Introduction

LIFE IN VENICE

The Philosophical Subject

The year 1968 was a remarkable one in the life of Giorgio Agamben. It began with a trip to Athens, his first visit to the ruins of the birthplace of Western philosophy and politics—the main planes in between which his thought still oscillates. Then, in May, he left for Paris to take part in the final chain of events that turned the city on its head during that restless spring. From Paris he went to New York. After attending a performance of *Hair* on Broadway, he took the train up to Harvard, where he participated in the International Seminar, a gathering of young intellectuals from around the world, headed by Professor Henry Kissinger. The director, however, was rarely to be seen, so the days passed with the seminar's host, a young philosophy professor named Stanley Cavell, usually showing the participants old Hollywood movies in between discussions about American culture. One day, Kissinger actually gave a short talk. At its end, Agamben, then twenty-six years old, raised his hand and frankly told the lecturer that he understood nothing about politics. Kissinger, according to Agamben, did not respond but only smirked. Not long after he returned home to Rome, Agamben packed his suitcase once again and checked into a small hotel in Provence, where he again participated in a seminar, this time with Martin Heidegger (another professor with a dubious political involvement). It was this event that initiated him into the world of philosophy for good. Agamben recollects: "At Le Thor, Heidegger held his seminar in a garden shaded by tall trees. At times, however, we left the village, walking in the direction of Thouzon or Rebanquet, and the seminar then took place in front of a small hut hidden away in the midst of an olive grove. One day, when the seminar neared its end and the students crowded round him,

pressing him with questions, Heidegger merely remarked: 'You can see my limit; I can't'" (*IP*, 59).

The stamps on Agamben's passport from this eventful year include some of the central stations in what would become his elaborate intellectual itinerary while traveling through the Western tradition. But they also help us comprehend the very limit that Heidegger claims he is unable to see. One way to interpret Heidegger's blindness, which has guided (or haunted) Agamben ever since, is to say that there is a certain concept, proposition, thesis, or argument that the philosopher cannot comprehend and that his followers need to try to articulate. "Until you understand a writer's ignorance," Coleridge declares, "presume yourself ignorant of his understanding."[1] Like the human eye, every thinker has a lacuna, which can be compensated for in two ways: either through constant movement (the thought, like the eye, must always change its position, so with the help of our short-term memory the blind spot can be erased) or by the employment of another perspective (even though another thinker, like a second eye, has a blind spot exactly as the first one does, using them together enables us to have an unobstructed view of the matter at hand). Yet another way to treat Heidegger's claim is to simply rewrite it thus: "Perhaps you could see my limit if you could see my self, but I can't." This is, more or less, what Ludwig Wittgenstein had in mind when he wrote that the subject, which he also called "the philosophical I," is "the limit—not a part of the world."[2] My "I" is missing from my world in the same way that my eye is missing from its visual field. Though human beings seem to have what Heidegger took to be a reflexive ability to be concerned about their very being, they also tend to relapse into Ovid's predicament, as they live and know not that they live. We always operate in the tension between this gnosis and ignorance. The Platonic injunction to "know thyself" is nice counsel but never an accomplished fact. From this perspective, we could suggest that the focal point, which is also the lacuna of every thinker, or the horizon, which is also the threshold of his or her thought, is his or her self. But this is a very special kind of self that has nothing to do with any individual, personal, psychological, or physiological considerations. Wittgenstein's philosophical "I" (or the

"I" of the philosopher) is, rather, a descendant of Kant's transcendental "I" and an ancestor of "the new postconscious and postsubjective, impersonal and non-individual transcendental field" that Agamben, following Gilles Deleuze, calls "*a life*" (*PC*, 225). When a person moves in this (admittedly still very vague) direction, his individuality could be said to become, in Walter Benjamin's words, "secondary to his life just as a flower's is to its perfume, or a star's to its light."[3]

The rumor about "the death of the author" has been greatly exaggerated. Put differently, though no less facetiously, a good author is not necessarily a dead author. In Agamben's philosophy, authors still enjoy a rather sweet afterlife, even if, in the wake of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, they are no longer considered to be entities that stand behind, are expressed in, or are represented by their work, and even though they lack a definable presence that can be located or captured. Instead, he claims that the life of the author is "put into play" within the work itself, in such a way that the author is transformed within the text into a "gesture," which is the name Agamben gives to "that which remains unexpressed in each expressive act" (*P*, 66–67). There is no apparent reason why we should not apply this approach to the very author to which this book is dedicated, by treating his own life as a gesture in language, so to speak, rather than as a mere fact in the world. This enables us to understand a critical point: Agamben's work is "not a *writing*, but a *form of life*," as he suggests in a different context (*TR*, 122). In other words, although this book is dedicated to Agamben's *philosophy* of life, its success or failure may be measured by its ability to lead the reader to imagine a *form* of life, by its capacity to clarify how his way of thinking points toward a way of living. Scholars tend to devote their research to a single thinker, rather than a single subject, either because they feel the need to scrutinize the internal coherence of the thought or because they are dazzled by it. But is it also possible to take a similar route in order to try to illuminate *a life*? Can the subject of philosophy be the philosophical subject? If Robert Musil's claim that one needs "to live as one reads" has more than a merely aesthetic appeal, then what is the ethical, even political relationship between reading and living?[4]

The problem, however, is that it is not difficult to get the impression that Agamben "let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame" of his work, to use another one of Benjamin's beautiful formulations.[5] But the truth of the matter is that neither Agamben's "life" nor his "work" can really make a lot of sense independently of one another, because they both operate in the zone of indetermination that we call a "lifework," which is all but extinct in the intellectual climate of our day. Since he always effaces "himself" by speaking through proxies, since he only asserts "his own philosophy" by means of synthesizing the writings of others, Agamben seems to follow Socrates's basic insistence that he does not give birth to his own ideas but only engenders them in his interlocutors. (One apparent difference, it must be said, is that for Agamben it is typically old texts, rather than young boys, that are pregnant with new and radical thoughts.) Despite these hurdles, this book will show how the true power of Agamben's work lies in its ability to reimagine political action, philosophical thought, and the ethical subject in such a way that the three constitute the corners of a triangle whose center is called "form of life."

There Is Something Inside the Text

To demonstrate how this book directs itself toward the very axis on which Agamben's thought turns, let us take a look at "*Experimentum linguae.*" Written in the late 1980s, this essay marks a subtle yet decisive turn that efficiently divides his writings into what may be called the "early Agamben" and the "later Agamben." In this threshold text he articulates in unequivocal terms "the terrain toward which all my work is oriented," which comes down to the following questions: "What is the meaning of 'there is language'; what is the meaning of 'I speak'?" (*IH*, 6). There is, however, something rather suspicious about this too easily granted confession. Retrospectively, the attentive reader can see that this self-conscious moment marks a genuine watershed in Agamben's work rather than the place in which he comes to terms with it once and for all. The point insisted on most fervently in a thinker's work is often the point seen least clearly; or, in Agamben's own words,

"only a thought that does not conceal its own unsaid—but constantly takes it up and elaborates it—may eventually lay claim to originality" (*ST*, 8). How, after all, can one express the very existence of language, the recently discovered center (or transfixion) of Agamben's thought? It is surely impossible to formulate a sentence *in* language that can express the existence of language as such. In the last lines of his essay, Agamben admits that there is only one possible way to express the fact that I speak: *that I live*. The existence of life is the proper manifestation for the existence of language. The result, therefore, of the experiment conducted in Agamben's essay, or the experience it tries to evoke, transports his thought from the question of language to the question of life. It is human life, understood "as *ethos*, as ethical way," as form of life (which is also nothing but an experiment/experience), that will function from this point on as the core of his entire philosophy (*IH*, 9–10). Even though the notions of language and life both play pivotal roles in his work from beginning to (the yet-to-be-seen) end, his thought's center of gravity seems to shift here from the former to the latter.

This does not mean that after his "turn" Agamben will hold that language simply dwells in life, that the lived has priority over the said. Such ideas inform the genre of biography: this effort to write a life, to dictate a form of life, as it were. Writing a biography about the life of a writer, for example, is mainly an attempt to reconstruct, explain, or justify the written work on the basis of the lived experience. One of the problems, however, with the lives of thinkers is that no matter how extraordinary their story may be, they tend to pursue an undistinguished life on paper. Even our cultish fascination with figures like Kafka and Benjamin does not arise from their life story per se but from this tension between their "vital" failures and their eventual "linguistic" triumphs. This is what stands behind Heidegger's apparent contempt toward any attempt to speak about the historical and personal context of a philosophical thought, which he famously dismissed by saying, "Aristotle was born, worked, and died."[6]

Agamben's resistance to the biographical temptation does not lead him to ignore life altogether by claiming that "there is nothing outside the text."

Instead, he presents, before and after his ostensible turn, the link between language and life in a manner diametrically opposite to that of the biographer. He maintains that *"life is only what is made in speech,"* that life is essentially nothing but a "fable" (*EP*, 81). Originating from the prologue to Saint John's Gospel, where life is said to dwell in the Word, this decisive idea found its exemplary manifestation in the medieval tradition of love poetry that extends from the troubadours to the Dolce stil Novo and, most important, to Dante Alighieri. On the face of it, these poems are the direct result of the existence of a certain flesh-and-blood woman with whom the poet fell in love. The biographer is therefore tempted to look for the thirteenth-century Florentine girl that Dante refers to in his *Vita nuova* as "Beatrice." Agamben questions this practice by claiming that any biographical event that the poem seems to put into words must be considered as invented, as fabulated. In his view, what is poeticized has a decisive priority over what is lived. Dante's true love, Agamben argues, is actually directed toward *language itself*, for which the poeticized Beatrice stands as the supreme metaphor. After all, it is only from this "event of language"—a poem written in the vernacular—that Dante's "new life" could emerge (*EP*, 58). This realization needs to inform any attempt, including the present one, to think about the ordinarily uneventful life of the philosopher; otherwise, it is doomed to fall into the double trap of biography and hagiography. Hannah Arendt sums up this attitude in her elucidation of Heidegger's one-line biography of Aristotle: "We are so accustomed to the old opposition of reason versus passion, spirit versus life, that the idea of a *passionate* thinking, in which thinking and aliveness become one, takes us somewhat aback."[7] There is a certain passion in Agamben's thought; there is a life that appears to be embedded in his words. This, before anything else, is what his reader should not lose sight of.

Agamben often thinks about language as pure potentiality: not merely as the communication of this or that piece of information but, above all, as communicability itself. What is really important for him is not that we speak about all sorts of things but that we have this capacity to speak, *speakability* as such. Language is a power that may *or may not* be exercised, and it is the

second point—what we *can not* say (which is not the same as what we *cannot* say)—on which he never tires of insisting. Nevertheless, it is impossible to even imagine the existence of this power of language apart from what we will call from now on "the power of life," without accounting for the living being who prefers or prefers not to speak, or act, or even think. The world may be filled with mountains of white paper and oceans of black ink, but without at least a single scribe (but also at least the hope of an addressee) nothing would ever be written. The potentiality of language is therefore not to be conflated with what Ferdinand de Saussure calls *langue,* which is language's abstract structure independent of its utterance in actual speech (*parole*). As Saussure himself conceded, there can be no science of language that does not study "the life of signs in the domain of social life."[8] If we forget for a second that language is always embedded in shared human praxis, that words are simply patterns in the weave of our common lives, then we might mistakenly believe, as Agamben himself once did, that "the power of language must be directed toward language," that "the eye must see its blind spot," which is, of course, impossible: "If I were truly able to see the blind spot in my eye," he admits in almost the same breath, "I would see nothing" (*IP*, 99, 128). Yet again, a proven method for coping with such a lacuna is to employ another eye, another thought, another thinker. It is only in Wittgenstein's work that a radical philosophy of language becomes inextricable from a new philosophy of life, where it becomes clear that "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life."[9] But even though the relationship between life and language finds its most potent expression in Wittgenstein, he still fails to see as clearly as Agamben does the *political* significance of both. This relationship between politics and life is the central concern of this book.

Nonparticipation

By the time Agamben was a teenager, the scorching traces of the Second World War, during which he was only an infant, were virtually imperceptible in the unabashed bustle of Rome. His formative years coincide with the short-lived cultural and economic renaissance that the city experienced between the

collapse of the Fascist regime in the mid-1940s and the spread of its corrupt politics in the mid-1970s. Because his father operated a movie theater, Agamben saw many films as a child, sometimes even two in a single day. But there were also many books in the Agambens' household, some of them works of philosophy, and they constituted the first items in what would become the mammoth reading list that shaped his mature thought. Sitting in his small apartment in Venice, which can be reached after climbing a rather steep set of stairs, he said that before his mother passed away, she gave him a piece of paper that she had saved since the time he was seven years old. "It was all there!" he said with astonishment. On this page, Agamben claimed, was a condensed version of his entire mature philosophy. As for its content, he remained mute.

After familiarizing himself with the required classical languages and literature taught at school, he managed to complete a first degree with a concentration in law before losing faith in formal education, which he still deems, at least in his case, worthless. It was instead the intelligentsia's demimonde outside the dogmatic bounds of academia that formed his subsequent career. Living in Rome, Paris, and London, he moved in various circles, befriending writers such as Elsa Morante and Italo Calvino, poets such as Ingeborg Bachmann and José Bergamin, philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, and radical intellectuals–turned–filmmakers such as Pier Paolo Pasolini and Guy Debord. But more important, it was his immersion in the writings of a swelling number of (mostly dead) authors, together with his ability to spin them within his own studies into an intricate web of references, that gave his work its distinct charm. It is quite surprising to realize that the eerie breadth of his erudition comes from the mind of an almost complete autodidact. This fact became clearer during a midday walk through the streets of Venice. "Look at these buildings," he said while stopping in a typical piazza; "none of them were built by professional architects." One of the easier arguments to make is that modern structures, those Corbusian "machines for living" produced by university-trained architects, are palpable eyesores when placed next to the (essentially objective) beauty of Venice. But isn't it also

possible, in light of Agamben's work, to make a similar argument concerning many of the texts produced by "professional" philosophers these days?

When Agamben came upon Arendt's writings in the late 1960s, he was so thrilled to discover their sense of promise and urgency that he sent her a personal note expressing his gratitude. But as the events of the 1960s subsided, as Arendt's work was somewhat forgotten and generally dismissed by the professional naysayers, the air of possibility was replaced by that of a missed opportunity. The fact that some years after her death she was admitted into the philosophical pantheon through an endless parade of conferences and monographs does not change much, as the opportunity to act upon the thought was missed for the sake of opportunism. In other words, something that could have happened did not take place.[10] At the turn of the new millennium, it was suddenly Agamben's name that was whispered in knowing circles around the globe with a sense of exigency. But the lessons of the past make it clear that the potency of this new way of thinking will have to face enormous, perhaps insurmountable, obstacles (starting with those mounted by a new generation of professional naysayers) before it can somehow imprint itself on our way of living. In this spirit, Agamben laments in an essay from the mid-1970s that our age "is not the epoch of faith and not even the epoch of incredulity," but rather "it is more than anything else the epoch of bad faith" in which "the first duty of each intellectual must consist in the nonparticipation in this lie."[11]

It is easy to assume and pretentious to assert that, unlike any other human activity, philosophy exists in some sort of eternal vacuum. Ignoring the academic context in which theoretical work is done today is like disregarding unsustainable practices that upset our faltering ecological system. The notion that the campus is a hotbed for revolt is a common myth that does not take into account the usual passivity and dispassion that prevails in classrooms and during faculty office hours around the world. Remember that even in the 1960s, when student unrest shook the foundations of entire cities and states, one of the protestors' main targets was the academic apparatus itself. The reason is that the college was never meant to perpetuate the revolutionary desires

of the young generation but rather to block them, or to channel those desires into so-called productive (read "futile") avenues. Even if deviation is allowed, it is circumscribed to specific times and places, or exceptions, that never interfere with the overall rule of the status quo. The teaching and writing of the professor are not really meant to agitate anyone, as radical creativity is transformed into timid and monotonous production. To some extent, the cherished academic freedom, much like the coveted tenure position, is nothing but the sleeping pill of comfortable living. Today, it becomes increasingly obvious that forms of resistance rarely converge with forms of academic discourse, which is not infrequently fueled by bad faith. When one realizes that the main agenda behind the demonstrations of the current student body is to protect its own privileges and those of its professors, one knows that something has gone terribly amiss. But even though it is not easy to see how the hegemony of the university-factory could be effectively contested, Agamben's lifework still offers a viable model for a kind of nonparticipatory participation in the operation of this sprawling, monopolistic institution.

The Mirror of Narcissus

He is tall and lean, with a slight hunch that seems to register years of lucubration at his desk. On first impression, his narrow eyes and fixed gaze may appear predatory, but after a while his taciturn demeanor gives his interlocutor the impression that his main strategy of attack is to refrain from doing so. Though his books may lead one to assume that his thoughts wander in a thousand different directions, in person he tends to be very calculated. As much as he seems to be receptive to everything, he can also be quite unyielding. "Protect your heart with all vigilance, for it is the wellspring of life"—this passage from Proverbs 4:23, which was inscribed above the entrance to Heidegger's home, also informs Agamben's comportment quite efficiently. One evening after a conversation that made this matter clear enough, he proposed that we go to a small bar along one of the canals where a young American folk singer was about to give an informal concert. After the show the singer was introduced to the philosopher and straightaway posed to him the first ques-

tion that most people associate with his strange vocation: "So how should I live my life?" Agamben answered right away: "Probably the way you live it." It was a reassuring reply, but the word "probably" lingered in the air of the night longer than expected.

Agamben's relationship with art and artists is very instructive for those interested in the way he sees his own thought and the thinker "behind" it. At the beginning of his philosophical work, in the first pages of *The Man Without Content*, his reader encounters an emphatic plea for the inseparability of art from life. Developing Nietzsche's critique of disinterested beauty, Agamben takes to task the Kantian aestheticization of art, which leads to an emphasis on the spectator's sensation at the expense of the artist's creation. Agamben reminds us that it is the immediate, inspired hand, more than the distant, judging eye, that has the most intimate relationship with the work of art. Pygmalion, "the sculptor who becomes so enamored of his creation as to wish that it belonged no longer to art but to life," is the symbol of Agamben's vision (*MC*, 2). Arthur Rimbaud and Rainer Maria Rilke, who insist that poetry must "change life," are his obvious models. The ultimate concern of such a vision is a promise of happiness instead of only a spectacle of happiness; its aim is the good life rather than good taste. This position offers a surprising take on the received view of Plato's infamous "crusade" against the poets who endanger the city-state. This position rings so wrong in our modern ears only because art does not have the same influence on us as it did on him: "Only because art has left the sphere of *interest* to become merely *interesting*," Agamben writes, "do we welcome it so warmly" (*MC*, 4). The decline of censorship, he implies, is not so much the result of a growing liberal tolerance as an indication that the artwork in question is impotent, since no one cares about banning ineffective art. Though he does not yet employ the word, it is obvious that art is understood here within a *political* context. As improbable as it may sound, from this standpoint beauty is conceived as an "indescribably more ruthless and cruel upheaval than any political revolution ever was," as Musil writes in *The Man Without Qualities*, to which Agamben alludes in the title of his first book.[12] A similar argument is shared

by Benjamin, who asks us to combat the "aestheticizing of politics" through the "politicization of art," which can be achieved even without dedicating the artwork to an explicitly political subject matter.[13] Given the current tendency of art as well as philosophy to transform themselves into mere spectacles—their "museification" or "academization"—it is not easy to remember this almost always unfulfilled promise that both of these fields of action can also function as potent forms of insurgency. It is also not hard to forget that a work of philosophy can be a work of beauty, too.

In the mid-1970s Agamben spent a very significant and productive year doing research at the Warburg Library in London. Aby Warburg is generally considered to be an art historian, but his work tends to resist the usual aestheticization of art that Agamben criticizes in his first book, and thus to cast aside the basic attitude of his discipline. "It is as if," Agamben comments, "Warburg were interested in this discipline solely to place within it the seed that would cause it to explode" (*PC*, 90). That this observation could also apply to Agamben's own volatile relationship with the discipline of philosophy is no coincidence. Warburg's great unfinished project best exemplifies his unique approach: in the last years of his life, he composed an atlas of images arranged according to various iconographical themes, where one can easily find a medieval drawing placed next to a modern advertisement photo. He called his project "Mnemosyne," after the Greek goddess of memory (and the mother of the Muses). In opposition to some critics, Agamben claims that Warburg's final project is neither capricious nor banal and insists that this atlas "was not an iconographical repertory but something like a mirror of Narcissus," by which Agamben means that it was essentially created in Warburg's image, according to his likeness (*PC*, 102). Like Narcissus, who looked into the pond only to see his own reflection, what one sees when one searches through "Mnemosyne" is not necessarily Warburg's personality but rather what F. Scott Fitzgerald calls a "personage," which is the sort of man who always "gathers," who "is never thought apart from what he's done," since a personage, unlike a personality, is "a bar on which a thousand things have been hung."[14] Such a personage is not far from what Agamben calls "the man

without content." The work of this man, his life, is in this sense a work of art, though it would be futile to search here for the artist behind the work or to confuse this man with either the aesthete or the dandy. In 1975, when Agamben developed this line of thought in "Warburg and the Nameless Science," he saw his essay "as the first of a series of portraits dedicated to exemplary personalities, each of which was to represent a human science" (*PC*, 101). In 2001, Agamben still believed that this planned book of profiles would eventually become the final installment of his *Homo Sacer* project, to be dedicated to the notion of form of life. Today, it is not clear that this book will ever be written in its intended form. But what *is* clear is that the lesson from Warburg's work could still be applied to Agamben's own sprawling oeuvre—his very own Narcissus's pond—in its ability to reflect not just a philosophy but also a life of a man without content. As is the case with Andy Warhol, if you want to know all about Giorgio Agamben, just look at the surface of his books and essays and seminars, and there he is. There is nothing behind it.

The Specter of Venice

From time to time Agamben allows himself to add a subtle personal touch to his texts. An interesting recent example is "On the Uses and Disadvantages of Living Among Specters," in which he contemplates his life in Venice. If, as Wittgenstein once suggested, language can be compared to a city, then Venice, according to Agamben, is like a dead language. Living in Venice, he claims, is like studying Latin. Though it is possible to read and even speak Latin with great effort and the help of a dictionary, it is still impossible, or nearly impossible, to find in this dead language the place of a subject, of the speaker who says "I." This leads him to describe Venice as a spectral city inhabited by ghosts. Perhaps, his argument continues, Venice is an emblem for much of our modern world, where cities and languages, peoples and states, religious orders and secular institutions, could be said to be essentially dead, although everyone continues to *pretend* that they are not, to treat them *as if* they were still alive. It is much easier to come to terms with the fact that eventually I am going to die, to achieve what Heidegger calls

a "being-toward-death," than to face the fact that *I am already dead*, which is the reason that ghosts are often depicted as being consumed by quantities of angst that would probably crush the soul of any living human being. "For a man can never be in death," Saint Augustine writes, "in a worse sense than where death itself is without death."[15] Nevertheless, there are also those special ghosts that learn to accept their ghostliness, because they realize, together with Agamben, that "spectrality is a form of life; a posthumous or complementary life that begins only when everything is finished. Spectrality has, with respect to life, the incomparable grace and astuteness of that which has been completed, the courtesy and precision of those who no longer have anything ahead of them" (*N*, 39).

Another appealing aspect of the spectral form of life is that ghosts rarely follow a leader, whether political or spiritual, nor do they tend to lead others. "There is no Virgil to guide us in this Inferno," reads a graffito in Agamben's neighborhood, which he took a visitor to see with what could have been a gesture of self-effacement. (When the spray-painted letters began to fade away, they were reinforced by Agamben's friend, who then added a small stenciled image of a Banksy-like rat in the bottom-right corner.) The specter of Venice continued to walk in the virtually empty streets one evening in late November. Since nightlife is somewhat limited in that city, it is not so difficult to imagine, a few hours after dinnertime, that it is, indeed, a ghost town. This impression was especially strong on that particular evening, as the rain sent the last tourists back into their hotel rooms. Agamben predicted that the next day at dawn the water would rise and flood the city (an increasingly recurring phenomenon that forewarns of the day the city will be completely submerged by the lagoon). Though he said that Venice feels like home, especially whenever he returns from abroad, he also admitted that it is the place, more than the people, that he really feels close to. This is perhaps why his nocturnal *flâneries* in the desolate streets are one of his most cherished pastimes. Toward the end of the stroll he pointed at the Dogana in the distance, with its twin statues of Atlas carrying the globe on which Fortuna is standing. It reminded him of the final scene from Debord's last film, *In girum imus nocte et*

consumimur igni ("We go wandering at night, consumed by fire," an old Latin palindrome of whose origins Agamben remains uncertain). The leitmotif of this semiautobiographical film is a slow traveling shot of Venice taken from a moving motorboat. The last of these scenes happens at the very end of the movie, as Debord's voice is heard in the background: "In any case," he says, "one traverses an era as one passes the Dogana promontory—that is to say, rather quickly."[16]