), 113.

61. Agamben criticizes Marx for focusing on forms of productivity to the neglect of forms of inoperativity (*U,* 94). Also see Lorenzo Chiesa's comment on this from the perspective of an historical-materialist in "Superpolitically Political," *Stanford University Press Blog*, July 8, 2016, accessed July 10, 2016, http://stanfordpress.typepad.com/blog/2016/07/superpolitically-apolitical-.html. Alberto Toscano has also argued that Agamben is hampered by his "banal Heideggerian prejudices about the place of labour and productivity in the Marxian critique of political economy." ("Divine Management," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 16, no. 3 (2011): 132.

62. Elsewhere Agamben argues that "the radical crisis of the presupposition is itself thought according to the form of the presupposition (This is the structure of the trace and originary writing in which our age has remained imprisoned.)" (*P,* 111), and a few pages later, in a critique of the undecidable, Agamben suggests that "signifier" and "trace" have been "converted into values . . . hypostatized" (*P,* 113).

63. Agamben, *Nudities,* trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedetella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 102. Originally published as *Nudità* (Rome: Nottetempo, 2009).

64. Jacques Derrida with Richard Kerney, "Deconstruction and the Other," in *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1984), 123.

65. For a discussion of Marx's reading of Aristotle, see Eric Alliez, *Capital Times: Tales from the Conquest of Time*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.

66. Toscano, "Divine Management," 132.

67. Randy Martin, "From the Critique of Political Economy to the Critique of Finance," in *Derivatives and the Wealth of Societies*, eds Benjamin Lee and Randy Martin (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016), 192–93. Martin suggests that there is a passage from metaphor (futures) through synecdoche (options) to irony (swaps) that operates as its own cycle of accumulation corresponding to the increasing socialization of capital.

68. See Arjun Appadurai, *Banking on Words: The Failure of Language in the Age of Derivative Finance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015) where he diagnoses the financial crash as a failure of language.

69. Szendy, "*Prêter ter le temps* (*usure et déconstruction*)," Lecture, Collège Internationale de Philosophie, Paris, April 5, 2017.

70. For an ambitious reading that splices Agamben together with Malabou (written before there was opportunity to consider *The Use of Bodies*), see Arne De Boever, *Plastic Sovereignties: Agamben and the Politics of Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

71. Malabou, "The End of Writing? Grammatology and Plasticity," trans. Annjeanette Wiese, *The European Legacy* 12, no. 4 (2007): 439.

72. Haines, " A Lyric Intensity of Thought."

73. Bennington, "The Democricy to Come," *The Oxford Literary Review* 39, no. 1 (2017): 130.