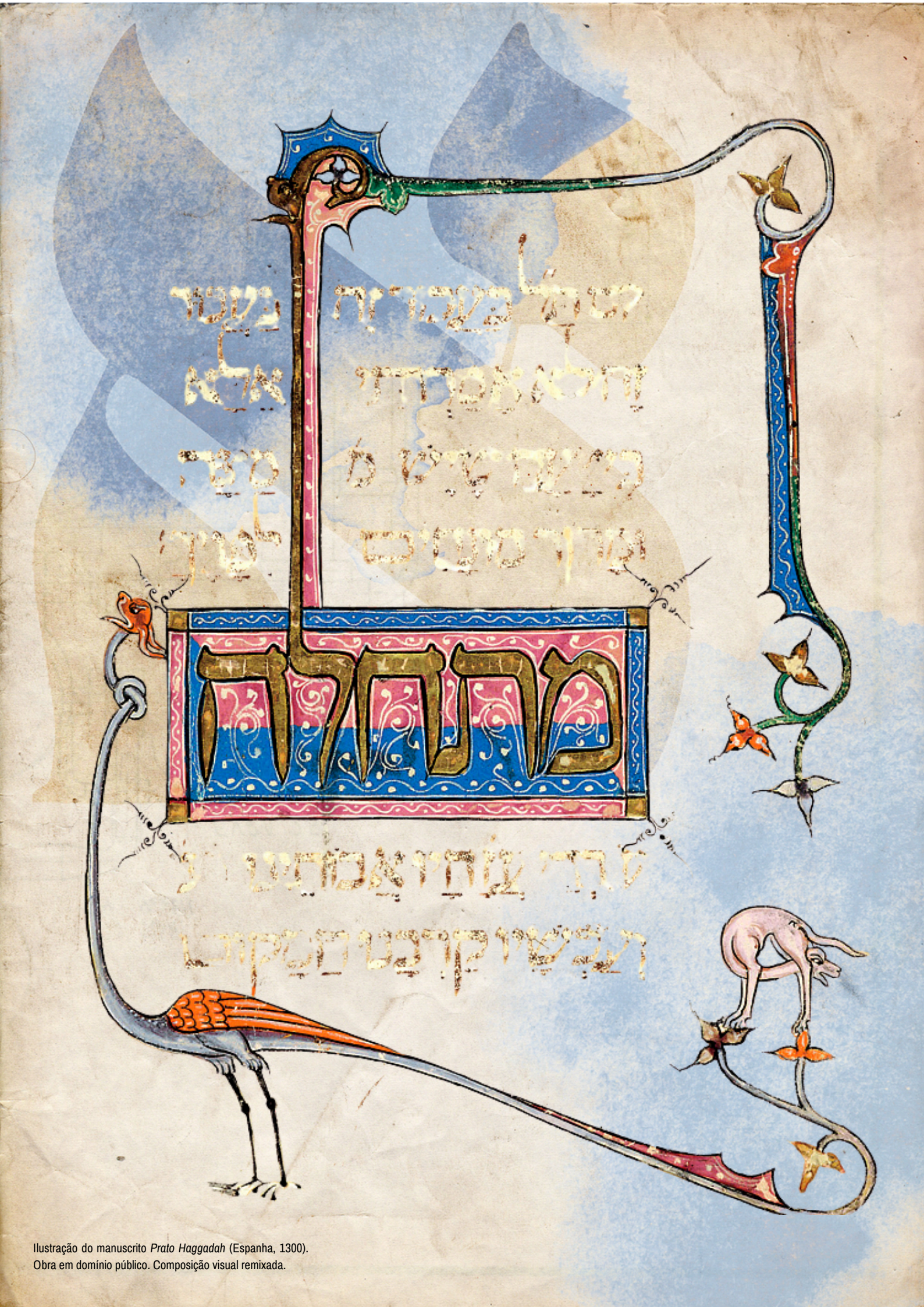

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TRADUÇÕES

THE ANARCHY OF THE COMMAND*

LA ANARQUÍA DEL MANDO

A ANARQUIA DO COMANDO

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* This text is an English translation, carried out by the author, of a presentation originally delivered at the Thematic Panel *"Anarchía y anarquismos: tensiones, rupturas y ontologías"* during the *IV Latin American Congress of Social Theory*, held in Santiago de Chile and Valparaíso on March 7–10, 2023. The paper addresses post-anarchist ontology, engaging in dialogue with authors such as Giorgio Agamben, Reiner Schürmann, Jacques Derrida, and Andityas Soares de Moura Costa Matos, and explores questions at the intersection of fundamental ontology, legal theory, and political philosophy.

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Abstract
The primary objective of this essay is to develop the interpretation made by Giorgio Agamben in his *Criation and Anarchy* (2017) around the aporia of the Greek word *arché*. As a secondary objective, this essay also seeks to develop into the underlying anarchy of the act of commanding, giving orders, and issuing rules. The question-problem of this essay is: What ontologically grounds a command? The hypothesis arises from the discussion surrounding two distinct interpretations of the anarchic nature of the "ontology of command." Between Reiner Schürmann and Jacques Derrida, Agamben differentiates the anarchic interpretation and the democratic interpretation of post-Heideggerian philosophy, respectively. From this, the conclusion is drawn to a reading that combines these two interpretations, revealing the mystical, hidden, but also unfounded, and, therefore, "an-archic" (Andityas Matos) nature of the act of commanding, of giving an order, as this subject can also be understood from the analytical philosophy of John L. Austin and his theory of the "act of speech." The study method adopted in this essay is hermeneutic-philosophical, based on studies of bibliographic and theoretical-qualitative sources.

Keywords
Anarchy; ontology; Giorgio Agamben; Reiner Schürmann; Jacques Derrida.

Resumen
El objetivo principal de este ensayo es desarrollar la interpretación realizada por Giorgio Agamben en *Creación y anarquía* (2017) en torno a la aporía del término griego *arché*. Como objetivo secundario, el ensayo también busca profundizar en la anarquía subyacente al acto de mandar, dar órdenes y emitir normas. La pregunta-problema que orienta este trabajo es: ¿qué fundamenta ontológicamente un mandato? La hipótesis surge de la discusión en torno a dos interpretaciones distintas del carácter anárquico de la "ontología del mandato". Entre Reiner Schürmann y Jacques Derrida, Agamben distingue, respectivamente, la interpretación anárquica y la interpretación democrática de la filosofía posheideggeriana. A partir de ello, se llega a una lectura que combina ambas interpretaciones, revelando la naturaleza mística, oculta, pero también infundada y, por tanto, "an-árquica" (Andityas Matos), del acto de mandar, de dar una orden, tal como este tema también puede ser comprendido desde la filosofía analítica de John L. Austin y su teoría del "acto de habla". El método de estudio adoptado en este ensayo es hermenéutico-filosófico, basado en el análisis de fuentes bibliográficas y teórico-cualitativas.

Palavras clave
Anarquía; ontología; Giorgio Agamben; Reiner Schürmann; Jacques Derrida.

Resumo
O ensaio tem como objetivo principal desenvolver a interpretação de Giorgio Agamben no seu *Criação e Anarquia* (2017) acerca da aporia da palavra grega *arché*. Com objetivo secundário, este ensaio também pretende aprofundar o tema da anarquia de fundo do ato de comandar, dar ordens e emitir regras. A pergunta-problema deste ensaio é: O que fundamenta ontologicamente um comando? A hipótese se dá a partir da discussão em torno de duas distintas interpretações quanto ao caráter anárquico da "ontologia do comando". Entre Reiner Schürmann e Jacques Derrida, Agamben diferencia a interpretação anárquica e a interpretação democrática da Filosofia pós-Heideggeriana, respectivamente, sobre o tema. A partir disto, conclui-se por uma leitura que combina aquelas duas interpretações, mostrando o caráter místico, ocultado, mas também sem fundamento, e, por isto, "an-árquico" (Andityas Matos) do ato de comandar, de dar uma ordem, conforme, também, pode-se entender este assunto a partir da filosofia analítica de John L. Austin e sua teoria do "ato de fala". O método de estudo adotado neste ensaio é o hermenêutico-filosófico, desde estudos de fontes bibliográficas e teórico-qualitativas.

Palavras-chave
Anarquia; ontologia; Giorgio Agamben; Reiner Schürmann; Jacques Derrida.

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For Giorgio Agamben, many texts speak of the true mystery around the act of obedience. In this regard, in addition to the classic text of La Boétie *Discourse of Voluntary Servitude* (1576), it is possible to remember the writings of Hannah Arendt, as the work *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), and the book of Judith Butler called *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997). Through different ways, all those works share a concern with servitude, obedience and subjection. But none of these texts concern themselves with the act of commanding, giving orders, imperative language, or simply with the act of commanding, or, simply, with the command.

In Chapter IV of his book called *Creation and Anarchy: The Work of Art and the Religion of Capitalism* (2019), Agamben begins an investigation into the theme of the command, on its nature and its ontology. In fact, the Italian philosopher's proposal is an attempt to conduct an "archeology of command." But, as he said, "two unexpected preliminary difficulties" confront his investigation:[1] 1) the aporia of the Greek word corresponding to the idea of command (*arché*), divided between two distinct meanings; and 2) the absence of an archeology of command in the Western philosophical tradition.

In an essayistic style, Agamben develops a series of hypotheses in Chapter IV of *Creation and Anarchy* (2019). However, in this essay, I will focus on the problem of the ontology of command through the following question: What ontologically grounds a mandate, an order, a duty, a command, in short, a command, and its *arché*?

Therefore, this investigation is an attempt to explore the foundation of command or, at least, the lack of its foundation. From that "two unexpected preliminary difficulties" encountered by Agamben, the objective here is to address the aporia of the word *arché*, especially in relation to the ways how Reiner Schürmann and Jacques Derrida dealt with the hypothesis that the foundation of command is empty, anomic, or rather, anarchic, in the sense of "without *arché*", or also by the term used by the Brazilian philosopher Andityas Matos in his *A an-arquia que vem* [*The an-archy that comes*] (2022): "an-*arché*".[2]

Agamben reminds us that the Greek word *arché* can have at least two meanings: 1) the meaning of beginning, foundation, principle, or, in other words, the meaning of temporal beginning; and 2) the meaning of governing principle, of a command that is actualized in time, not being, therefore, just an initial command, but being a principle that does not cease to generate effects in the present, as it is actualized in historicity.

Thus, if Agamben proposes to conduct an "archaeology of command," the first hypothesis of his reading highlights that such an investigation implies a redundancy: archaeology is already an investigation, not of the beginning, but of the command (*arché*). Therefore, proposing to conduct an "archaeology of command", Agamben wants to research what governs, in a certain historicity and in a certain tradition, and what is the meaning of commands and orders. And this would necessarily lead to a kind of "ontology of the *arché*" itself – the "arche-ontology" –, implied by a historical investigation, within the so-called Western philosophical tradition.

[1] Agamben, *Creation and anarchy*, p. 51.
[2] Matos, *A na-arquia que vem*, p. 75.

And to accomplish this task, it is necessary to work on the "archeology of command" in these terms: the investigation of the *arché* of command, in truth, is not only an investigation on a foundation, as a founding, as the initial principle of command; if command and *arché* are synonymous, then an "archeology of command" is also a study of the "command of command" – a kind of a study on the regent principle of the regency. Therefore, the question of the foundation of command leads to the aporia of also knowing the command about – or even better, "below" – the command.

In summary, the aporia of the *arché* ultimately leads to the following question: What grounds the command? What governs it, what commands it? At long last, what is the command of the command?

In *Creation and Anarchy* (2019), Agamben mentions two post-Heideggerian thinkers who dealt with the ontological notion of ground in distinct ways: Schürmann, "(...) which we could define as the anarchic interpretation of Heidegger"; and Derrida, "(...) which it will not be illegitimate to define as the democratic interpretation of Heidegger".[3] But, unfortunately, neither Agamben, Schürmann nor Derrida provided further explanation in their texts. Therefore, this assay is an attempt to understand those two post-Heideggerian readings that Agamben briefly has presented to us, concerning the problematic of the "archeology of command," or rather, ontological investigation, within the historicity of the philosophical tradition, regarding the ground of command — which is, in the end, an investigation of the "*arché* of the *arché*".

After all, why would Schürmann's and Derrida's readings be so distinct? In what sense is one reading anarchic, while the other is democratic? How does this distinction between Schürmann and Derrida is sustained?

Maybe it is not necessary to do a long exposition about the "ontological turn" backgrounding the "ontological difference" (*Differenz*) between "being" and "entity", and the meaning of being as be-ing (*Seyn*) for the later Heidegger. I will assume from here the late Heideggerian sense of the fundamental ontology, accepting that the Being must be read as an "epochal sending", the "en-ownment" (*Ereignis*). According to *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* (GA 65) (1936-1940), Martin Heidegger said: "Differentiation of 'being' *and* 'a being' – that be-ing [*Seyn*] *distinguishes itself from* a being – can have its origin only in the *essential swaying* of be-ing [*Seyn*], if indeed a being as such is also grounded by be-ing [*Seyn*] (...) What is ownmost to this distinction and its ground is be-ing [*Seyin*] as en-ownment [*Ereignis*].".[4]

Therefore, *Seyn* must be understood as a kind of epochal manifestation in distinct ontic forms, comprehended not only as a foundation, but also as a governing principle — in exact accordance with that second meaning of *arché*. And to be able to reflect about Schürmann and his "anarchic interpretation of Heidegger", it is also necessary to assume that we live in the time that Benedito Nunes – another Brazilian philosopher – called once about our age as the "time of nihilism".[5]

After the eras in which being was understood as an idea, substance, God, a mere position of equivalence between subject and predicate etc., this actual time

[3] Agamben, *Creation and anarchy*, p. 53.
[4] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, §266, p. 327.
[5] Nunes, *Heidegger e a poesia*, p. 14.

could be the age when/in which be-ing (Seyn) "gives itself" (*es gibt*), or even manifests or sends itself through the "abandonment" of the entity by the be-ing itself (*Seyn*). It is the time of the abandonment of the supreme values, of the specific goals and foundations: once more, the "time of nihilism" (Nunes).

Continuing the argument based on the notion of "ontological turn" or *Differenz*, even in the late Heidegger, in his *Post-Anarchism* (2016) Saul Newman says that contemporary anarchism has undergone an "ontological shift" also in the sense given by Schürmann, especially when it became aware of "the experience of anarchy, which he relates to Heidegger's idea of the closure of metaphysics, a fading away of epochal principles.".[6] In Newman's reading, however, this "fading away" would not necessarily imply in nihilism, in its strong sense of a complete absence of possibilities to come or of a lack of possible meaning to think and to do. As Newman said, for Schürmann "[t]he moment of ontological anarchy is thus an experience of freedom and, indeed, intense ethical reflection (...) Action becomes 'anarchic' – that is to say, groundless and without predetermined ends.".[7] Because of this Schürmann says in his *On being and acting: From principles to anarchy* (1987) that "(...) anarchy does not mean anomie".[8]

While for Derrida, according to Agamben claims that the Franco-Algerian philosopher made a "similarly opposite attempt" to the reading developed by Schürmann on the Heideggerian idea of *arché*. Instead of understanding it as an "epochal sending"/"en-ownment", rather than as a pure origin, or as a pure beginning, its meaning would be now that of an imperative, which says: "interpret!" (2017, p. 95).

But, unfortunately, Agamben offers no further explanation for the apparent opposition between Schürmann and Derrida. In his already quoted *Postanarchism* (2016), even Newman found a common characteristic between Schürmann and Derrida, precisely in the "[t]his gesture of de-grounding, removing or questioning the absolute authority of the *arché*",[9] Agamben, however, placed the two post-Heideggerians philosophers in opposite similarity: between the "pure origin" and the imperative "interpret!".

But what does this really mean?

It is worth noting that, along with Schürmann, Agamben is showing how we are now living in the time of the lack of *arché* and that, therefore, we are experiencing anarchy in its ontological sense: nothing grounds our actions; there is no *télos* (end, goal). And it is worth remembering that this does not mean that we are living in a paralyzing nihilism, which could be unable to conceive of a *nómos* (rule, law). We simply lack predetermination, ontological principles for our existence and our political organizations.

The central hypothesis of this essay is that Agamben does not attempt to resolve the aporia of the archaeology of command, as if he had chosen a path between Schürmann and Derrida, between the "pure origin" and the fundamental command, the imperative as *arché*. In fact, Agamben is showing that, with these two paths, it is possible to conclude two things: 1) that there is no foundation anymore;

[6] Newman, *Postanarchism*, p. 22.
[7] Newman, *Postanarchism*, p. 22.
[8] Schürmann, *On being and acting*, p. 290.
[9] Newman, *Postanarchism*, p. 22.

2) but, at the same time, this does not imply a "nullifying" nihilism – the nothing that "nothing" – because the foundation maintains the archaic aporia. The ground founds itself. It is already expressed by a command, given by a blow, by an action, by an act that is a command. The experience with the *an-arché* (Matos) can be imperative, already endowed with a dimension, or rather, a mandating potentiality.

The argument may seem strange, but it can be better understood if we remember that, as Agamben says: "There is not an *arché* of the command, because the command itself is the *arché*; it is the origin, or, at least, it is in the place of the origin.".[10] What the Italian philosopher is perhaps insinuating is that the "un-founding" alleged by Schürmann may have an imperative, commanding, mandatory dimension, which is, logically, also unfounded, since this command is the foundation of itself. It is an imperative act that grounds itself without, therefore, a former foundation – or, at least, without a foundation that is comprehensible to us, in the common language dimension.

This is in this way maybe because there can be no *arché* of the *arché*, or even the command of the command, nor the foundation of the command. We are dealing here with the wordplay produced by this ambiguity, or with the aporetic duality of the word *arché*, localized between foundation and command. And the person who can better explain this other dimension of the "ontological experience", developed by Schürmann, ironically, is Derrida with his speech delivered at the Cardozo Law School, under the title *Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"* (1989). And in his speech, Derrida said this on the foundation of Law, of the command:

> the operation that amounts to founding, inaugurating, justifying law (*droit*), making law, would consist of a *coup de force*, of a performative and therefore interpretative violence that in itself is neither just nor unjust and that no justice and no previous law with its founding anterior moment could guarantee or contradict or invalidate.[11]

The *coup de force* mentioned by Derrida is unfounded because what is the ground, the fundamental element, is the coup itself. What gave rise to such an act is hidden from us. Or, at most, it is in the realm of the ineffable, the mystical, of the "pure" or the divine languageless violence to which Walter Benjamin had referred to in his *Critique of Violence* (1921): "(..) divine violence is pure power over all life for the sake of the living".[12] Regarding this, Derrida says: " Here the discourse comes up against its limit: in itself, in its performative power itself. It is what I here propose to call the mystical. Here a silence is walled up in the violent structure of the founding act.".[13]

There is no cause, no beginning and no end to our existence, our actions, or our political-community organizations. However, what for us is hidden in language, which presents itself as a mystical and ineffable foundation, does not prevent us from acting in an "act of speech", in an imperative performance that can gestalt a tactic or a political organization. There are, therefore, no more "foundationalist" or

[10] Agamben, *Creation and anarchy*, p. 54.
[11] DERRIDA, *Force of Law*, p. 13.
[12] Benjamin, *Critique of violence*, p. 250.
[13] DERRIDA, *Force of Law*, pp. 13-14.

fundamentalist illusions, which, as Schürmann said, would only "*displace* the origin" to some substitute, exchanging "(...) one focal point with another".[14]

In his *How to do things with words?* (1955), the British analytical philosopher John L. Austin gave to us a possible explanation of why he used the term "performance", and his clarification on the subject helps us to better understand the meaning of *coup de force*, which Derrida referred. Austin can also help us to understand the aporetic meanings of *arché* found by Agamben in his archaeology of command. According to Austin: "The name is derived, of course, from 'perform', the usual verb with the noun 'action': it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action is not normally thought of as just saying something.".[15]

To conclude this essay, it is necessary to return to the central question made by Agamben, in *Creation and Anarchy* (2017), and its consequent answer. Because his answer seems to conciliate, in one hand, the Schürmann's "anarchic" reading of Heidegger's fundamental ontology, and, in the other, Derrida's "democratic" reading of what grounds the foundation of a command — or even of the magic, the religion and the Law. Agamben asks: "What grants words the power to transform into facts? Linguists do not explain it, as if here they had truly hit upon a sort of magical power of language.".[16]

This is the same power that exists when one makes a swearing, an oath, a contract, a spell, a witchcraft, a blasphemy or when one blames or absolves someone: the power to overcome the duality between speaking and saying, theory and practice, language and thing, expectation and present, identity and any singularity, program and revolution, *tópos* and *u-topia*.

[14] Schürmann, *On being and acting*, p. 6.
[15] Austin, *How to do things with words?*, pp. 06-07.
[16] Agamben, *Creation and anarchy*, p. 105.

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