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Research Article

"Everything Must Leave Some Kind of Mark": An Agambenian Reading of Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*

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ABSTRACT

The concept of "remnant" or "remainder" holds a special place in Giorgio Agamben's philosophy. Across his discussions of language/law, bios/zoe, and potentiality/impotentiality, Agamben dismantles binary oppositions through the concept of 'remainder,' focusing on the zone of indistinction that exceeds division and dialectical thinking. The concept of remainder, which functions as a key in the thought of Agamben, is also the title of Tom McCarthy's debut novel *Remainder* (2005). The novel unfolds the story of an unnamed thirty-year-old man whose life takes a dramatic turn after an accident involving "something falling from the sky." Following his emergence from a coma, he finds himself in a threshold where he is a remnant of his former identity. For months, he endeavours to recover both his memory and motor control with the expectation that he will eventually return to a semblance of normalcy. But contrary to expectations, he develops a fixation on recreating, re-enacting, and simulating specific scenes and situations that linger in his memory as disjointed images. From Agamben's standpoint, he might be approached as the 'remainder' of the human/inhuman binary, akin to a 'remnant' during the time of the end, a parody of the sovereign who suspends law to create his state of exception, or a 'kink' in the smoothly operating system of simulations. This paper offers a reading of Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* from Giorgio Agamben's perspective and provides an analysis of its eccentric character's relationship with time, space, and reality by delving into the threshold he occupies.

Keywords: *Remainder*, kairotic time, *homo sacer*, Tom McCarthy, Giorgio Agamben

Introduction

The concept of "remnant" or "remainder" holds a special place in Giorgio Agamben's philosophy. It refers to a zone of indiscernibility that exceeds division and dialectical thinking. This zone emerges when the binary oppositions of human and animal collapse because "the animality of the human can never coincide with humanity without residue" (Agamben, 1999, p. 127). The meanings that Agamben attributes to "remainder" and its variations might be aligned with Lyotard's concept of "differend", Derrida's "différance", Deleuze's "zone of indistinction" and Adorno's "negative dialectics". Agamben employs this concept in diverse contexts as a constituent of his thought. For example, in language, the remainder appears as an unbridgeable gap between the sayable and unsayable, or in poetry as "the prolonged hesitation between sound and sense" (Watkin, 2011, p. 178). As a concept, "remnant" represents the potential to disrupt the 'anthropological machine,' which operates by differentiating humans from animals, and indicates the rise of a new, blessed life after this disruption (Mills, 2011, p. 89). Agamben uses this concept as a linchpin to render coherence to his diverse analyses ranging from concentration camps to comatose patients, from the prisoners of Guantanamo to George Bush's state of exception after 9/11, and from politics to aesthetics.

In Agamben's context, "Remainder becomes sensible when a *caesura*, a division or break occurs in moments that language fails to say when the thought is paused" (Agamben, 2005, p. 64, emphasis original). Caesura here refers to the action of kairotic time that intervenes between chronos and eschaton, creating a "zone of indiscernibility, in which the past is dislocated into the present and the present is extended into the past" (Agamben, 2005, p. 74). Caesura implies a break between linear time and the end of time where the remainder emerges as "the time of the end," i.e. the messianic time or *kairos*.

The concept of remainder, which functions as a key in the thought of Agamben, is also the title of Tom McCarthy's debut novel, *Remainder* (2005). The novel, with its stunningly strange story and character, has become a great success and made Tom McCarthy one of the most interesting writers in contemporary British fiction. Tom McCarthy is also, with the philosopher Simon Critchley, the co-founder of the International Necronautical Society (INS), and since 1999, he has been the general secretary of this semi-fictitious avant-garde network which operates through publications, manifestos, live events, media interventions, or art exhibitions that place "death," with a very affirmative attitude, as the central focus of scrutiny and display. In time, McCarthy's

popularity increased as a bright novelist, and *Remainder* is followed by *Men in Space*, *C*, *Satin Island,* and his latest novel *The Making of Incarnation* which came out in 2021.

Giorgio Agamben and Tom McCarthy, as two writers/thinkers, are not less philosophical and enigmatic, in degree and capacity, from one another. McCarthy's experimental novels can be interpreted within the frameworks of various philosophers such as Jean Baudrillard (simulations), Jean-Paul Sartre (existentialism), Gilles Deleuze (difference and repetitions), Alain Badiou (event), Quentin Meillassoux (materialism and contingency) and many others. Although we know, from his interviews and essays, that McCarthy read and admired Giorgio Agamben (Clarke, 2022; Huber, 2018; Rourke, 2010; Tuten, 2015), Agamben is seldom mentioned among the philosophers whose effect is explicit in McCarthy's fiction. The aim of this paper is not to assert that McCarthy wrote *Remainder* under the direct influence of Agamben; rather it seeks to demonstrate that Agamben's and McCarthy's thinking coincide, and to propose that McCarthy's *Remainder* can be read as the literary counterpart to Agamben's elaboration of "remainder" as a concept. *Homo sacer,* kairotic time, potentiality, and threshold are the four prominent concepts in Agamben's philosophy to each of which "remainder" is integral. Deliberately or not, McCarthy employs in his novel a strategy that can be associated with these concepts in constructing the character and his story.

Remainder (2005)

Remainder is a remarkable, funny, yet deeply disturbing novel. It is a highly suggestive and intriguing work that invites interpretations from various theoretical perspectives. In terms of genre, the novel defies classifications: it encompasses elements of a psychological novel, a thriller, a modernist satire, a postmodern parody, a contemporary comedy, a realist novel, and a slipstream fantasy fiction all at once. However, it subverts our typical expectations associated with each of these generic categories and transcends them. McKenzie Wark aptly describes the novel in her preface as follows,

> *Remainder* is not a Postmodern novel. Or not only. Nor does it claim to be doing anything new. It *imitates* the once new, now old methods of Modernism. It is about –and indeed maybe it is- the remainder, the reverb, the noise of communication, rather than the act of communication or even mimesis. It is about the leftover trash heap of aesthetic strategies. (2016, p. x, emphasis original)

"Remainder" is not merely the title or the theme of the novel; rather, the novel itself can be viewed as the remainder of the novel genre, representing what remains in the 21st century from realist, modernist, and postmodernist writing strategies "after everything novelistic has been subtracted from [them]" (Vermeulen, 2012, p. 549). In the novel, everything can be seen or treated as a remainder: the protagonist is a remainder (of an accident or his former identity), the settlement money is a remainder, the re-enactments serve as remainders of "event" or reality, memory is a remainder, "matter" is a remainder, the hero's trauma is a remainder, the narrative itself is the remainder of the narrator's experiences, and the novel is constructed as the remainder of fiction in a world where mimesis has become impossible.

Remainder is a first-person narrative following an unnamed 30-year-old man, a single Londoner who worked as a market researcher until he was severely injured in an accident involving "something falling from the sky" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 5). He remains in coma for several months, then regains consciousness and spends additional months in the hospital recovering his motor skills and relearning "all the activities we normally perform unthinkingly" (Attridge, 2016, "Tom McCarthy's Fiction"). After extensive treatment, he returns home as a mere remnant of his former self. Suffering from amnesia, he struggles to distinguish between genuine memories and fabricated images. As an extremely embarrassed figure, he feels estranged from his own body, considers himself "inauthentic, duplicate, unnatural, and second-rate" because he "cannot just be," and feels like an "interloper on the whole scene [of life], a voyeur" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 49). To him, "all life feels fake, filled with impostors, performers of second-hand actions, repetitive, camp; everything is formed of patterns, yet he remains on the outside, unable to blend in" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 50). He finds himself "bored by everything, everybody around him enormously" (p. 55). As compensation for his injuries, he receives a settlement of 8.5 million pounds from the company which was charged responsible for the accident. However, the vast sum fails to excite him at all. Instead, he is more intrigued by the numerical figure of eight than its monetary value. He muses, "The eight was perfect, neat: a curved figure infinitely turning back into itself. But then the half. Why had they added the half? It seemed to me so messy, this half: a leftover fragment, a shard of detritus… redundant, surplus to requirements..." (McCarthy, 2016, p. 9).

The settlement money and the word "settlement" worm its way to him into and out of coma. He describes his obsession with the word as follows:

> The Settlement. That word: *Settlement. Set-l-ment*. As I lay abject, supine, tractioned and trussed up, all sorts of tubes and wires pumping one thing into my body..., running through my useless flesh and organs like sea water through a sponge-during the months I spent in hospital, this word planted itself in me and grew. (McCarthy, 2016, p. 6, emphasis original)

The terms of the settlement prohibit him from discussing the accident and expect him to move on with the compensation money granted to him. Consequently, he becomes fixated on re-settling, repeating what they did to him with the money. Just as the settlement money was an artificial and temporary solution to his trauma and losses, so would his re-settlements be a means to alleviate his feeling of dizziness caused by the things he did not understand (p. 7). Thus, motivated by an urge to do things, to "undo matter," re-build places, and re-enact scenes to gain a glimpse of the meaning or essence of things, he holds the belief that there is "No Doing without Understanding: the accident bequeathed me that forever, an eternal detour" (p. 21).

His apathy and alienation take on a new form when an epiphanic moment, "a sudden sense of deja vu, a revelation" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 58) creates a *caesura* and kindles a flame in his heart. During a house party, a crack in the wall of the bathroom triggers memories of a time he actually felt serene and intense, a time he had been "real without first understanding how to try to be: cut out the detour" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 60). To feel real again, he decides to recreate this image, the reconstruction of which turns into an all-or-none project, an obsession for which he does not hesitate to throw millions of pounds around. He buys blocks of buildings, hires property developers, and architects, employs interior designers, plumbers, carpenters, actors, and a facilitator Nazrul Ram Vyas who will henceforth act as "an extra set of limbs issuing his commands and instructions" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 69). Soon he employs many people to work for him as re-enactors. Every smell, color, taste, sound, and every other detail has to be recreated to generate the feeling of authenticity which he experiences in the form of "a tingling in the base of his spine" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 10). Exactitude matters to him in the same way as it mattered to the cartographers in Borges' tale "On the Exactitude of Science"—the tale mentioned by Baudrillard in "Simulacra and Simulations" (1998, p. 166). All the re-enactors start to work on 24-hour calls in buildings or places that had "on" and "off" modes, repeating their tasks incessantly whenever he switches over to on mode. They are paid well to do as they are commanded: to re-enact insignificant roles such as frying the liver, playing the piano, emptying the dustbin, or arranging cats on the roof. "What

they lacked was comprehension" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 101), the same thing that we lack, as his readers, in following the logic of his purposeful purposelessness. He becomes a sovereign figure whose plans are unquestionable, no matter how absurd they sound. Like a God, he re-creates spaces and controls time, fills the spaces with things, humans, animals, food, rules, orders, and events. It is possible to observe these re-enactments as the simulations of our world which reduces us to puppets repeating insignificant tasks on a daily basis, or a parody of religions that forbid questioning God's will or designs no matter how illogical they may sound. McCarthy's hero overcomes boredom by activating his imagination to experience authenticity, and in that, he affirms Agamben who criticizes the modern times for depriving us of authentic experience. Agamben relates this deprivation to "the removal of imagination from the realm of experience, and to the individual's lack of active intellect which is the basis for real knowledge" (Agamben, 1993a, p. 33).

McCarthy's protagonist remains aloof, completely detached, except for moments when he includes himself in the simulated reality through exclusion. Following the crack-in-the-wall project, which costs him 3.5 million pounds, he embarks on a simulation of a tire repair shop, where he repeatedly examines the disappearance and reappearance of liquids in a hypnotic fashion. His subsequent projects increasingly draw inspiration from spontaneous, real-life events rather than his memories. His third project revolves around a street shooting that occurs in the neighbourhood. He procures a whole area on the street to experience "the tingling," meticulously recreating every detail to feel the reality of the murder and the materiality of the dead body lying on the asphalt. He is fascinated by the dead body and describes his fascination as follows:

> The truth is that, for me, this man had become a symbol of perfection. It may have been clumsy to all from his bike, but in dying beside the bollards on the tarmac he'd done what I wanted to do: merge with the space around him, sunk and flowed into it until there was no distance between it and him –and merged too, with his actions, merged to the extent of having no more consciousness of them. He'd stopped being separate, removed, imperfect. Cut out the detour. Then both mind and actions had resolved themselves into pure stasis. (p. 178)

For days and nights, weeks and months, he re-rotates the patterns, repeats the re-enactments, and remains constantly ensnared in a loop. The novel progresses into a

thriller with his final project: a simulation of a bank heist, once again alluding to Baudrillard. However, this time the project ends in failure—a "fuck up" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 252)—because, after numerous rehearsals in a warehouse, he decides to execute it in the real bank, with real guns, in real-time. The unrepeatability of the event, the sense of emergency, and its challenge to any clear distinction between the "real" and the "fake" intensify his tingling. However, the replacement of the rehearsed simulations by real-time action is doomed to leave a remainder: contingency spoils everything. Ultimately, two people are killed simply because of a "kink" (wrinkle) in the carpet of the bank which was present in the simulation but absent in the real bank (Vermeulen, 2012, p. 560). The sheer actuality of the event happening here and now fascinates the protagonist, and although the project fails, he recalls it "as a very happy day" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 252) and as his biggest achievement. He escapes from the crime scene by a private jet. The pilot, unknowingly carrying away a murderer, is commanded by the tower to turn back. The protagonist wielding a real shotgun, hijacks the plane and orders the pilot to continuously turn away and keep circling, drawing eights in the sky for an indefinite period of time. The figure, when viewed vertically as eight, tilts to the side, horizontally becoming the sign for infinity. It is as if the half that spoiled the evenness of "8" in the settlement money is erased, and the protagonist, who once felt like a "leftover fragment, shard of detritus" is no longer surplus to reality. Finally, he merges with it.

The novel concludes with the protagonist seeking neither justification nor empathy, totally irresponsible for his decisions or actions, beyond, elevated, enlightened, unpunishable, suspended, and content to be in an infinite circuit of existence. What Tom McCarthy said of Serge Carrefax, a character in his novel *C*, can be repeated for the protagonist of *Remainder*:

> This is it, you see: what we find in technology and networks is desire. Which doesn't mean the desiring individual; it means desiring consciousness itself. That's why I wanted Serge Carrefax to be more than an individual; if he was a circuit, he'd be over-charged. The surge is too much, it blows. It's about the desire for impossibility. Giorgio Agamben, when describing melancholia (which Serge has in spades), says that the condition isn't at all a detachment from the world, even though it may seem like it; in fact, it's an investment in the world so much that the desire for the world exceeds its own limit. The melancholic wants what is impossible; he wants impossibility itself – to experience it and to merge with it. To surge towards

> it. That's why the melancholic is the ultimate rebel. (McCarthy, [Interview with Lee Rourke], 2010)

Similarly, the hero of *Remainder* embodies that circuit overcharged with a surge that compels him to invest his melancholy in the world. He creates a short-circuit, a rupture in life as a melancholic who seeks to push his state of being into extremes to merge with life, and overcome the inauthenticity caused by the caesura that divides *bios* and *zoe*. In this regard, he may be seen as a rebel imbued with more life than the people around him.

The reactions to the novel and its anti-hero have been various: For some, it is disturbing because, contrary to the novelistic tradition, its "protagonist offers no emotional traction for the reader, and McCarthy scrupulously avoids relatability" (Duncan, 2010, p. 6). Others view it as the preposterous transformation of a vulnerable man to a monster who kills just because he wants to and does not sacralise life (Sarıkaya Şen, 2017, p. 61). Some approach it as a novel that "adopts the grammar but not the psychology of post-trauma" (Vermeulen, 2012, p. 551).

In line with Agamben's comic paradigm, it is possible to interpret it as a story of a man who, by forging an authentic life, attains happiness. This form of life, which Agamben sees as the precondition of happy life, can only be attained by a remnant figure who must renounce his *homo sacer* identity and embrace his potentiality as a threshold figure existing in kairotic time. For Agamben, the remnant is the only real political subject (Agamben, 2005, p. 57) because it signifies the liberation of the subject from boundaries. From this perspective, we may cease to view the hero as an inhuman or mentally disturbed figure, and instead perceive him as a melancholic individual who, by pursuing the impossible, becomes the ultimate rebel.

Homo Sacer/Sovereign

In a recent interview with Rebecca Clarke, Tom McCarthy referred to Giorgio Agamben as a philosopher he admires because "he elevates the pause, the interval, the in-between and the unresolved to ontological conditions" (2022). *Homo sacer* is the metaphorical figure, the embodiment of the in-betweenness that Agamben employs to illustrate the ontological meaning of threshold.

Agamben defines *homo sacer* or bare life as what the sovereign power produces by suspending the law. This form of life arises when *bios* (social life) and *zoe* (pure life common to all beings) are treated as binaries. In other words, whenever there is a division between *bios* and *zoe*, humanity and animality, bare life emerges and whenever there is a zone of indistinction, bare life leaves a remainder. *Homo sacer* represents the abandoned life that can be killed without committing homicide, and without it being considered a sacrifice (Agamben, 1998, p. 83, 88). For Agamben, life can only become "sacred" (as in *homo sacer,* and hence, pejoratively) when life-as-zoe has been distinguished from life-as-bios. Accordingly, he conceives the ideal life as free from the processes of sacralisation that entail this split and inflect the polity.

Homo sacer is a limit figure who exists in the ban, excluded by way of inclusion, and signifies a subject who has no personal "form-of-life", and no potential for happiness, because his life and its form are separated from each other. Agamben traces this way of being through his analyses of concentration camps, comatose patients, prison inmates, or refugees, but also notes that it is the default status of anyone whatsoever because the state of exception has become the norm, the matrix of politics now, and transformed every human being into bare life.

In McCarthy's *Remainder*, the unnamed hero, allegorically representing everyman, used to be a *homo sacer*, an abandoned figure, until the accident. He was an ordinary precariat, a vulnerable white-collar who lived under the sword of Damocles in the capitalist world order, symbolised by the technological parts and pieces that fell on him, causing the accident. The value of his life was equated monetarily; the cost of his injuries could easily be quantified and settled. If he died, nobody would care for him or simply consider him a victim; his death wouldn't be notable or sanctified. Like us, he was merely a statistical figure, a nobody within the system.

For Agamben, the only way out of this status is to render the system inoperative by way of suspending the law, deactivating it, and dissolving the relation between law and life, norm and fact. Similarly, McCarthy's hero refuses to compromise and seeks refuge in his simulations, where he unleashes his potential to construct a form-of-life and renders the state apparatuses inoperative. His re-constructed spaces become his states of exception, operating under his rule and freeing him from ethical and political boundaries. These spaces are integrated into the real economy of life, in actual streets or locations in the heart of London, yet they remain excluded from the public domain. Within these spaces,

he is non-relational, "no longer bound by the rules, everyone else is but not [him]" (McCarthy, 2016, p. 201). As a sovereign figure, he unintentionally produces bare lives not because he wills, but because his employees voluntarily submit themselves to his will in exchange for handsome payment. From the sovereign's perspective, life (whether human or animal) is neutral, and death is not perceived as tragic. This neutrality is perceived by some readers as monstrous when the hero refuses to aid African people, poor or starving people using the huge sum of money for donations. Similarly, the hero sees nothing abnormal in pushing real cats from the roof of the building, disregarding their lives; instead, he regards them as "pure matter" or mere accessories to satisfy his desire for authenticity. He refuses to compromise on any of the elements of his memory, even if it means becoming indifferent to death (such as pushing the cats or killing the actors without hesitation). He does not sacralise life—not even his own life—in order to transcend or merge with the sheer materiality of being and feel authentic, real. However, he also understands that authenticity can only be achieved by approaching materiality inauthentically.

In the eleventh doctrine of "The New York Declaration: INS Statement on Inauthenticity", Tom McCarthy and Simon Critchley perceive inauthenticity as the core of the self, rooted solely in an experience of division or of splitting (2007, p. 9). Therefore, they reject all cults of authenticity on the grounds of being melodramatic and tragic in approaching this split of the self, or life and death. Thereby, they prefer a comic acknowledgement that undermines uniqueness instead of the tragic affirmation which tries to reconcile the freedom of the subject with the causal necessity of the material world. In their sixteenth thesis, they adhere to comedy, which is the mechanical splitting of the self, the dividuation or disintegration of the self into insubstantiality (2007, p. 12). This comic vision explains the indifference of *Remainder*'s hero toward death and his refusal to treat it as something melodramatic or tragic, as nothing about death or life is inherently authentic. In this regard, the INS Declaration affirms Agamben's philosophy of (in) authenticity which is similarly built on a comic paradigm.

Agamben, following Heidegger, discusses authentic and inauthentic life in *The Time That Remains*. Inauthentic life, for Heidegger, defines everyday being-in-the-world: when we are absorbed in ongoing activities, defined by prevailing norms, and inattentive to our contingent, finite, temporal existence. Authentic life, by contrast, acknowledges and appropriates its existential and temporal finitude (as cited in Sinnerbrink, 2011, p. 102). However, Agamben chooses to treat authentic and inauthentic life as mutually inclusive and offers an anti-dialectical approach to them.

Authentic life can be attained by overcoming the state of expropriation. In *The Coming Community*, Agamben introduces the concept of "expropriation" and states that "Existence within spectacular societies is such that there is no longer any space of authentic or proper being since everything has been expropriated and commodified under conditions of global capitalism" (1993b, pp. 78–79). Agamben proposes another form of being instead of "proper" or inauthentic being and introduces the concept of "whatever being" as a new ontology. For Sinnerbrink "an ethics and politics of the improper would therefore mean finding new uses for the inauthentic that defines our empty modern experience. Lacking any determinate identity, existing essentially as singularity or 'whatever being' making use of this impropriety for new ends" (2011, p. 102).

Expropriation is the gradual erosion of human control over the products of their work, and the diminishment of the abilities and attributes that define their humanity. Agamben identifies this process as the entire history of Western politics and social organisation which is crystallised in the history of sovereignty, the process by which life is expropriated by the sovereign ban, through the removal of the voice, and the separation of *zoe* and *bios* (Molad, 2011, p. 66). Agamben thinks that to overcome this split, a new ethical experience is necessary. And for him, "the only ethical experience is the experience of being one's own potentiality, one's own inactuality" (Colebrook & Maxwell, 2016, p. 33) in forming an (in)authentic life. For this, one has to be indifferent, non-relational to time as chronos, which is the temporality of *potestas* or politics. McCarthy's hero does exactly what Agamben proposes for (in)authentic life by depriving the system of its privileges of relations, to embrace his inactuality or potentiality to "not do" in the way Melville's Bartleby did. It is not the money that gives McCarthy's hero the opportunity of liberation but simply his will, like Bartleby, to "not do" what most of us would do. The hero describes the goal of his re-enactments as follows:

> Their goal was to allow me to be fluent, natural, to merge with actions and with objects until there was nothing separating us- and nothing separating me from the experience that I was having: no understanding, no learning first and emulating second-hand, no self-reflection, nothing: no detour. I'd gone to these extraordinary lengths in order to be real. (McCarthy, 2016, p. 214)

If we approach him from Agamben's perspective, there is nothing abnormal about McCarthy's hero insofar as we remember Agamben's statement that, "human beings

neither are nor have to be any essence, any nature, or any specific destiny, and their condition is the emptiest and the most insubstantial of all" (Agamben, 2000, pp. 94–95). Ontologically, there is no such thing as a pre-determined historical or universal task assigned to humanity, or there is nothing sacred about human life or death. However, this fact has been veiled for centuries by religions and political systems. In other words, man is essentially workless, without any tasks to achieve (Prozorov, 2014, p. 33). The hero's futile re-enactments, repetitive actions, and choices expose our inherent worklessness and the essential inoperativity that is embedded in the core of our being. When we read the novel from the traditional humanist perspective, we may be disturbed by the hero's approach to money, people, cats, time, and space, perceiving him as alien or inhuman. What we typically consider as "normal" life is filled with tasks and duties that reduce us to zealots like Naz, the hero's facilitator, or monthly paid workers like the re-enactors who waste their lives for jobs they cannot comprehend. Theirs is what Agamben calls expropriated and inauthentic life. Instead, enormously bored by the boundaries of such a life, the hero chooses to suspend and re-expropriate them to be able to own his life as a "whatever singularity."

Kairotic Time and Potentiality

This encounter of the human with their radical being-without-work can only occur through the suspension of *chronos* in *kairotic* time, which leads us to the next aspect integral to Agamben's concept of remainder. Agamben's thought on time is best understood through his discussions of *homo sacer* and "whatever being." He describes his concept of "whatever being" or "whatever singularity" in *The Coming Community* as a status that rejects any notion of belonging and identity, as a pure singularity that severs any obligation to belonging in order to recover identity from expropriation (1993b, p. 11). He maintains that "Having no identity and no belonging, the whatever singularities cannot possibly build a *societas*, and as such they disavow the logic and workings of sovereignty; therefore, the "whatever singularity [. . .] is the principal enemy of the state" (p. 87). Agamben introduces "whatever being" as a threshold figure of (im)potentiality that affirms the essential worklessness of man, and invites us to take and love it with all its predicates (1993b, p. 2). This form of being is inoperative and indifferent to redemption because it is irredeemable. It exists in limbo, in-between and the only time that functions in this threshold is the *kairotic* time, which refers to "the time of the end" (i.e. the Messianic time) where *chronos* is rendered inoperative. Agamben categorises performative ethics that is shaped by will and necessity as

moralistic, because they entail "operativity and command." Instead, he proposes an ethics liberated entirely from the concepts of duty and will or imagines an ontology, a theology of being where life does not have a proper end, i.e. beyond operativity and command (Antakyalıoğlu, 2022, p. 90).

As the enemy of the state, this singularity's activity embodies a form of profanation. Profanation is a process of re-expropriation that facilitates the emergence of an authentic form of life. Profanation involves the desacralization of the sacred (such as life and death) in *homo sacer* (sacred human) and aims to liberate it. Playfulness is essential for deactivating the ritualistic aspect of the sacred. The time of the play is suspended because the play is the pathway to and practice of a messianic (kairotic) or redeemed time. Thus, profanation entails the temporal disruption that deactivates the logic of the capital (sovereignty) and the temporality (chronos) governing it.

In *Infancy and History*, Agamben defines *kairos* as the time that enables man's liberation from the *chronos* to own his freedom in the moment. It is "the abrupt and sudden conjunction where decision grasps opportunity, and life is fulfilled in the moment" (Agamben, 1993a, pp.101–104). Kairotic time, by creating a rupture in chronos, carries an emancipatory possibility.

After the accident, the hero abandons what has abandoned him, namely the imposed politics of life, and suspends the tragic paradigm. He seeks refuge in his simulations, where he can control time and space. While planning the process of simulations, both before and after the re-enactments, chronological time operates; he meticulously forms timetables and organizes the time flow only to suspend and abolish it at the opportune moments. He recreates space as a zone of indiscernibility, where fact and fiction, real and simulation, living and acting become indistinguishable. The "tingling" signifies his potential for forming a life that cannot be regulated by the existing symbolic order. However, in his inoperative, playful, ritualistic and repetitive simulations, he is never inactive. He "plays with the law just as children play with disused objects, not in order to restore them to their canonical use but to free them from it for good" (Agamben, 2005b, p. 64). He controls time, feels authentic in the suspended time and the replicated spaces, staging his own scenes by deactivating the programmable time, the eschaton (chronological time or telos) which is the time of organization especially for the legal authority. In the kairotic time, he finds the potential for change and transformation which is signified by the tingling in his spine that enables him to eliminate the primacy

of actuality on which the ontology of *homo sacer* and the sovereign power is founded. In McCarthy's *Remainder*, the hero can be taken as a perfect illustration of Agamben's idea of whatever singularity since he suspends the economy of life (polity) through his simulations to abolish time and profane the *homo sacer* identity that is imposed on him. His bank heist project is an attempt to make a bit of space, within time where "time becomes a topographic surface in which he can find cracks and partitions, enclaves and defiles" (Hart et al., "Interview with Tom McCarthy," 2013, p. 667).

Agamben defines "potentiality as that through which Being founds itself *sovereignly*, which is to say, without anything preceding or determining it other than its own ability not to be" (Agamben, 1998, p. 46). McCarthy's hero happily embraces his own ability "not to be" when he identifies with the unrepeatable, emergent and contingent reality that reminds itself with the kink. The novel ends with the hero in a threshold, "weightless –or at least differently weighted: light but dense at the same time" (McCarthy, p. 129), "not coming from, nor going to anywhere, beyond telos and redemption" (Agamben, 1999, p. 182). He represents the possibility of negative biopolitics, one that deprives life of any relation to the law by establishing life as non-relational, and suspending the sovereign ban to recover his substance as potentiality and "to accede to a kind of authenticity through his strange, pointless residual" (McCarthy, p. 231).

Conclusion

Agamben is contested by many "for seeking to theorise life as enigmatically silent and possessing a capacity for inactivation or impotentiality" (Colebrook & Maxwell, 2016, p. 26). However, once we comprehend Agamben's concept of inoperativity, we can find a way out of our inauthentic forms of life. In that respect, McCarthy's hero becomes the literary configuration of Agamben's ideal subject capable of upsetting the system by creating a rupture (*caesura*) in the biopolitical order. Like Bartleby, he reminds us that by preferring not to comply with such life, we can render the whole system inoperative. We would simply prefer not to be consumers, modern slaves in the social caste systems or participate in the dehumanising world order. With the power of what remains, we can collapse the system that produces nothing but bare lives. The story of *Remainder*'s hero is a provocative and extraordinary configuration of such a life pushed to extremes to estrange the readers from their way of being.

To collapse the system, we must first reckon with the remnant, the remainder: "the concept through which we can view how a totality conceives of itself and of its component parts. Then we can become real political subjects as not parts of a totalizing whole" (de la Durantaye, 2009, p. 299). Only then we may see McCarthy's hero as a figure that embodies a potential for change or a different life. Ethnically, historically, biologically, sexually and politically there will always be remainders that expose the monstrosity of the totalising systems which treat us as masses, statistical figures without authentic forms of life.

The novel ends in a way that confirms the first doctrine of the INS Declaration as an "experience of failed transcendence": "a failure that is at the core of the General Secretary's (Tom McCarthy's) novels and the Chief Philosopher's (Simon Critchley's) tomes. Being is not full transcendence, the plenitude of the One or cosmic abundance, but rather an ellipsis, an absence, an incomprehensibly vast lack scattered with debris and detritus". ("The New York Declaration: INS Statement on Inauthenticity", 2007).

At the end of the novel, nothing is resolved, and the future of the hero remains unknown. With him, we remain entrapped in an ever-rotating Möbius strip. Or perhaps, his plane will fall from the sky and its debris or "technological bits and parts" will hit another's head triggering another trauma, rotating to where it begins and starting over another story "turning back, then turning out. Then turning back again." (p. 275) As Wark remarks, "*Remainder* is the trace, the residue, of McCarthy's virtuoso telling of the story. It is the story of what it means to make anything –a novel, a life- when all the real Gods are dead, and yet there's nothing for it but to read –and write- on" (2016, p. xii). The novel itself is "a leftover fragment, a shard of detritus" or a "kink" with which we have to figure out what we have to do. Until then, we will share the weightlessness and density of its hero as what remains because the novel leaves a mark on us, a remainder that we, as disturbed readers, feel in the form of a tingling in our spines.

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