

RELIGIOUS *WIEDERHOLUNG*:
SØREN KIERKEGAARD AND GIORGIO AGAMBEN

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to reveal the nihilistic sense of an experiential structure, which has been distinctively rooted in Western philosophical tradition. On the one hand, this hermeneutical analysis will be based on a certain conception of nihilism providing two theoretical models of nihilism – nihilism, which refers to the theory of *Überwindung*, and nihilism, associated to the idea of *différance*. On the other hand, it will be built on a certain (the so-called “onto-theological”) pretext, which might be used for recognition of the structure of repetition in Western tradition of thinking, – i. e. a text fragment from St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians Eph. I, 10 – the paradigmatic passage proposing this universal structure of repetition. Focused both on philosophy of Kierkegaard and Agamben, hermeneutical analysis will aim to disclose the separate invariants of such repetition as cases of explosion of the mentioned text fragment. The question is raised – what is it – the repetition? Where does its negativity lie? How does its nihilistic sense appear? How does the difference mediate in this process of revealing of negativity and nihilism? The article argues that *différance*, as a motion of negation representing nihilistic logic, can be treated both in formal and in realistic way. The treating of *différance* as real denying in Kierkegaard’s and Agamben’s thinking corresponds to the ontological rootedness of a same structure of the experience – the repetition.

Keywords: repetition, nihilism, *différance*, negativity, time.

The purpose of this article is to unfold the nihilistic sense of the structure of experience called “repetition”, which has been established in Western philosophical tradition in a very distinctive way. Such a phrasing of the purpose, however, makes it necessary to outline some preliminary assumptions. On one hand, this hermeneutical analysis will be based on my own approach to the problem of nihilism, i. e. it will be based on a specific conception of nihilism. On the other hand, it will be built on a certain (the so-called “onto-theological”) pretext, which is used in the Western tradition of thought to apprehend the structure of repetition.

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As it concerns the problem of nihilism, my underlying position is that the term of “nihilism” in Western philosophical tradition refers to two interconnected, but, nevertheless, different problematical configurations. In other words, from the point of view of contemporary post-metaphysical thought, it is possible to draw a distinction between two interrelated but, nonetheless, different interpretations of nihilism (theoretical models of nihilism). Nihilism in the first sense refers to the theory of *Überwindung*; nihilism in the second sense is associated to the idea of *différance*. The basis for segregation of these two theoretical meanings of nihilism lies in certain treatment of the motion of negation, which has the constitutional importance for nihilistic consciousness. Nihilism referred to by the theory of *Überwindung* establishes itself on the basis of negation understood in the classical meaning; nihilism referred to by the theory based on the idea of *différance* or the theory proposing primacy, preferentiality of *difference* (*différance*) establishes itself from the negation understood as *différance*. In the context of our discussion, *i.e.* in the context of the problem of negativity/nihilism, the second theory, *i.e.* the one based on the idea of *différance*, will be of primary importance². Thus, it would be possible to say that the discussion concerning relationship between nihilism and repetition turns, in essence, to the discussion concerning relationship between difference and repetition.

At the same time, this preliminary conclusion might give an impression that we will focus entirely on the post-modern tradition, where the tandem of difference and repetition has become a paradigmatic figure of thought. And I mean here not only Gilles Deleuze, but other contemporary thinkers of difference, such as Derrida, Foucault, Vattimo, etc., as well. Yet in this case, my point of departure is not a formal orientation towards the post-modern tradition which exploits the concepts of difference and repetition, but some other pretext.

What I have in mind is one textual reference of a contemporary philosopher Giorgio Agamben to the Epistles of Apostle Paul, and, to be more precise, to the Paulinian Epistle to the Ephesians (Ef. 1, 10); this passage has been analysed in the book of Agamben *Il tempo che resta*:

“that in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might *gather together in one all things* [or, to be closer to the Greek original: *recapitulate all things*] in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him [*“eis oikonomían tou plērōmatos tōn kairōn, anakephalaiōsasthai ta panta en tō cristō, ta epi tois ouranoís kai ta epi tēs gēs en autō”*]³.

In the opinion of Agamben, this passage is of such richness and capacity, that it could be seen as one of the foundational texts of Western culture. Such doctrines as *apocatastasis* of Origen and Leibniz, repetition (*ripresa*) of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche’s eternal return, and Heidegger’s *Wiederholung*, can be traced back to this Paulinian passage. These doc-

² See R. Šerpytytė: *Nihilizmas ir Vakarų filosofija*, Vilnius: VU leidykla 2077.

³ G. Agamben: *Il tempo che resta*, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri 2005, 75.

trines are nothing else as the fragments of explosion of the aforementioned passage.

We should add that Agamben's conception of Messianic time could also be viewed as a case of such explosion; the same could be said about Richard Kearney's atheistic interpretation of secularly sacred experience or about the figure of *revenant* in *Specters of Marx* of Derrida referred to by Agamben.

Thus, what is the repetition, where its negativity lies, and how its nihilistic sense reveals itself? What is the mediation of *différance* in this revelation of negativity and nihilism?

Philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard provides the most articulate expression of the problematic nature of *repetition* in the thought of late modernity. While discussing faith, Kierkegaard analyses it as the structure of repetition of religious act, which is the highest existential motion. And in this perspective, the most important question turns out to be an inquiry concerning the very possibility of repetition: is repetition possible?

Considering the conditions of modernity, we would be obliged to acknowledge that the essential question in this case is the question concerning *approach* to experience. How is it possible to repeat a journey to Berlin? How is it possible to repeat the Abrahamic motion? How is it possible to recognise a *knight of faith*? This silently uttered and sometimes only intuited "how?" represents the complicated nature of the aforementioned approach in a very essential way. It's not without reason that in his treatise *Repetition* Kierkegaard points out to the fact that the

"Repetition is a new category which is destined to be introduced in the future. Having some knowledge of the most recent philosophy and being not entirely ignorant of Greek philosophy, it is not difficult to see that it is precisely this category that explains the relationship between the doctrines of the Eleatic school and Heraclites, and that, to say truth, the repetition is precisely this phenomenon that has mistakenly been called mediation. ... There is no explanation in our age as to how mediation takes place, whether it results from the motion of two factors and in what sense it is already contained in them, or whether it is something new that is added, and, if so, how"⁴.

Thus, Kierkegaard is looking for an alternative to the "disenchanted" modern mind/reason, by opposing to its motion of *mediation*. That alternative, however, is a *direct, unmediated* repetition of a certain experience. Thus, in order to examine the possibility and meaning of repetition, Kierkegaard makes a decision to repeat his journey to Berlin...

Yet one could not call this experiment of "repetition" undertaken by the hero of Kierkegaard/by his pseudonym *Constantin Constantius*, once he is again in Berlin, a success. To begin with an experience of going to "the same" building lightened with gas lamps and rooms fur-

⁴ S. Kierkegaard: *Fear and Trembling. Repetition*, ed. and transl. H.V. Hong and E.H. Hong. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1983, 148–149.

nished in the same way... It is impossible to name *all* the details that create the field of apparently the same experience. The more Constantin Constantius describes that environment in more detail, the more it appears different... The multitude of details described in a scrupulous way should, as it would seem, to witness the repetition of what has happened, to prove that all is the same; but in reality it conveys something different. It is impossible to cover the totality of the past experience: in every case something would be missing and impossible to repeat. Thus, at the very beginning of his return to Berlin, C. C. has to admit: the repetition is impossible. And not to speak about his visit to the theatre which he left in a half an hour after the beginning of the performance, uttering the words: "there is no repetition". Kierkegaard in Constantin Constantius' person laughs at a tourist who is determined to "quickly visit" the famous places of Berlin: "*Das ganze Berlin*, just for four pennies". In that treatise, however, his very own attempt of repetition, in a very ironic way, turns to be a very similar search for *das ganze Berlin* in the belief of possibility to discover Berlin anew.

But as everyone knows, it is possible to detect the structure of *repetition* in other texts of Kierkegaard as well, not only in the aforementioned treatise: this structure is visible in his description of all existential stages or various – aesthetic, ethic, etc. – experiences. The question of *repetition* finds its most imperious expression in his *Fear and Trembling*, this time as a "problem" of the most radical experience, that of the repetition of faith. In the treatise *Fear and Trembling*, as in his *Repetition*, it is not difficult to discover the idea that faith is impossible to *mediate*. But is it possible that the repetition as unsuccessful experiment of a journey to Berlin would find its realisation/accomplishment while performing the Abrahamic motion? Is it really so "terribly easy" not only to understand Abraham, but also to match him by the very repetition of his motion of faith?

But is it really so much simpler and easier to "rise", "get back", i. e. to *repeat* the experience of faith in comparison to that of the "everydayness life"?

Even if such a "hierarchy" might seem quite strange, it is not "illogical". In other words, there is no contradiction here, or, to put in differently, the relationship between those two cases of repetition might seem illogical only from the first sight. After a closer look to the attempts of Kierkegaard, one can see that his *Wiederholung* might be written in order to show that here, in this everyday-life there is no place for repetition. There is no repetition without interruption of the transcendence, without absolutely *other*, without *difference*. This is why this "surprise", this paradox is possible; this is the reason why the repetition of the journey to Berlin is just an unsuccessful experiment, while the motion of a knight of faith is a *real* repetition of the journey of Abraham. Repetition, not the recollection of the past. Kierkegaard was the first one to notice in a very clear way the paradox of time of *repetition*, opposing it to recollection. *Repetition* is directed *forwards*, while recollection is directed *backwards*. It is possible to repeat only something that will

happen in the future, not something that has already happened. Thus, repetition is “recollection” forwards. Yet it is customary to believe that repetition is possible only in the case of something that has already happened, and as such, repetition is linked to the past tense. This is true, however, only while we think from the perspective of chronological time. Yet the Kierkegaardian existentially anticipating interpretation of repetition leads to the Christian context, *i. e.* to the Paulinian conception of time as *kairós*. The repetition is an interruption of *kairós* into human experience. And in this case, the future turns out to be the most important modus of time. As a consequence, one can speak of pre-conceived, anticipatory repetition of what “will happen” in the future. This is why this essentially Kierkegaardian attitude can be expressed in the post-modern style, affirming that “*Repetition* precedes”. There are different kinds of repetition, though.

The experiential nature of *repetition* discussed by Kierkegaard becomes even clearer compared to the descriptions of epiphanies of Marcel Proust in his epopee of time. The well-known “Return to Venice” could provide an answer to Kierkegaard, that repetition is possible not merely in the case of religious existence. But why Marcel succeeds the repetition, while Constantin Constantius does not? One answer could be easily found in that very novel of Proust: “After all, I was not looking for two rough stone plates over which I had stumbled in the courtyard”⁵. Marcel is not conducting an “experiment” of his “return to Venice”: “...it was this inevitable contingency of perception that confirmed the truth of the past which it made to come back, of the images it uncapped”⁶. And it has to be noted that repetition of “Venice” is not the repetition of Venice itself, but it is more like a “being reborn in me, when, trembling with joy, I heard the sound which was the same while tinkling a fork to a plate, and the same while striking a wheel with a hammer, when I felt the roughness of stones of the pavement, which was the same in the court of Germanti as in the baptistery of Saint Marc...”⁷. Marcel succeeds while Constantin Constantius does not, not only because, unlike Marcel, he conducts an “experiment”. Constantin Constantius searches for repetition as, one could say, a “total” experience of Berlin, that, using Kierkegaardian irony against Kierkegaard himself, we have already called as a search for repetition as an experience of *das ganze Berlin*. No matter how many there were of those, as Marcel Proust puts it, “instantaneous photographs of memory” (of Venice or Berlin), we believe that they would only be putative, and their “multitude” or “comprehensiveness” would never create either “Berlin” or “Venice”, since they would never utter anything about an impression that could be only returned by an accident, which repeats, however, the reality itself, and not just “Venice itself”.

⁵ M. Proust: *Prarasto laiko beieškant. 7. Atrastas laikas*. Vertė Baužytė-Čepinskienė. Vilnius: Alma litera 1997, 147.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. 142.

Thus, the response to the “experiment” is not a contingency (which, by the way, as an anticipation of “conditions of possibility”, is, most likely, only an instance of mediation, and cannot pretend to be repetition), but reality as singular experientiality, which is opposed to intelligible (recollected) and, for that matter, universal “reality”.

The reality, however, is experienced as transformation of time: Proust, the one who searches for lost time and finds it, conveys exactly the same idea as the one perceived by Kierkegaard in his discussions on religious existence, i. e. the interruption of the time of eternity into our experience, the living experience of *kairós* as reality.

The “success” of *repetition* depends exactly on the fact that it is impossible to conduct an “experiment” with it, i. e. *it is impossible* to anticipate the conditions of its possibility; on the other hand, that “success” is not a new repetition of the totality of former everyday-life experience, but is *the same* authentic experience. In this case *the same* stands for that very first primordial authenticity, which, as *repetition*, precedes any particular experience.

Kierkegaardian *repetition* as a certain structure of experience establishes a *difference* between reality (existence, Being) and thought. This thought of *difference* finds its realisation through the *difference* as temporality, i. e. through the difference between *kairós* and *chronos*.

According to Kierkegaard, a “miracle” of repetition can be performed if one breaks a closed circle of experience and reflection, where those two moments, existence and thought, emerge as the factors “eliminating” one another. At the same time, repetition is a “miracle” for one more reason: it recalls and gets back the “past” which precedes it by negation and elimination of the logic of thought. It is a singularly accessible epiphany which urges to surpass the temporal chronology. But what is the *past* for Kierkegaard in this case? It is obvious that it cannot be a certain customary modus of chronological time. Kierkegaardian discussion on repetition while questioning the novelty of it could help to provide an answer to this question. Does repetition embrace something new? Or, maybe on the contrary, repetition is the reiteration of what has already happened? Kierkegaard in the person of C. C. advises against being deceived by the idea that repetition could be something *new*⁸. Then, however, we need to ask another question: how does it happen that for Kierkegaard the non-existence of what is new, something what “has happened”, what is “old”, matches to the elimination of recollection from the structure of repetition? One should admit in this case that the past and the future as the modes of chronological time are, most likely, used here only to emphasise a certain paradoxical nature underlying the structure of repetition, discovered by thought. We are speaking, after all, about a super-temporal dimension that surpasses *chronos*, where it is possible to repeat not what has already happened and what is called the “past”, but what will happen; however, what is repeatable, due to its primordially (and precedence) is not new, but, on the contrary, is “old”...

⁸ Kierkegaard, op. cit., 132.

Thus, we could presume that we are dealing with that modern and, in essence, Deleuzian structure of *repetition*, with that primordially of repetition which eliminates all identities and questions all ontologies.

Despite of the fact that Kierkegaard represents the same nihilistic logic, i. e. the logic of *difference* based on negation as *différance*, the Kierkegaardian *repetition* in a nihilistic way expresses a different approach to reality (thinking of Being) than, say, philosophy of Deleuze. *Repetition, which comprises/involves* difference between reality and thought, between *kairós* and *chronos*, is “based” on or supposes the *real* negation and not some formal logical negation (Trendelenburg’s lesson to Kierkegaard). Thus, Kierkegaard transforms the problematics of “real” negation into ontological theory of *difference*. Kierkegaardian *difference* in itself is an expression of nihilistic conflict between *reality* and thought, between *existence* and thought, the conflict, which is constant interminable negation of each other as different, of destruction of each other by difference. In that perspective, however, the most important “element” remains *reality/existence*.

The Kierkegaardian paradox, which can also be found in the structure of *repetition*, from the point of view of the nihilistic logic represents the concurrence between autoreferentiality and negation; from ontological point of view, it announces or expresses the loss of the *reality* in a nihilistic way.

Thus, from the point of view of relation to reality emerging from a certain interpretation of *difference*, this Kierkegaardian *repetition* can be seen as an explosion of the Paulinian passage of the Epistle to the Ephesians quoted by Agamben.

The most eminent continuation of such a *repetition*, which, on one hand, expresses the nihilistic logic of *difference*, and, on the other hand, by the very perspective of *difference* leads to the reality and Being, i. e. to the ontological dimension, is provided by the philosophy of Heidegger. The Heideggerian *Wiederholung*, based on a certain conception of temporality, is directed towards the authenticity of being. The authentic having-beenness is repetition, the movement backwards, back to the past, of our own life/or tradition, and the *recovery* of possibilities of our own ability to be. In the case of the non-authentic being, someone’s thrownness and his own ability-to-be is “forgotten” due to concerns of the present. The past objects and events remain the foundation of this fundamental forgetfulness as long as they serve the concerns of the present. Not everyone is able to “keep” them, i. e. to “forget” them in a certain way. And the recollection itself is possible only through certain forgetfulness, through that fundamental “oblivion” which is in contrast to repetition, but not to so-called retention. Thus, repetition comprises, involves certain temporality: the fundamental forgetfulness makes the past to be more the past than the present; it is precisely *Dasein*, which has forgotten about itself and has lost itself in the superficiality of its own concerns that can remember, i. e. to enter the realm made open

by that forgetfulness⁹. Thus, forgetfulness as a certain negative instance becomes here the most important approach to authenticity, i. e. reality. We will draw attention to the fact that in the philosophy of Heidegger the authentic being is discussed in the context of ontological distinction, the *Differenz*, between the Being and beings.

Moving to other cases of the explosion, *repetition*, of the Paulinian passage, and inquiring if Deleuze, Derrida, and Foucault with their interpretations of the relationship between *repetition* and *difference* perform this explosion, let us think of an observation of Gianni Vattimo made some decades ago in his book *The adventures of the Difference*:

“Jacques Derrida’s 1968 Paris lecture on difference may at the time have looked like a straight manifesto of the philosophy of difference, but today it looks more like a kind of epitaph or memorial for it. Even at the time of its delivery this discourse was symptomatic and indicative of the decline of difference. (Is this too perhaps a peculiar destiny of difference, an ‘effect of difference?’) If we retrace the theoretical path followed by thinkers like Derrida and Deleuze, this decline looks inevitable. But my point is that this phenomenon is very far from signifying any decline in or exhaustion of the idea of ontological difference put forward by Heidegger; it is precisely in such adventures and in such a dissolution of ‘the philosophy of difference’ that ontological difference taps into its still-productive core, a core that constitutes an authentic future for thinking”¹⁰.

As such reflection on Heideggerian *ontological difference* which managed to evade the *decline of difference*, and at the same time as the explosion of *repetition*, can be identified the philosophy of Agamben and his interpretation of Messianic time in his book *Il tempo che resta*.

Agamben’s approach to *repetition*, from the point of view of the concepts of Being and time, is a certain continuation of Heideggerian *Wiederholung*, and, in the perspective of the represented time, it is mainly based on a distinction between an apostle and the figures of a prophet and an apocalyptic.

The focus of the interest of the apostle is not the last day nor the moment when time will come to an end, but time which shrinks and starts to come to an end (*ho kairós synestalménos estín*: I Cor. 7,29), or time which remains between time and its end.

But how is it possible to recognise and imagine such time? And, lastly, how is it possible to “represent” it?

We would say that the most important moment, characteristic to Christian time, which was disclosed by Agamben and even represented using the spatial linear principle, is the non-concurrence of Messianic time neither with the end of times, nor with the *eon* of the future, nor with profane chronological time, and at the same its being non-extraneous to the latter. Messianic time, *ho nyn kairós*, in the Agambenian

⁹ M. Heidegger: *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag 1979, 334–372.

¹⁰ G. Vattimo: *Le avventure della differenza*, Milano: Garzanti 2001, 151–152.

interpretation of Apostle Paul is “one part of profane time which is experienced as integrally transforming the recapitulation”¹¹.

Agamben, on one hand, tries to graphically imagine the “place” of messianic time on the “line of times”, and, on the other hand, he tries to look for “theological”, i. e. biblical “analogy” to the Paulinian conception of messianic time.

He compares the Messianic time to the circumcision of Apelle, and affirms that in both of these cases we face a certain caesura of time. Thus, the essential negative moment which allows Agamben to bring about the specificity of Messianic time, is the caesura of time, the non-continuation, “pause”, “silence”, which divides the division into two separate times: *i.e.* it includes in itself (the division) the “remainder”, which exceeds, surpasses the very differentiation and which starts to represent the *difference* in time.

“In this scheme, – as Agamben puts it, – the Messianic time emerges as that part of the profane eon which constantly surpasses *chronos*, and the part of eternity which transcends the eon of the future. They both [emerge] as the remainder of the two-eon division”¹².

Yet, to say truth, any attempt to schematise and represent Messianic time in this way is doomed to failure: since any attempt to re-present or “express” destroys that very *ho nyn kairós*. It’s not without reason that Agamben tries to show that *kairós* appears as a caesura, as a fracture in the time (and in any representation as well). As a consequence, we could say that Agamben talks about *ho nyn kairós* as *difference* and pure ineffability. From this point of view, one can compare Agamben to Walter Benjamin and his ideas on caesura as the contents of a piece of art and its truth as a concurrence of caesura and ineffability¹³.

For Agamben, however, this caesura of the time is intelligible. Thus, it might appear that it is possible to think *via* the thought free from any spatial representations. The point of confusion between *eschaton* and Messianic time consists in the fact that the first one is representable, but, as Agamben believes, is unintelligible. Meanwhile the real experience of time meets with (spatially) un-representable, but intelligible time. Any attempt to represent Messianic time fails to discern the essential, *i.e.* time that remains, the “remainder”, “rest” of time that provides evidence that time has started to come to an end.

Agamben introduces the definition of “operative time” of Guillaume as a perspective of his own research, and quotes this author:

“Operative time’ is time which the mind (*mente*) uses/takes on (*imperia*) in order to produce the image-time (*imagine-tempo*)”¹⁴.

¹¹ Agamben, op. cit., 64.

¹² Ibid., 65.

¹³ W. Benjamin: *Selected Writings*. Vol. I (1913–1926), eds. M. Bullock, M.W. Jennings. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1999, 341.

¹⁴ Agamben, op. cit., 65.

As one can see, one of the most important concepts in this definition is the expression “image-time”, which provides an alternative to representation in two-dimensional space. Yet if in this case too we have to deal with representation again, then how this new concept of time, the one of “operative time” can turn to the rejection of representation as representation? That is, is it possible to have a non-representative representation or image?

According to Agamben, Guillaume introduces a complication into chronological representation/imagining of time, while projecting the very process of formation of image-time into the latter¹⁵. The result of this complicating projection is a new representation of time, which is no longer linear, but three-dimensional. This representation corresponds to the so-called chronogenetic time.

Agamben projects this Guillaumian philosophical-linguistic approach to language and time, which enables the insight of “operative time”, into Paulinian conception of time seeking to unveil the Messianic meaning of time. He notes that our every representation of time, every discourse on time implies further, ulterior time (*il tempo ulteriore*), which is impossible to exhaust nor by that time representation, nor by that discourse.

By “ulterior” he means a description of vertical perspective, not of horizontal one. Ulterior time, *i.e.* time “acting” in the vertical perspective, is not “complimentary” to chronological time, which might appear as “added” or “connected” to chronological time; it is interior time, time in time. As it concerns *ulterior* time (*il tempo ulteriore*), Agamben maintains it to be *non ulteriore, ma interiore*.

Thus, we would say, *ulterior time* is not *subsequent (exterior) time, but interior time*. Only such interpretation of Agamben can help us also to understand his explanation of “backlog” from time, the fact of its being “remainder”, “rest” of time, being the “rest” in the state of non-concurrence with time that is represented, expressed by representations, or “put into image”. Yet Agamben derives our possibility to “achieve”, “complete” or “catch” time precisely from this. The definition of Messianic time proposed by Agamben is based on the structure of Messianic time as *ulterior time*.

Meantime, to Agamben, Messianic time is, to put in Heideggerian terms, the only authentic time; and we are time. In consequence, it is the only *real* time.

But why the Agambenian interpretation of Paulinian concept of time as Messianic time while trying to enforce the distinction *chronos/kairós*, does not find it enough to apply the Benveniste’s linguistic merits to the philosophy, *i. e.* to use the enunciation as performative utterance, and tends to the Guillaumian linguistic theory which is prior to Benveniste?

Besides the insight of Benveniste of the performative aspect of enunciation, what is very important to Agamben in that performative character of enunciation, it is the insight of operative time, a subsequent fracture of coherence, and a lag of enunciation in the “pure presence”.

¹⁵ Agamben, *op. cit.*, 65.

It might seem that the latter linguistic insight is decisive while trying to uncover the structure of operative time in Messianic time. It turns to be even more imperious if we remember that *kairós* emerges as caesura, as a fracture in chronological time. In consequence, it might appear that if one discerns in the structure of *enunciation* as performative act not only a concurrence of *dictum* and *factum*, but also a fracture of coherence and a lag of enunciation in the “pure presence”, then, at least in a formal way, one can also recognise the structural relationship between *kairós* and *chronos*.

We believe that the search for the structure of *repetition* in the Agambenian concept of Messianic time is framed by two important concepts: *Unforgetfulness* (*l'indimenticabile*) and *Recapitulation* (*Ricapitolazione*).

The theme of *Unforgetfulness* comes to Agamben's horizon not only through Kierkegaard but also through Walter Benjamin.

“I think that Benjamin had in mind something of the same kind, when he talked about the life of an idiot, about the requirement to remain unforgettten”¹⁶.

As Agamben puts it, one speaks here not about a simple requirement to remember, to bring back to memory what has been forgotten. Agamben affirms:

“This requirement is related not to the fact of being remembered, but with the fact of remaining unforgettten”.

At the same time he draws a very clear distinction between remembrance and unforgetfulness. What Agamben is really talking about, it is not the requirement of remembrance, but an “idiotic” (in Benjamin's sense) requirement to preserve in us and with us, as unforgetfulness, what has been lost. The only sense of unforgetfulness is the fact that what has been lost, does not require any constant remembrance, but has to be preserved with us and in us as what has been forgotten or lost. Thus, Agamben tends not to the remembrance as repetition of *the same*, but to the negative “experience” of difference, to the repetition which becomes negatively possible through the preservation of what has been lost. For Agamben thus, the unforgetfulness is “alive” through that experience of negativity.

What is the most important of all, however, is the fact that, to Agamben's view, there is no alternative between forgetfulness and remembrance. First of all, he understands this opposition only as an opposition between unconsciousness and consciousness. Meanwhile, “only the capacity to remain loyal to what has to remain unforgettten, even if it has been forgotten, is determinant, and it seeks to remain with us somehow, to be for us in some possible way.”¹⁷ And this way unveils itself to Agamben as the primordial negativity.

¹⁶ Agamben, op. cit., 43.

¹⁷ Ibid., 44.

Messianicity coincides with the place of the fulfilment/accomplishment of the requirement of unforgetfulness *par excellence*. It is possible to relate Messianicity to the requirement of unforgetfulness for that reason that it is not an attitude according to which one should look at the world as if the redemption has been completed.

“The coming of the Messiah, – writes Agamben, – means that all things along with their seeing subject are taken ‘not as if/probably not,’ one evokes them and revokes with the same gesture. There is no more any seeing subject left, who at some moment would be able to make a decision to act *as if* in a positive way. The Messianic evocation, first of all, dislocates and eliminates the subject: such is probably the meaning of Gal. 2, 20: ‘I live; yet not I [zō *oukēti ego*], but Christ/Mesiah liveth in me”¹⁸.

In the Agambenian interpretation, however, that corporeal “loss of the self” relates to unforgetfulness: only the one who remains loyal to what he loses, is unable to believe in any worldly identity or *klēsis*.

Thus, Agamben’s *requirement (esigenza)* and his formula “*not as if*” is an expression of the *other logic*, which, as we will see, is his justification of Messianicity as the structure of *repetition*. Agamben makes a reference to *De non aliud* of N. Cusanus, where the opposition A/not-A supposes the third possibility, an opposition that has the form of double negation: not not-A. Agamben considers that this logical paradigm is based on a Paulinian passage, on his Epistle to the Corinthians I Cor 9, 20–23, where he defines his position concerning the partition/differentiation of the Jews:

“And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might Gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to Christ) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some”.

Thus, the one who has the Messianic law is not-without law/not-not under the law.

This *other logic* of Cusanus which supposes the “third possibility” is very important to Agamben in his attempt to justify his position. Agamben uses it to justify his “differentiation of differentiation or his logic of *difference*. We mentioned this in our discussion about the place of *kairós* in the profane *chronos*. We can apply now the same *other logic* for the Messianic experience as the one that reveals itself through the opposition between remembrance and forgetfulness. The fact that there is no alternative between those two elements of opposition supposes the “third possibility”:

If remembrance is A, and non remembrance is not-A,

¹⁸ Agamben, op. cit., 44.

then while we speak about *unforgetfulness*, we also speak about *non-non-remembrance* (not not-A) or *repetition*. Thus, the “partition of the partition” or the *other* logic, the logic of difference, and not the dialectical logic, is what makes the repetition structurally possible. This is how Agamben reasserts the Aristotelian logic by renewing it in a paradoxical way, i. e. by nihilistically introducing “the possibility of third” as *difference*.

However, the time of Messiah as the structure of *repetition*, would remain formal enough if we would discuss it only in the perspective of “possible third” as remembrance or non-remembrance or simply unforgetfulness. The time of Messiah is articulated by Agamben by introducing of one more important concept, that of *recapitulation* (*Ricapitolazione*). We believe that it would be helpful to understand its meaning in order to provide some contents to that formal *other logic*. In his discussion concerning this concept, Agamben notices that Apostle Paul, while speaking about the time of Messiah, does not use the noun *anakephalaíōsis*, but uses the corresponding verb *anakephalaiómai*, which could be translated as “to repeat in a short way”, “to repeat summarizing” “to recapitulate”, “to provide a brief reminder”.

Thus, he makes an attempt to disclose in time the structure of what he calls *ricapitolazione* and original Greek form of which would be *anakephalaíōsis/anakephalaiómai*.

“Thus, Messianic time is total repetition of the past, even in the meaning which it gets in the legal term ‘total sentence’”¹⁹.

Speaking of the “total repetition of the past” it is important not to slide to the representations produced by the chronological time and expressed through the linear structure. The *recapitulation* is not just any “reproduction” of the past achieved through recollection of any past experience. What we have in mind, after all, is not time as *chronos*, but the relationship between *chronos* and *kairós*. Even if the so-called “recapitulation” is really related to *chronos*, it is only its relation to *kairós* that makes it possible to “recapitulate”, to offer its “total” version.

As Agamben puts it, “repetition is nothing else as the other side of the typological relation between the present and the past, which is established by the Messianic *kairós*.”²⁰

He writes here, however, not only about an archetype, but about a certain constellation or even unity of *kairós* and *chronos*, where the “entire” past as total is contained, concentrated, i. e. repeated in the present. When Agamben speaks about “remaining time” (“*il tempo che resta*”), such in the only way to realise his claim to the “remainder”, the “rest” (*resto*); the “remainder” coincides with “everything” here. This is why that Agamben’s Messianic time does not favour the future, but establishes an extraordinary relationship between the past and the future in the perspective of discovery of *kairós* in *chronos*. According to Agamben,

¹⁹ Agamben, op. cit., 75.

²⁰ Ibid., 76.

the total repetition for Apostle Paul means that *ho nyn kairós* is the recapitulation of the past and the future, when at the fateful moment we stand before the past, or the past is before us, and we have to adjust and define our relations with it. It would not be possible to assume, however, that this is the case of an attempt to settle accounts with the past, since in such a case we would consider the past as entirely accomplished. Yet our obligation to the past is imperative, thus, the “total repetition”, to put in legal terms, is the “total sentence” of the past.

In order to justify that attitude of recapitulation of the past and the future, Agamben quotes a passage the Paulinian Epistle to the Philipians (Fil. 3, 13):

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before [*epekteinómenos*].”²¹

It is not without reason that Agamben in his text does not translate the Greek *epekteinómenos*. Yet he does not discuss the meaning of the Greek term, but he focuses on prefixes. Meanwhile, we will draw attention to the fact that in Greek language *epéktasis* means expansion, prolongation; *epekteinó* – to expand, to prolong, to pull forward. The derivative *epekteinomai*, however, is only used in that passage (Fil. 3, 13) and it literally means a pointed and intensive act of expansion, i. e. *the act of pulling forward of the faithful*. Agamben points out to the fact that this term verb has two prefixes: *epi-* which means “being on”, “on the top of something” or “close to something”; “an excess of something”, “addition”, “moving after something”; “around”; and prefix *ek-*, which means “from”. The presence of these two different prefixes in this word and their combination with the verb meaning “to be expanded” refers, as Agamben sees it, to the duplicity of Paulinian motion. With this interpretation of Paulinian gesture as double motion, Agamben shows how the Messianic *kairós* establishes a relationship between the present and the past. And this relationship is *repetition*. The interpretation of Messianic time, provided in the chapter *Ricapitolazione* of Agamben’s book, could be considered as one more fragment of the explosion of the Paulinian passage. It not only discloses and accomplishes in a very particular way that Agambenian conception of *repetition*, but it is also purposefully asserts the nihilistic perspective of *difference* formally defined by the “other logic” of the *unforgetfulness*.

This nihilistic vision of time and repetition also provides a broad context for theoretical discussions of Richard Kearney’s atheistic conception of the narrative imagination as the condition of the accomplishment of repetition.

At the same time, this interpretation of *repetition* from ontological, *authentic* perspective provides a possibility to problematically raise a question concerning the “unity” of the thought which represents the nihilistic logic of difference: is it possible to consider that philosophies of

²¹ Agamben, op. cit., 44.

Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, etc. are the cases of explosion of *repetition*?
Or do they only show the twilight of the thinking of difference, are they
just a naked confirmation of the “effect of difference”?