

SIGNS OF THE AMERICAS

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**A Poetics of Pictography,
Hieroglyphs, and Khipu**

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FOR THE ANCESTORS CROWDING THE ROOM—
GRANDMOTHERS AND GRANDFATHERS

Origin, although an entirely historical category, has, nevertheless, nothing to do with genesis. The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis. That which is original is never revealed in the naked and manifest existence of the factual; its rhythm is apparent only to a dual insight. On the one hand, it needs to be recognized as a process of restoration and re-establishment, but, on the other hand, and precisely because of this, as something imperfect and incomplete. There takes place in every original phenomenon a determination of the form in which an idea will constantly confront the historical world, until it is revealed fulfilled, in the totality of its history. Origin is not, therefore, discovered by the examination of actual findings, but it is related to their history and their subsequent development. The principles of philosophical contemplation are recorded in the dialectic which is inherent in origin. This dialectic shows singularity and repetition to be conditioned by one another in all essentials.

—Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*

When amnesia began to sow shadows in our memory, we went to our ancient lakes, seeking in the depth the faces we had lost. We saw through the mist of the ages that they were blurred and no longer the same. We reached the ancient bed of a river, facing the mountain of granite. We shouted for the echo to give back to us the names and the voices that had departed . . . leaving us empty. We came down from the hills, along the trails and roads, dragging our roots against the thorns, the snow, and the fire. We inquired after our destiny, but no one wanted to understand us because our signs were so strange. . . . We descended to the bottom of the sea, where the stars descend to their nests, to ask if the heavens know where we are headed or where we come from. . . . *Know, those who have been immolated, for in this region you will be the dawn and you will also be the river. . . .*

—Miguel Méndez, *Pilgrims in Aztlán*