

40 DIGRESSIONS ON MEASURE

- Man is the measure of all things.
- According to Plato, this statement was made by Protagoras. It raises a question. To what exactly does 'man' here refer to? Does Protagoras mean 'man' the individual or 'Man' in the communal sense?
- In Greek, the line runs thus: "Πάντων χρημάτων μέτρων άνθρωπος", or "*Pandon xrimaton metron anthropos*".
- The modern English term 'measure' has its etymological source in *metron*.
- Some definitions of 'measure' from the Oxford English Dictionary: "To ascertain or determine the spatial magnitude or quantity of"; "To regulate, moderate, restrain"; "To mark the boundary or course of; to delimit".
- In Ancient Greek, *metron* referred to a rhythmic measure in poetry. One *metron* was "the smallest metrical unit, consisting of a given sequence and a number of long and short elements". (Halporn, *Meters of Greek and Latin Poetry*)
- By the time the Romans had appropriated the forms of Greek poetry the unit of poetic measure had been designated the 'pes'. This was the Latin word for foot.
- Curiously enough, even before their Latin appropriation, there was one particular Greek meter similarly rich in metaphorical resonance called the *dactyl*. It consisted of a long syllable, followed by two short syllables. The word 'dactyl', *dáktylos*, means 'finger'.
- Poetry: ποιέω; *poiesis*; to make, or to bring forth.

- Another definition of 'measure' from the OED: "To travel over, traverse (a certain distance, a tract of country)".
- In the winter of 1998, the artist Richard Long walked 221 miles in 7 days from the west coast to the east coast of Ireland. This constituted an artwork, what you might call a poetic gesture.
- Another definition of 'measure' from the OED: "to circle, encompass".
- The word 'economy' comes from the Greek formulation *oikonómos*, from *oikos*, "home, household" and *nemō*, "to allot, apportion". *Oikonómos* thus refers to the "administration of the house" (Giorgio Agamben) or, in other words, a certain mode of measurement pertaining to the home.
- In 2008, it was reported that Irish banks had lent 25 billion euro to builders and developers for the construction of apartments and houses.
- Another definition of 'measure' from the OED: "to mete or deal out".
- In April 2013, an Irish newspaper stated, "the Central Bank's own figures revealed in December that more than one in 10 mortgage holders were in arrears of three months".
- Nietzsche once said, "It is part of my good fortune not to be a house owner".
- To that, Theodor Adorno added, "It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home".
- Is it possible to step out of the economy? How does one live *outside of one's home*?
- In W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*, an unnamed narrator describes a 30-mile walking tour of Suffolk. The text consists almost entirely of digressions.

- Digression (n.): late 14c., from Latin *DIGRESSIONEM* (nominative *DIGRESSIO*) "a going away, departing", noun of action from past participle stem of *DIGREDI* "to deviate", from *DIS-* "apart, aside" (see also *DIS-*) + *GRADI* "to step, go" (see *GRADE* (n.)).
- Nietzsche on another occasion remarked, "Only those thoughts that come from walking have any value".
- Digressing is a kind of wandering. Is it also, perhaps, a form of dissent?
- In 1951, Martin Heidegger wrote that man needed to rediscover how to *dwell*. In his view human existence is threatened by the technological and economic forces of *enframing* (*ge-stell*), which amount to reducing man to quantifiable use values. This changes our mode of living in the world, no longer freely dwelling but rather being encroached upon by the forces of modernity. He remarked, "The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell".
- But perhaps what man needs to rediscover is how to *not dwell*. Perhaps we need to learn how to get out of the house. *Perhaps we need to remember how to wander.*
- "To delimit". *Delimit what?* Does the person delimit the house, or the house delimit the person?
- What Heidegger called *ge-stell*, 'enframing', 55 years later Giorgio Agamben would call the *dispositivo* or 'apparatus'. The contemporary economic/political apparatus is the structure of regulation that delimits what the human subject can and cannot do, gearing it toward acquiescence, consumption and productivity. It is a measuring of the human.

- As an antidote, Agamben proposed the notion of *inoperativity* as a way of uncovering the limits of the apparatus, and thereby circumventing it. One example of inoperativity he pointed to was the poem: "Poetry is ... the point at which language, which has deactivated its communicative and informative functions, rests within itself, contemplates its power of saying and in this way opens itself to a new possible use".
- "Is there a measure on Earth?" Friedrich Holderlin, ('In Lovely Blue')
- "Gross Domestic Product is the most familiar and widely used measure of national progress". American Enterprise Institute, October 27, 2009.
- Our homes embed us in the economy. We become administered and administrators, our roles measured by the house. The house becomes the physical *ge-stell*, that which enframes us. We become static, stable and hence quantifiable.
- On September 17th 2011 in Zuccotti Park in New York a protest movement began called 'Occupy Wall Street'.
- At midnight on November 15th 2011 police began to clear the park. By then the encampment had all but replicated general conditions of domesticity, with kitchens, sleeping and recreation areas and a concomitant organizational administration.
- However, out of all the clashes between 'occupiers' and authorities, by far the largest numbers of arrests (700) was made on October 1st. On that occasion, the protestors had attempted to walk across the Brooklyn Bridge.
- Thus, Occupy Wall Street posed the greatest challenge to the political-economic apparatus not when it chose to replicate the *oikonomia* of the home (Zuccotti Park), but rather when it eschewed occupation and stability in favor of wandering, instability and dynamism. In other words, a shift from being measured to becoming the measurer.

- In 1974, Gordon Matta-Clark physically cut a house in New Jersey into two pieces. He called the work 'Splitting'.
- That same year he filled pages of a notebook with numerous ways of expressing something he called 'anarchitecture'.
- There, after underlining the phrase 'SOMEWHERE OUTSIDE THE LAW', he wrote, 'YOU ARE THE MEASURE'.
- You are the measure. It answers our initial question. 'Man' is the individual. 'You'. But a new question arises. No longer *of* whom but *to* whom does the author speak? By 'you' does he mean 'me'? Or does he mean 'you'?
- A foot is the measure. Now step outside.

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