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The Signator

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The meaning of things is much more important than that of words, because words are only a human convention, but things are ordained by nature. Words are the language of man, but things are the language of God addressed to man... The meaning of things is, moreover, much more multiple than that of words, because few words have more than two or three meanings, but every thing may mean as many other things as it has visible or invisible qualities in common with other things.¹ The signatory art teaches how to give true and genuine names to all things. Adam the Protoplast truly understood all of these things in their entirety. And so after the creation he gave its own proper name to every thing, to animals, trees, roots, stones, minerals, metals, waters, and the like... Now these names were based upon a true and intimate foundation, not on mere opinion, and were derived from a predestinated knowledge, that is to say, the signatorial art. Adam is the first signator.² Signs are either proper or figurative. They are called proper when they are used to point out the objects they were designed to point out... Signs are figurative when those things themselves that are indicated by the proper names are used to signify something else.³ Insight into the areas of the "similar" has fundamental importance for the illumination of large areas of occult knowledge. Such insight, however, is to be gained less by demonstrating found similarities than by reproducing processes which produce such similarities.⁴ I take myself as an example, from the time when I believed that I could gain divine counsel from the vain art of geomancy; and truly as I was in the midst of casting the figure, my mind was so perfectly fixed by the action of my hand to the movements of the heavens that my intention was completely absorbed. And because of that firm connection it seemed to me that every truth of heaven poured itself into the figure [I was making]. And if anyone were to interrupt me, or if the pen ran out of ink and forced me to return to the inkwell before I could complete the figure, then it seemed to me that I could not make any judgments on the basis of that figure, because the course of my intention had been interrupted.⁵ It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation.⁶ The historian does not randomly or arbitrarily choose the documents out of the inert and endless mass of the archive but follows the subtle and obscure thread of signatures that demand to be read here and now.⁷

¹ Hugh of St. Victor, *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris*, ch. 14

² Aurelius Philippus Theophrastus Bombast of Hohenheim, called Paracelsus, *Concerning the Nature of Things*, book 9, *Concerning the Signature of Natural Things*.

³ St. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 2.10.15.

⁴ Walter Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar (1933)," in *New German Critique* 17 (1979): 65.

⁵ Giulio Camillo, "De L'Umana Deificatione," in Cesare Vasoli, "Uno scritto inedito di Giulio Camillo 'De L'Umana Deificatione,'" *Rinascimento* 24 (1984): 212.

⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1982), pp. 463.

⁷ Giorgio Agamben, "The Theory of Signatures," in *The Signature of All Things: On Method* (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 73.