This is a transcribed text of the Agamben lecture that can be seen on Youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9Wxn1L9Er0

In spite of the awkward and unedited transcription, I think the text is worth reading. Agamben’s discussion of paradigm provides a potentially useful interpretation of the phenomenological notion of example, fragment, anecdote, image for phenomenological inquiry and writing—even though Agamben states that he does not want to address such phenomenological and methodological concerns.

Max van Manen

GIORGIO AGAMBEN: WHAT IS A PARADIGM?

Agamben: This title "What is a Paradigm" seems to suggest that my presentation will focus on epistemological and methodological questions. I do not feel at all it is about these questions, I don’t like these kind of problems, I always have the impression, as once Heidegger put it, that we have here people busy sharpening knives when there is nothing left to cut. But in the life of a scholar there comes a time when methodological premises become necessary. As a matter of fact, in two recent books I have analyzed figures and phenomena such as Homo Sacer in Roman law or der Musslemen in Auschwitz which are obviously propositive historical phenomena. However, in my books they were treated as paradigms whose function was to establish and make intelligible a wider set of problems. This brought about some misunderstanding, especially amongst those persons who in good or in bad faith seemed to think that I was illegitimately acting as a historian, using facts as metaphors and vice versa.

Anyway we all make use of paradigms in our work, but do we really know what a paradigm is, and what does it mean to use a paradigm in philosophy, in the human sciences, or even in art? These are the questions I will try to answer today. Feuerbach once wrote that the philosophical element in each work is its Entwicklungsfähigkeit, literally, its capability to be developed. If a work, be it a work of science or art or scholarship has some value, it will contain this philosophical element. It is something which remains unsaid within the work but which demands to be unfolded and worked out. By the way I think this is a very good definition of philosophy. Philosophy has no specificity, no proper territory, it is within literature, within art or science or theology or whatever, it is this element which contains a capability to be developed. In a sense philosophy is scattered in every territory. It is always a diaspora, and must recollected and gathered up.

In any case this is the way I like to work, to try to discover this philosophical element, this Entwicklungsfähigkeit, in the work of the author I like. This philosophical element, to use Benjamin’s words, is similar to the fragment of messianic time scattered and disseminated in the profane time. This is the only meaning I can give to Schleiermacher’s famous hermeneutic principle: to understand an author better than he has understood himself. To me this can only mean to find the Entwicklungsfähigkeit in his work. But then you must never forget the hermeneutic principle that Coleridge states in chapter twelve of his "Biographia Litteraria": until you understand a writer’s ignorance, presume yourself ignorant of his understanding. Ignorance stands here as what the author had to leave unsaid, undeveloped, or as a potential. This ignorance names the supreme art of writing, to allow something to remain as a potential so the reader can develop it and eventually bring it to actuality. Michel Foucault uses the word "paradigm"
many times in his writings, but without ever defining it. On the other hand, in the "Archeology of Knowledge", and in subsequent books, he names the objects of his investigation, in order to distinguish them from the objects of historians, "knowledge embedded in a practice". The analogy between these concepts and what Kuhn in his book on the structure of scientific revolution calls "paradigms" has already been observed. Even though Foucault never thematizes the function of the paradigm, according to Dreyfus and Rabinow "it is clear that his work follows an orientation which makes use of these notions. His method consists in describing a discourse as historical articulations of a paradigm." Yet Foucault who declares that he read Kuhn's book, which he describes as "admirable" and "definitive", very rarely refers to it, and seems even explicitly to keep a distance from it.

So we have then first to check if this apparent analogy between these two methodologists corresponds in reality to different problems and different strategies. Kuhn acknowledges having used the term "paradigm" in two different meanings. In the first one, "paradigm" designates what the members of a certain scientific community have in common, that is to say, the whole of techniques, patents and values shared by the members of the community. In the second sense, the paradigm is a single element of a whole, say for instance Newton's Principia, which, acting as a common model or an example, paradigm means simply "example", as you know, stands for the explicit rules and thus defines a coherent tradition of investigation. Thus the question is for Kuhn to investigate by means of the paradigm what makes possible the constitution of what he calls a "normal science". That is to say, the science which can decide if a certain problem will be considered scientific or not. Normal science does not mean at all a science guided by a coherent system of rules, on the contrary, the rules can be derived from the paradigms, but the paradigms can guide the investigation also in the absence of rules. This is precisely the second meaning of the term "paradigm", which Kuhn considered the most new and profound, though it is in truth the oldest. The paradigm is in this sense just an example, a single phenomenon, a singularity, which can be repeated and thus acquires the capability of tacitly modeling the behavior and the practice of scientists.

So in writing that the paradigm can guide the investigation also in the absence of rules and laws, Kuhn probably refers implicitly to the Kantian doctrine of the example in the third Critique, in paragraph eighteen. This is the first example I make of a philosopher trying to define the example. Kant refers to the exemplarity of the aesthetic judgment which needs the agreement of all men in the judgment, and which can be seen as a example of a universal rule which cannot be stated. So the example is the example of a rule which cannot be stated. The example, according to Kant, refers to an absent or unsayable law, and yet it does not dare to free completely the example from the empire of the law, of the rule. That’s why in the "Critique of Pure Reason" he writes that "examples are the crutches and the leading strings of a weak judgment. By a judgment I mean that which can only understand the universal in abstractum and is unable to decide whether a concrete case is covered or not by the law." So here you have the bad side of Kant. I think that the concept of law is really the weak point in Kant's thought. Remember Deleuze showing how Kant has this obsession with instituting tribunals, making the law function. What I will try to do, on the contrary, is to show that the logic of the example has nothing to do with the universality of the law. Let's go back to Foucault. It has often been observed that Foucault deliberately ignores the traditional approach to the problems of power founded on juridical and institutional models in order to concentrate on the analysis of the positive device through which power gets into the very
bodies of the subjects to govern and form their forms of life. The analogy with Kuhn again is striking. Just as Kuhn dismisses the investigation of the rules which constitute a normal science in order to focus on the paradigms which guide the behavior of scientists, Foucault seems to reject the primacy of the juridical and institutional models to emphasize the techniques by which the state takes upon itself the care of the life of individuals. So why then does Foucault seem to carefully avoid not only Kuhn’s name but also the term "paradigm" when he is reflecting on epistemological questions? Did he have some personal reason for it? As a matter of fact, in 1971, someone wrote in the New York Times an aggressive review under the title “The Mandarin of the Hour, Michel Foucault”.

It was probably a very stupid enterprise, but the author was no stupid man, being none other than George Steiner. But sometimes even intelligent men make mistakes or faux pas, and this was certainly a big mistake. Anyway Foucault who at the time ignored even the name of George Steiner and thought he was just a journalist, wrote an ironic and equally aggressive reply. George Steiner wrote in turn his reply, which was followed by even more ironic response from Foucault. Steiner accused Foucault of not having mentioned Kuhn’s name in his book. Foucault explained that he read Kuhn’s book in winter of ’63-’64 after having written it. In the preface to his book Kuhn acknowledges his debt to two French epistemologists, Courier and Meyerson, his never mentions Kandellam. This is just a hypothesis, but it is possible that Foucault, who was closely linked to Kandellam, avoiding any reference to Kuhn’s name was simply paying him back for his impoliteness. But although Foucault was certainly sensible to personal and friendly motivations, it is evident that the reason for his silence cannot be only of this kind. So let us have a closer look at the way that the paradigm functions in Foucault.

Let's take the panopticon. What we have here is first of all a single historical phenomenon, a peculiar architectonic model described by Jeremy Bentham published in Dublin in 1791, under the title "Panopticon, or the Inspection House, Containing the Idea of a New Principle of Construction…etc, etc," I suppose you are familiar with the panopticon which will then become a kind of archetype of institutions like prisons. Foucault describes the panopticon and then says you have only to put a guard or a watchman in the central tower, and in each cell a prisoner, a madman, or even a student, and you will produce a kind a theater where a single person can watch and control a multitude of men. So, the panopticon is a concrete, singular, historical phenomenon, but for Foucault at the same time the panopticon is, as he writes, "panoptism". That is so say, a model of functioning which can be generalized, which allows the definition and establishment of new sets in the relationship between power and the everyday life of man.

From this point of view the panopticon is no more simply a dreamlike building but also the diagram of a mechanism of power in its ideal form. This means that the panopticon functions as a paradigm, as an example which defines the intelligibility of the set to which it belongs and at the same time which it constitutes. Foucault always works in this way. There is always a concrete phenomenon - the confession, the juridical inquiry, etc, which functions as a paradigm, because it will decide a whole problematic context which it both constitutes and makes intelligible. This is what distinguishes Foucault’s work from the work of a historian. It has often been observed that Foucault as a historian has shown the superiority of contexts created through metaphors to the context created by chronological or geographical caesuras, that is to say, by metonymical contexts. Following work by Marc Bloch and Lucien Fevre, Foucault has freed history from the tyranny of metonymical context, for example, "France in the seventeenth century", to
I am convinced that the primacy of the metaphorical context is correct. In order to have the appearance of rigor of seriousness, academic disciplines which have no epistemological status, such as those in the humanities, specialize in a chronological context, for example "Eighteenth-century German literature". This is really ridiculous, because the century is just a convention for measuring which has no reality at all. It’s also very recent, because the use of the concept of century came into popularity only after the French Revolution. The apparent seriousness of metonymical contexts, like the chronological and geographical, have no epistemological basis at all. Let me now try to describe the logic of the paradigm. Usually scholars refer to Foucault’s methods as "metaphorical"-this isn’t true, it’s just the paradigm. Let’s try to describe this logic which is, so to speak, a forgotten chapter, or even a better a displaced concept in the history of Western philosophy. Moreover, the problem of the paradigm is strictly linked to the problem of analogy, whose relations to logic have always been controversial. So the locus classicus for the epistemological problem of the paradigm is Aristotle’s Analytica Prioria.

Philosophy very rarely refers to the problems of paradigm and analogy; Aristotle is perhaps the first, however briefly. Aristotle says that the paradigm, the example, does not concern a part with respect to the whole, nor the whole with respect to the part, it concerns a part with respect to the part. This is a very interesting definition. This means that the paradigm does not move from the particular to the universal, nor from the universal to the particular, but from the particular to the particular. In other words, we first have deduction which goes from the universal to the particular, we have induction which goes from the particular to the universal and then the third we have the paradigm and the analogy which go from the particular to the particular. But what does this mean? What kind of movement is this, and how can a paradigm, which is a singularity, create a new analogical context, a new generality, as we saw in Foucault? To understand how a paradigm works, we first have to neutralize traditional philosophical oppositions such as universal and particular, general and individual, and even also form and content. The paradigm analogy is depolar and not dichotomic, it is tensional and not oppositional. It produces a field of polar tensions which tend to form a zone of undecidability which neutralizes every rigid opposition. We don’t have here a dichotomy, meaning two zones or elements clearly separated and distinguished by a caesura, we have a field where two opposite tensions run.

The paradigm is neither universal nor particular, neither general nor individual, it is a singularity which, showing itself as such, produces a new ontological context. This is the etymological meaning of the word paradigm in Greek, paradigm is literally "what shows itself beside." Something is shown beside, "para". Yet Aristotle’s treatment of the paradigm is in a way inadequate, though he had these beautiful ideas of the paradigm as going from the particular to the particular, he does not seem to develop this point and like Kant still sticks to the idea that the individuals concerned in the example belong to the same genus. Thus in the "Rhetorics", 1357b, he writes that the two singularities in the paradigm are under the same genus. But then he has a very enigmatic statement immediately afterwards: "But only one of them is more knowable than the other." It’s a very interesting point. The important thing is not that the two are homogenous but precisely that one is more knowable. Why is the example, the paradigm, more knowable? What is the sense of this excess of knowability? So we have now to leave Aristotle for the second locus classicus of the problem of paradigm in Greek philosophy,
Plato’s "Statesman". This will also allow us to identify a possible direct source for
Foucault's conception of paradigm. As a matter of fact, in 1947, Victor Goldschmidt, an
extraordinary French historian of Greek philosophy, published "The Paradigm in Plato’s
Dialectics". As it often happens in Goldschimdt's writings, who was a kind of genius in
his field, the analysis of an apparently minor problem such as the paradigm sheds a
completely new light on the whole of Plato’s philosophy, specifically the relation between
the Idea and the Phenomenon. The starting point of Goldschimdt is another book by
another historian who noticed the peculiar structure of Plato’s Dialogues and his use of
the example/paradigm.

Sometimes the Idea acts as a paradigm for sensible things, but sometimes it is the
sensible thing that acts as a paradigm for the Idea. The fact is so embarrassing that you
can often find the paradigm translated with two different words in two different instances,
which is absurd. Goldschimdt analyses a passage in the "Statesmen" where a sensible
paradigm, the art of weaving, must lead to the understanding of the Idea of the
Statesmen, as a politician. What the example the paradigm and the phenomenon have
in common is not substance or a kind of common material element. What they have in
common according to Goldschmidt is just a relationship, it is itself a relationship that we
have to grasp - which kind of relationship and between what. Goldschimdt shows that in
the paradigm, the generality or the idea does not result from a logic consequence by
means of induction from the exhaustive enumeration of the individual cases. Rather it is
produced by the comparison by only one paradigm, one singular example, with the
object or class that the paradigm will make intelligible. The paradigmatic relation does
not occur between a plurality of singular objects or between a singular object, and the
general principle or law which is exterior to it, the paradigm is not already given, but
instead the singularity becomes a paradigm - Plato says it becomes a paradigm by being
shown beside the others. Thus the paradigmatic relationship takes place between the
single phenomenon and its intelligibility. The paradigm is a singularity considered in the
medium of its knowability. What makes something intelligible is the paradigmatic
exhibition of its own knowability. Aristotle said the example is "more knowable". So the
relation that an example and an object have in common is the exhibition if this
knowability. Let’s make an example, using the simplest case - the grammatical
paradigm.

Grammar is built by means of paradigm - you don’t have grammar if you don’t have
paradigms. Let’s take for instance the Latin term rosa. Rose. By means of its
paradigmatic exhibition, as an example, it is suspended from its immediate denotative
character, and in this way it makes possible the constitution and intelligibility of a more
general set, “feminine noun of the first declination”, of which it is both member and
paradigm. It acts as a paradigm for the intelligibility of the set. It’s a very important point
to observe this neutralization of reference which defines the example. For instance, I say
"I swear" as an example of the performative. In order to give an example of the syntagm,
"I swear" cannot be understood in the normal context as an oath and yet must be treated
as a real utterance in order to be taken as an example. This is the paradoxical status of
the example. What an example shows is its belonging to a class, but for this very
reason, it steps out of this class at the very moment in which it exhibits and defines it.
Showing its belonging to a class, it steps out from it and is excluded. So, does the rule
apply to the example? It’s very difficult to answer. The answer is not easy since the rule
applies to the example only as a normal case and not as an example. The example is
excluded from the normal case not because it does not belong to it but because it
exhibits its own belonging to it. In way, it is the reverse case of the exception.
If we define the exception as an inclusive exclusion, in which something is included by means of its exclusion, the example functions as an exclusive inclusion. Something is excluded by means of its very inclusion. So we have now from this short analysis three characters which define exemplarity. First, from Aristotle, the example moves from a singularity towards a singularity. Second, the example is more knowable. Third, the exemplary or paradigmatic relationship takes place between a phenomenon and its own intelligibility or knowability. Now, in Plato, the proper place for paradigms is dialectics. For Plato in dialectics the paradigm shows the very relationship between the sensible and the intelligible. Let’s try to grasp how the paradigm functions in dialectics. A real crucial problem in the interpretation of Plato’s philosophy is the exposition of the dialectical method in the sixth book of the Republic. Immediately before the allegory of the cave there is the famous passage which has always been considered an obscure and difficult problem.

My claim or my suggestion is that this very difficult passage becomes clearer if we read it as an exposition of the paradigmatic method. Here Plato distinguishes two stages or two degrees in the production of science which he describes as two segments on a straight line. The first segment defines the method of what he calls geometra, and those who practice science of this kind, mathematicians. According to Plato this method is founded on hypothesis or presupposition. The term "hypothesis" in Greek means, literally, "presupposition". So I quote: "Geometers presuppose or hypothesize odd or even, the various schema or geometric figures, the types of angles, and other things of the same kind, and they treat them as if they were already known and thus, making hypotheses out of them, they presume they do not have to give account of them, as if they were evident. Thus, starting from them, they reach the point they intend to investigate." In the second segment, describing the second scientific method for the production of science which for Plato defines dialectics, "Language itself grasps by means of dialectic power, treating the hypothesis not as principles or origins but truly as hypotheses. That is to say, steps in order to reach the non-presupposed principle". It’s a very beautiful concept Plato describes here, a principle not presupposed. So what does this mean, to treat a hypothesis truly as a hypothesis? A very interesting concept, you have to reach a principle you have not presupposed.

If you remember, the intelligibility of the paradigm is never presupposed, on the contrary, the specificity of the paradigm resides precisely in the suspension of its immediate factual reference and in the exhibition of its intelligibility as such in order to give life to a new problematic context. Perhaps to treat the hypothesis truly as a hypothesis and not as a principle may simply mean to treat them as paradigms. The paradigm is a hypothesis treated and exposed as such. It is a hypothesis or presupposition whose intelligibility is no more presupposed but exposed, so that it allows us to reach an un presupposed principle. In this sense, the dialectical method shows that in many theoretical or historical investigations the object can never be presupposed. It must be reached and constructed by means paradigms. The fallacy which remains unseen in the common usage of hypothesis is that what appears as a given is in reality only a presupposition of the hypothesis which would explain it. Thus the origin, the un presupposed principle, remains hidden. On the contrary, to show a phenomenon in its original paradigmatic character means to exhibit it in the medium of its knowability. You have no presupposed principle, it is the phenomenon itself which is original. No more origin, but an original phenomenon. While in the hypothesis the intelligibility of something is presupposed to it and then reached by induction or by deduction, in the paradigm the
thing itself is shown beside itself exposed in its own knowability. To conclude I know no better definition of what I mean here than an extraordinary poem by Wallace Stevens, *Description Without Place*. Following Badiou's example, I propose to inaugurate a tradition here in Saas-Fee, every lecture must end with a quotation from Wallace Stevens. So, let me read this very extraordinary poem, at least the first four verses. *It is possible that to seem, it is to be. And the sun is something seeming, and it is. The sun is an example. What it seems, it is. And in such seeming all things are.*

A paradigm, an example, is something which is what it seems. In it being and seeming are undecidable. Philosophy and poetry coincide insofar as both are contemplation of phenomenon in the medium of their knowability, as examples.

**Schirmacher:** It sounds very much like a phenomenological approach: how the thing shows itself to you, and it is how it seems. There is this a little problem, as Heidegger indicated in the beginning of "Being and Time". A phenomenon is something which cannot be seen at first glance. This is a big difference from the phenomenological method used by sociologists, who believe they can just describe what's going on and that's phenomenology. We always say, "No no, no, what is seen needs what can't be seen, but which still belongs to the phenomenon, in order to be understood." The paradigm must have a hidden side which is as important as what is revealed about it. The good message about "trust what you see", is that this message is poisoned. Trust what you see and then wait, they'll take it away again, because there's a task in there, you are not at the end. The paradigm's hope is that it allows you enter, but after that darkness will come back. I'm sure I'm not saying anything new to you, but that's my question, in the praise of the paradigm, what is the other side to it?

**Agamben:** The analogy with phenomenology is only apparent. Here we have a peculiar ontology which we could define with respect to phenomenology - para-ontology, an ontology which is still to be thought. The problem here is that it's not the phenomenon as such which is being seen, but only by means of the example which is a kind of strange movement beside, it is not itself, but beside itself. This para is the essential problem of the example, so we have to invent and define the para-ontology, paradigm, paraoxa, it's still to be defined, it's kind of a paraphysics. What adds itself to be metaphysics, what is besides metaphysics, a para-ontology. It is the problem of this being shown beside and not the immediate knowability of the thing itself. The problem is this para, beside being.

**Schirmacher:** This para is a kind of traitor to the phenomenon.

**Agamben:** The phenomenon has a space beside it, this is the essential point.

**Schirmacher:** Take your table, we want to describe it as phenomenon, we can go on and try to recognize what's not seen, etc, but if you take it as an example, steal the phenomenon from the table…

**Agamben:** It is no more a table. It is excluded from the class to which it belongs. If you consider it as an example it is no more a table and still it is a table.

**Schirmacher:** As you know, we have rules here, the rules are the students who haven't been in his class should ask questions. I recognize it's not easy to ask questions after such a talk. It is logic and epistemology, it's hard to find a connection to the question.
"Why is there still war and not peace in the world?"

**Weber:** The term "knowability" in English is very unusual. I’m very happy to hear it, because I’m one of the few up to this point who has tried to introduce it into academic English as a translation of Benjamin’s Erkennbarkeit, which the editors of the Harvard edition prefer to translate as “recognizability”. Listening to you, as you well know, the phrase that Benjamin uses there, particularly in his work on the Passagenarbeit, is to talk about the now of knowability. The now, is in terms of the historian’s obligation, to introduce a radical rupture in the historical continuum. Of course this changes the whole pattern of what historical knowledge can be. Now in listening to you I began to think. Since the crucial demonstration that I think you’re developing has to do with the para, the ex, the exhibition, the exposition, the way the example exposes its singularity, sets up a singular relation, and so on, I’m just wondering whether the Benjaminian idea of time back to the now which is a spatial-temporal category, which is also desubstantializing, dematerializing, could in anyway be complementary to some of thoughts you presented here. Benjamin doesn’t use the term but operates in a way that might be similar to the paradigmatic relation.

**Agamben:** Perhaps one could try to read Benjamin’s conception of the now of knowability, in his criticism of historicism it’s always that the historical object is always made by a constellation between a moment of the past and a moment of the present. In the now of knowability there is always this constellation, and perhaps we could try to discuss the relation between these two moments, perhaps as a paradigmatic relation. I’m sure that like the paradigm it is analogical.

**Weber:** What about the other aspect, the paradigmatic relationship being a historical relationship, in the way that Benjamin is temporalizing and historicizing?

**Agamben:** Absolutely. For Benjamin this is also a paradigm of what he calls "messianic time". Perhaps also the messianic time works in the same way. There is again a constellation of a moment of the past, from the time of the Hebrews, and the moment of messianic time, the now time. Benjamin and Paul use literally the same term, the "now time". It’s a typological interpretation. The moment of the past is the typos, the figure, the foreshadowing, of the moment of messianic present. Then perhaps it could be an analogy between the paradigm and the typos. Probably it’s the same. The typological relation between a moment in the Hebrew past and a moment in the messianic present is clearly paradigmatic. Adam as typos of the messiah is a paradigm of the messiah. So I think that perhaps there is a strong relation, it’s a good suggestion.

**Audience:** I’d like to address the frame as a paradigm, the relationship between the frame and the paradigm, and the paradigm as a fragment, a singularity. There’s a certain paradox that I’d like to address. If we think the fragment as a fragment of a whole, to what could extent could we really think the example as a fragment.

**Agamben:** There is a strong analogy. The paradigm is a part, a fragment of the whole, excluded from the whole in order to show its belonging to it. In a way the fragment could be as a kind of paradigm for the whole. When a fragment pretends to be more than itself, hints to a more general, infinite dimension, perhaps the fragment could act as a kind of paradigm for the whole.

**Audience:** The fragment as a pure singularity, it seems that in your phrasing, the
paradigm is a means for comprehending the set, yet at the same time it’s a singularity.

**Agamben:** This is the para problem, precisely as you’ve said. It’s a singularity which in some way stands for all the others. I try to show it’s an element of the set which is withdrawn from it by means of the exhibition of its belonging to it. This is the strange movement of the example.

**Schirmacher:** But that’s exactly what we’re interested in. The fragment, in the form of the paradigm, can be an organizing principle and help us to get a kind of overview we lack of the situation.

**Ronnell:** I just wanted to clarify one thing. Did you suggest that this kind of got sprung from the tyranny of metonymic displacements?

**Agamben:** Someone said Foucault freed historical investigation from the tyranny of metonymical context and substituted then the primacy of metaphorical context. The paradigm belongs then to this second category.

**Ronnell:** That surprised me because with the para and the beside, I thought that would be more within the family of metonymic displacement.

**Agamben:** Metonymic there was referring only to historical investigations in which we use chronological or geographical contexts. It’s not my idea, it was someone else who made this opposition.

**Ronnell:** ...because I thought that you can kind of unraveled that in your elaboration, in an interesting way. I noticed that one can trace a certain movement from your mentioning of ignorance and understanding, or non-understanding that then moves towards a certain kind of paradigm. By the way, I was very interested in what you attributed to Schleiermacher, about having to understand an author better than he understands himself, because in his letters to Schlegel he freaks out at one point and he says "Well, I don’t know if we can continue to be best friends, because I don’t understand a thing you write." and Schlegel writes back and says "Actually our friendship should then be based and affirmed by nonunderstanding." Schleiermacher was always on the side of necessary understanding, and even its excess, and he was very shattered by not understanding the work of his friend. If it’s a question, it appears to me that despite the very interesting destabilization of an ontology, and the undecidability of seeing and being, does the paradigm ever question its capacity to know? Your talk has one register, according to which it begins with Coleridge, ignorance, and some stupefying paralyses and then moves to a place where maybe the epistemological presumption isn’t entirely shattered. It seems to me that it was almost like a rocket, it took off and then you let the booster drop, ignorance or the other side of knowability, which almost in the beginning gave the energy to the demonstration but was kind of withdrawn…I don’t know if intelligibility was questioned by you, maybe it was.

**Agamben:** In the beginning when I was quoting Feuerbach about the point of the work which is capable of being developed, which presupposed something left unsaid or unclear, there I was just describing the way I like to work, so I was approaching Foucault from this point of view. Foucault speaks a lot about paradigmatic epistemology but he never defines what he means by that. There was a kind of point of possibility, and that’s why I began like that. About knowability, we were speaking of the example, I was trying
to understand, was it a relation between two particular objects? What do they have in common, as Goldschimdt tried to understand? The real relationship is not between an object and another object, but between an object and its knowability.

**Schirmacher:** This is good news, a success story, there is a relation between the object and its knowability. What is the bad news? Is there a relation between the object and its not-knowability? What is the paradigm not telling? Where does the paradigm break down?

**Agamben:** This is another very important problem. This depends on the ability of the author to find and create the good paradigm. It's not given, in order to make a good investigation you have to find the paradigm which functions.

**Schirmacher:** Remember Badiou, he told you about this forcing. You have explained tonight how the paradigm is a forcing. Badiou explained that forcing is an evil thing, we can't stop it but we should be aware of it. What can't be named is never meant to be named, and we have to protect not-naming. But again, your other work shows that you know that.

**Agamben:** We can find an example for that too...

**Audience:** In "The Order of Things", is "episteme" a substitute translation for "paradigm"?

**Agamben:** No, Foucault often speaks of episteme. They are not interchangeable. The paradigm is one of the ways to build an episteme. He speaks of the epistemological paradigm but then never defines it. The word comes again and again, and no definition.

**Audience:** I'm still fascinated by the table which is not a table, which is beside itself, and I'm wondering if the relation between the table and its knowability similar to that of the table and our ignorance.

**Agamben:** It is because we are ignorant and trying to understand the table that we have to employ examples.

**Schirmacher:** So the dark side is coming. Now we are on the same page again.

**Audience:** When the example is poetry, in this dance of potentiality and actuality, is there something else that happens with the example, perhaps canceling even the example itself, in the way there is something potential withdraws in poetry?

**Agamben:** In a way I'm not taking the poem as an example because I am convinced that in the poem Stevens gives the definition of the example because he says that what the sun seems to be, it is. I'm not quoting the poem as an example so to speak but a definition of the example.

**Schirmacher:** An exemplary definition. You could have given us this definition in plain words, but you chose the singularity of a poem, which doesn't have the function of giving you a definition. You exploited it, took it out of context and made it a piece of you. Wallace Stevens will turn over in his grave, I'm sure. That was your paradigm, and you made a paradigmatic use of it.
Agamben: Making use of examples is one of the most common things we do, but it has no clear epistemological status. I think it’s a very important thing to try and construct an epistemology of the example, because we always use examples.

Audience: What is perhaps revolutionary about this notion of paradigm is that it breaks the cause and effect relationship to the movement of history. Politically speaking, it opens up a new space where we get to the other end of the table.

Schirmacher: I think you made a very good case about what is the good news about it, but what is the violence of the example? Just because we do it all the time, and put it in new contexts, make it para, doesn’t make it right. I think in your description you should be aware of what price you pay for the example. That’s the uneasiness I have when I hear your positive story. We see how it works, but what have we done to the phenomenon, for me it has the sense of the anthropocentric in it, which is something I would only allow the poets to get away with. I don’t want the statesmen to.

Audience: In your opening statement you said you were not going to concern itself with epistemological or methodological problems. It reminded me of another philosopher of science who critiqued the paradigmatic arguments put forth by Kuhn, Paul Feier, who presents a counter-argument to Kuhn’s model of scientific revolution, and uses two metaphors, one of the bank robber, he talks about Dillinger robbing banks knowing how to get into the safe using paradigms and he counters that with a creative approach to the task of constituting new knowledge, which would be a Dadaist, against models. It seems that the Platonic notion of paradigm has this anarchic potential again method, while you’re not against paradigm-building and the efficacy and use of paradigms...

Agamben: I totally argue with you. It’s true that Kuhn just showed the normative function of the paradigm, which is exactly not what I wanted to emphasize, not the normative effects. Kuhn is not interested in what a paradigm is, just in its normative functioning within the scientific community. This is what I tried to understand, the "dadaistic" function.

Schirmacher: Feier’s main point was, if you are a scientist, you do whatever it takes, you don’t care about the rules and paradigms, you just want success and don’t care how it is done. This was his argument against all these people coming up with structures based on past knowledge, there is no past knowledge, you just jump into the abyss and hope for the best paradigm.