

THEOCRIT Agamben's Philosophical Archeology: An Historiographical Research Method

Course Information Sheet prepared by Dr. Edward Matthews, Ph.D.

ematthews@fanshawec.ca

OVERVIEW

Archeology is traditionally considered to be the study of human history and prehistory through the excavation of geographical sites and the analysis of physical artifacts. According to Giorgio Agamben (2008), philosophical archeology, on the other hand, is “that practice which in any historical investigation has to do not with origins but with the moment of a phenomenon’s arising and must therefore engage anew the sources and traditions.” In this definition, Agamben alludes to a distinction between the empirical, temporal nature of history in general and the ahistorical nature of philosophical thought itself. In this sense, philosophical archeology is a history of conceptual, terminological, thematic, and argumentative networks, in which philosophy encounters its own problems. Agamben’s definition implies the notion of an *ur*-history that pre-dates the phenomenon’s coming-into-being, or what Foucault calls “the moment of arising.” The “moment of arising” may occur objectively in history but it cannot come into one’s purview without the emergence of the knowing subject as well.

NOTE: As the course progresses, I will be reading selections from my forthcoming book, *Heretical Materialism: An Archaeological Inquiry*, in which I apply the method of philosophical archeology to the emergence of 18th century materialism (here viewed as empirico-materialist embodiment).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, students will focus exclusively on philosophical archeology as an historiographical research method and study the three approaches that are presently being practiced. Agamben’s methodology includes key concepts such as paradigm, signature, potentiality, genealogy, archeology, and *archē*. As Alain De Libera argues, we owe to Kant the notion of philosophical archeology and to Foucault its precise definition, namely, *that which renders necessary a certain form of thought*. The course itself begins with Kant and then journey through the relevant writings of Foucault, then to Agamben, and, finally, to Alain de Libera. The link between these different thinkers is both the notion of an historical *a priori* and of language’s relationship to the unsayable. Along the way, students will encounter secondary literature that investigates the various junctures between Kant, Foucault, and Agamben. As they rejoin Agamben’s archeological enterprise in the second half of the course, students will also engage with various “philosophies” of history (e.g., Benjamin, Collingwood, Ricœur, Veyne).

ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS and GRADING

Short Exploratory Essay (5-8 pages) 25%

Seminar Presentation of Short Essay (15-20 mins + 10 min question period) 30%

Research Essay (15-25 pages) 35%

Attendance and Participation 10%

REQUIRED TEXTS

Agamben, Giorgio. *The Signature of All Things: On Method*. Translated by Lucia Di Santo and Kevin Atell. New York: Zone Books, 2009. \$58.93 hardcover (Amazon pricing)

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. London, New York: Routledge, 2005. \$41.60 softcover (Amazon pricing)

Foucault, Michel. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith, New York: Pantheon Books, 2010. \$26.74 softcover (Amazon pricing)

OPTIONAL (for your consideration)

Foucault, M. *Le discours philosophique*. Paris: Gallimard, 2023.

Govrin, Ido. *Philosophical Archeology: With and Beyond Agamben on Philosophy, History, and Art*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2023. \$59.69 softcover (Amazon pricing)

De Libera, Alain. *L'archéologie philosophique*. Paris: Vrin, 2016. \$43.12 softcover (Amazon pricing)

NOTE: Students are allowed to purchase second-hand copies of these books, providing they purchase the most recent version. Also, weekly readings from the books listed above will be available as .pdf files.

WEEKLY TOPICS AND READINGS

MODULE 1: Course Introduction, Breakdown, and Academic Requirements

MODULE 2: Introduction to Philosophical Archeology in Kant's Work

Readings:

Kant, I. "Conjectural Beginning of Human History (1786)" in *Anthropology, History, and Education*. Edited by Günther Zöllner and Robert B. Louden. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Kant, I. "What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany Since the Time of Leibniz and Wolff?" (1794/1803) in *Theoretical Philosophy After 1781*. Edited by Günther Zöllner and Robert B. Louden. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

MODULE 3: Foucault's Systematization of Philosophical Archeology from *The Order of Things* to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*

Readings:

Foucault, M. Selections from *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. London, New York: Routledge, 2005.

Foucault, M. Selection from *The Archeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith, New York: Pantheon Books, 2010.

MODULE 4: Foucault's *Le discours philosophique*

Readings:

Foucault, M. “*Chronologie*” and “*Une histoire restée muette*” (“A [His]Story Left Silent”) in *Dits et Écrits 1954-1988, tome 1, 1954-1969*. Edited by Daniel Defert and François Ewald in collaboration with Jacques Lagrange. Paris: Gallimard, 1994. NOTE: Because there is currently no English translation of this text, I will provide a summary of the main points that are most relevant to our discussion on philosophical archeology.

Foucault, M. “What Our Present Is” in *The Politics of Truth*. Edited by Sylvere Lotringer. Introduction by John Rajchman. Translated by Lysa Hochroth & Catherine Porter. Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2007.

Foucault, M. *Le discours philosophique*. Paris: Gallimard, 2023. NOTE: Because there is currently no English translation of this text, I will provide a summary of the main points that are most relevant to our discussion on philosophical archeology.

MODULE 5: Giorgio Agamben and Philosophical Archeology

Readings:

Agamben, G. *The Signature of All Things: On Method*. Translated by Lucia Di Santo and Kevin Atell. New York: Zone Books, 2009.

MODULE 6: Selections from Agamben's Texts

Readings:

Agamben, G. “Language and History: Linguistics and Historical Categories in Benjamin's Thought” and “Tradition of the Immemorial” in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Edited and translated with an Introduction by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Agamben, G. “On the Sayable and the Idea” in *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Lorenzo Chiesa. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018.

Agamben, G. “Archeology of the Work of Art” in *Creation and Anarchy: The Work of Art and the Religion of Capitalism*. Translated by Adam Kotsko. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019.

MODULE 7: Alain de Libera and the “Subject” in Philosophical Archeology

Readings:

De Libera, Alain. Selections from *L’archéologie philosophique*. Paris: Vrin, 2016. **NOTE:** Because there is currently no English translation of this text, I will provide a summary of the main points that are most relevant to our discussion on philosophical archeology.

MODULE 8: Review of Secondary Literature on Foucault, Agamben and Philosophical Archeology

Readings:

Cerella, Antonio. “The Myth of Origin: Archaeology and History in the Work of Agamben and Girard” in *The Sacred and the Political: Exploration on Mimesis, Violence, and Religion*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Gourgouris, Stathis. “*Archē*” in *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, edited by J. M. Bernstein, Adi Ophir, and Ann Laura Stoler. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018.

Govrin, Ido. Philosophical Archeology in Theoretical and Artistic Practice, Ph. D. thesis later published as *Philosophical Archeology with and beyond Agamben on Philosophy, History, and Art*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2023.

Howard, Stephen. “Archaeology and/or Genealogy: Agamben’s Transformation of Foucauldian Method” in *Journal of Italian Studies*, Volume 1 (2018).

McQuillan, J. Colin. “Philosophical Archeology in Kant, Foucault, and Agamben” in *Parrhesia* 10 (2010).

McQuillan, J. Colin. “Philosophical Archeology and the Historical A Priori: From Kant to Foucault” in *Symposium* 20, no. 2 (Fall 2016).

Östman, Lars. “Philosophical Archeology as Method in the Humanities. A Comment on Cultural Memory as the Problem of History” in *Danish Yearbook of Philosophy* 46 (2011).