

The Poetic Word in the Taking-Place of Language: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Politics / *A palavra poética no ter-lugar da língua: estética, ética e política*

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ABSTRACT

This work aims to investigate the nature and function of the poetic word from its relation with aesthetics, ethics, and politics. We are stirred to know the ways poetic language, inscribed within language, may appear as a gesture of resistance and subversion. This is due to its investments both in non-representation and in the presentation of an (almost) rising being in a *hic et nunc* of its presence in the “taking place” of language. Contemporary philosophers, such as Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben, suggest possible answers to this question through the operation of negativity that takes place in language so as to make it uninformative. Barthes also seems to follow the same path by lingering on the emptiness of the appearance of “this is” in the poetic form of haiku, which prevents any further interpretation. We expect that these ways of thinking the poetic may offer literary criticism new investigative parameters.

KEYWORDS: Poetic Language; Negativity; Aesthetics; Ethics; Politics

RESUMO

Trata-se de um trabalho que objetiva especular sobre a natureza e a função da palavra poética do ponto de vista da relação que estabelece entre o estético, o ético e o político. Inquieta-nos saber como a linguagem poética, inscrita no seio da língua, pode se configurar como um gesto de resistência e subversão ao investir na não-representação e na apresentação de um (quase) ser nascente no aqui e agora de sua presença no “ter-lugar” da língua. Filósofos contemporâneos, como Alain Badiou e Giorgio Agamben, apontam possíveis respostas para essa questão por meio da operação de negatividade que se faz na língua, de modo a torná-la não informativa. Barthes também acena nessa direção ao se deter sobre o vazio da aparição do “é isto” na forma poética do haikai, que bloqueia qualquer interpretação ulterior. Espera-se que esses modos de pensar o poético possam oferecer à crítica literária novos parâmetros investigativos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Linguagem poética; Negatividade; Estético; Ético; Político

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When I write, I don't think about literature: I think about capturing living things. It was the need to capture living things, together with my physical aversion to common-places (and common-places are never to be taken as simplicity), that led me to another intimate necessity: to enrich and embellish language, making it more plastic, flexible, and alive. That's why I don't have any process regarding linguistic creation: I want to profit from everything good the Portuguese language has to offer, be it in Brazil, Portugal, Angola or Mozambique, and even from other languages as well: for the same reason I explore both popular and erudite spheres, both the city and the country. If very beautiful words, such as "gramado" [lawn] and "aloprar" [to go crazy], are part of Brazilian slang, and "malga" [bowl], "azinhaga" [lane], "azinha"[watermill] are used only in Portugal, is this a real reason for me not to use them in the correct context?

*Guimarães Rosa*¹

Where is the place for capturing the poetic, be it in verse or prose? A writer always knows it, even if abruptly, as Guimarães Rosa does in this interview. It can only be in language. The scene offered to the contemplation of someone who might read it someday happens within language. But even if this does not happen, the treasure remains there, waiting for that "you." This was lucidly and beautifully asserted by a poet from Eastern Europe, viz., Paul Celan, when receiving an award in 1958 in Bremen. The passage that we consider worth quoting is the following:

A poem, as a manifestation of language and thus essentially dialogue, can be a message in a bottle, sent out in the—not always greatly hopeful—belief that somewhere and sometime it could wash up on land, on heartland perhaps. Poems in this sense, too, are under way: they are making toward something [...] toward something standing

¹ Interview with Guimarães Rosa given to the writer and journalist Arnaldo Saraiva on November 24, 1966. The interview is available in Portuguese at <http://www.revistabula.com/383-a-ultima-entrevista-de-guimaraes-rosa/>.

Text in Portuguese: "Quando escrevo, não penso na literatura: penso em capturar coisas vivas. Foi a necessidade de capturar coisas vivas, junto à minha repulsa física pelo lugar-comum (e o lugar-comum nunca se confunde com a simplicidade), que me levou a outra necessidade íntima de enriquecer e embelezar a língua, tornando-a mais plástica, mais flexível, mais viva. Daí que eu não tenha nenhum processo em relação à criação linguística: eu quero aproveitar tudo o que há de bom na língua portuguesa, seja do Brasil, seja de Portugal, de Angola ou Moçambique, e até de outras línguas: pela mesma razão, recorro tanto às esferas populares como às eruditas, tanto à cidade como ao campo. Se certas palavras belíssimas como "gramado", "aloprar", pertencem à gíria brasileira, ou como 'malga', 'azinhaga', 'azinha' só correm em Portugal — será essa razão suficiente para que eu as não empregue, no devido contexto?"

open, occupiable, perhaps toward an addressable (CELAN, 1958 *apud* FELSTINER, 1995, p.115).²

We are stirred to understand this manifestation in language, this divestment and abandonment of a particular purpose, this open destination, which are only faint marks of a path to the “un-touchable.”

1 Philosophers Speak

Some contemporary philosophers, such as Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben, deeply analyze poetic thought in two of their works, *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (2005)³ and *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (1993),⁴ respectively. Although taking different paths, they arrive at a common point at which a non-recoverable operation of negativity, be it Badiou’s “unnamable” (2005, p.16) or Agamben’s “nonapprehensibility” and “inactivity” (2008, p.139), stands out.

If, for both of them, it is within language that the “taking-place” of the operation of poetic thought happens, then it is necessary to point out some issues, such as the type of thinking involved and the fact that this leads Badiou to hit the heart of the matter: it is a thought which questions discursiveness and deductive reasoning, a critical issue for Plato’s restriction to poetry. For Plato, poetry is dangerous to the order and harmony that should prevail in the ideal Republic.

It is then a paradox. In other words, a thought refuses deduction and categorization, but opens up to a space between appearance-disappearance, setting-unsetting, visibility-invisibility. In it it is possible to live the experience of passage and interval, which, according to Walter Benjamin, in his unfinished work *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940),⁵ is so rare for the modern man, who is eager to cross the demarcated border lines and to go forward. Thus, he does not pay attention to these brief moments of suspension between being in and out simultaneously.

² Extract of Paul C elan’s speech cited by John Felstiner (1995) [FELSTINER, J. *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995].

³ BADIOU, A. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Translated by Alberto Toscano. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005.

⁴ AGAMBEN, G. *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*. Translated by Ronald L. Martinez. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

⁵ BENJAMIN, W. *The Arcades Project*. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann and translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1999.

Remaining in this place-non place of passage is to experience, within language, its most primitive and original negativity, that is, its power to say without saying. It is resisting the communicative act by means of an (almost) mute (almost) saying, so as to foster the experimentation of potential emptiness – this powerful emptiness of senses that remains as a desire for knowledge even when it is inaccessible. Badiou calls it the “unnamable”:

A truth comes up against the rock of its own singularity, and it is only there that it is stated, in powerlessness, that a truth exists.
Let us call this obstacle the *unnamable*. The unnamable is that thing whose naming cannot be forced by a truth. That thing whose entrance into truth [*mise en vérité*] truth itself cannot anticipate. [...]
If we now turn to poetry, we can see that what characterizes its effect is its capacity to manifest the powers of language itself. Every poem brings a power into language, the power of eternally fastening the disappearance of what presents itself. Or, through the poetic retention of its disappearance, the power of producing presence itself as Idea. Nevertheless, this power of language is precisely what the poem cannot name (2005, pp.24-25).⁶

In agreement with this reflection on the poetic, Giorgio Agamben, the Italian philosopher, highlights two more singularities of this thought in *Stanzas*. He thinks about poetry and every single criticism – not only literary criticism –, that is willing to be in tune with its origin. That is, he reflects upon the limits of knowledge, whose “unappropriability” is its most precious possession (AGAMBEN, 1993, p.xvii).⁷

A new paradox hits us, motivating us to face this perplexity that challenges and silences deductive expectations. How can we deactivate the most precious good of criticism – the interpretation of the puzzle that a poem is?

This is thought-provoking, for the poem, as an operation that places the communicative and informative functions of language in question, cannot be committed to any attempt to secure its meaning, which is always in a passing motion and in a process of disappearance. Due to this, for Agamben it is precisely in this movement of presenting language in its powerful position of saying/not saying, without stabilizing meaning in a synthesis, that the singularity of the poetic resides in the “taking-place” of

⁶ For reference, see footnote 3.

⁷ For reference, see footnote 4.

language. This is expressed in a conference held in Porto, at Fundação Serralves in 2007:

What in fact is a poem if not a linguistic operation which renders language inoperative by de-activating its communicative and informative functions in order to open it to a new possible use? Poetry is in other words, in Spinoza's terms, a contemplation of language, which brings it back to its capacity to speak (AGAMBEN, 2008, p.140).

However, when referring to the “poetic,” we do not intend to limit it to poems, but extend it also to prose. In this sense, in *Idea of Prose* (1995),⁸ Agamben meets this thin threshold by means of a figure – *enjambement* (p.39). *Enjambement*, in its movement of “versura” (p.41),⁹ would be in a double movement of going forward and backwards, creating a distance between the sound chain (the caesura), sharply cut, and the semantics that goes forward in search of the continuity of meaning offered by the prosaic line.

It is not, however, a stylistic and rhetorical device, but it is an operation made in language and in its ability of not saying/saying. It again enters an un-decidability zone, rebelling against the narrowness of a bipolar split that establishes the boundary between what poetry is and what it is not; it is and it not prose. Instead, it is positioned in the interval in which poetry desires to be prose, without being it entirely. Similarly, prose desires to be poetry, without being it entirely. Both remain immersed in this rich zone of passage and contamination in which language contemplates its power of saying. Thus, what is rescued is not what is in the act only, but the “indiscernible babbling” that is not there and that still guarantees the power of a “no,” the creator of a contingency, i. e., the possibility of not being or being otherwise. Agamben affirms that “[t]his act of *decreation* is precisely the *life* of the work, that which allows its reading, its translation

⁸ AGAMBEN, G. *Idea of Prose*. Translated by Sam Whitsitt and Michael Sullivan. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995.

⁹ It is a figure which is not present in the metric agreements and that in *Idea of Prose* Agamben rescues from its original meaning in Latin, which is “the place (and the movement) where the plough turned around at the end of a furrow” (1995, p.40; footnote). This going back and forth is exactly the *enjambement* movement that displays simultaneously the breaking of the sound chain, making the verse go back on itself, and the continuity of direction in the following verse, projecting the prose line: “It is an ambiguous gesture, that turns in two opposed directions at once: backwards (uersus), and forwards (pro-uersa)” (AGAMBEN, 1995, p.33 – reference on footnote 8).

and its critique, and that which, in them, it is increasingly repeated” (2007, p.252; author’s emphasis; our translation).¹⁰

These ways of thinking the poetic through a philosophical perspective may offer critics other perspectives that forgo having a “key to the poem.” In addition, as a partner in this shaky ground, we can only point to a route where it is precisely in the gaps and empty places that an investigation erects “about precisely that which can be neither posed nor grasped” (AGAMBEN, 1993, p.xv).¹¹

2 Poems Respond

What [] wants to say¹²
To Haroldo de Campos,
translator maximus

What [] wants to say, say(s).
[] does not keep doing
what once I always did.
[] does not keep only wanting, wanting
a thing I never wanted.
What [] wants to say, say(s)
Only by saying in another
what one day was said
someday will [] be happy.
Paulo Leminski

Here is a poetic event in which it is possible to notice a thought moving back and forth, and its chorus turns to language itself. It avoids being locked to a single meaning and creates a labile bond that can be changed by a single break. The part of the

¹⁰ TN. This citation is from the author’s Foreword found in the Portuguese version of the work, but not present in the English version, the reason why we have translated it. Text in Portuguese: “Este ato de *descrição* é, propriamente, a *vida* da obra, o que permite a sua leitura, sua tradução e sua crítica, e o que, em tais coisas, se trata cada vez mais de repetir.”

¹¹ For reference, see footnote 4.

¹² TN. In Portuguese, “o que quer dizer” may be rendered both as “what [] wants to say” and “what it means.” As the Portuguese language allows the use of hidden subjects, in order for the sentence not to be grammatically inaccurate in English, we have placed [] as the subject of the verbs. The translation, that is, the transcriation (as proposed by Haroldo de Campos) tries to suggest the ambiguity there is in Portuguese when writing “what [] wants to say – say,” instead of using “what [] wants to say, says.” This poem is from a book published in 1987 entitled *Distraídos venceremos* [Unfocused We Will Succeed]. It was published again in *Toda Poesia* [Every Poem] in 2013. Text in Portuguese: “O que quer dizer/ *para Haroldo de Campos, translator maximus* O que quer dizer, diz./Não fica fazendo/o que, um dia, eu sempre fiz./ Não fica só querendo, querendo,/ coisa que eu nunca quis./ O que quer dizer, diz./Só se dizendo num outro/ o que, um dia, se disse,/um dia, vai ser feliz. (Paulo Leminski).”

title “What [...] wants to say” is also the starting line of the poem, which finds correspondence and expansion in “What [...] wants to say – say.” There are two possible meanings: the meaning is intransitive and returns to itself: what [...] wants to say, says (what wants to say); in the second movement, there is a request to an implicit another in the vocative that is installed from the pause comma: “what [] wants to say, says (you).”

This other to which the poem is dedicated and the intransitive meaning is not exactly another “I,” be it the reader or Haroldo de Campos, the *translator maximus*. It is another poem, originated by a *transcreation* or an *in-translation*, as asserted by Augusto de Campos. It is so equal to itself as the one from which it departed. It is the presence of an always delayed, indeterminate and slippery waiting in space-time that slips through the empty intervals of what was left to say:

Only by saying in another (which one?)
what one day was said (what?)
someday will [] be happy. (when?)

This is the poem’s operation: the introduction of an unexpected and foreign “other” language within that of everyday life in which what matters is communication. However, this counter-communicative and device-resistant movement¹³ of language is its political-aesthetic gesture that calls the inexhaustible power of the Portuguese language to new ways of saying, new ways of thinking, new ways of being.

3 The Poetic between the Ethical and the Political

Poetry = practice of subtlety in a barbaric world. Whence the need to fight for poetry today: Poetry should be one of our “Human Rights”; it

¹³ Device is being used here to mean “anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings. Not only, therefore, prisons, madhouses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, juridical measures, and so forth (whose connection with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones and—why not—language itself, which is perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses [...]” (AGAMBEN, 2009, p.14). [AGAMBEN, G. *What Is An Apparatus? and Other Essays*. Translated by David Kishik and Stefim Pedatella. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009].

isn't "decadent", it's subversive: subversive and vital (BARTHES, 2011, pp.45-46).¹⁴

In the context of his classes on a poetic form from the East, the haiku – a Japanese poem that stands out for its extreme brevity, Barthes's thinking summons us to wonder how the aesthetic subtlety of haiku could be a gesture of ethical and political resistance to the world's barbarity.

I come by the mountain path
Ah! this is exquisite!
A violet!
Basho
(BARTHES, 2011, p.358)¹⁵

There is no comparison or metaphor in this poem by Basho, the acclaimed Japanese poet. Everything is simply focused on the brief moment of the movement in a crack – the path of the mountain – and the appearance of a singular violet. There is nothing to say about it, its abstract qualities or correlations. There is simply "Ah! this is exquisite," which is intransitive in its untranslatability. It means nothing beyond itself: the fascination with the violet's presence. It is not possible to continue looking for an interpretation in order to fulfill this complete, dense, indescribable time instant. It is there, pointing to this place in language where there is no real complete sign, but a gesture, an interjection, which is the expression of an impression without an I. This is because it is inscribed in another, i.e., in the violet. "Ah! this is exquisite!" is enough to stop any comment other than the display of the violet itself. There is an absence of a passage to the symbol and to interpretation. Blocking has been placed in the evolutionary chain of the sign, re-turning it to its origin of pure contingency of not being/being.

This does not mean refusing to mean and creating a polarity that is opposed to communication; it means "being halfway without reaching the destination," which, incidentally, is how Blanchot defines the "secret law of narrative" (2003, p.7):¹⁶ the movement toward an unknown point. It is not the reporting of an event, but the event

¹⁴ BARTHES, R. *The Preparation of the Novel: Lecture Courses and Seminars at the Collège de France* (1978-1979 and 1979-1980). Translated by Kate Briggs. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

¹⁵ For reference, see footnote p.14.

¹⁶ BLANCHOT, M. *The Book to Come*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003.

that is still to come, as if it were in standby. It is a positioning in a crack where something vibrates, a desire to mean that abruptly stops echoing the “I would prefer not to” of Melville’s *Bartleby, the Scrivener*.¹⁷

Thus, where would be the “vital subversion” of this aesthetic gesture materialized in the poem’s operation?

Seen from an ethical point of view, we think that there is a call for the present, for the event in its uniqueness and for simplicity, because it is simply “what it is” in its contingency. It is a *kairos*¹⁸ in which “this is...” vibrates in this contraction of “now,” which withdraws the event and the “opportunity” for an attention to intervals, to passages. According to Walter Benjamin, this is an experience that urban people have lost because, eager to quickly overcome steps, they do not live “rites of passage” anymore. These threshold¹⁹ spaces allow the exercise of the simplicity of gestures that have no pragmatic use or interpretive anxiety. Art and literature are spaces that allow people to live this experience of interval, pause, waiting ... When seeking an (almost) definition of haiku, Barthes asserts with subtlety and rigor that:

Haiku=the art (an art) that “skims” reality of its ideological resonance, that is, of its *commentary*, even when that commentary is virtual. Perhaps the most beautiful haiku=those that retain a trace a scent of this resistance to meaning. [...] I consider the haiku to be a sort of *Incident*, a tiny fold, an insignificant crease on a great empty surface (BARTHES, 2011, p.68; highlighted by the author).²⁰

¹⁷ It refers to *Bartleby, the Scrivener* by the North-American writer Herman Melville (1819-1891), published in 1853 at *Putnam's Magazine*. This work is the opening point of a trend called “not literature.” The catchphrase repeated by Bartleby throughout the narrative - *I would prefer not to* - constitutes the core of Agamben’s instigating essay “Bartleby, or contingency” and Deleuze’s “Bartleby or the formula.” As to Agamben, the narrative becomes a paradigm of key concepts of his thought: contingency and the power of “not” (negativity). For Deleuze, the ungrammatical function of the phrase *I would prefer not to* resides in its power of non-representation as a barrier to symbology and interpretation. It is from the unexpected performance of this sentence in the here and now of the text and from the changes it causes in every character, including the narrator, that comes its constituent power, transforming it into the most important figure of the narrative.

¹⁸ According to Jonnefer Barbosa’s *Política e tempo em Giorgio Agamben [Politics and Time in Giorgio Agamben]*, “*Kairos*, to use a term Benjamin holds dear, is not other time, but a contracted, abbreviated *chronos*” (2014, p.150; our translation). Text in Portuguese: “O *kairós* para falar em termos caros a Benjamin, não é outro tempo, mas um *chronos* contraído, abreviado”.

¹⁹ The concept of *threshold* is from Walter Benjamin’s unfinished work *The Arcades Project*. For him: “[t]he threshold must be carefully distinguished from the boundary. A *Schwelle* <threshold> is a zone. Transformation, passage, wave action are in the word *schwellen*, swell, and the etymology ought not to overlook these senses” (1999, p.494). For reference, see footnote 5.

²⁰ For reference, see footnote p.14.

Agamben is also committed to unravel the way that unites aesthetics to ethics and politics. He does it in a conference at Fundação Serralves in 2007, to which we referred earlier. In it, he takes an unusual path to reflect on this issue. He asks himself about the emptiness and inoperativeness that are at the center of all power, even the divine, for the creator established the non-creation at the center of creation to separate one day for resting. The “empty throne,” which can be seen in many symbolic images of power, is one example (AGAMBEN, 2008, p.137). Then a question about created devices²¹ is raised so as to cover the fact that every *locus* of power hides, in its center, a non-power and its own possibility of being questioned and subverted by non-governability. Speech and language, which are also devices that configure human beings’ behavior and beliefs, are not different. In the center of the discourse there is also its other, the possibility of disarticulation so that new possibilities of orders may arise. Literature, by its turn, also does not escape from devices – genres, the canon, etc. – in a constant crisis of negativity and undoing in favor of new combinations.

At this point, we are faced with Agamben’s core concept: *inactivity*. That does not mean a passive and useless inaction, but a revolutionary gesture that skips emptiness, which is the essence of power systems, whatever they are, in order to disable their devices, making them inoperative. Thus, it brings to light the *power of “not,”* which devices secretly kept in their origin, freeing it for new possibilities of use:

[...] the idea that idleness and *désœuvrement* define the essence – or rather the specific praxis – of man is, as you will have gathered, the hypothesis I am about to propose to you here. [...]
“[W]hy does power need idleness and glory? What is so essential in these that power has to establish them at all cost in the empty centre of its governmental equipment? What does power feed on?” [...] [T]his hypothesis makes it possible to think of politics and, in a more general way, the sphere of human action in a new way.

²¹ Agamben uses the concept of device from Foucault. Through a bypass operation, dependent on Benjamin’s method, he wants to imprint in it a brand when detecting the origin of a fracture that seeks to disentangle from the genealogy of the term (Latin *device*) and of its theological meaning. It is the separation between the being (God) and praxis, i. e., the devices of governance or mechanisms of the world of creatures. When penetrating this conflicting space, Agamben recovers the ambivalent movement of the device that at one time determines the processes of subjectivity inscribed in the very practices that captures them: “I invite you therefore to abandon the context of Foucauldian philology in which we have moved up to now in order to situate apparatuses in a new context. I wish to propose to you nothing less than a general and massive partitioning of beings into two large groups or classes: on the one hand, living beings (or substances), and on the other, apparatuses in which living beings are incessantly captured.” (AGAMBEN, 2009, p.13). For reference, see footnote 13.

Inactivity does not in fact mean simply inertia, non-activity. It refers rather to an operation which involves inactivating, decommissioning (des-oeuvrer) all human and divine endeavour (AGAMBEN, 2008, p.139; emphasis added).

In the case of literature, it means to make language inoperative and counter-communicative. Hence, it points to its roots in an un-evolutionary movement of the sign that resists going towards the symbol and communication and contemplates its purely potential gesture of not saying/saying. Here the “this is” of haiku is in force, as Barthes states, “the sudden apparition of the referent in the walk (the walk of life) and of the word in the sentence” (2011, p.78).²²

In an untimely speculative intervention, Agamben asserts at the end of his lecture at Fundação Serralves that:

If this is true, then we need radically to change the manner in which we are accustomed to think about the problem of the relationship between art and politics. Art is not a human activity of an aesthetic type which can, if necessary and in certain circumstances, also acquire a political significance. Art is political in itself, because it is an operation which contemplates and renders non-operational man's senses and usual actions, thus opening them to new possible uses. For this reason art comes so close to politics and philosophy as almost to merge with them. What poetry achieves by the power of speech and art by the senses, politics and philosophy have to achieve by the power of action. By rendering biological and economic operations inactive, they show of what the human body is capable, they open the body to new possible uses. (AGAMBEN, 2008, pp.140-141; emphasis added).

What is astonishing is that Agamben assigns a “constitutively political” essence to the nature of art. Contrary to common sense, he makes no separation between them. One must consider, however, that the concept of politics, in this case, is dominated by the aesthetic, and this makes a whole difference. Thus, if the operation of “making inactive” unites politics and art in disabling devices that are responsible for perceptual habits, beliefs and rules of conduct in order to open them to new possible uses, the difference between politics and art and poetry is the field in which inactiveness operates: in the case of politics, it operates in the conduct of human beings; in the case of art and poetry, it operates in sensitive perception and language.

²² For reference, see footnote 14.

In both cases, however, what prevails is the continuous deactivation of devices – if that is possible in a contemporary society where they are everywhere, capturing subjectivities and creating behaviors and beliefs that detach subjects from themselves in a process of intense de-subjectivation. How can it be established as a subject in this fight with devices without truce?

Agamben points to the rescue of the subject in a ternary operation in which we “have then two great classes: living beings (or substances) and apparatuses.” He proposes the existence of subjects between these two, as a third class: “*I call a subject that which results from the relation and, so to speak, from the relentless fight between living beings and apparatuses.*” (2009, p.14, emphasis added).²³

Literature and especially the poetic language discussed here signal a possible way in the field of language perception. As Agamben puts it, it is one of the oldest devices that captures those who use it in order to make them unconscious of the very being of language that they use on a daily basis for communication purposes. Poems then rescue the capacity of astonishment of human beings when confronted with a stanza, an image that blocks immediate understanding and makes them live the experience of threshold and passage between what was said and what was left to say, without being able to solve the stalemate. Instead, what is opened to them in this kind of “foreign language” that exposes the “empty throne” through this operation of inactivity is the contemplation of the overwhelming strength of this brief moment of pure negativity. It renders no possible restoration that brings them back to the core of their deepest humanity, to the center of their creation, when things were not as yet an act, but a contingency, or simply a power of not being/being. As Barthes would say when referring to haiku, the poem “is this!”

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²³ For reference, see footnote 13.

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