

MIND YOUR MANNERS. AGAMBEN AND PHISH

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ABSTRACT

In the final volume of his *Homo Sacer* series Giorgio Agamben develops the concept of destituent power, a power that unworks itself in every constitution and renders itself inoperative in its every operation. This concept helps elucidate Agamben's more enigmatic notion of form-of-life. Whereas the power of sovereign biopolitics is constitutive, i.e. constituting a determinate actual bios out of the indefinite potentialities of zoe, form-of-life exemplifies the power of rendering actual and determinate forms inoperative or destitute. Rather than attempt to devise a 'proper' form of life, Agamben seeks to free life from the gravity of all tasks or vocations imposed on it by privileged forms. What matters to Agamben is less the form itself but rather the manner, in which it is lived. Whereas style designates a consistent model that defines a form of life in its recognizable identity, manner refers to a failure or refusal to fully appropriate or identify with this style. The article traces the development of the idea of form-of-life in Agamben's work, discusses the ontological implications of Agamben's argument in *The Use of Bodies* and concludes by discussing the American jam band Phish as the paradigm of Agamben's form-of-life.

KEYWORDS

Giorgio Agamben, power, subjectivity, style, manner

1. INTRODUCTION

In *The Use of Bodies*, the final volume of his *Homo Sacer* series, Giorgio Agamben develops the concept of destituent power, a power that unworks itself in every constitution and renders itself inoperative in its every operation. This concept helps elucidate Agamben's enigmatic idea of form-of-life, which he has developed since the early 1990s. Understood in destituent terms, form-of-life is diametrically opposed to the constitutive power of sovereign biopolitics that negates the indefinite possibilities of *zoe* in constructing a determinate and actual form of *bios*. In contrast, the power that defines form-of-life renders these actual and determinate forms inoperative or destitute, restoring to them their potentiality (see Kishik 2012; Prozorov 2014).

This understanding of form-of-life has important ethico-political implications. Rather than attempt to devise anything like a proper form of life, to be affirmed, defended or implemented as a matter of a political project, Agamben seeks to free life from the *gravity* of all tasks or vocations imposed on it by such proper and privileged forms: no life has to be in a certain form and no form must be actualized in life. This entails an important shift in the ethico-political discourse from the more substantive consideration of the forms of life in question towards the manner in which they are lived. In this article we shall probe Agamben's distinction between style and manner in order to illuminate the destituent character than defines form-of-life. Whereas style for Agamben refers to a more or less consistent, recognizable and repeatable model or identity, manner pertains to the deviation from this model or identity that precludes one's full identification with it. It is this deviation, however slight and imperceptible, that introduces an element of destitution into the style, opening it to new possibilities of use.

Our argument in this article will unfold in three steps. We shall first trace the development of the notion of form-of-life in Agamben's key works, culminating in the analysis of destituent power in *The Use of Bodies*. We shall then address the ontological implications of the move towards the destituent understanding of form-of-life, tracing the way Agamben endows the apparently banal dimension of lifestyle, habit, fashion, etc. with an ontological significance, as being ends up thoroughly dispersed in its manners. Thirdly, we discuss Agamben's recent distinction between style and manner and address the question of the specifically destituent manner that defines a form-of-life. Following Agamben's own methodological precepts (Agamben 2009a), we seek to produce a paradigm of this destituent manner. Agamben's own paradigms are famously hyperbolic and extreme, which has led to the misunderstanding of many of his insights, e.g. the state of exception illustrated by the Roman figure of homo sacer or the idea of potentiality illustrated by Melville's Bartleby (see Prozorov 2014: 108-112; Whyte 2009; Passavant 2007). Yet, particularly given Agamben's shift of focus towards the rather more mundane realm of habits, fashions, lifestyles in *The Use of Bodies*, more familiar and less eccentric paradigms may be in order. Thus, in the final section of this article we shall offer the American jam band Phish as the paradigm of Agamben's form-of-life, in which 'destitution coincides without remainder with constitution, [and] position has no other consistency than in deposition' (Agamben 2016: 275).

2. FORM OF LIFE BETWEEN CONSTITUTION AND DESTITUTION

The concept of form-of-life remains one of the more elliptic and elusive concepts in Agamben's work. At the end of the first volume of the *Homo Sacer* series, this concept is introduced as a resolution of the problem of the inclusive exclusion of bare life into the political order that defines the logic biopolitical sovereignty.

Just as the biopolitical body of the West cannot be simply given back to its natural life in the oikos, so it cannot be overcome in a passage to a new body – a technical body or a wholly political or glorious body – in which a different economy of pleasures and vital functions would once and for all resolve the interlacement of *zoe* and *bios* that seems to define the political destiny of the West. This biopolitical body that is bare life must itself instead be transformed into the site for the constitution and installation of a form of life that is wholly exhausted in bare life and a *bios* that is only its own *zoe* (Agamben 1998: 188).

While biopolitical sovereignty operates by capturing and separating bare life from the positive forms of *bios*, Agamben makes the opposite move of articulating *zoe* and *bios* into a new figure, in which ‘it is never possible to isolate something like naked life’ (Agamben 2000: 9). While bare life was obtained by the negation of *zoe* within *bios*, this articulation of *zoe* and *bios* produces a new unity, which Agamben calls *form-of-life*, the hyphenation highlighting the *integrity* of this figure, in which life and its form are inseparable (Agamben 2000: 11).

In the *Kingdom and the Glory*, Agamben elaborates this notion of the form-of-life through an engagement with the theological idea of ‘eternal life’ (*zoe aionios*). In Pauline messianism ‘eternal life’ does not refer to a hypothetical extension of life indefinitely, but rather designates a specific quality of life in the messianic time, characterized by the becoming-inoperative of every determinate identity or vocation, which now appear in the suspended form of the ‘as not’ (*hos me*) – the notion Agamben addressed at length in *The Time that Remains* (2005). “Under the ‘as not’, life cannot coincide with itself and is divided into a life that we live and a life for which and in which we live. To live in the Messiah means precisely to revoke and render inoperative at each instant every aspect of the life that we live and to make the life for which we live, which Paul calls ‘the life of Jesus’, appear within it” (Agamben 2011: 248). In this reading, eternal life has nothing to do with the afterlife but is rather a way of living *this* life that renders inoperative all its specific forms of *bios*, its functions, tasks and identities.

Agamben then proceeds from the theological to the philosophical context to elaborate this figure of eternal life in terms of the Spinozan idea of *acquiescentia* (self-contentment), “the pleasure arising from man’s contemplation of himself and his power of activity” (Spinoza cited in Agamben 2011: 250). In Agamben’s interpretation, it is precisely this contemplation of one’s own power that articulates inoperativity and potentiality, opening one’s existence to a free use (see Chiesa and Ruda 2011).

[The] life, which contemplates its (own) power to act, renders itself inoperative in all its operations, and lives only (its) livability. In this inoperativity the life that we live is only the life through which we live: only our power of acting and living. Here the *bios* coincides with the *zoe* without remainder. Properly human praxis is sabbatism that, by rendering the specific functions of the living inoperative, opens them to possibility (Agamben 2011: 251).

Insofar as this ‘sabbatical’ life renders all positive forms of *bios* inoperative, it coincides with *zoe*, yet insofar as *zoe* is no longer negated as a foundation of *bios*, it does not take the degraded form of bare life. Rather than reduce political life to a pseudo-natural life through acts of dehumanization, the ‘eternal life’ of contemplation affirms the potentiality of the human being and thus functions as a “[metaphysical] operator of anthropogenesis, liberating the living man from his biological or social destiny, assigning him to that indefinable dimension that we are accustomed to call ‘politics’. The political is neither a *bios* nor a *zoe*, but the dimension that the inoperativity of contemplation, by deactivating linguistic and corporeal, material and immaterial praxes, ceaselessly opens and assigns to the living” (Agamben 2011: 251). What is eternal about this ‘eternal life’ is then evidently not its span, but rather the excess of potentiality over actuality that is freed when the actual positive forms of life are rendered inoperative in the mode of contemplation.

In *The Use of Bodies* these themes of deactivation, inoperativity and potentiality are elaborated under the rubric of *destituent power*. Whereas the power of sovereign biopolitics is *con*-stitutive, i.e. producing a determinate actual *bios* out of the indefinite potentialities of *zoe*, form-of-life exemplifies the power of rendering actual and determinate forms *de*-stitute, restoring to them their potentiality (Agamben 2016: 207-213, 263-279). Instead of the biopolitical apparatus, in which life was fractured into the unqualified *zoe*, presupposed and negated in the name of the attainment of the political life of *bios*, we end up with a life that generates its forms in its own living and which forms itself to enjoy its own living, a life that is inseparable from the form it takes. “It is generated in living and for that reason does not have any priority, either substantial or transcendental, with respect to living. It is only a manner of being and living, which does not in any way determine the living thing, just as it is in no way determined by [the living thing] and is nonetheless inseparable from it” (Agamben 2016: 224). Life forms itself in myriad modes and does not coincide with any of its specific forms, since it is present in all of them. Whatever form life takes, it retains within it the potential to be otherwise and thereby brings an element of destitution into its every constitution and renders inoperative its every operation.

3. FROM BEING THROWN TO BEING CARRIED

Agamben’s development of the idea of form-of-life throughout the *Homo Sacer* project may be further illuminated in the context of his continuous engagement with Heidegger’s ontology. Indeed, the first formulation of form-of-life in *Homo Sacer* began with a parallel between the opposition between *bios* and *zoe* and the Heideggerian distinction between essence and existence: “Today *bios* lies in *zoe* exactly as essence, in the Heideggerian definition of Dasein, lies in existence” (Agamben 1998: 188). If the essence of the human is unrepresentable in terms of

positive predicates ('what one is') but consists in the sheer facticity of its existence ('that one is'), then the form of *bios* proper to the human is indeed its own *zoe*, whose sheer facticity is no longer the negated foundation of bios but rather its entire content, there being no other form, essence, task or identity imposed on it. What Agamben calls form-of-life is then "a being that is its own bare existence, [a] life that, being its own form, remains inseparable from it" (Agamben 1998: 188).

While the discussion in *Homo Sacer* did not go beyond these remarks on this parallel, in *The Use of Bodies* Agamben chooses to distance his idea of form-of-life from Heideggerian ontology. He argues that despite Heidegger's affirmation of possibility as the constitutive aspect of Dasein, his figure of Dasein nonetheless remained stuck with or riveted to its being-there, its thrownness which it had to assume as a task. In contrast to this grave pathos of being-consigned, which Agamben himself relied on in *The Remnants of Auschwitz* to theorize shame as the structure of subjectivity (Agamben 1999b: 87-134), Agamben's own modal ontology rather recalls the para-existential ontology developed by Heidegger's student, Oskar Becker. Against the unwarranted privileging of being-thrown in Heidegger, Becker affirmed a light and adventurous experience of "being-carried" (*Getragensein*): thrown as Dasein might be, it does not land irrevocably in some determinate 'there' but is carried away in the very throw itself (Agamben 2016: 189-91).

Similarly, for Agamben life is never stuck in a form it must assume but is rather carried by it, when we adopt or uphold a particular form, or carried away from it, when we withdraw or recoil from a form we find oppressive or obscene. In his early critique of Heidegger Emmanuel Levinas (1993) similarly problematized Heidegger's figure of being as the inescapable, something we are stuck with and have to be. In his *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism* (1990) he also addressed the political implications of this ontological standpoint, which consist in founding political community and praxis not on the possible but on the necessary, the given and the inescapable. Levinas's own account of ethics as first philosophy is rather marked by the exigency of escaping the inescapable, which requires breaking outside of ontology as the realm of the necessary (Levinas 1998: 3-20). In contrast, Agamben seeks to redefine the ontological domain itself as that of movement rather than substance. It is not a matter of escaping being but of being itself as escape, as the movement from one form of life to the other, of being carried and carried away at one and the same time.

This ontological shift explains Agamben's renewed attention to the domain that is usually seen as unworthy of philosophical attention, i.e. the realm of lifestyle, habit, fashion and taste, in which life is carried from one form to another. Rather than treat lifestyle in strictly aesthetic terms, Agamben proposes to reinscribe it in terms of ontology and ethics that, moreover, are found to coincide in it. Just as Agamben's 'modal ontology' approaches being as nothing other than its

modifications, so his ethics has its entire content in the manifold tastes, habits, manners or styles that comprise the subject's forms of life:

It is necessary to decisively subtract tastes from the aesthetic dimension and rediscover their ontological character, in order to find in them something like a new ethical territory. It is not a matter of attributes or properties of a subject who judges, but of the mode in which each person, in losing himself as subject, constitutes himself as form-of-life. The secret of taste is what form of life must solve, has always already solved and displayed. If every body is affected by its form-of-life as by a clinamen or a taste, the ethical subject is that subject that constitutes itself in relation to this clinamen, the subject who bears witness to its tastes, takes responsibility for the mode in which it is affected by its inclinations. Modal ontology, the ontology of the how, coincides with an ethics (Agamben 2016: 231).

This is not a new theme in Agamben's work, as he dealt with the ontological status of habits as early as *Language and Death* and discussed manner and taste as key concepts of politics and ethics in *The Coming Community* (Agamben 1991: 91-98; Agamben 1993: 27-29, 63-65). What is novel is the centrality these questions assume at the end of the *Homo Sacer* project. If the analysis of sovereignty and biopolitics in the first volumes critically targeted the confluence of ontology and politics, whereby e.g. the logic of sovereignty corresponded to the Aristotelian doctrine of potentiality, and the inclusive exclusion of bare life in the state of exception corresponded to the relationship between existence and essence in ontology (Agamben 1998: 39-48, 182), the final volume is concluded by articulating ontology and ethics in an affirmative vision of form-of-life:

Just as in ethics character expresses the irreducible being-thus of an individual, so also in ontology what is in question in mode is the 'as' of being, the mode in which substance is its modifications. The mode in which something is, the being-thus of an entity is a category that belongs irreducibly to ontology and to ethics (which can also be expressed by saying that in mode they coincide). In this sense, the claim of a modal ontology should be terminologically integrated in the sense that, understood correctly, a modal ontology is no longer an ontology but an ethics (on the condition that we add that the ethics of modes is no longer an ethics but an ontology) (Agamben 2016: 174).

It is this articulation of ontology and ethics that inserts the hyphens into the syntagm 'form of life', transforming something utterly trivial into a highly specific experience that nonetheless remains available to all: "All living beings are in a form of life, but not all are a form-of-life" (Agamben 2016: 277). Agamben repeatedly emphasizes that it is not a matter of offering some specific, new, hitherto unheard of practice as an *alternative* to the existing or predominant forms: where would it come from and what good would it do? "It is not a matter of thinking a better or more authentic form of life, a superior principle, or an elsewhere that suddenly arrives at forms of life and factual vocations to revoke them and render them inoperative. Inoperativity is not another work that suddenly arrives and works to deactivate and depose them: it coincides completely and constitutively with their destitution, with

living a life” (Agamben 2016: 277). Instead, it is a matter of adopting a different perspective on something entirely familiar and banal - quite simply, our habits, hobbies, tastes, manners, quirks, etc. To constitute a form-of-life out of a form of life we must not abandon any of them for some great unknown, but rather live these very familiar forms otherwise than we have tended to. In other words, what is affirmed is not any specific form but only the *manner* in which any form whatsoever could be lived.

In *The Fire and The Tale* Agamben contrasts manner and style in the following way: “In any good writer, in any artist, there is always a manner that takes its distance from the style, a style that disappropriates itself as manner” (Agamben 2017: 9). Similarly, in *The Use of Bodies* style marks the “most proper trait” of a poetic gesture and manner “registers an inverse demand for expropriation and non-belonging” (Agamben 2016: 86-87). If style refers to a consistent model that defines a form of life in its recognizable and repeatable identity, manner consists in a deviation from this model that introduces into a style a modicum of deactivation or destitution. It is clear that the aspects that Agamben discusses under the rubric of form-of-life cannot be found on the level of style but pertain only to the level of manner, in which the style in question is carried along by a living being in idiosyncratic and unpredictable ways.

It is of course possible to argue that some styles lend themselves more easily to be used in the manner of form-of-life, while others are more likely to resist such use. We need only recall Agamben’s own tirade against mobile phones and their users in *What is an Apparatus?*⁹ to see that he is no stranger to strong statements of preference for some forms of life over others (Agamben 2009b: 16-17). Similarly, in *The Use of Bodies* Agamben disdainfully discusses personal ads in a French newspaper, in which those looking for a life companion vainly try to communicate their form of life in terms of a list of identity predicates and/or possessions: blond hair, good sense of humour, fondness for opera, fly fishing or fox hunting (Agamben 2016: 230). Nonetheless, even in this discussion Agamben explicitly recognizes that the problem is not so much the form, style or apparatus itself but rather the manner in which it is used, which can never be entirely defined by the form in question. Just as in *Profanations* even pornography was shown to be amenable to a profanation that ushers in a “new form of erotic communication” (Agamben 2007: 90), so in *The Use of Bodies* Agamben argues, with reference to Kafka, that “it is not justice or beauty that moves us but the mode that each one has of being just or beautiful, of being affected by her beauty or her justice. For this reason, even abjection can be innocent, even ‘something slightly disgusting’ can move us” (Agamben 2016: 232). The truth of a form of life is its form-of-life and for that reason it cannot be contained within the form itself. Thus, the most minor, insignificant and even ‘slightly disgusting’ forms, from speed dating to food porn, may be practiced in the manner of form-of-life, even though each of us will probably draw the line at

practicing some of them. In the final section we shall venture to develop a paradigm of this destituent manner that would further elucidate Agamben's argument.

4. FREEFORM LIFE

What is this manner that can make even slightly disgusting behaviors and practices appealing?⁹ As we have seen in the first section, Agamben's formal notion of form-of-life is characterized by deactivation, inoperativity and destitution – all negative attributes that appear to have no other content than what they negate. Yet, Agamben does not simply affirm destitution against constitution, potentiality against actuality, manner against style, but ventures to define a way of living in which both are present at once, i.e. an act that retains and manifests its potentiality not to be, a constitutive practice that brings destitution into its every act, a style qualified and disappropriated by a manner.

We may call this manner of living that retains the potentiality for its own transformation in every form it assumes a *freeform* life, by analogy with freeform improvisation in jazz and rock music. The analogy with musical improvisation is quite helpful for grasping the specificity of this manner of living, especially in contrast with the more familiar understanding of life as a series of freely chosen forms. In a paradigmatic improvisation, there is a theme (harmonic framework or chord progression), within which improvisation begins to unfold and to which it might also return (especially in jam-band improvisation in rock). While improvisation may begin as a set of variations on that theme, the theme need not be present at every time in the improvised section, which may rather unfold in an entirely spontaneous manner, veering into all possible directions. Unlike some forms of free improvisation, in which no main theme is discernible at all, in more familiar modes of improvisation the theme nonetheless remains defined at least at the beginning as well as possibly at the end. In the same way, a life that retains the potentiality for transformation in whatever form it dwells in may be easily recognizable in its form yet perpetually surprising in the specific manner in which it assumes this form, as the form in question is stretched to its limits, brought in relation with its opposites, recontextualized in numerous ways, all the while carrying that undefinable air of familiarity. Freeform life is therefore not a matter of a succession of forms that we freely take up and uphold, as e.g. in the (neo)liberal politics of entrepreneurial self-fashioning, but rather a matter of a *free relation to form as such*, not just a freedom to form but a freedom exercised within the process of formation itself, even if this formation ultimately yields little else than the endless playing with the same theme.

This freedom-in is paradigmatic for the process of artistic creation more generally. For Agamben, the process of creation is never reducible to the faithful execution of a style that would simply actualize a given model but is always combined with the opposed process of 'decreation' that resists this actualization, leaving a mark of

incompleteness, hesitation and, ultimately, the potentiality of being otherwise on every work (Agamben 1999a: 270; Agamben 2019). Similarly, Jean-Luc Nancy identified drawing as the paradigm of artistic creation, since its work is indissociable from the activity, never taking on a definitive form but retaining the dynamic moment of formation within itself. “Drawing is not a given, available, formed form. On the contrary, it is the gift, invention, uprising or birth of form. ‘That a form comes’ is drawing’s formula and this formula implies at the same time the desire for and the anticipation of form, a way of being exposed to what comes, to an unexpected occurrence, or to a surprise that no prior formality will have been able to precede or preform” (Nancy 2013: 3).

The idea of freeform life is thus more than a fancy name for the freedom of the subject in relation to the preconstituted forms of life or the equality of these forms in relation to each other. A freeform life involves both the subject and the variety of incommensurable forms in a reciprocal transformation: the subject captivated by the form gives it vitality and diffusion, making an otherwise lifeless form into a form of life, while the same process transforms the subject in accordance with the form, changing his or her life in a particular way, but always in a tentative fashion, retaining the possibility of deactivation in every action it takes. Evidently, retaining this possibility does not entail any injunction to actualize it in every setting. Such injunctions make no sense because the potentiality in question is strictly infinite. We could in principle change one’s lives every second, yet what would be the point in that? What is at stake in freeform improvisation is not the ceaseless production of novelty, which quickly becomes tedious and oppressive, but rather the potentiality for the new to emerge in the midst of the most familiar and repetitive, which thereby exhibit their own transience and mutability. Just as in a jazz or rock improvisation, you never know how long the performers will stay on any particular theme, so a freeform life is as such compatible with a remarkable durability of forms of life: it is possible to improvise relentlessly, while retaining a signature sound over decades.

This is perhaps the secret of the popularity of Phish, an American jam band founded in 1983 that has enjoyed a strongly dedicated fanbase over decades. While Phish released fifteen studio albums during their career that sold over eight million copies, they are best known for their live shows that feature extensive improvisation. In the summer of 2017 Phish performed thirteen sold out shows at Madison Square Garden in New York City and completed the year with a similarly sold out four night run ending on New Year’s Eve. Although the band has not produced any hit singles and have rarely, if ever, been played on the radio, their concerts have gained enormous popularity and, similarly to the live recordings of the Grateful Dead in previous decades, became more popular than studio releases. The band has released dozens of ‘official’ live albums and, in addition to that, practically every show has been recorded unofficially to be traded by the fans since the band’s early days.

What is it about Phish that generates such excitement about their performances? It would certainly be difficult to understand it by listening only to their studio albums, which feature more or less conventional classic rock songs with jazz, funk and country influences. Numerous critics of the band focus precisely on the quality of the studio material, complaining about the absence of memorable songs. If one remains focused on the songs themselves as the ultimate criterion for evaluation, then it becomes almost inexplicable why these generally unremarkable songs would generate a demand for concert tickets that the most popular mainstream pop and rock acts would envy and struggle to match. Would not extended jam sessions based on those songs be adding insult to injury, making the audience sit through a thirty-minute version of what was not even particularly likeable as a three-minute song?

The puzzle is resolved if we approach improvisation at Phish concerts in terms of the destituent manner that defines a freeform life. Extended jamming does not merely introduce additional variations to a pre-existing song, making the same song merely last longer. Instead, improvisation only takes up the songs in question as templates for improvised experimentation, which may involve chopping up and re-arranging them, playing parts of different songs together or playing a song in reverse order. Rather than play their songs with additional solos and variations, Phish play *with* their own songs, using the established forms of the songs in unpredictable ways, thereby ending up rendering the familiar unfamiliar and introducing difference into repetition. Just as in Agamben's argument even something 'slightly disgusting' can still be moving or touching when practiced in the destituent manner of form-of-life, even the less than memorable Phish compositions sound much better when ceaselessly de- and re-composed in the manner that restores to these songs the potentiality, transience and hesitation that characterize the process of artistic (de)creation (see Agamben 2019). Similarly to Nancy's pleasure in drawing, what is enjoyed in Phish performances is not the definitive form produced by the artists but the manifestation of formation within every form, in which creation and decreation become indiscernible.

In the extended jams at every show Phish songs are de- and re-created all over again and it is this free relation to the familiar songs that the audience looks forward and rapturously responds to in these performances. While we usually expect the concerts of our favorite bands to feature faithful renditions of familiar songs, at a Phish concert fidelity to established forms is abandoned for a free relation to form and this freedom involved in the process of formation is exposed on stage every night. Rather than ceaselessly try to invent new forms, becoming other with every album, Phish has performed the same act of free formation for over thirty years with admirable dependability, which is why many fans are not content with seeing only one show and instead book tickets for the entire residency. They both know exactly what they are going to hear (the freeform experimentation with the familiar songs) and have not the slightest idea how this freeform jam is going to sound like

on any given night. In this manner, repetition and novelty, composition and improvisation, creation and decreation become indiscernible, exposing in every form the contingency of its coming to presence. By the same token, a freeform life is not defined by the novelty it produces in actuality but by the potentiality for being otherwise that it exhibits in every activity it practices.

This is why we must rigorously distinguish our idea of a freeform life from the valorization of innovation and transformation that characterizes today's neoliberal governance. Neoliberalism prescribes constant change in one's life as a matter of the actualization of one's potentialities, whereby one ends up being all that one can be. The neoliberal subject must move from form to form without any respite of decreation. The perception that everything is possible, that I can be or do both this and that conceals one's subjection to the apparatuses of government that feed on that very potentiality in setting human beings to work in actuality:

The idea that anyone can do or be anything – the suspicion that not only could the doctor who examines me today be a video artist tomorrow but that even the executioner who kills me, is actually, as in Kafka's *Trial*, also a singer – is nothing but the reflection of the awareness that everyone is simply bending him- or her self according to the flexibility that is today the primary quality that the market demands from each person (Agamben 2010: 44-45).

Freeform life is free precisely *from* this injunction to perpetual transformation, which may be just as or even more oppressive than a mere prohibition. A four-hour Phish concert does not attempt to actualize all the potential of the band members by demonstrating their flexible skills in playing every possible genre of music. On the contrary, the band's freeform jamming has retained a signature sound for decades, which nonetheless contains within itself and exhibits the potentiality for being otherwise. Freeform life does not involve a ceaseless procession of new forms but rather the exposure in every form of the contingent force of its formation. Just as Phish play with their songs, suffusing their most familiar works with a sense of indeterminacy and hesitation, a freeform life plays with the forms it dwells in, bringing a measure of formlessness into every form it takes up. It matters little that the forms might be unremarkable, as long as they retain this potentiality of their own decreation.

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