

The Signature of All Things

On Method

Giorgio Agamben

Translated by Luca D'Isanto with Kevin Attell

ZONE BOOKS · NEW YORK

2009

© 2009 Urzone, Inc.
ZONE BOOKS
1226 Prospect Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11218

All rights reserved.
Second Printing, 2010

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including electronic, mechanical, photocopying, microfilming, recording, or otherwise (except for that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the Publisher.

Originally published as *Signatura rerum: Sul metodo*
© 2008 Bollati Boringhieri editore.
Printed in the United States of America.

Distributed by The MIT Press,
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Agamben, Giorgio, 1942-

[*Signatura rerum*. English]

The signature of all things : on method / Giorgio

Agamben ; translated by Luca D'Isanto with Kevin Attell.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-890951-98-6

1. Methodology. 2. Paradigm (Theory of knowledge)

3. Foucault, Michel, 1926-1984. I. Title.

BD241.A3513 2009

195-dc22

2009001976

Contents

	<i>Preface</i>	7
I	<i>What Is a Paradigm?</i>	9
II	<i>Theory of Signatures</i>	33
III	<i>Philosophical Archaeology</i>	81
	<i>Notes</i>	113
	<i>Index of Names</i>	123

of science, or of thought, is its capacity to be developed, which Ludwig Feuerbach defined as *Entwicklungsfähigkeit*. It is precisely when one follows such a principle that the difference between what belongs to the author of a work and what is attributable to the interpreter becomes as essential as it is difficult to grasp. I have therefore preferred to take the risk of attributing to the texts of others what began its elaboration with them, rather than run the reverse risk of appropriating thoughts or research paths that do not belong to me.

Moreover, every inquiry in the human sciences—including the present reflection on method—should entail an archaeological vigilance. In other words, it must retrace its own trajectory back to the point where something remains obscure and unthematized. Only a thought that does not conceal its own unsaid—but constantly takes it up and elaborates it—may eventually lay claim to originality.

What Is a Paradigm?

I

In the course of my research, I have written on certain figures such as *homo sacer*, the *Muselman*, the state of exception, and the concentration camp. While these are all actual historical phenomena, I nonetheless treated them as paradigms whose role was to constitute and make intelligible a broader historical-problematic context. Because this approach has generated a few misunderstandings, especially for those who thought, in more or less good faith, that my intention was to offer merely historiographical theses or reconstructions, I must pause here and reflect on the meaning and function of the use of paradigms in philosophy and the human sciences.

Foucault frequently used the term “paradigm” in his writings, even though he never defined it precisely. Nonetheless, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and subsequent works, in order to distinguish the objects of his investigations from those of the historical disciplines, he designated them with terms like “positivity,” “problematization,” “discursive formation,” “apparatus,” and, more generally, “knowledge.” In a May 1978 lecture at the Société Française de Philosophie, he defines “knowledge” thus: “The use of the word knowledge (*savoir*) . . . refers to all procedures and all effects of knowledge (*connaissance*) which are acceptable at a given point in time and in a specific domain.” In order to clarify the necessary relation of the concept of knowledge to that of power,

Foucault added these comments: "For nothing can exist as an element of knowledge if, on one hand, it does not conform to a set of rules and constraints characteristic, for example, of a given type of scientific discourse in a given period, and if, on the other hand, it does not possess the effects of coercion or simply the incentives peculiar to what is scientifically validated or simply rational or simply generally accepted."

As others have noted, these concepts are analogous to Thomas S. Kuhn's notion of "scientific paradigms," introduced in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, for example, argue that although Foucault never thematized the function of paradigms, "his current work clearly follows a course that uses these insights, if not the words themselves. He is now proceeding through a description of discourse as the historical articulation of a paradigm, and approaching analytics in a manner that is heavily dependent on the isolation and description of social paradigms and their practical applications."

Yet Foucault, who declared that he had read Kuhn's "admirable and definitive" book only after he had completed *The Order of Things*, almost never refers to it, and even seems to distance himself from Kuhn.³ In his 1978 introduction to the American edition of Georges Canguilhem's *The Normal and the Pathological*, Foucault writes: "This norm cannot be identified with a theoretical structure or an actual paradigm because today's scientific truth is itself only an episode of it—let us say provisional at most. It is not by depending on a 'normal science' in T. S. Kuhn's sense that one can return to the past and validly trace its history: it is rediscovering the 'norm' process, the actual knowledge of which is only one moment of it."⁴

It is therefore necessary first of all to reflect on whether the analogy between these two different methods does not correspond to different problems, strategies, and inquiries and whether the "paradigm" of Foucault's archaeology is not merely

a homonym for that which, according to Kuhn, marks the emergence of scientific revolutions.

2

Kuhn recognized that he had used the concept of "paradigm" in two different senses.⁵ The first meaning of "paradigm," which he proposes to replace with the term "disciplinary matrix," designates the common possessions of the members of a certain scientific community, namely, the set of techniques, models, and values to which the group members more or less consciously adhere. The second meaning refers to a single element within the set, such as Isaac Newton's *Principia* or Ptolemy's *Almagest*, that serves as a common example and thus replaces explicit rules and permits the formulation of a specific and coherent tradition of inquiry.

When Kuhn elaborated on Ludwik Fleck's concept of "thought style" (*Denkstil*) and the distinction between what is and what is not pertinent within a "thought collective" (*Denkkollektiv*), he sought, through the concept of the paradigm, to examine what makes possible the constitution of a normal science, that is, a science capable of determining which problems within a specific community are scientific or not. Normal science does not then mean one governed by a precise and coherent system of rules. On the contrary, if the rules are derived from paradigms, then paradigms can "determine normal science" even in the absence of rules.⁶ This is the second meaning of the concept of paradigm, which Kuhn considers "most novel:"⁷ a paradigm is simply an example, a single case that by its repeatability acquires the capacity to model tacitly the behavior and research practices of scientists. The empire of the rule, understood as the canon of scientificity, is thus replaced by that of the paradigm; the universal logic of the law is replaced by the specific and singular logic

of the example. And when an old paradigm is replaced by a new paradigm that is no longer compatible with the previous one, what Kuhn calls a scientific revolution occurs.

3

Foucault constantly sought to abandon traditional analyses of power that were grounded on juridical and institutional models as well as on universal categories (of law, the state, the theory of sovereignty). He focused instead on the concrete mechanisms through which power penetrates the very bodies of subjects and thereby governs their forms of life. Here the analogy with Kuhn's paradigms seems to find an important corroboration. Just as Kuhn set aside the identification and examination of the rules constituting a normal science in order to focus on the paradigms that determine scientists' behavior, Foucault questioned the traditional primacy of the juridical models of the theory of power in order to bring to the fore multiple disciplines and political techniques through which the state integrates the care of the life of individuals within its confines. And just as Kuhn separated normal science from the system of rules that define it, Foucault frequently distinguished "normalization," which characterizes disciplinary power, from the juridical system of legal procedures.

If the proximity of these two methods seems clear, then it is all the more enigmatic why Foucault remained silent when it came to Kuhn's work and seems to have carefully avoided using the very term "paradigm" in the *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. To be sure, the reasons for Foucault's silence may have been personal. In his reply to George Steiner, who had reproached him for not mentioning Kuhn by name, Foucault explains that he had read Kuhn's book only after he had completed *The Order of Things* and adds: "I therefore did not cite Kuhn, but the historian of science who molded and inspired his thought: Georges Canguilhem."⁸

This statement is surprising, to say the least, since Kuhn, who did acknowledge in the preface to *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* his debt to two French epistemologists, Alexandre Koyré and Émile Meyerson, does not once mention Canguilhem in the book. Since Foucault must have meant what he said, perhaps his close relationship to Canguilhem prompted him to repay Kuhn for this discourtesy. However, even if Foucault was not above holding personal grudges, this alone cannot explain his silence concerning Kuhn.

4

A closer reading of Foucault's writings shows that even without naming the American epistemologist, he did on more than one occasion grapple with Kuhn's notion of paradigm. In "Truth and Power," Foucault's 1976 interview with Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino, when answering a question concerning the notion of discontinuity, he explicitly opposed his notion of the "discursive regime" to that of the paradigm:

Thus, it is not a change of content (refutation of old errors, recovery of old truths), nor is it a change of theoretical form (renewal of a paradigm, modification of systematic ensembles). It is a question of what *governs* statements, and the way in which they *govern* each other so as to constitute a set of propositions that are scientifically acceptable and, hence, capable of being verified or falsified by scientific procedures. In short, there is a problem of the regime, the politics of the scientific statement. At this level, it's not so much a matter of knowing what external power imposes itself on science as of what effects of power circulate among scientific statements, what constitutes, as it were, their internal regime of power, and how and why at certain moments that regime undergoes a global modification.⁹

A few lines later, when referring to *The Order of Things*, he insists on the distance between a discursive regime (a genuine political phenomenon) and a paradigm (a criterion of scientific truth): "What was lacking here was this problem of the 'discursive regime,' of the effects of power peculiar to the play of statements. I confused this too much with systematicity, theoretical form, or something like a paradigm."¹⁰ At some point, then, Foucault did indeed recognize the proximity to Kuhn's paradigm; but this proximity was not the effect of an actual affinity but the result of a certain confusion. What was decisive for Foucault was the movement of the paradigm from epistemology to politics, its shift onto the plane of a politics of statements and discursive regimes, where it was not so much the "change of theoretical form" that was in question as the "internal regime of power," which determines the way in which the statements govern one another to constitute an ensemble.

From this perspective, it is clear that even though he does not explicitly name them in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault already wished to distinguish the theme of his own research from Kuhn's paradigms. For Foucault, discursive formations do not define

the state of knowledge at a given moment in time: they do not draw up a list of what, from that moment, had been demonstrated to be true and had assumed the status of definitively acquired knowledge, and a list of what, on the other hand, had been accepted without either proof or adequate demonstration, or of what had been accepted as a common belief or a belief demanded by the power of the imagination. To analyze positivities is to show in accordance with which rules a discursive practice may form groups of objects, enunciations, concepts, or theoretical choices.¹¹

A little further down, Foucault describes something that seems to correspond to Kuhn's paradigm but that he prefers to

call "epistemological figures" or "thresholds of epistemologization." Thus he writes: "When in the operation of a discursive formation, a group of statements is articulated, claims to validate (even unsuccessfully) norms of verification and coherence, and when it exercises a dominant function (as a model, a critique, or a verification) over knowledge, we will say that the discursive formation crosses a *threshold of epistemologization*. When the epistemological figure thus outlined obeys a number of formal criteria. . . ."¹²

The change in terminology is not merely formal: in a manner wholly consistent with the premises of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault diverts attention from the criteria that permit the constitution of a normal science with respect to subjects (the members of a scientific community) to the pure occurrence of "groups of statements" and "figures," independently of any reference to subjects ("a group of statements is articulated," "the epistemological figure thus outlined"). And when, a propos of the different types of history of science, Foucault defines his own concept of the episteme, it is once again not a matter of identifying something like a worldview or a structure of thought that imposes common postulates and norms on the subject. Rather, the episteme is the "total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems."¹³ Unlike Kuhn's paradigm, the episteme does not define what is knowable in a given period, but what is implicit in the fact that a given discourse or epistemological figure exists at all: "In the enigma of scientific discourse, what the analysis of the episteme questions is not its right to be a science, but the fact that it exists."¹⁴

The Archaeology of Knowledge has been read as a manifesto of historiographical discontinuity. Whether this characterization is correct or not (Foucault contested it a number of times), it is certain that in this book Foucault appears most interested in

that which permits the constitution of contexts and groups, in the positive existence of “figures” and series. Only that these contexts emerge in accordance with an entirely peculiar epistemological model which coincides neither with those commonly accepted in historical research nor with Kuhnian paradigms, and which we must therefore undertake to identify.

5

Consider the notion of panopticism, which Foucault presents in the third part of *Discipline and Punish*. The panopticon is a particular historical phenomenon, an architectural model published by Jeremy Bentham in Dublin in 1791 under the title *Panopticon; or, The Inspection-House: Containing the Idea of a New Principle of Construction, Applicable to Any Sort of Establishment, in Which Persons of Any Description Are to Be Kept Under Inspection*. Foucault recalls its basic features:

We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres.¹⁵

Yet for Foucault, the panopticon is both a “generalizable model of functioning,” namely “panopticism,” that is to say, the principle

of an “ensemble,” and the “panoptic modality of power.” As such, it is a “figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use”; it is not merely a “dream building,” but “the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form.”¹⁶ In short, the panopticon functions as a paradigm in the strict sense: it is a singular object that, standing equally for all others of the same class, defines the intelligibility of the group of which it is a part and which, at the same time, it constitutes. Anyone who has read *Discipline and Punish* knows not only how the panopticon, situated as it is at the end of the section on discipline, performs a decisive strategic function for the understanding of the disciplinary modality of power, but also how it becomes something like the epistemological figure that, in defining the disciplinary universe of modernity, also marks the threshold over which it passes into the societies of control.

This is not an isolated case in Foucault’s work. On the contrary, one could say that in this sense paradigms define the most characteristic gesture of Foucault’s method. The great confinement, the confession, the investigation, the examination, the care of the self: these are all singular historical phenomena that Foucault treats as paradigms, and this is what constitutes his specific intervention into the field of historiography. Paradigms establish a broader problematic context that they both constitute and make intelligible.

Daniel S. Milo has remarked that Foucault demonstrates the relevance of contexts produced by metaphorical fields in contrast to those created only through chronological caesurae.¹⁷ Following the orientations of such works as Marc Bloch’s *Royal Touch*, Ernst Kantorowicz’s *King’s Two Bodies*, and Lucien Febvre’s *Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century*, Foucault is said to have freed historiography from the exclusive domain of metonymic contexts—for example, the eighteenth-century or southern France—in order to return metaphorical contexts to primacy.

This observation is correct only if one keeps in mind that for Foucault, it is a question not of metaphors but of paradigms in the sense noted above. Paradigms obey not the logic of the metaphorical transfer of meaning but the analogical logic of the example. Here we are not dealing with a signifier that is extended to designate heterogeneous phenomena by virtue of the same semantic structure; more akin to allegory than to metaphor, the paradigm is a singular case that is isolated from its context only insofar as, by exhibiting its own singularity, it makes intelligible a new ensemble, whose homogeneity it itself constitutes. That is to say, to give an example is a complex act which supposes that the term functioning as a paradigm is deactivated from its normal use, not in order to be moved into another context but, on the contrary, to present the canon—the rule—of that use, which can not be shown in any other way.

Sextus Pompeius Festus informs us that the Romans distinguished *exemplar* from *exemplum*. The *exemplar* can be observed by the senses (*oculis conspicitur*) and refers to that which one must imitate (*exemplar est quod simile faciamus*). The *exemplum*, on the other hand, demands a more complex evaluation (which is not merely sensible: *animo aestimatur*); its meaning is above all moral and intellectual. The Foucauldian paradigm is both of these things: not only an *exemplar* and model, which imposes the constitution of a normal science, but also and above all an *exemplum*, which allows statements and discursive practices to be gathered into a new intelligible ensemble and in a new problematic context.

6

The *locus classicus* of the epistemology of the example is in Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*. There, Aristotle distinguishes the procedure by way of paradigms from induction and deduction. "It is clear,"

he writes, "that the paradigm does not function as a part with respect to the whole [*hōs meros pros holon*], nor as a whole with respect to the part [*hōs holon pros meros*], but as a part with respect to the part [*hōs meros pros meros*], if both are under the same but one is better known than the other."¹⁸ That is to say, while induction proceeds from the particular to the universal and deduction from the universal to the particular, the paradigm is defined by a third and paradoxical type of movement, which goes from the particular to the particular. The example constitutes a peculiar form of knowledge that does not proceed by articulating together the universal and the particular, but seems to dwell on the plane of the latter. Aristotle's treatment of the paradigm does not move beyond these brief observations, and the status of knowledge resting within the particular is not examined any further. Not only does Aristotle seem to hold that the common type exists before particulars, but he leaves undefined the status of "greater knowability" (*gnōrimōteron*) that belongs to the example.

The epistemological status of the paradigm becomes clear only if we understand—making Aristotle's thesis more radical—that it calls into question the dichotomous opposition between the particular and the universal which we are used to seeing as inseparable from procedures of knowing, and presents instead a singularity irreducible to any of the dichotomy's two terms. The domain of his discourse is not logic but analogy, the theory of which was reconstructed by Enzo Melandri in a book that has by now become a classic. And the *analogon* it produces is neither particular nor general. Hence its special value, and our task of understanding it.

7

In *La linea e il circolo*, Melandri shows that analogy is opposed to the dichotomous principle dominating Western logic. Against the

drastic alternative “A or B,” which excludes the third, analogy imposes its *tertium datur*, its stubborn “neither A nor B.” In other words, analogy intervenes in the dichotomies of logic (particular/universal; form/content; lawfulness/exemplarity; and so on) not to take them up into a higher synthesis but to transform them into a force field traversed by polar tensions, where (as in an electromagnetic field) their substantial identities evaporate. But in what sense and in what way is the third given here? Certainly not as a term homogeneous with the first two, the identity of which could in turn be defined by a binary logic. Only from the point of view of dichotomy can analogy (or paradigm) appear as *tertium comparationis*. The analogical third is attested here above all through the disidentification and neutralization of the first two, which now become indiscernible. The third is this indiscernibility, and if one tries to grasp it by means of bivalent caesurae, one necessarily runs up against an undecidable. It is thus impossible to clearly separate an example’s paradigmatic character—its standing for all cases—from the fact that it is one case among others. As in a magnetic field, we are dealing not with extensive and scalable magnitudes but with vectorial intensities.

8

Nowhere, perhaps, is the paradoxical relation between paradigms and generality as forcefully formulated as in *The Critique of Judgment*, where Kant conceives of the necessity of the aesthetic judgment in the form of an example for which it is impossible to state the rule:

Now this necessity is of a special kind: not a theoretical objective necessity, where it can be cognized a priori that everyone will feel this satisfaction in the object called beautiful by me, nor a practical necessity, where by means of concepts of a pure will, serving as rules for freely acting beings, this satisfaction is a necessary

consequence of an objective law and signifies nothing other than that one absolutely (without a further aim) ought to act in a certain way. Rather, as a necessity that is thought in an aesthetic judgment, it can only be called exemplary [*exemplarisch*], i.e., a necessity of the assent of all to a judgment that is regarded as an example [*Beispiel*] of a universal rule that one cannot produce [*angeben*].¹⁹

As with the aesthetic judgment for Kant, a paradigm actually presupposes the impossibility of the rule; but if the rule is missing or cannot be formulated, from where will the example draw its probative value? And how is it possible to supply the examples of an unassignable rule?

The aporia may be resolved only if we understand that a paradigm implies the total abandonment of the particular-general couple as the model of logical inference. The rule (if it is still possible to speak of rules here) is not a generality preexisting the singular cases and applicable to them, nor is it something resulting from the exhaustive enumeration of specific cases. Instead, it is the exhibition alone of the paradigmatic case that constitutes a rule, which as such cannot be applied or stated.

9

Anyone familiar with the history of the monastic orders knows that, at least in regard to the first centuries, it is difficult to understand the status of what the documents call *regula*. In the most ancient testimonies, *regula* simply means *conversatio fratrum*, the monks’ way of life in a given monastery. It is often identified with the founder’s way of living envisaged as *forma vitae*—that is, as an example to be followed. And the founder’s life is in turn the sequel to the life of Jesus as narrated in the Gospels. With the gradual development of the monastic orders, and the Roman Curia’s growing need to exercise control over them, the term *regula* increasingly assumed the meaning of a written text,

preserved in the monastery, which had to be read by the person who, having embraced the monastic life, consented to subject himself to the prescriptions and prohibitions contained therein. However, at least until Saint Benedict, the rule does not indicate a general norm but the living community (*koinos bios, cenobio*) that results from an example and in which the life of each monk tends at the limit to become paradigmatic—that is, to constitute itself as *forma vitae*.

We can therefore say, joining Aristotle's observations with those of Kant, that a paradigm entails a movement that goes from singularity to singularity and, without ever leaving singularity, transforms every singular case into an *exemplar* of a general rule that can never be stated a priori.

10

In 1947, Victor Goldschmidt, an author whom Foucault appears to have known and admired, published *Le paradigme dans la dialectique platonicienne*. As is often the case with the writings of this brilliant historian of philosophy, the examination of an apparently marginal problem—the use of examples in Plato's dialogues—throws new light on the entirety of Plato's thought, especially the relation between ideas and the sensible, of which the paradigm is revealed to be the technical expression. Georges Rodier had already observed that sometimes ideas function in the dialogues as paradigms for sensible objects, whereas at other times sensible objects are presented as the paradigms of ideas. If in the *Euthyphro* the idea of piety is that which is used as a paradigm in order to understand corresponding sensible objects, in the *Statesman* a sensible paradigm—weaving—instead leads to the understanding of ideas. To explain how an example may produce knowledge, Plato introduces here the example of the syllables children are able to recognize in different words as a “paradigm

for the paradigm”: “A paradigm is generated when an entity, which is found in something other and separated [*diespasmēnōi*; the Greek term means “torn,” “lacerated”] in another entity, is judged correctly and recognized as the same, and having been reconnected together generates a true and unique opinion concerning each and both.”²⁰

Commenting on this definition, Goldschmidt shows that here there seems to be a paradoxical structure, at once sensible and mental, which he calls the “element-form.”²¹ In other words, even though it is a singular sensible phenomenon, the paradigm somehow contains the *eidos*, the very form that is to be defined. It is not a simple sensible element that is present in two different places, but something like a relation between the sensible and the mental, the element and the form (“the paradigmatic element is itself a relationship”).²² Just as in the case of recollection—which Plato often uses as a paradigm for knowledge—where a sensible phenomenon is placed into a nonsensible relation with itself, and thus re-cognized in the other, so in the paradigm it is a matter not of corroborating a certain sensible likeness but of producing it by means of an operation. For this reason, the paradigm is never already given, but is generated and produced (*paradeigmatos . . . genesis; paradeigmata . . . gignomena*) by “placing alongside,” “conjoining together,” and above all by “showing” and “exposing” (*paraballontas . . . paratithemena . . . endeiknynai . . . deichthēi . . . deichthenta*).²³ The paradigmatic relation does not merely occur between sensible objects or between these objects and a general rule; it occurs instead between a singularity (which thus becomes a paradigm) and its exposition (its intelligibility).

11

Consider the relatively simple case of a grammatical example. Grammar is constituted and may state its rules only through the

practice of paradigmatics, by exhibiting linguistic examples. But what is the use of language that defines grammatical practice? How is a grammatical example produced? Take the case of the paradigms that in Latin grammars account for the declensions of nouns. Through its paradigmatic exhibition (*rosa, ros-ae, ros-ae, ros-am . . .*), the normal use as well as the denotative character of the term "rose" is suspended. The term thus makes possible the constitution and intelligibility of the group "feminine noun of the first declension," of which it is both a member and a paradigm. What is essential here is the suspension of reference and normal use. If, in order to explain the rule that defines the class of performatives, the linguist utters the example "I swear," it is clear that this syntagma is not to be understood as the uttering of a real oath. To be capable of acting as an example, the syntagma must be suspended from its normal function, and nevertheless it is precisely by virtue of this nonfunctioning and suspension that it can show how the syntagma works and can allow the rule to be stated. If we now ask ourselves whether the rule can be applied to the example, the answer is not easy. In fact, the example is excluded from the rule not because it does not belong to the normal case but, on the contrary, because it exhibits its belonging to it. The example, then, is the symmetrical opposite of the exception: whereas the exception is included through its exclusion, the example is excluded through the exhibition of its inclusion. However, in this way, according to the etymological meaning of the Greek term, it shows "beside itself" (*para-deiknymi*) both its own intelligibility and that of the class it constitutes.

12

In Plato, the paradigm has its place in dialectics, which, by articulating the relation between the intelligible and the sensible order,

makes knowledge possible. "The relation between these two orders may be conceived in two ways: as a relation of likeness (between copy and model) or as a relation of proportion."²⁴ To each of these conceptions there corresponds, according to Goldschmidt, a specific dialectical procedure: to the first, recollection (defined by Plato in the *Meno* and in the *Theatetus*); to the second, the paradigm, which is discussed above all in the *Sophist* and in the *Statesman*. Continuing Goldschmidt's analyses we must now attempt to understand the specific meaning and function of the paradigm in dialectics. The whole thorny discussion of the dialectical method in book 6 of the *Republic* becomes clear when it is understood as an exposition of the paradigmatic method.²⁵ Plato distinguishes two stages or moments within the emergence of science, which are represented as two continuous segments on a straight line. The first, which defines the procedures of "geometry and calculus and those who practice these kinds of sciences," grounds its investigations on hypotheses. It presupposes (this is the meaning of the Greek term *hypothēsis*, from *hypotithēmi*, "I lay it below as a base") givens that are treated as known principles, the evidence of which does not need to be accounted for. The second belongs to dialectics: "it does not consider hypotheses as first principles [*archai*] but truly as hypotheses—that is, as stepping stones to take off from, enabling it to reach the unhypothetical [*anypotheton*] first principle of everything. Having touched this principle, and keeping hold of what follows from it, it comes down to a conclusion without making use of anything sensible at all, but only of ideas themselves, moving on from ideas to ideas, and ending with ideas."²⁶

What does it mean to treat hypotheses (presuppositions) as hypotheses rather than as principles? What is a hypothesis that is not presupposed but exposed as such? If we recall that the knowability of the paradigm is never presupposed, and that on the contrary its specific operation consists in suspending and

deactivating its empirical givenness in order to exhibit only an intelligibility, then treating hypotheses as hypotheses means treating them as paradigms.

Here the aporia that both Aristotle and modern commentators have observed—that in Plato the idea is the paradigm of the sensible and the sensible the paradigm of ideas—is resolved. The idea is not another being that is presupposed by the sensible or coincides with it: it is the sensible considered as a paradigm—that is, in the medium of its intelligibility. This is why Plato is able to state that even dialectics, like the arts, starts from hypotheses (*ex hypotheseōs iousa*),²⁷ but unlike them it takes hypotheses as hypotheses rather than principles. To put it differently, dialectics uses hypotheses as paradigms. The non-hypothetical, to which dialectics has access, is above all opened by the paradigmatic use of the sensible. It is in this sense that we should understand the following passage, where the dialectical method is defined as “doing away with hypothesis”: “Dialectic is the only method that proceeds in this manner, doing away with hypotheses [*tas hypotheseis anairousa*] and reaching to the first principle itself.”²⁸ *Anaireō*, like its corresponding Latin term *tollere* (and the German *aufheben*, which Hegel placed at the heart of his dialectic), signifies both “to take,” “to raise,” and “to take away,” “to eliminate.” As previously noted, what operates as a paradigm is withdrawn from its normal use and, at the same time, exposed as such. The non-hypothetical is what discloses itself at the point where hypotheses are “taken away,” that is, raised and eliminated at the same time. The intelligibility in which dialectics moves in its “descent toward the end” is the paradigmatic intelligibility of the sensible.

13

The hermeneutic circle, which defines the procedures of knowledge in the human sciences, acquires its true meaning only from

the perspective of the paradigmatic method. Before Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, Georg Anton Friedrich Ast had already observed that in the philological sciences, knowledge of a single phenomenon presupposes knowledge of the whole and, vice versa, knowledge of the whole presupposes that of single phenomena. Grounding this hermeneutic circle in *Being and Time* on pre-understanding as *Dasein's* anticipatory existential structure, Martin Heidegger helped the human sciences out of this difficulty and indeed guaranteed the “more original” character of their knowledge. Since then, the motto “What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way” has become a magic formula that allows the inquirer to transform the vicious circle into a virtuous one.²⁹

However, such a guarantee was less reassuring than it at first appeared. If the activity of the interpreter is always already anticipated by a pre-understanding that is elusive, what does it mean “to come into [the circle] in the right way?” Heidegger suggested that it was a matter of never allowing the pre-understanding to be presented (*vorgeben*) by “fancies” or “popular conceptions,” but instead “working [it] out in terms of the things themselves.”³⁰ This can only mean—and the circle then seems to become even more “vicious”—that the inquirer must be able to recognize in phenomena the signature of a pre-understanding that depends on their own existential structure.

The aporia is resolved if we understand that the hermeneutic circle is in actuality a paradigmatic circle. There is no duality here between “single phenomenon” and “the whole” as there was in Ast and Schleiermacher: the whole only results from the paradigmatic exposition of individual cases. And there is no circularity, as in Heidegger, between a “before” and an “after,” between pre-understanding and interpretation. In the paradigm, intelligibility does not precede the phenomenon; it stands, so to speak, “beside” it (*para*). According to Aristotle’s definition, the

paradigmatic gesture moves not from the particular to the whole and from the whole to the particular but from the singular to the singular. The phenomenon, exposed in the medium of its knowability, shows the whole of which it is the paradigm. With regard to phenomena, this is not a presupposition (a "hypothesis"): as a "non-presupposed principle," it stands neither in the past nor in the present but in their exemplary constellation.

14

Between 1924 and 1929, Aby Warburg was working on his "atlas of images," which was to be called *Mnemosyne*. As is well-known, it is a collection of plates or boards to which are attached a heterogeneous series of images (reproductions of works of art or manuscripts, photographs cut out of newspapers or taken by Warburg himself, and so on) often referring to a single theme that Warburg defined as *Pathosformel*. Consider plate 46, in which we find the *Pathosformel* "Nymph," the figure of a woman in movement (when she appears in Ghirlandaio's fresco in the Tornabuoni Chapel, Warburg gives her the familiar nickname Fraulein Schnellbring, "Miss Quick-Bring"). The plate is made up of twenty-seven images, each of which is somehow related to the theme that gives its name to the whole. In addition to Ghirlandaio's fresco, one can identify a Roman ivory relief, a sibyl from the cathedral of Sessa Aurunca, a few miniatures from a sixteenth-century Florentine manuscript, a detail from one of Botticelli's frescos, Fra Filippo Lippi's tondo of the Madonna and the birth of John the Baptist, a photo of a peasant woman from Settignano taken by Warburg himself, and so on. How should we read this plate? What is the relation that holds together the individual images? In other words, where is the nymph?

A mistaken way of reading the plate would be to see in it something like an iconographic repertory, where what is in

question is the origin and history of the iconographic theme "figure of a woman in movement." This would be a matter of arranging, as far as possible, the individual images in chronological order by following the probable genetic relation that, binding one to the other, would eventually allow us to go back to the archetype, to the "formula of *pathos*" from which they all originate. A slightly more careful reading of the plate shows that none of the images is the original, just as none of the images is simply a copy or repetition. Just as it is impossible to distinguish between creation and performance, original and execution, in the "formulaic" composition that Milman Parry had recognized at the basis of the Homeric poems and more generally of any oral compositions, so are Warburg's *Pathosformeln* hybrids of archetype and phenomenon, first-timeness (*primavolità*) and repetition. Every photograph is the original; every image constitutes the *archē* and is, in this sense, "archaic." But the nymph herself is neither archaic nor contemporary; she is undecidable in regards to diachrony and synchrony, unicity and multiplicity. This means that the nymph is the paradigm of which individual nymphs are the exemplars. Or to be more precise, in accordance with the constitutive ambiguity of Plato's dialectic, the nymph is the paradigm of the single images, and the single images are the paradigms of the nymph.

In other words, the nymph is an *Urphänomen*, an "originary phenomenon" in Goethe's sense of the term. This technical term, which is essential to Goethe's investigations on nature from the *Theory of Colors* to *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, even though it is never clearly defined by the author, becomes intelligible only when understood in a decidedly paradigmatic sense, thereby following a suggestion by Elizabeth Rotten, who traced its origin back to Plato. Goethe often juxtaposes his method to that which proceeds by "single cases and general rubrics, opinions and hypotheses."³¹ In the essay "The Experiment as Mediator

Between Object and Subject," he proposes a model of "experience of a higher type," where the unification of individual phenomena does not occur "in hypothetical and systematic manner," but where instead each phenomenon "stands in relation with countless others, in the way we say of a freely floating luminous point, that it emits its rays in every direction."³² How such a singular relation among phenomena ought to be understood is discussed a few lines below in a passage where the paradigmatic nature of the procedure is stated beyond any doubt: "Such an experience, which consists of many others, is clearly of a higher type. It represents the formula in which countless single examples find their expression."³³ "Every existent," he reiterates in another fragment, "is the *analogon* of every existent; for this reason, existence always appears to us as separated and connected at the same time. If one follows the analogy too closely, everything becomes identical; if we avoid it, everything scatters to infinity."³⁴ As a paradigm, the *Urphänomen* is thus the place where analogy lives in perfect equilibrium beyond the opposition between generality and particularity. Hence, Goethe writes of the "pure phenomenon" that it can "never be isolated, since it shows itself in a continuous series of appearances."³⁵ And in the *Maximen und Reflexionen*, he sums up its nature with a definition that could be equally valid for the paradigm: "the originary phenomenon: ideal insofar as it is the last knowable/real, insofar as it is known/symbolic because it embraces all cases;/identical with all cases."³⁶ Even though it never crosses into the generality of a hypothesis or law, the *Urphänomen* is nevertheless knowable; it is indeed in the single phenomenon the last knowable element, its capacity to constitute itself as a paradigm. For this reason, a famous Goethean dictum states that one should never look beyond the phenomena: insofar as they are paradigms, "they are theory."

At this point, let us try to put in the form of theses some of the features that, according to our analysis, define a paradigm:

1. A paradigm is a form of knowledge that is neither inductive nor deductive but analogical. It moves from singularity to singularity.
2. By neutralizing the dichotomy between the general and the particular, it replaces a dichotomous logic with a bipolar analogical model.
3. The paradigmatic case becomes such by suspending and, at the same time, exposing its belonging to the group, so that it is never possible to separate its exemplarity from its singularity.
4. The paradigmatic group is never presupposed by the paradigms; rather, it is immanent in them.
5. In the paradigm, there is no origin or *archē*; every phenomenon is the origin, every image archaic.
6. The historicity of the paradigm lies neither in diachrony nor in synchrony but in a crossing of the two.

At this point, I think it is clear what it means to work by way of paradigms for both me and Foucault. *Homo sacer* and the concentration camp, the *Muselman* and the state of exception, and, more recently, the Trinitarian *oikonomia* and acclamations are not hypotheses through which I intended to explain modernity by tracing it back to something like a cause or historical origin. On the contrary, as their very multiplicity might have signaled, each time it was a matter of paradigms whose aim was to make intelligible series of phenomena whose kinship had eluded or could elude the historian's gaze. To be sure, my investigations, like those of Foucault, have an archaeological character, and the phenomena with which they deal unfold across time and therefore

require an attention to documents and diachrony that cannot but follow the laws of historical philology. Nevertheless, the *archē* they reach—and this perhaps holds for all historical inquiry—is not an origin presupposed in time. Rather, locating itself at the crossing of diachrony and synchrony, it makes the inquirer's present intelligible as much as the past of his or her object. Archaeology, then, is always a paradigmatology, and the capacity to recognize and articulate paradigms defines the rank of the inquirer no less than does his or her ability to examine the documents of an archive. In the final analysis, the paradigm determines the very possibility of producing in the midst of the chronological archive—which in itself is inert—the *plans de clivage* (as French epistemologists call them) that alone make it legible.

If one asks whether the paradigmatic character lies in things themselves or in the mind of the inquirer, my response must be that the question itself makes no sense. The intelligibility in question in the paradigm has an ontological character. It refers not to the cognitive relation between subject and object but to being. There is, then, a paradigmatic ontology. And I know of no better definition of it than the one contained in a poem by Wallace Stevens titled "Description Without Place":

It is possible that to seem—it is to be,
As the sun is something seeming and it is.

The sun is an example. What it seems
It is and in such seeming all things are.

Theory of Signatures

I

Book 9 of Paracelsus's treatise *De natura rerum* (On the Nature of Things) is titled "De signatura rerum naturalium" (Concerning the Signature of Natural Things).¹ The original core of the Paracelsian episteme is the idea that all things bear a sign that manifests and reveals their invisible qualities. "Nothing is without a sign" (*Nichts ist ohn ein Zeichen*), he writes in *Von den naturlichen Dingen*, "since nature does not release anything in which it has not marked what is to be found within that thing."² "There is nothing exterior that is not an announcement of the interior," reads the *Liber de podagricis*, and by means of signs man can know what has been marked in each thing.³ And if, in this sense, "all things, herbs, seeds, stones, and roots reveal in their qualities, forms, and figures [*Gestalt*] that which is in them," if "they all become known through their *signatum*," then "*signatura* is the science by which everything that is hidden is found, and without this art nothing of any profundity can be done."⁴ This science, however, like all knowledge, is a consequence of sin, insofar as Adam, in Eden, was absolutely unmarked (*unbezeichnet*), and would have remained so had he not "fallen into nature," which leaves nothing unmarked.

Based on these presuppositions, "De signatura rerum naturalium" is able to go right to the heart of the matter and inquire into the nature and the number of "signers." Here *signatura* is no longer the name of a science but the very act and effect of