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The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)

In the beginning, I would like to entrust myself to words that, were it possible, would be naked.

Naked in the first place—but this is in order to announce already that I plan to speak endlessly of nudity and of the nude in philosophy. Starting from Genesis. I would like to choose words that are, to begin with, naked, quite simply, words from the heart.

And to utter these words without repeating myself, without beginning again what I have already said here, more than once. It is said that one must avoid repeating oneself, in order not to give the appearance of training [*dressage*], already, of a habit or a convention that would in the long term program the very act of thanking.

Some of you, and the thought of it moves me to tears, were already here in 1980, or again in 1992, at the time of the previous two conferences. Some even, among my dearest and most faithful friends (Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Marie-Louise Mallet) had already inspired, conceived of, and brought to fruition those two occasions, with the smiling genius that Marie-Louise radiates once again. Jean-Luc Nancy promised us he would be here again. Along with Philippe he opened the 1980 conference. I think of him constantly and he must know that his friends and admirers send him their very best wishes from here.¹

To those I have just named I owe so much that the language of gratitude is insufficient. What I owe them remains infinite and indelible.

Without forgetting that, I wish, if you'll forgive me, to go back in time, back to an earlier moment still, to a time before that time.

And to speak starting from that point in time, so long ago, as one says,² a time that for me becomes fabulous or mythical.

Some of you here, Maurice de Gandillac, first of all, whom I wish to greet and thank in pride of place, know that about forty years ago, in 1959, our wonderful hosts here at Cerisy were already offering me their hospitality—and it was the moment of my very first lecture, in fact, the first time I spoke in public. If I were already to give in to what others might call the instinct of the autobiographical animal, I might recall that in 1959, as today, the theme was, in short, Genesis. The title of the conference was “Structure and Genesis,” and it was my first ten-day Cerisy event. Following that I have greatly enjoyed returning for “Nietzsche” in 1972, “Ponge” in 1974, “Lyotard” in 1982. I don't think I have to say any more about that for you to be able, not so much to measure, for it is immeasurable, but rather to sense the immensity of my gratitude.

Everything I shall venture to say today will therefore be, once more, in order to express my thanks, in order to say “thanks to this place, to those who welcome us here and to you.” I experience my returns to Cerisy as a wonderful and intense story that has parsed almost the whole of my adult life, everything I have tried to think about it out loud. If ever the animal that I am were one day to take it upon itself to write an autobiography (whether intellectual or emotional), it would have to name Cerisy again and again, more than once and in more than one way—in the renown of the proper name and of metonymy.

As for these ten days, the third in something like a series, they seemed to me unimaginable, even excluded in advance. Last time, in 1992, when Didier Cahen alluded to the possibility in the attic on the last evening, asking me what the theme of a third conference would be, I still remember dismissing such a hypothesis: “This guy is crazy,” I exclaimed. He wasn't so crazy, but the whole idea remains, like everything that happens, and such is the condition for something to be able to happen, impossible to anticipate. It is only after the event, reading the titles of these three meetings (*Les fins de l'homme* [The Ends of Man], *Le passage des frontières* [The Crossing of Borders], *L'animal autobiographique* [The Autobiographical Animal]) with a feeling of uncanniness, that I perceived a sort of prescriptive arrangement, a preestablished if not harmonious order, a providential machine, as Kant would say, precisely, concerning the animal, “als ein Maschinen der Vorsehung,” an obscure foresight, the process of a blind but sure prefiguration in the configuration: one and the same movement being outlined and seeking its end. The Ends of Man (title

chosen by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy without asking for my input, and I didn't ask to give it, although the title was also that of one of my texts), *The Crossing of Borders*, and *The Autobiographical Animal* (titles that I myself proposed to Marie-Louise and to our hosts at Cerisy): later I began to hear in them, in this series of three kick-offs, what no one, least of all myself, had ever calculated, and what no one would be able to reappropriate, namely, the outline or the temptation of a single phrase, a phrase offering more to follow [*qui se donnerait à suivre*].

It follows, itself; it follows itself. It could say “I am,” “I follow,” “I follow myself,” “I am (in following) myself.” In being pursued this way, consequentially, three times or in three rhythms, it would describe something like the course of a three-act play or the three movements of a syllogistic concerto, a displacement that becomes a *suite*, a result, in a single word.

If I am (following) this suite [*si je suis cette suite*], and everything in what I am about to say will lead back to the question of what “to follow” or “to pursue” means, as well as “to be after,” back to the question of what I do when “I am” or “I follow,” when I say “*Je suis*,” if I am (following) this suite then, I move from “the ends of man,” that is the confines of man, to “the crossing of borders” between man and animal. Passing across borders or the ends of man I come or surrender to the animal, to the animal in itself, to the animal in me and the animal at unease with itself, to the man about whom Nietzsche said (I no longer remember where) something to the effect that it was an as yet undetermined animal, an animal lacking in itself. Nietzsche also said, at the very beginning of the second treatise of *The Genealogy of Morals*, that man is a promising animal, by which he meant, underlining those words, an animal that is permitted to make promises (*das versprechen darf*). Nature is said to have given itself the task of raising, domesticating, and “disciplining” (*heranzüchten*) this animal that promises.

Since time, since so long ago, hence since all of time and for what remains of it to come we would therefore be in passage toward surrendering to the promise of that animal at unease with itself.



Since time, therefore.

Since so long ago, can we say that the animal has been looking at us?³

What animal? The other.

I often ask myself, just to see, *who I am*—and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for

example, the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time⁴ overcoming my embarrassment.

Whence this malaise?

I have trouble repressing a reflex of shame. Trouble keeping silent within me a protest against the indecency. Against the impropriety [*malséance*] that can come of finding oneself naked, one's sex exposed, stark naked⁵ before a cat that looks at you without moving, just to see. The impropriety of a certain animal nude before the other animal, from that point on one might call it a kind of *animalséance*: the single, incomparable and original experience of the impropriety that would come from appearing in truth naked, in front of the insistent gaze of the animal, a benevolent or pitiless gaze, surprised or cognizant. The gaze of a seer, a visionary or extra-lucid blind one. It is as if I were ashamed, therefore, naked in front of this cat, but also ashamed for being ashamed. A reflected shame, the mirror of a shame ashamed of itself, a shame that is at the same time specular, unjustifiable, and unavowable. At the optical center of this reflection would appear this thing—and in my eyes the focus of this incomparable experience—that is called nudity. And about which it is believed that it is proper to man, that is to say, foreign to animals, naked as they are, or so it is thought, without the slightest consciousness of being so.

Ashamed of what and naked before whom? Why let oneself be overcome with shame? And why this shame that blushes for being ashamed? Especially, I should make clear, if the cat observes me *frontally* naked, face to face, and if I am naked faced with the cat's eyes looking at me from head to toe, as it were just *to see*, not hesitating to concentrate its vision—in order to see, with a view to seeing—in the direction of my sex. *To see*, without going *to see*, without touching yet, and without biting, although that threat remains on its lips or on the tip of the tongue. Something happens there that shouldn't take place—like everything that happens in the end, a lapsus, a fall, a failing, a fault, a symptom (and “symptom,” as you know, also means “fall”: case, unfortunate event, coincidence, what falls due [*échéance*], mishap). It is as if, at that instant, I had said or were going to say the forbidden, something that shouldn't be said. As if I were to avow what cannot be avowed in a symptom and, as one says, wanted to bite my tongue.

Ashamed of what and before whom? Ashamed of being as naked as a beast.⁶ It is generally thought, although none of the philosophers I am about to examine actually mentions it, that the property unique to animals, what in the last instance distinguishes them from man, is their being

naked without knowing it. Not being naked therefore, not having knowledge of their nudity, in short, without consciousness of good and evil.

From that point on, naked without knowing it, animals would not be, in truth, naked.

They wouldn't be naked because they are naked. In principle, with the exception of man, no animal has ever thought to dress itself. Clothing would be proper to man, one of the “properties” of man. “Dressing oneself” would be inseparable from all the other figures of what is “proper to man,” even if one talks about it less than speech or reason, the *logos*, history, laughing, mourning, burial, the gift, etc. (The list of “what is proper to man” always forms a configuration, from the first moment. For that very reason, it can never be limited to a single trait and it is never closed; structurally speaking it can attract a nonfinite number of other concepts, beginning with the concept of a concept.)

The animal, therefore, is not naked because it is naked. It doesn't feel its own nudity. There is no nudity “in nature.” There is only the sentiment, the affect, the (conscious or unconscious) experience of existing in nakedness. Because it *is* naked, without *existing* in nakedness, the animal neither feels nor sees itself naked. And therefore it isn't naked. At least that is what is thought. For man it would be the opposite, and clothing derives from technics. We would therefore have to think shame and technicity together, as the same “subject.” And evil and history, and work, and so many other things that go along with it. Man would be the only one to have invented a garment to cover his sex. He would be a man only to the extent that he was able to be naked, that is to say, to be ashamed, to know himself to be ashamed because he is no longer naked. And knowing *himself* would mean knowing himself to be ashamed. On the other hand, because the animal is naked without consciousness of being naked, it is thought that modesty remains as foreign to it as does immodesty. As does the knowledge of self that is involved in that.

What is shame if one can be modest only by remaining immodest, and vice versa? Man could never be naked any more because he has the sense of nakedness, that is to say, of modesty or shame. The animal would be *in* non-nudity because it is nude, and man *in* nudity to the extent that he is no longer nude. There we encounter a difference, a time or *contretemps* between two *nudities without nudity*. This *contretemps* has only just begun giving us trouble or doing us harm [*mal*] in the area of the knowledge of good and evil.

Before the cat that looks at me naked, would I be ashamed *like* a beast that no longer has the sense of its nudity? Or, on the contrary, *like* a man who retains the sense of his nudity? Who am I, therefore? Who is it that

I am (following)? Whom should this be asked of if not of the other? And perhaps of the cat itself?

I must immediately make it clear, the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, *a little cat*. It isn't the *figure* of a cat. It doesn't silently enter the bedroom as an allegory for all the cats on the earth, the felines that traverse our myths and religions, literature and fables. There are so many of them. The cat I am talking about does not belong to Kafka's vast zoopoetics, something that nevertheless merits concern and attention here, endlessly and from a novel perspective. Nor is the cat that looks at, concerning me, and to which I seem—but don't count on it—to be dedicating a negative zootheology, Hoffmann's or Kofman's cat Murr, although along with me it uses this occasion to salute the magnificent and inexhaustible book that Sarah Kofman devotes to it, namely, *Autobiogriffures*,⁷ whose title resonates so well with that of this conference. That book keeps vigil over this conference and asks to be permanently quoted or reread.

An animal looks at me. What should I think of this sentence? The cat that looks at me naked and that is *truly a little cat*, *this* cat I am talking about, which is also a female, isn't Montaigne's cat either, the one he nevertheless calls "my [pussy]cat" [*ma chatte*] in his "Apology for Raymond Sebond."⁸ You will recognize that as one of the greatest pre- or anti-Cartesian texts on the animal that exists. Later we will pay attention to a certain mutation between Montaigne and Descartes, an event that is obscure and difficult to date, to identify even, between two configurations for which these proper names are metonymies. Montaigne makes fun of "man's impudence with regard to the beasts," of the "presumption" and "imagination" shown by man when he claims, for example, to know what goes on in the heads of animals; especially when he presumes to assign them or refuse them certain faculties (330–31). On the contrary, he deems it necessary to recognize in animals a "facility" in forming letters and syllables. This capacity, Montaigne assures us with assurance, "testifies that they have an inward power of reason which makes them so teachable and determined to learn" (340). Taking man to task for "carv[ing] out their shares to his fellows and companions the animals, and distribut[ing] among them such portions of faculties and powers as he sees fit," he asks, and the question refers from here on not to the animal but to the naïve assurance of man:

How does he know, by the force of his intelligence, the secret internal stirrings of animals? By what comparison between them and us does he infer the stupidity that he attributes to them?

When I play with my cat [*ma chatte*], who knows if I am not a pastime to her more than she is to me? (331)

[The 1595 edition adds: "We entertain each other with reciprocal monkey tricks. If I have my time to begin or to refuse, so has she hers."]

Nor does the cat that looks at me naked, she and no other, the one *I am talking about here*, belong, although we are getting warmer, to Baudelaire's family of cats,⁹ or Rilke's,¹⁰ or Buber's.¹¹ Literally, at least, these poets' and philosophers' cats don't speak. "My" pussycat (but a pussycat never belongs) is not even the one *who speaks* in *Alice in Wonderland*. Of course, if you insist at all costs on suspecting me of perversity—always a possibility—you are free to understand or receive my emphasis on "really a little cat" as a quote from chapter 11 of *Through the Looking Glass*. Entitled "Waking," this penultimate chapter consists in a single sentence: "—it really *was* a kitten, after all"; or as one French translation has it: "and, after all, it really was a little black pussycat" [*et, finalement, c'était bel et bien une petite chatte noire*].¹²

Although I don't have time to do so, I would of course have liked to inscribe my whole talk within a reading of Lewis Carroll. In fact you can't be certain that I am not doing that, for better or for worse, silently, unconsciously, or without your knowing. You can't be certain that I didn't already do it one day when, ten years ago, I let speak or let pass a little hedgehog, a suckling hedgehog [*un nourrisson hérisson*] perhaps, before the question "What is Poetry?"¹³ For thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry. There you have a thesis: it is what philosophy has, essentially, had to deprive itself of. It is the difference between philosophical knowledge and poetic thinking. The hedgehog of "What is Poetry?" not only inherited a piece of my name but also responded, in its own way, to the appeal of Alice's hedgehog. Remember the croquet ground where the "balls were live hedgehogs" ("The Queen's Croquet Ground"). Alice wanted to give the hedgehog a blow with the head of the flamingo she held under her arm, and it would "twist itself round and look up in her face," until she burst out laughing.¹⁴

How can an animal look you in the face? That will be one of our concerns. Alice noticed next that "the hedgehog had unrolled itself and was in the act of crawling away: besides all this, there was generally a ridge or a furrow in the way wherever she wanted to send the hedgehog to." It was a field on which "the players all played at once, without waiting for turns, quarreling all the while, and fighting for the hedgehogs."

We will be all the more silently attracted to *Through the Looking Glass* because we will have to deal with a type of *mirror stage*—and to ask certain questions of it, from the point of view of the animal, precisely.

But my real cat is not Alice's little cat (certain translations say *le petit chat* for "kitten," or, as I have just quoted, *une petite chatte noire*), because I am certainly not about to conclude hurriedly, upon waking, as Alice did, that one cannot speak with a cat on the pretext that it doesn't reply or that it always replies the same thing. Everything that I am about to entrust to you no doubt comes back to asking you to *respond* to me, you, to me, reply to me concerning what it is to *respond*. If you can. The said question of the said animal in its entirety comes down to knowing not whether the animal speaks but whether one can know what *respond* means. And how to distinguish a response from a reaction. In this respect we must keep in mind Alice's very Cartesian statement at the end:

It is a very inconvenient habit of kittens (Alice had once made the remark) that, whatever you say to them, they *always* purr. "If they would only purr for 'yes,' and mew for 'no,' or any rule of that sort," she had said, "so that one could keep up a conversation! But how *can* you talk with a person if they *always* say the same thing?"

On this occasion the kitten only purred: and it was impossible to guess whether it meant "yes" or "no."¹⁵

You can speak to an animal, to the cat said to be *real* inasmuch as it is an animal, but it doesn't reply, not really, not ever, that is what Alice concludes. Exactly like Descartes, as we shall later hear.

The letter counts, as does the *question* of the animal. The question of the animal response often has as its stakes the letter, the literality of a word, sometimes what the word *word* means literally. If, for example, the word *respond* appears twice in all the translations of Carroll that I consulted, it corresponds neither to any lexical term nor to any word as such in the original. The English no doubt implies responding without stating it, and this is surely a matter of economy. Where the translation says, without underlining the "always": *quoiqu'on leur dise, elles ronronnent toujours pour vous répondre*, the original simply says "whatever you say to them, they *always* purr." And where the translation says, without underlining the allusion to *pouvoir* ("can"): *Mais comment peut-on parler avec quelqu'un qui répond toujours pareil?* Carroll himself writes "But how *can* you talk with a person if they *always* say the same thing?"

That said, the sense of "response" seems to be implicit here; one can always maintain that the difference between the presence and absence of

the word *response* doesn't count. Perhaps. Perhaps, on the contrary, one should take the matter very seriously, but that will only be later on.

In any case, isn't Alice's credulity rather incredible? She seems, at this moment at least, to believe that one can in fact discern and decide between a human *yes* and *no*. She seems confident that when it comes to man it is possible to guess whether yes or no. Let us not forget that the Cheshire Cat had told her, in the course of a scene that deserves a long meditation: "We're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad." After that he undertakes to demonstrate to her this collective folly. It is the moment of a simulacrum of discussion, which comes to grief when they are unable to agree on the sense of the words, on what a *word* means, and in the end, no doubt, on what "word," what the term *word* could ever mean. "Call it what you like," the Cat ends up saying about the difference between growling and purring, before announcing that he will be present at the Queen's croquet game, where my poor hedgehogs will be badly treated [*mis à mal*].¹⁶

No, no, my cat, the cat that looks at me in my bedroom or bathroom, this cat that is perhaps not "my cat" or "my pussycat," does not appear here to represent, like an ambassador, the immense symbolic responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race, from La Fontaine to Tieck (author of "Puss in Boots"), from Baudelaire to Rilke, Buber, and many others. If I say "it is a real cat" that sees me naked, this is in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity. When it responds in its name (whatever "respond" means, and that will be our question), it doesn't do so as the exemplar of a species called "cat," even less so of an "animal" genus or kingdom. It is true that I identify it as a male or female cat. But even before that identification, it comes to me as *this* irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, into this place where it can encounter me, see me, even see me naked. Nothing can ever rob me of the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized [*rebelle à tout concept*]. And a mortal existence, for from the moment that it has a name, its name survives it. It signs its potential disappearance. Mine also, and that disappearance, from this moment to that, *fort/da*, is announced each time that, with or without nakedness, one of us leaves the room.

But I must immediately emphasize the fact that this shame that is ashamed of itself is more intense when I am not alone with the pussycat in the room. Then I am no longer sure before whom I am so numbed with shame. In fact, is one ever alone with a cat? Or with anyone at all? Is this cat a third [*tiers*]? Or an other in a face-to-face duel? These questions will return much later. In such moments, on the edge of the thing,

in the imminence of the best or the worst, when anything can happen, where I can die of shame or pleasure, I no longer know in whose or in what direction to throw myself. Rather than chasing it away, chasing the cat away, I am in a hurry, yes, in a hurry to have it appear otherwise. I hasten to cover the obscenity of the event, in short, to cover myself. One thought alone keeps me spellbound: dress myself, even a little, or, which amounts to the same thing, run away—as if I were chasing¹⁷ myself out of the room—bite myself, therefore, bite my tongue, for example, at the very moment when I ask myself “Who?” But “*Who* therefore?” For I no longer know who, therefore, I am (following) or who it is I am chasing, who is following me or hunting me. Who comes before and who is after whom? I no longer know which end my head is. Madness: “We’re all mad here. I’m mad. You’re mad.” I no longer know how to respond, or even to respond to the question that compels me or asks me who I am (following) or after whom I am (following), but am so as I am running [*et suis ainsi en train de courir*].

To follow and to be after will not only be the question, and the question of what we call the animal. We shall discover in the follow-through the question of the question, that which begins by wondering what to respond means and whether an animal (but which one?) ever replies in its own name. And by wondering whether one can answer for what “I am (following)” means when that seems to necessitate an “I am inasmuch as I am after [après] the animal” or “I am inasmuch as I am alongside [auprès] the animal.”

Being after, being alongside, being near [près] would appear as different modes of being, indeed of being-with. With the animal. But, in spite of appearances, it isn’t certain that these modes of being come to modify a preestablished being, even less a primitive “I am.” In any case, they express a certain order of being-huddled-together [être-serré] (which is what the etymological root, *pressu*, indicates, whence follow the words *près*, *auprès*, *après*), the being-pressed, the being-with as being strictly attached, bound, enchained, being-under-pressure, compressed, impressed, repressed, pressed-against according to the stronger or weaker stricture of what always remains pressing. In what sense of the neighbor [*prochain*] (which is not necessarily that of a biblical or Greco-Latin tradition) should I say that I am close or next to the animal, and that I am (following) it, and in what type or order of pressure? Being-with it in the sense of being-close-to-it? Being-alongside-it? Being-after-it? Being-after-it in the sense of the hunt, training, or taming, or being-after-it in the sense of a succession or inheritance? In all cases, if I am (following) after it, the animal therefore comes before me, earlier than me (*früher* is Kant’s word regarding the

animal, and Kant will be one of our witnesses to come). The animal is there before me, there next to me, there in front of me—I who am (following) after it. And also, therefore, since it is before me, it is behind me. It surrounds me. And from the vantage of this being-there-before-me it can allow itself to be looked at, no doubt, but also—something that philosophy perhaps forgets, perhaps being this calculated forgetting itself—it can look at me. It has its point of view regarding me. The point of view of the absolute other, and nothing will have ever given me more food for thinking through this absolute alterity of the neighbor or of the next-door than these moments when I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat.

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What is at stake in these questions? One doesn’t need to be an expert to foresee that they involve thinking about what is meant by living, speaking, dying, being, and world as in being-in-the-world or being-within-the-world, or being-with, being-before, being-behind, being-after, being and following, being followed or being following, there where I am, in one way or another, but unimpeachably, near what they call the animal. It is too late to deny it, it will have been there before me who is (following) after it. After and near what they call the animal and with it—whether we want it or not, and whatever we do about this thing.

I’ll be obliged to return more than once to the malaise of this scene. I beg your forgiveness for it. I shall do all I can to prevent its being presented as a primal scene: this deranged theatrics of the wholly other they call “animal,” for example, “cat.” Yes, the wholly other, more other than any other, which they call an animal, for example, a cat, when it looks at me naked, at the instant when I introduce myself, present myself to it—or, earlier, at that strange moment when, before the event, before even wanting it or knowing it myself, I am passively presented to it as naked, I am seen and seen naked, before even seeing myself seen by a cat. Before even seeing myself or knowing myself seen naked. I am presented to it before even introducing myself. Nudity is nothing other than that passivity, the involuntary exhibition of the self. Nudity gets stripped to bare necessity only in that frontal exhibition, in that face-to-face. Here, faced with a cat of one or the other sex, or of one and the other sex. And faced with a cat that continues to see me, to watch me leave when I turn my back on it, a cat that, from that moment on, because I no longer see it seeing me still, from behind, I therefore risk forgetting.

I have just attributed passivity to nudity. We could nickname this denuded passivity with a term that will come back more than once, from

different places and in different registers, namely, *the passion of the animal*, *my passion of the animal*, *my passion of the animal other*: seeing oneself seen naked under a gaze behind which there remains a bottomlessness, at the same time innocent and cruel perhaps, perhaps sensitive and impassive, good and bad, uninterpretable, unreadable, undecidable, abyssal and secret. Wholly other, like the every other that is every (bit) other found in such intolerable proximity that I do not as yet feel I am justified or qualified to call it my fellow, even less my brother. For we shall have to ask ourselves, inevitably, what happens to the fraternity of brothers when an animal appears on the scene. Or, conversely, what happens to the animal when one brother comes after the other, when Abel is *after* Cain who is *after* Abel. Or when a son is *after* his father. What happens to animals, surrogate or not, to the ass and ram on Mount Moriah?

What does this bottomless gaze offer to my sight [*donne à voir*]? What does it “say” to me, demonstrating quite simply the naked truth of every gaze, when that truth *allows me to see and be seen* through the eyes of the other, in the *seeing* and not just *seen* eyes of the other? I am here thinking of those seeing eyes, those eyes of a seer whose color must at the same time be *seen and forgotten*. In looking at the gaze of the other, Levinas says, one must forget the color of his eyes; in other words, see the gaze, the face that gazes before seeing the visible eyes of the other. But when he reminds us that the “best way of meeting the other, is to not even notice the color of his eyes,”¹⁸ he is speaking of man, of one’s neighbor as man, kindred, brother; he thinks of the other human and this, for us, will later be revealed as a matter for serious concern.

As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called “animal” offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say, the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself. And in these moments of nakedness, as regards the animal, everything can happen to me, I am like a child ready for the apocalypse, *I am (following) the apocalypse itself*, that is to say, the ultimate and first event of the end, the unveiling and the verdict. I am (following) it, the apocalypse, I identify with it by running behind it, after it, after its whole zoo-logy. When the instant of extreme passion passes, and I find peace again, then I can speak calmly of the beasts of the Apocalypse, visit them in the museum, see them in a painting (but for the Greeks “zoography” referred to the portraiture of the living in general and not just the painting of animals); I can visit them at the zoo, read about them in the Bible, or speak about them as in a book.

If I began by saying “the wholly other they *call* ‘animal,’ and, for example, ‘cat,’” if I underlined the call [*appel*] and added quotation marks, it was to do more than announce a problem that will henceforth never leave us, that of appellation—and of the *response* to a call.

Before pursuing things in that direction, let me entrust to you the hypothesis that crossed my mind the last time my gaze met that of a pussycat that seemed to be imploring me, asking me clearly to open the door for it to go out, as she did, without waiting, as she often does, for example, when she first follows me into the bathroom then immediately regrets her decision. It is, moreover, a scene that is repeated every morning. The pussycat follows me when I wake up, into the bathroom, asking for her breakfast, but she demands to leave that said bathroom as soon as it (or she) sees me naked, ready for everything and resolved to make her wait. However, there I am naked under the gaze of what they call “animal,” and a fictitious tableau is played out in my imagination, a sort of classification after Linnaeus, a taxonomy of the *point of view of animals*. Other than the difference mentioned earlier between poem and philosopheme, there would be, at bottom, only two types of discourse, two positions of knowledge, two grand forms of theoretical or philosophical treatise regarding the animal. What distinguishes them is obviously the place, indeed, the body of their signatories; that is to say, the trace that that signature leaves in a corpus and in a properly scientific, theoretical, or philosophical thematics. In the first place there are texts signed by people who have no doubt seen, observed, analyzed, reflected on the animal, but who have never been *seen seen* by the animal. Their gaze has never intersected with that of an animal directed at them (forget about their being naked). If, indeed, they did happen to be seen seen furtively by the animal one day, they took no (thematic, theoretical, or philosophical) account of it. They neither wanted nor had the capacity to draw any systematic consequence from the fact that an animal could, facing them, look at them, clothed or naked, and in a word, without a word, *address them*. They have taken no account of the fact that what they call “animal” could *look at* them, and *address* them from down there, from a wholly other origin. That category of discourse, texts, and signatories (those who have never been seen seen by an animal that addressed them) is by far the one that occurs most abundantly. It is probably what brings together *all* philosophers and all theoreticians *as such*. At least those of a certain “epoch,” let’s say, from Descartes to the present, but I shall soon say why the word *epoch* and even this historicism leaves me quite uneasy or dissatisfied. Clearly all those (males and not females, for that difference is not

insignificant here) whom I shall later situate in order to back up my remarks, arranging them within the same configuration—for example Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lacan, and Levinas—belong to this quasi-epochal category.¹⁹ Their discourses are sound and profound, but everything in them goes on as if they themselves had never been looked at, and especially not naked, by an animal that addressed them. At least everything goes on as though this troubling experience had not been theoretically registered, supposing that it had been experienced at all, at the precise moment when they made of the animal a *theorem*, something seen and not seeing. The experience of the seeing animal, of the animal that looks at them, has not been taken into account in the philosophical or theoretical architecture of their discourse. In sum they have denied it as much as misunderstood it. From here on we shall circle round and round this immense disavowal, whose logic traverses the whole history of humanity, and not only that of the quasi-epochal configuration I just mentioned. It is as if the men representing this configuration had seen without being seen, seen the animal without being seen by it, without being seen by it; without being seen seen naked by someone who, from deep within a life called animal, and not only by means of the gaze, would have obliged them to recognize, at the moment of address, that this was their affair, their lookout [*que cela les regardait*].

But since I don't believe, deep down, that it has never happened to them, or that it has not in some way been signified, figured, or metonymized, more or less secretly, in the gestures of their discourse, the symptom of this disavowal remains to be deciphered. It could not be the figure of just one disavowal among others. It institutes what is proper to man, the relation to itself of a humanity that is above all anxious about, and jealous of, what is proper to it.

As for the other category of discourse, found among those signatories who are first and foremost poets or prophets, in the situation of poetry or prophecy, those men and women who admit to taking upon themselves the address that an animal addresses to them, before even having the time or the power to take themselves off [*s'y dérober*], to take themselves off with clothes off or in a bathrobe, I as yet know of no *statutory representative* of it, that is to say, no subject who does so as theoretical, philosophical, or juridical man, or even as citizen. I have found no such representative, but it is in that very place that I find myself, here and now, in the process of searching.

That is the track I am following, the track I am ferreting out [*la piste que je dépiste*], following the traces of this “wholly other they call ‘animal,’ for example, ‘cat.’”

Why rename that appellation? Why say “the wholly other they call ‘animal,’ for example, ‘cat?’” In order to recall a scene of name calling, beginning at the beginning, namely, in Genesis—and at least a type of new beginning, a second beginning in what is distinguished in Bereshit as the *second* narrative. For one must indeed specify that that story is a second “Heading” (“Entête” in Chouraqui’s translation).²⁰ The man who, in that rendering, calls the animals by name is not only Adam, the man of the earth, the husbandman [*glébeux*]. He is also Ish preceding Ishah, man before woman. It is the man Ish, still alone, who gives names to the animals created before him: “The husbandman cried out the name of each beast,” one translation (Chouraqui) says; another (Dhormes): “Man called all the animals by their names.”

Let me insist: it is only recorded thus in the *second* narrative. If one believes what is called the *first* narrative, God creates man in his image but he brings male and female into the world at the same time, in a single stroke. Naming will thus have been the fact of man as a couple, if it can be put that way. The original naming of the animals does not take place in the first version. It isn’t the man-woman of the first version but man *alone* and *before* woman who, in that second version, gives their names, his names, to the animals. On the other hand, it is in the so-called first version that the husbandman, created as God’s replica, and created male-female, man-woman, immediately receives the order to subject the animals to him. In order to obey he is required to mark his ascendancy, his domination over them, indeed, his power to tame them. Having created the living animals on the fifth day (the beasts, that is to say animals for domestication, birds, fish, reptiles, and wild beasts) and having blessed them:

Elohim said: “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness! Let them [note the sudden move to the plural] *have authority* [my italics] over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens, over the cattle, over all the wild beasts and reptiles that crawl upon the earth!” Elohim therefore created man in his image, in the image of Elohim he created him. Male and female he created them. Elohim blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, *have authority* [my italics again] over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens, over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Dhormes)²¹

Elohim said: “We will make Adam the husbandman—
As our replica, in our likeness.

They will *subject* [my italics] the fish of the sea, the flying creatures of the heavens,

The beasts, the whole earth, every reptile that crawls upon the earth.”

Elohim created the husbandman as his replica,

As a replica of Elohim he created him,

Male and female he created them.

Elohim blessed them. Elohim said to them:

“Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, conquer it.

Subject [my italics again] the fish of the sea, the flying creatures of the heavens,

Every living thing that crawls on the earth.” (Chouraqui)²²

That is the first narrative. God commands man-woman to command the animals, but not yet to name them. What happens next, in the second narrative? There occurs something, a single and double thing, twice at the same time, something that, it seems to me, gets little notice in most readings of this Genesis that is infinite in its second breath.

On the one hand, the naming of the animals is performed *at one and the same time*, before the creation of Ishah, the female part of man, *and*, as a result, before they perceive themselves to be naked; and to begin with they are naked without shame. (“The two of them are naked, the husbandman and his wife; they don’t blanch on account of it.”²³) After a certain serpent—one we shall speak more of—comes by, they will perceive themselves to be naked, and not without shame.

On the other hand, and this is especially important, the public crying of names remains *at one and the same time* free *and* overseen, under surveillance, under the gaze of Jehovah, who does not, for all that, intervene. He lets Adam, he lets man, man alone, Ish without Ishah, the woman, freely call out the names. He lets him indulge in the naming all by himself. But he is waiting around the corner, watching over this man alone with a mixture of curiosity and authority. God observes: Adam is observed, within sight, he names under observation. In Chouraqui’s translation: “He has them come toward the husbandman *in order to see* what he will call out to them.”²⁴ He has them come forward; he summons them, the animals that, as the first narrative was saying, he had, moreover, created—and I firmly emphasize this trait, which is fundamental to what concerns us—he summons them in order to “subject” (Chouraqui) them to man’s command, in order to place them under man’s “authority” (Dhormes). More precisely, he has created man in his likeness *so that* man will *subject, tame, dominate, train, or domesticate* the animals born before him and assert his authority over them. God destines the animals to an experience of the power of man, *in order to see* the power of man in action, in order to see the power of man at work, in order to see man take power over all the other living beings. Chouraqui: “He has them come toward

the husbandman *in order to see* what he will call out to them”; Dhormes: “He brings them to man *in order to see* what he will call them.”²⁵

“In order to see,” which I have twice emphasized, seems to overflow with meaning. It is the **same expression** in both translations. God gives Ish alone the freedom to name the animals, granted, and that represents at the same time his sovereignty and his loneliness. However, everything seems to happen as though God still wanted to oversee, keep vigil, maintain his right of inspection over the names that would shortly begin to resound and by means of which Ish, Ish all alone, Ish still without woman, was going to get the upper hand with respect to the animals. God wanted to oversee but also to abandon himself to his curiosity, even allow himself to be surprised and outflanked by the radical novelty of what was going to occur, by this irreversible, welcome or unwelcome event of naming whereby Ish would begin to see them and name them without allowing himself to be seen or named by them. God lets him, Ish, speak on his own, call out on his own, call out and nominate, call out and name, as if he were able to say “*I name,*” “*I call.*” God lets Ish call the other living things all on his own, give them their names in his own name, these animals that are older and younger than him, these living things that came into the world before him but were named after him, on his initiative, according to the second narrative. In both cases, man is in both senses of the word *after* the animal. He follows him. This “after,” which determines a sequence, a consequence, or a persecution, is not in time, nor is it temporal: it is the very genesis of time.

God thus lets Ish do the calling all alone; he accords him the right to give them names in his own name—but just in order to see. This “in order to see” marks *at the same time* the infinite right of inspection of an all-powerful God *and* the finitude of a God who doesn’t know what is going to happen to him with language. And with names. In short, God doesn’t yet know what he really wants: this is the finitude of a God who doesn’t know what he wants with respect to the animal, that is to say, with respect to the life of the living as such, a God who sees something coming without seeing it coming, a God who will say “*I am that I am*” without knowing what he is going to see when a poet enters the scene to give his name to living things. This powerful yet deprived “in order to see” that is God’s, the first stroke of time, before time, God’s exposure to surprise, to the event of what is going to occur between man and animal, this time before time has always made me dizzy. As if someone said, in the form of a promise or a threat: “You’ll see what you will see,” without knowing what was going to end up happening. It is the dizziness I feel before the abyss opened by this stupid ruse, this feigned feint, what I have

been feeling for so long [*depuis le temps*] whenever I run away from an animal that looks at me naked. I often wonder whether this vertigo before the abyss of such an “in order to see” deep in the eyes of God is not the same as that which takes hold of me when I feel so naked in front of a cat, facing it, and when, meeting its gaze, I hear the cat or God ask itself, ask *me*: Is he going to call me, is he going to address me? What name is he going to call me by, this naked man, before I give him woman, before I lend her to him in giving her to him, before I give her to him or before he gives her to himself by taking it upon himself, from under him, from at his side [*à ses côtés*]? Or even from his rib [*de sa côte*]?

Since time.

For so long now, it is as if the cat had been recalling itself and recalling that, recalling me and reminding me of this awful tale of Genesis, without breathing a word. Who was born first, before the names? Which one saw the other come to this place, so long ago? Who will have been the first occupant, and therefore the master? Who the subject? Who has remained the despot, for so long now?

37

Things would be too simple altogether, the anthropo-theomorphic reappropriation would already have begun, there would even be the risk that domestication has already come into effect, if I were to give in to my own melancholy. If, in order to hear it in myself, I were to set about overinterpreting what the cat might thus be saying to me, in its own way, what it might be suggesting or simply signifying in a language of mute traces, that is to say without words. If, in a word, I assigned to it the words it has no need of, no more than does the cat’s “voice” in Baudelaire (“To utter the longest of sentences it has no need of words”).

But in forbidding myself thus to assign, interpret or project, must I for all that give in to the other violence or *asinanité* [*bêtise*], that which would consist in suspending one’s compassion and in depriving the animal of every power of manifestation, of the desire to manifest *to me* anything at all, and even to manifest to me in some way *its* experience of *my* language, of *my* words and of *my* nudity?

From the vantage of that time when the animals were named, *before original sin*, I shall mark, for the moment, still in the guise of an epigraph, the following reservation: the questions I am posing, my having confessed to feeling disarmed before a small mute living being, and my avowed desire to escape the alternative of a projection that appropriates and an interruption that excludes, all that might lead one to guess that I am not ready to interpret or experience the gaze that a cat fixes, without a word, on my nakedness, *in the negative*, if I can put it that way, as Benjamin suggests

doing within a certain tradition, which we must speak of later. In fact that tradition assigns to nature and to the animality named by Adam a sort of “deep sadness” (*Traurigkeit*).²⁶ Such a melancholic mourning would reflect an impossible resignation, as if protesting in silence against the unacceptable fatality of that very silence: the fact of being condemned to muteness (*Stummheit*) and to the absence of language (*Sprachlosigkeit*), to stupor also, to that *Benommenheit* that Heidegger speaks of and that he defines, in a text that later I would like to read closely, as the essence of animality (*Das Wesen der Tierheit*). *Benommenheit* is a mute stupor, stupefaction, or daze. A new translation uses the word “absorption” [*accaparement*]²⁷ in order to attenuate, somewhat euphemistically, the potential violence of this qualification but also in order to render the sense of a type of encirclement (*Umring*) within which the animal, as *alogon*, finds itself, according to Heidegger, deprived of access in its very opening to the being of the entity as such, to being as such, to the “as such” of what is. It is true that, according to Benjamin, the sadness, mourning, and melancholy (*Traurigkeit*) of nature and of animality are born out of this muteness (*Stummheit*, *Sprachlosigkeit*), but they are also born out of and by means of the wound without a name: that of having *been given a name*. Finding oneself deprived of language, one loses the power to name, to name oneself, indeed to answer [*répondre*] for one’s name. (As if man didn’t also receive his name and his names!)

The sentiment of this deprivation, of this impoverishment, of this lack would thus be the great sorrow of nature (*das grosse Leid der Natur*). It is in the hope of requiting that, of redemption (*Erlösung*) from that suffering, that humans live and speak in nature—humans in general and not only poets as Benjamin makes clear. What is already more interesting is that this putative sadness doesn’t just derive from the inability to speak (*Sprachlosigkeit*) and from muteness, from a stupefied or aphasic privation of words. If this putative sadness also gives rise to a lament, if nature laments, expressing a mute but audible lament through sensuous sighing and even the rustling of plants, it is perhaps because the terms have to be inverted. Benjamin suggests as much. There must be a reversal, an *Umkehrung* in the essence of nature. According to the hypothesis of this reversing reversal, nature (and animality within it) isn’t sad because it is mute (*weil sie stumm ist*). On the contrary, it is nature’s sadness or mourning that renders it mute and aphasic, that leaves it without words. (*Die Traurigkeit der Natur macht sie verstummen*.) What, for so long now, has been making it sad and as a result has deprived the mourner of its words, what forbids words, is not a muteness and the experience of a powerlessness, an inability ever to name; it is, in the first place, the fact of *receiving one’s*

name. This is a startling intuition. Benjamin says that even when the one who names is equal to the gods, happy and blessed, being named (*bennant zu sein*) or seeing oneself given one's proper name is something like being invaded by sadness, by sadness *itself* (a sadness whose origin would therefore always be this passivity of being named, this impossibility of reappropriating one's own name), or at least by a sort of obscure foreshadowing of sadness. One should rather say *a foreshadowing of mourning* (*eine Ahnung von Trauer*). A foreshadowing of mourning because it seems to me that every case of naming involves announcing a death to come in the surviving of a ghost, the longevity of a name that survives whoever carries that name. Whoever receives a name feels mortal or dying, precisely because the name seeks to save him, to call him and thus assure his survival. Being called, hearing oneself being named, receiving a name for the first time involves something like the knowledge of being mortal and even the feeling that one is dying. To have already died of being promised to death: dying. (How could one, I ask in passing, refuse the animal access to the experience of death as such by depriving it thus of nomination?) But as I was suggesting just now, I am not (following) Benjamin when I find myself naked under the gaze of the animal, I am not ready to follow him in his wonderful meditation written right in the middle of the First World War, in 1916.

Why not? Among other reasons because his meditation lays out this whole scene of a grieving aphasia within the time frame of redemption, that is to say, after the fall and after original sin (*nach dem Sündenfall*). It would thus take place *since the time* of the fall. I situate this time of the fall at the purposive intersection of two traditions, because in the Genesis tale as much as in the myth of Prometheus (let's remember the *Protagoras* and the moment when Prometheus steals fire, that is to say, the arts and technics, in order to make up for the forgetfulness or tardiness of Epimetheus, who had perfectly equipped all breeds of animal but left "man naked [*gymnon*]," without shoes, covering, or arms), it is paradoxically on the basis of a fault or failing in man that the latter will be made a subject who is master of nature and of the animal. From within the pit of that lack, an eminent lack, a quite different lack from that he assigns to the animal, man installs or claims in a single stroke *his property* (the peculiarity [*le propre*] of a man whose property it even is not to have anything that is proper to him), and his *superiority* over what is called animal life. This latter superiority, infinite and par excellence, has as its property the fact of being at one and the same time *unconditional* and *sacrificial*.

That would be the law of an imperturbable logic, both Promethean and Adamic, both Greek and Abrahamic (Judaic, Christian, and Islamic).

Its invariance hasn't stopped being verified all the way to our modernity. Still, I have been wanting to bring myself back to my nudity before the cat, since so long ago, since a previous time, in the Genesis tale, since the time when Adam, alias Ish, called out the animals' names *before* the fall, still naked but before being ashamed of his nudity.

I am thus speaking from within that time frame [*depuis ce temps*]. My passion for the animal is awakened at that age. I admitted just now to being ashamed of being ashamed. I could therefore be surprised by my uneasiness, my shame at being ashamed, naked before the animal or animals, only by taking myself back to a time before the fall, before shame and the shame of being ashamed. Before evil [*le mal*] and before all ills [*les maux*]. Can one speak of the animal? Can one approach the animal? Can one from the vantage of the animal see oneself being looked at naked? From the vantage of the animal before evil and before all ills?

From within that time frame I am trying to speak to you, of myself in particular, in private or in public, but of myself in particular. That time would also be that which, in principle, supposing it were possible, separates autobiography from confession. Autobiography becomes confession when the discourse on the self does not dissociate truth from an avowal, thus from a fault, an evil, an ill. And first and foremost from a truth that would be due, a debt, in truth, that needs to be paid off. *Why would one owe* [*devrait-on*] truth? Why would it belong to the essence of truth to be due, and nude? And therefore confessed? Why this duty to pay off truth if hiding the truth, feigning truth, feigning also to hide, feigning to hide oneself or hide the truth, were not already the experience of evil and of ill, of a potential fault, of a culpability, of a sufferance [*passibilité*], of a debt—of deception and lying.

How and why would truth be due? And how and why caught, surprised from the first instant in a logic of debt and owing? Why would truth be what is due, that is to say, owed to veracity, to the revealing of oneself, to the truth of self as sincerity? Is there, and in particular in the history of discourse, indeed, of the becoming-literature of discourse, an ancient form of autobiography immune to confession, an account of the self free from any sense of confession? And thus from all redemptive language, within the horizon of salvation as a requiting? Has there been, since so long ago, room and sense for an autobiography before original sin and before all the religions of the book? Autobiography and memoir before Christianity, especially before the Christian institutions of confession? That has been in doubt for so long now, and a reading of the prodigious *Confessions* of European history, which have formed our culture of

subjectivity from Augustine to Rousseau, would not suffice to dispel that doubt.

Between Augustine and Rousseau, within the same indisputable filiation, within the differentiated history of the *ego cogito ergo sum*, stands Descartes. He waits for us with his animal-machines. I presume that he won't interrupt the lineage that, for so long now, has tied the autobiographical genre to the institution of confession.

Since that time, since time: that means since the time that has passed, but also since the time before time. Since time, that is to say, since a time when there was not yet time, when time hadn't elapsed, if that is possible, before the verdict, the reckoning [*échéance*], or the fall [*déchéance*].

Although I must put off until later a patient reading and interpretation of the systematic and rich text that, in 1929–30, following *Being and Time*, Heidegger devoted to the animal, I note the following in anticipation of it here, having just spoken of time before time: one of the rare times, perhaps the only time (that needs checking) that Heidegger names the animal in *Being and Time*—a text that is also in its own way a treatise that seeks to be non-Christian, concerning a certain fall of the *Dasein*—it is in order to admit to and put off until later a difficulty (my hypothesis is this: whatever remains to be dealt with later will probably remain so forever; later here signifies never). What is that difficulty? That of knowing if the animal *has time*, if it is “constituted by some kind of time.” According to Heidegger that “remains a problem” (*bleibt ein Problem*):

It remains a problem in itself [or for itself, *bleibt ein Problem für sich*: remains an original problem, separate, to be treated separately] to define ontologically the way in which the senses can be stimulated or touched in something that merely has life [*in einem Nur-Lebenden*], and how and where the Being of animals [*das Sein der Tiere*], for instance [*zum Beispiel*], is constituted by some kind of “time.”²⁸

The being of animals is only an example (*zum Beispiel*). But for Heidegger it is a trustworthy example of what he calls *Nur-Lebenden*, that which is living but nothing more, life in its pure and simple state. I think I understand what that means, this “nothing more” (*nur*), I can understand it on the surface, in terms of what it would like to mean, but at the same time I understand nothing. I'll always be wondering whether this fiction, this simulacrum, this myth, this legend, this phantasm, which is offered as a pure concept (life in its pure state—Benjamin also has confidence in what can probably be no more than a pseudo-concept), is not precisely pure philosophy become a symptom of the history that concerns us here. Isn't that history the one that man tells himself, the history of

the philosophical animal, of the animal for the man-philosopher? Is it a coincidence that the sentence is the last one preceding a section entitled “Die Zeitlichkeit des Verfallens” (the temporality of “reckoning,” “fall,” or “decay”)?

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I suggested before that for certain of us, perhaps, for those who welcome us here, for those who have gratified me by coming back once more, this château has remained for me, for so long now, a château of haunted friendship. For nearly forty years. Indeed, friendship that is haunted, shadows of faces, furtive silhouettes of certain presences, movements, footsteps, music, words that come to life in my memory, on the terraces around us, among the trees, beside the lake, and in all the rooms of this mansion, beginning with this room. I enjoy more and more the taste of this memory that is at the same time tender, joyful, and melancholic, a memory, then, that likes to give itself over to the return of ghosts, many of whom are happily still living and, in some cases, present here. Others, alas, have died since that time, but they remain for me, just as when they were alive, close and present friends: Toyosaki Koitchi, Francis Ponge, Gilles Deleuze, Sarah Kofman. From here I can see them see and hear us.

However, if I am to believe a memory so swamped with memories, for so long now, a memory that is almost hallucinated, I find myself on the threshold of probably the most *chimerical* discourse that I have ever attempted, or that has ever tempted me in this château.

We thus have the scene of a chimera, the temptation of or attempt at a chimera in a haunted castle. Is it an animal, this chimera, an animal that can be defined as one, and only one? Is it more than or other than an animal? Or, as one often says of the chimera, more than one animal in one?

The animal, what a word!

The animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to the living other.

At the point at which we find ourselves, even before I get involved, or try to drag you after me²⁹ or in pursuit of me upon an itinerary that some of you will no doubt find tortuous, labyrinthine, even aberrant, leading us astray from lure to lure, I'll attempt the operation of disarmament that consists in *posing* what one could call some hypotheses in view of theses; posing them simply, naked, frontally, as directly as possible, *pose* them as I just said, by no means posing in the way one indulgently poses by looking at oneself in front of a spectator, a portraitist, or a camera, but “pose” in the sense of situating a series of “positions.”

First hypothesis: for about two centuries, intensely and by means of an alarming rate of acceleration, for we no longer even have a clock or chronological measure of it, we, we who call ourselves men or humans, we who recognize ourselves in that name, have been involved in an unprecedented transformation. This mutation affects the experience of what we continue to call imperturbably, as if there were nothing to it, the animal and/or animals. I intend to stake a lot, or play a lot on the flexible slash of this *and/or*. This new situation can be determined only on the basis of what is most ancient. We shall have to move continuously along this coming and going between the oldest and what is coming, in the exchange among the new, the “again [*de nouveau*],” and the “anew [*à nouveau*]” of repetition. Far from appearing, simply, within what we continue to call the world, history, life, etc., this unheard-of relation to the animal or to animals is so new that it should oblige us to worry all those concepts, more than just problematize them. That is why I would hesitate to say that we are *living through* that (if one can still confidently call *life* the experience whose limits come to tremble at the bordercrossings between *bios* and *zoē*, the biological, zoological, and anthropological, as between life and death, life and technology, life and history, etc.). I would therefore hesitate just as much to say that we are living through a historical turning point. The figure of the turning point implies a rupture or an instantaneous mutation whose model or figure remains genetic, biological, or zoological and which therefore remains, precisely, to be questioned. As for history, historicity, even historicality, those motifs belong precisely—as we shall see in detail—to *this* auto-definition, *this* auto-apprehension, *this* auto-situation of man or of the human *Dasein* as regards what is living and animal life; they belong to this auto-biography of man, which I wish to call into question today.

Since all these words, in particular *history*, belong in a constitutive manner to the language, interests, and lures of this autobiography, we should not be overhasty in giving them credence or in confirming their pseudo-evidence. I shall therefore not be speaking of a historical turning point in order to name a transformation in progress, an alteration that is at the same time more serious and less recognizable than a historical turning point in the relation to the animal, in the being-with shared by the human and by what the human calls the animal: the *being* of what calls itself man or the *Dasein with* what he himself calls, or what we ourselves are calling, what we are still daring, provisionally, to name in general but in the singular, *the animal*. However one names or interprets this alteration, no one could deny that it has been accelerating, intensifying, no

longer knowing where it is going, for about two centuries, at an incalculable rate and level.

Given this indetermination, the fact that it is left hanging, why should I say, as I have more than once, “for about two centuries,” as though such a point of reference were rigorously possible within a process that is no doubt as old as man, what he calls his world, his knowledge, his history, and his technology? Well, in order to recall, for convenience to begin with and without laying claim here to being at all exact, certain preexisting indices that allow us to understand and agree in saying “us” today. Limiting ourselves to the most imposing of these indices, we can refer to those that go well beyond the animal sacrifices of the Bible or of ancient Greece, well beyond the hecatombs (sacrifices of one hundred cattle, with all the metaphors that that expression has since been charged with), beyond the hunting, fishing, domestication, training, or traditional exploitation of animal energy (transport, plowing, draught animals, the horse, ox, reindeer, etc., and then the guard dog, small-scale butchering, and then experiments on animals, etc.). It is all too evident that in the course of the last two centuries these traditional forms of treatment of the animal have been turned upside down by the joint developments of zoological, ethological, biological, and genetic forms of *knowledge*, which remain inseparable from *techniques* of intervention *into* their object, from the transformation of the actual object, and from the milieu and world of their object, namely, the living animal. This has occurred by means of farming and regimentalization at a demographic level unknown in the past, by means of genetic experimentation, the industrialization of what can be called the production for consumption of animal meat, artificial insemination on a massive scale, more and more audacious manipulations of the genome, the reduction of the animal not only to production and overactive reproduction (hormones, genetic crossbreeding, cloning, etc.) of meat for consumption, but also of all sorts of other end products, and all of that in the service of a certain being and the putative human well-being of man.

All that is all too well known; we have no need to take it further. However one interprets it, whatever practical, technical, scientific, juridical, ethical, or political consequence one draws from it, no one can today deny this event—that is, the *unprecedented* proportions of this subjection of the animal. Such a subjection, whose history we are attempting to interpret, can be called violence in the most morally neutral sense of the term and even includes the interventionist violence that is practiced, as in some very minor and in no way dominant cases, let us never forget, in the service of or for the protection of the animal, but most often the human animal. Neither can one seriously deny the disavowal that this involves. No one

can deny seriously any more, or for very long, that men do all they can in order to dissimulate this cruelty or to hide it from themselves; in order to organize on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding of this violence, which some would compare to the worst cases of genocide (there are also animal genocides: the number of species endangered because of man takes one's breath away). One should neither abuse the figure of genocide nor too quickly consider it explained away. It gets more complicated: the annihilation of certain species is indeed in process, but it is occurring through the organization and exploitation of an artificial, infernal, virtually interminable survival, in conditions that previous generations would have judged monstrous, outside of every presumed norm of a life proper to animals that are thus exterminated by means of their continued existence or even their overpopulation. As if, for example, instead of throwing a people into ovens and gas chambers (let's say Nazi) doctors and geneticists had decided to organize the overproduction and overgeneration of Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals by means of artificial insemination, so that, being continually more numerous and better fed, they could be destined in always increasing numbers for the same hell, that of the imposition of genetic experimentation, or extermination by gas or by fire. In the same abattoirs. I don't wish to abuse the ease with which one can overload with pathos the self-evidences I am drawing attention to here. Everybody knows what terrifying and intolerable pictures a realist painting could give to the industrial, mechanical, chemical, hormonal, and genetic violence to which man has been submitting animal life for the past two centuries. Everybody knows what the production, breeding, transport, and slaughter of these animals has become. Instead of thrusting these images in your faces or awakening them in your memory, something that would be both too easy and endless, let me simply say a word about this "pathos." If these images are "pathetic," if they evoke sympathy, it is also because they "pathetically" open the immense question of pathos and the pathological, precisely, that is, of suffering, pity, and compassion; and the place that has to be accorded to the interpretation of this compassion, to the sharing of this suffering among the living, to the law, ethics, and politics that must be brought to bear upon this experience of compassion. What has been happening for two centuries now involves a new experience of this compassion. In response to what is, for the moment, the irresistible but unacknowledged unleashing and the organized disavowal of this torture, voices are raised—minority, weak, marginal voices, little assured of their discourse, of their right to discourse, and of the enactment of their discourse within the law, as a declaration of rights—in order to protest, in order to appeal (we'll return to this) to what is still presented

in such a problematic way as *animal rights*, in order to awaken us to our responsibilities and our obligations vis-à-vis the living in general, and precisely to this fundamental compassion that, were we to take it seriously, would have to change even the very cornerstone (and it is next to that cornerstone that I wish to do my business today) of the philosophical problematic of the animal.

It is in thinking of the source and ends of this compassion that about two centuries ago someone like Bentham, as is well known, proposed changing the very form of the question regarding the animal that dominated discourse within the tradition, in the language both of its most refined philosophical argumentation and of everyday acceptance and common sense. Bentham said something like this: the question is not to know whether the animal can think, reason, or speak, etc., something we still pretend to be asking ourselves (from Aristotle to Descartes, from Descartes, especially, to Heidegger, Levinas, and Lacan, and this question determines so many others concerning *power* or *capability* [pouvoirs] and *attributes* [avoirs]: being able, having the power or capability to give, to die, to bury one's dead, to dress, to work, to invent a technique, etc., a power that consists in having such and such a faculty, thus such and such a capability, as an essential attribute). Thus the question will not be to know whether animals are of the type *zōon logon echon*, whether they can speak or reason thanks to that *capacity* or that *attribute* of the *logos*, the *can-have* [pouvoir-avoir] of the *logos*, the aptitude for the *logos* (and logocentrism is first of all a thesis regarding the animal, the animal deprived of the *logos*, deprived of the *can-have-the-logos*: this is the thesis, position, or presupposition maintained from Aristotle to Heidegger, from Descartes to Kant, Levinas, and Lacan). The *first* and *decisive* question would rather be to know whether animals *can suffer*.

"Can they suffer?" asks Bentham, simply yet so profoundly.

Once its protocol is established, the form of this question changes everything. It no longer simply concerns the *logos*, the disposition and whole configuration of the *logos*, having it or not, nor does it concern, more radically, a *dynamis* or *hexis*, this having or manner of being, this *habitus* that one calls a faculty or "capability," this can-have or the power one possesses (as in the power to reason, to speak, and everything that that implies). The question is disturbed by a certain *passivity*. It bears witness, manifesting already, as question, the response that testifies to a sufferance, a passion, a not-being-able. The word *can* [pouvoir] changes sense and sign here once one asks, "Can they suffer?" Henceforth it wavers. What counts at the origin of such a question is not only the idea of what transitivity or activity (being able to speak, to reason, etc.) refer to; what counts

is rather what impels it toward this self-contradiction, something we will later relate back to auto-biography. "Can they suffer?" amounts to asking "Can they *not be able*?" And what of this inability [*impouvoir*]? What of the vulnerability felt on the basis of this inability? What is this nonpower at the heart of power? What is its quality or modality? How should one take it into account? What right should be accorded it? To what extent does it concern us? Being able to suffer is no longer a power; it is a possibility without power, a possibility of the impossible. Mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion, to the possibility of sharing the possibility of this nonpower, the possibility of this impossibility, the anguish of this vulnerability, and the vulnerability of this anguish.

With this question—"Can they suffer?"—we are not undermining the rock of indubitable certainty, the foundation of every assurance that one could, for example, look for in the *cogito*, in *Je pense donc je suis*. But from another perspective altogether we are putting our trust in an instance that is just as radical, although essentially different: namely, what is undeniable. No one can deny the suffering, fear, or panic, the terror or fright that can seize certain animals and that we humans can witness. (Descartes himself, as we shall see, was not able to claim that animals were insensitive to suffering.) Some will still try—this is something else we will come to—to contest the right to call that *suffering* or *anguish*, words or concepts that would still have to be reserved for man and for the *Dasein* in the freedom of its being-toward-death. We will have reason to problematize that discourse later. But for the moment let us note the following: the response to the question "Can they suffer?" leaves no room for doubt. In fact, it has never left any room for doubt; that is why the experience that we have of it is not even indubitable; it precedes the indubitable, it is older than it. No doubt either, then, of there being within us the possibility of giving vent to a surge of compassion, even if it is then misunderstood, repressed, or denied, held at bay. Before the *undeniability* of this response (yes, they suffer, like us who suffer for them and with them), before this response that precedes all other questions, both ground and cornerstone of the problematic shift. Perhaps it loses all security, but in any case it no longer rests on the old, supposedly natural (ground) or historic and *artifactual* (cornerstone) foundation. The two centuries I have been referring to somewhat casually in order to situate the present in terms of this tradition have been those of an unequal struggle, a war (whose inequality could one day be reversed) being waged between, on the one hand, those who

violate not only animal life but even and also this sentiment of compassion, and, on the other hand, those who appeal for an irrefutable testimony to this pity.

War is waged over the matter of pity. This war is probably ageless but, and here is my hypothesis, it is passing through a critical phase. We are passing through that phase, and it passes through us. To think the war we find ourselves waging is not only a duty, a responsibility, an obligation, it is also a necessity, a constraint that, like it or not, directly or indirectly, no one can escape. Henceforth more than ever. And I say "to think" this war, because I believe it concerns what we call "thinking." The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there.



Here now, in view of another thesis, is the *second hypothesis* that I think must be deduced without hesitation. It concerns or puts into effect another logic of the limit. I would thus be tempted to inscribe the subject of this thesis in the series of three conferences that, beginning with *The Ends of Man* and followed by *The Crossing of Borders*, have been devoted to a properly *transgressal* if not transgressive experience of *limitrophy*. Let's allow that word to have a both general and strict sense: what abuts onto limits but also what feeds, is fed, is cared for, raised, and trained, what is cultivated on the edges of a limit. In the semantics of *trephō*, *trophē*, or *trophos*, we should be able to find everything we need to speak about what we should be speaking about in the course of these ten days devoted to the autobiographical animal: feeding, food, nursing, breeding, offspring, care and keeping of animals, training, upbringing, culture, living and allowing to live by giving to live, be fed, and grown, autobiographically. *Limitrophy* is therefore my subject. Not just because it will concern what sprouts or grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what *feeds the limit*, generates it, raises it, and complicates it. Everything I'll say will consist, certainly not in effacing the limit, but in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply. Moreover, the supposed first or literal sense of *trephō* is just that: to transform by thickening, for example, in curdling milk. So it will in no way mean questioning, even in the slightest, the limit that we have had a stomachful of, the limit between Man with a capital *M* and Animal with a capital *A*. It will not be a matter of attacking frontally or antithetically the thesis of philosophical or common sense on which has been constructed the relation to the self, the presentation of self of human life, the autobiography of the human species, the whole history of the self

that man recounts to himself, that is to say, the thesis of a limit as rupture or abyss between those who say “we men,” “I, a human,” and what this man among men who say “we,” what he *calls* the animal or animals. I shan’t for a single moment venture to contest that thesis, nor the rupture or abyss between this “I-we” and what we *call* animals. To suppose that I, or anyone else for that matter, could ignore that rupture, indeed that abyss, would mean first of all blinding oneself to so much contrary evidence; and, as far as my own modest case is concerned, it would mean forgetting all the signs that I have managed to give, tirelessly, of my attention to difference, to differences, to heterogeneities and abyssal ruptures as against the homogeneous and the continuous. I have thus never believed in some homogeneous continuity between what calls *itself* man and what *he* calls the animal. I am not about to begin to do so now. That would be worse than sleepwalking, it would simply be too asinine [*bête*]. To suppose such a stupid memory lapse or to take to task such a naive misapprehension of this abyssal rupture would mean, more seriously still, venturing to say almost anything at all for the cause, for whatever cause or interest that no longer had anything to do with what we claimed to want to talk about. When that cause or interest seeks to profit from what it simplistically suspects to be a biologicistic continuism, whose sinister connotations we are well aware of, or more generally to profit from what is suspected as a geneticism that one might wish to associate with this scatterbrained accusation of continuism, at that point the undertaking becomes in any case so aberrant that it neither calls for nor, it seems to me, deserves any direct discussion on my part. Everything I have suggested so far and every argument I shall put forward today stands overwhelmingly in opposition to the blunt instrument that such an allegation represents.

There is no interest to be found in debating something like a discontinuity, rupture, or even abyss between those who call themselves men and what so-called men, those who name themselves men, call the animal. Everybody agrees on this; discussion is closed in advance; one would have to be more asinine than any beast [*plus bête que les bêtes*] to think otherwise. Even animals know that (ask Abraham’s ass or ram or the living beasts that Abel offered to God: they know what is about to happen to them when men say “Here I am” to God, then consent to sacrifice themselves, to sacrifice their sacrifice, or to forgive themselves). The discussion is worth undertaking once it is a matter of determining the number, form, sense, or structure, the foliated consistency, of this abyssal limit, these edges, this plural and repeatedly folded frontier. The discussion becomes interesting once, instead of asking whether or not there is a limit that produces a discontinuity, one attempts to think what a limit becomes

once it is abyssal, once the frontier no longer forms a single indivisible line but more than one internally divided line; once, as a result, it can no longer be traced, objectified, or counted as single and indivisible. What are the edges of a limit that *grows and multiplies by feeding on an abyss*? Here is my thesis in three versions:

1. This abyssal rupture doesn’t describe two edges, a unilinear and indivisible line having two edges, Man and the Animal in general.
2. The multiple and heterogeneous border of this abyssal rupture has a history. Both macroscopic and microscopic and far from being closed, that history is now passing through the most unusual phase in which we now find ourselves, and for which we have no scale. Indeed, one can speak here of history, of a historic moment or phase, only from one of the supposed edges of the said rupture, the edge of an anthropo-centric subjectivity that is recounted or allows a history to be recounted about it, autobiographically, the history of its life, and that it therefore calls *History*.
3. Beyond the edge of the *so-called* human, beyond it but by no means on a single opposing side, rather than “The Animal” or “Animal Life” there is already a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living, or more precisely (since to say “the living” is already to say too much or not enough), a multiplicity of organizations of relations between living and dead, relations of organization or lack of organization among realms that are more and more difficult to dissociate by means of the figures of the organic and inorganic, of life and/or death. These relations are at once intertwined and abyssal, and they can never be totally objectified. They do not leave room for any simple exteriority of one term with respect to another. It follows that one will never have the right to take animals to be the species of a kind that would be named The Animal, or animal in general. Whenever “one” says “The Animal,” each time a philosopher, or anyone else, says “The Animal” in the singular and without further ado, claiming thus to designate every living thing that is held not to be human (man as *rational animal*, man as political animal, speaking animal, *zōon logon echon*, man who says “I” and takes himself to be the subject of a statement that he proffers on the subject of the said animal, etc.), well, each time the subject of that statement, this “one,” this “I,” does that he utters an *asinanity* [*bêtise*]. He avows without avowing it, he declares, just as a disease is declared by means of a symptom, he offers up for diagnosis the statement “I am uttering an *asinanity*.” And this “I am uttering an *asinanity*” should confirm not only the animality that he is disavowing but his complicit, continued, and organized involvement in a veritable war of the species.

Such are my hypotheses in view of theses on the animal, on animals, on the words *animal* [animal] or *animals* [animaux].

Yes, animal, what a word!

Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. These humans are found giving it to themselves, this word, but as if they had received it as an inheritance. They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beings within a single concept: "The Animal," they say. And they have given it to themselves, this word, at the same time according themselves, reserving for them, for humans, the right to the word, the naming noun [*nom*], the verb, the attribute, to a language of words, in short to the very thing that the others in question would be deprived of, those that are corralled within the grand territory of the beasts: The Animal. All the philosophers we will investigate (from Aristotle to Lacan, and including Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, and Levinas), all of them say the same thing: the animal is deprived of language. Or, more precisely, of response, of a reponse that could be precisely and rigorously distinguished from a reaction; of the right and power to "respond," and hence of so many other things that would be proper to man.

Men would be first and foremost those living creatures who have given themselves the word that enables them to speak of the animal with a single voice and to designate it as the single being that remains without a response, without a word with which to respond.

That wrong was committed long ago and with long-term consequences. It derives from this word, or rather it comes together in this word *animal*, which men have given themselves as at the origin of humanity, and which they have given themselves in order to be identified, in order to be recognized, with a view to being what they say they are, namely, men, capable of replying and responding in the name of men.

I would like to try to speak of a certain wrong or evil that derives from this word, to begin with, by stammering some chimerical aphorisms.

The animal that I am (following), does it speak?

That is an intact question, virginal, new, still to come, a completely naked question.

For language is like the rest—it is not enough to speak of it.

From the moment of this first question, one should be able to sniff the trace of the fact that this animal seems to speak French here, and is no less asinine for it. "The animal that I am (following), does it speak?" This address could be a feint, like the switch from "I" to "it." The question could be the ruse or stratagem of what English calls a rhetorical question, one whose response is already taken for granted. The question will shortly be very much that of the response, and no doubt I shall try to imply that

one cannot treat the supposed animality of the animal without treating the question of the response, and of what *responding* means. And what *being erased*⁸⁰ means. As we shall see, even those who, from Descartes to Lacan, have conceded to the animal some aptitude for signs and for communication have always denied it the power to *respond*—to *pretend*, to *lie*, to *cover its tracks* or *erase its own traces*.

But whether it is fictive or not, when I ask, "The animal that I am, does it speak?" the question seems at that moment to be signed, to be sealed by someone.

What does it seal? What claim does it make? Pretense or not, what does it seem to translate?

What this animal is, what it will have been, what it would, would like to, or could be is perhaps what I am (following).

But if I say that *I am (following) it* in French, in this and in no other language, that amounts less to claiming some national idiom than to recalling an irreducible ambiguity about which we shall have more to say: an animal's signature might yet be able to erase or cover its traces. Or allow it to be erased, rather, be unable to prevent its being erased. And this possibility, that of tracing, effacing, or scrambling its signature, allowing it to be lost, would then have considerable consequences. Having or not having traces at one's disposal so as to be able to dissimulate [*brouiller*] or erase them, in such a manner as, it is said, some (man, for example) can and some (the animal, for example, according to Lacan) cannot do, does not perhaps constitute a reliable alternative defining an indivisible limit. We will have reason to go back over these steps and tracks. The fact that a trace can always be erased, and forever, in no way means—and this is a critical difference—that someone, man or animal, I am emphasizing here, *can of his own accord* erase his traces.

It is a question of words, therefore. For I am not sure that what I am going to set about saying to you amounts to anything more ambitious than an exploration of language in the course of a sort of chimerical experimental exercise, or the testing of a testimony. Just to see. We can act as though I were simply trying to analyze a number of discursive modalities or usages—in order to put them to the test and to see, to keep an eye out for, what will come of it—that *they* (I insist on this "they"), what *humans* do with certain words, but also, and for some time yet, to track, to sniff, to trail, and to follow some of the reasons they adduce for the so confident usage they make, and which for the moment we are making together, of words such as, therefore, *animal* and *I*.

A critical uneasiness will persist, in fact, a bone of contention will be incessantly repeated throughout everything that I wish to develop. It

would be aimed in the first place, once again, at the usage, in the singular, of a notion as general as “The Animal,” as if all nonhuman living things could be grouped within the common sense of this “commonplace,” the Animal, whatever the abyssal differences and structural limits that separate, in the very essence of their being, all “animals,” a name that we would therefore be advised, to begin with, to keep within quotation marks. Confined within this catch-all concept, within this vast encampment of the animal, in this general singular, within the strict enclosure of this definite article (“the Animal” and not “animals”), as in a virgin forest, a zoo, a hunting or fishing ground, a paddock or an abattoir, a space of domestication, are *all the living things* that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his brothers. And that is so in spite of the infinite space that separates the lizard from the dog, the protozoon from the dolphin, the shark from the lamb, the parrot from the chimpanzee, the camel from the eagle, the squirrel from the tiger, the elephant from the cat, the ant from the silkworm, or the hedgehog from the echidna. I interrupt my nomenclature and call Noah to help insure that no one gets left on the ark.

Since I have come to the point of sketching out a taxonomy, excuse me the immodesty of a further confession. It won't be *otobiographical*, as I tried on a previous occasion with respect to a Nietzschean ear, although he, like Kafka, is more attuned than anyone else [*s'y entend comme pas un*] when it comes to animals. Instead it will be *zootobiographical*. This zoo-auto-bio-biblio-graphy will be brief. I allow myself or constrain myself to this indulgence precisely for mnemonic effect, in the name of the name of our meeting, The Autobiographical Animal. I shall indulge in it before dealing in a different mode with what ties the history of the “I am,” the autobiographical and autodeictic relation to the self as “I,” to the history of “The Animal,” of the human concept of the animal. Since today I would like to run ahead of myself and sketch out other steps in moving forward, that is to say, in stepping out without too much retrospection and without looking twice, I won't go back over arguments of a theoretical or philosophical kind, or in what we can call a deconstructive style, arguments that for a very long time, since I began writing, in fact, I believe I have dedicated to the question of the living and of the living animal. For me that will always have been the most important and decisive question. I have addressed it a thousand times, either directly or obliquely, by means of readings of *all* the philosophers I have taken an interest in, beginning with Husserl and the concepts of *rational animal*, of life or transcendental instinct that are found at the heart of phenomenology (but, paradoxically,

when it comes to the animal, Husserl, like Hegel, is not the most “Cartesian” of the philosophers I shall later speak of). Still, short of outlining a philosophical autobiography, short of retracing my steps along the paths of philosophy, I could have, or perhaps should have undertaken an anamnestic interpretation of all *my* animals. They certainly do not form a family, but they are the critters [*bêtes*] that I have been (following) from the start, for decades and from one ten-day conference to another. I won't do that, out of modesty or discretion, and because there are too many of them; it would be interminable and seen as indecorous in this august setting [*salon*]. But I do think I need to open other paths, two, perhaps, for whomever might wish, retrospectively, to follow such an exploration. I shall do so briefly, limiting myself strictly to the theme of our conference.

On the one hand, my animal figures multiply, gain in insistence and visibility, become active, swarm, mobilize and get motivated, move and become moved all the more as my texts become more explicitly autobiographical, are more often uttered in the first person.

I just said “animal figures.” These animals are without doubt something other than figures or characters in a fable. As I see it, one of the most visible metamorphoses of the figural, and precisely of the animal figure, would perhaps be found, in my case, in “White Mythology.” Indeed, that essay follows the movement of tropes and of rhetoric, the explanation of concept by means of metaphor, by prowling around animal language, between an Aristotle who withholds from the animal language and word and *mimesis*, and a Nietzsche who, if it can be said, “reanimalizes” the genealogy of the concept. The one who parodied *Ecce Homo* tries to teach us to laugh again by plotting, as it were, to let loose all his animals within philosophy. To laugh and to cry, for, as you know, he was mad enough to cry in conjunction with [*auprès de*] an animal, under the gaze of, or cheek by jowl with a horse. Sometimes I think I see him call that horse as a witness, and primarily in order to call it as a witness to his compassion, I think I see him take its head in his hands.



Animals are my concern. Whether in the form of a figure or not.³¹ They multiply, lunging more and more wildly in my face in proportion as my texts seem to become autobiographical, or so one would have me believe.

It is obvious. Even a little too obvious, beginning at the end, the end of “A Silkworm of One's Own,” published this year. Already, in the iconography of “Socrates and Plato” at the Bodleian Library, the animals emerge on page after page, says the signatory of one of the postcards from July 1979, “like *squirrels*,” “squirrels” “in a forest.” As for the *monkey* of

“Heidegger’s Hand,” he takes, he grasps, but he will not give, or greet, and especially not think according to Master Heidegger. The *hedgehog* of “What is Poetry?” a letter written in the first person, bears in its quills, among other things, the heritage of a piece of my name. Which is signed “Fourmis” [“Ants”] in *Lectures de la différence sexuelle* (*Readings in Sexual Difference*).³²

On the other hand, I note in passing that almost all these animals are welcomed, in a more and more deliberate manner, on the threshold of sexual difference. More precisely, of sexual differences, that is to say, what for the most part is kept under wraps in almost all of the grand philosophical-type treatises on the animality of the animal. This opening, on the threshold of sexual differences, was the very track left by the hedgehog and the (agrammatically) masculine ant, but more than that, in the most recent text, where it is precisely a matter of nakedness, with and without a veil, the thinking of what is naked, as it is said, like a worm,³³ “A Silkworm of One’s Own.” From beginning to end that threefold journal talks of the ambiguity of the sexual experience at its birth. It deals with veils of modesty and truth, while recalling one of the zootobiographical origins of my bestiary. After noting that “it was impossible to discern a sexual organ,” the child recalls:

There was indeed something like a brown mouth but you could not recognize in it the orifice you had to imagine to be at the origin of their silk, this milk become thread, this filament prolonging their body and remaining attached to it for a certain length of time: the extruded saliva of a very fine sperm, shiny, gleaming, the miracle of a feminine ejaculation, which would catch the light and which I drank in with my eyes. . . . The self-displacement of this little fantasy of a penis, was it erection or detumescence? I would observe the invisible progress of the weaving, a little as though I was about to stumble on the secret of a marvel, the secret of this secret over there, at the infinite distance of the animal, of this little innocent member, so foreign yet so close in its incalculable distance.

Later, the child continues: “the spinning of its filiation, sons or daughters—beyond any sexual difference or rather any duality of the sexes, and even beyond any coupling. In the beginning, there was the worm that was and was not a sex, the child could see it clearly, a sex perhaps but then which one? His bestiary was starting up.”³⁴

There is a rhythmic difference between erection and detumescence. It is no doubt at the heart of what concerns us here, namely, a sentiment of

shame related to standing upright—hence with respect to erection in general and not only phallic surrection—and to the face-to-face. Let us leave that remark—notably, the role played by sexual difference in the matter of shame—to be followed up on or discussed later: Why would a man be at the same time *more and less* modest than a woman? What must shame be in terms of this “*at the same time*” of the “*more or less*?”

In calling up still more of my recent animal texts, or those of yesteryear, I take my cue from the title of our program. Indeed, that title obliges us to cross the animal with autobiography. I therefore admit to my old obsession with a personal and somewhat paradisaical bestiary. It came to the fore very early on: the crazy project of constituting everything thought or written within a zoosphere, the dream of an absolute hospitality and an infinite appropriation. How to welcome or liberate so many animal-words [*animots*³⁵] *chez moi*? In me, for me, like me? It would have amounted at the same time to something more and less than a bestiary. Above all, it was necessary to avoid fables. We know the history of fabulization and how it remains an anthropomorphic taming, a moralizing subjection, a domestication. Always a discourse *of* man, on man, indeed on the animality of man, but for and in man.

Rather than developing that fabulous bestiary, I gave myself a horde of animals, within the forest of my own signs and the memoirs of my memory. I was no doubt always thinking about such a company, well before the visitation of the innumerable critters that now overpopulate my texts. Well before the (masculine) ant, the hedgehog, or the silkworm of yesterday; well before the spider, bee, or serpents of “Freud and the Scene of Writing” (*Writing and Difference*) or of “White Mythology” (*Margins*); well before the wolves of the Wolfman in “Fors” (foreword to Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word*); well before the horse of *Spurs*, and especially before Kant’s horse, about which it is said, in “Parergon” (*The Truth in Painting*), concerning his theory of free and dependent beauty, that, unlike birds or crustaceans, it is “bothersome” (the theory is straitjacketed by this horse, whether one takes it to be wild or broken in, exploited, tamed, “finalized” by man, by the subject of aesthetic and teleological judgements; relayed through the jennet [*genet*], the Spanish horse that runs through the middle of *Glas*; the horse from “Parergon” is, moreover, compared to the steer, the sheep, the pig, and the ass; there was also a quite different ass, the ass of multiple references to the *Ja Ja* of affirmation following the traces of Zarathustra); well before the mole from I forget where, *Specters of Marx*, I think; well before Florian’s hare and Kant’s black swan in *Politics of Friendship*, but also before

those I secretly call “my friends the birds” of Laguna Beach in “Circumfession,” where I also bring back on stage certain white hens sacrificed in the *Pardès* on the Day of Atonement of my Algerian childhood; and still yet before the fish of “+R” in *The Truth in Painting*, which plays upon “I” by means of the *Ich* of *Ichthus*, of Ish and Ishah, crossed with *Khi* by means of a chiasmus, and with a certain *Chi-mère* whose name decomposes in *Glas*, where a certain eagle soars over the two columns; well before all the dead-alive viruses, undecidably between life and death, between animal and vegetal, that come back from everywhere to haunt and obsess my writing; well before the reminder of all of Nietzsche’s animals in *Spurs* but also in “Otobiographies,” including a certain “hypocritical dog” (the Church) and the ears of a “phonograph dog”; well before Ponge’s zooliterature in *Signsponge* (the swallow, the shrimp, the oyster); well before the sponge itself, that marine zoophyte that is wrongly held to be something vegetal, and about which I spoke in this very place, but which had also passed through my work earlier, again in “White Mythology,” in relation to what Bachelard identified as the “metaphysics of the sponge.” But since I wish ultimately to return at length to the treatment of the animal in Heidegger, permit me to create a special place in this short taxonomy, in the form of a reminder [*pense-bête*], for a note that appears in brackets. It is from *Of Spirit*. That short book deals abundantly and directly with the Heideggerian concept of the animal as “poor in world” (*weltarm*), an analysis I would like to pursue further tomorrow, looking closely at the seminar of 1929–30. The note in brackets in my text does not appear to relate to the development of the problematic of the animal. It brings to the fore the “gnawing, ruminant, and silent voracity of . . . an animal-machine and its implacable logic.” But there is only the resemblance to an animal-machine, Cartesian or otherwise. It is an animal of reading and rewriting. It will be at work in all the tracks we are heading down here, announcing them and ferreting them out in advance:

[Pause for a moment: to dream of what the Heideggerian corpus would look like (*pour rêver à la figure* [also, “in the face of”—Trans.] *du corpus heideggerien*) the day when, with all the application and consistency required, the operations prescribed by him at one moment or another would indeed have been carried out: “avoid” the word “spirit,” at the very least place it in quotation marks, then cross through all the names referring to the world whenever one is speaking of something which, like the animal, has no *Dasein*, and therefore no or only a little world, then place the word “Being” everywhere under a cross, and finally cross through without a cross

all the question marks when it’s a question of language, i.e., indirectly, of everything, etc. One can imagine the surface of the text given over to the gnawing, ruminant, and silent voracity of such an animal-machine and its implacable “logic.” This would not only be simply “without spirit,” but a figure of evil. The perverse reading of Heidegger. End of pause.]³⁶

This animal-machine has a family resemblance to the virus that obsesses, not to say invades everything I write. Neither animal nor nonanimal, neither organic nor inorganic, neither living nor dead, this potential invader is *like* a computer virus. It is lodged in a processor of writing, reading, and interpretation. But, if I may note this in generous anticipation of what is to follow, it would be an animal that is capable of deleting (thus of erasing a trace, something Lacan thinks the animal is incapable of). This quasi-animal would no longer have to relate itself to being *as such* (something Heidegger thinks the animal is incapable of), since it would take into account the need to strike out “being.” But as a result, in striking out “being” and taking itself beyond or on this side of the question (and hence of the response) is it something completely other than a species of animal? Yet another question to follow up.

We are following, we follow ourselves. I shall not impose upon you a complete exposition of this theory of *animots* that I am (following) or that follow me everywhere and the memory of which seems to me inexhaustible. Far from resembling Noah’s ark, it would become more like a circus, with an animal trainer having his sad subjects, bent low, file past. The multiple *animot* would still suffer from always having its master on its back. It would have it up to the neck [*en aurait plein le dos*] with being thus domesticated, broken in, trained, docile, disciplined, tamed. Instead of recalling the menagerie to which some who badmouth me might compare my autobiobiography, I shall simply recall the idea, or rather the troubling stakes, of a philosophical bestiary, of a bestiary at the origin of philosophy. It was not by chance that it first imposed itself in the region of an undecidable *pharmakon*. Concerning the Socratic irony that “precipitates out one *pharmakon* by bringing it in contact with another *pharmakon*,” that is to say, “reverses the *pharmakon*’s powers and turns its surface over,” I tried (in 1968, thirty years ago, therefore) to imagine what the program of a Socratic bestiary on the eve of philosophy might be, and more precisely (I note this because this afternoon we shall speak more of it in the context of Descartes), how that would appear in a place where the demonic, the cunning, indeed, the evil genius has some affinity with the animal: a malign and hence perverse beast, at one and the same time

innocent, crafty, and evil. Keeping to the program here, let me refer to the note that made explicit, right in the middle, in the very center, in the binding between the two parts of "Plato's Pharmacy," this alternating bordercrossing:

Alternately and/or all at once, the Socratic *pharmakon* petrifies and vivifies, anesthetizes and sensitizes, appeases and anguishes. Socrates is a numbing stingray but also an animal that needles [this is a reference to well-known texts]: we recall the bee in the *Phaedo* (91c); later we will open the *Apology* at the point where Socrates compares himself precisely to a gadfly. This whole Socratic configuration thus composes a bestiary. [Of course, since this is a matter of animal figures in Socrates' presentation of self, the question is indeed that of Socrates as "autobiographical animal."] Is it surprising that the demonic inscribes itself in a bestiary? It is on the basis of this zoopharmaceutical ambivalence and of that other Socratic *analogy* that the contours of the *anthropos* are determined.³⁷

At the risk of being mistaken and of having one day to make honorable amends (which I would willingly accept to do), I'll venture to say that never, on the part of any great philosopher from Plato to Heidegger, or anyone at all who takes on, *as a philosophical question in and of itself*, the question called that of the animal and of the limit between the animal and the human, have I noticed a protestation *based on principle*, and especially not a protestation that amounts to anything, against the general singular that is *the animal*. Nor against the general singular of an animal whose sexuality is as a matter of principle left undifferentiated—or neutralized, not to say castrated. Such an omission is not without connection to many others that form, as we shall see, either its premise or its consequence. No one has ever called for changing philosophically this philosophical or metaphysical datum. I indeed said "philosophical" (or "metaphysical") datum, for the gesture seems to me to constitute philosophy as such, the philosopheme itself. Not that all philosophers agree on the definition of *the* limit presumed to separate man in general from the animal in general (although this is an area that is conducive to consensus and is no doubt where we find the dominant form of consensus). Despite that, through and beyond all their disagreements, philosophers have always judged and *all* philosophers have judged that limit to be single and indivisible, considering that on the other side of that limit there is an immense group, a single and fundamentally homogeneous set that one has the right, the theoretical or philosophical right, to distinguish and mark as opposite, namely, the set of the Animal in general, the Animal

spoken of in the general singular. It applies to the whole animal kingdom with the exception of the human. Philosophical right thus presents itself as that of "common sense." This agreement concerning philosophical sense and common sense that allows one to speak blithely of the Animal in the general singular is perhaps one of the greatest and most symptomatic *asinanities* of those who call themselves humans. We shall perhaps speak of *bêtise* and of bestiality later, as that from which beasts are in any case exempt by definition. One cannot speak—moreover, it has never been done—of the *bêtise* or bestiality of an animal. It would be an anthropomorphic projection of something that remains the preserve of man, as the single assurance, finally, and the single risk of what is "proper to man." One can ask why the ultimate fallback of what is proper to man, if there is such a thing, a property that could never in any case be attributed to the animal or to God, thus comes to be named *bêtise* or bestiality.

Interpretive decisions (in all their metaphysical, ethical, juridical, and political consequences) thus depend upon what is presupposed by the general singular of this word *the Animal*. I was tempted, at a given moment, in order to indicate the direction of my thinking, not just to keep this word within quotation marks, as if it were a citation to be analyzed, but without further ado to change the word, indicating clearly thereby that it is indeed a matter of a word, only a word, the word *animal* [*du mot "animal"*], and to forge another word in the singular, at the same time close but radically foreign, a chimerical word that sounded as though it contravened the laws of the French language, *l'animot*.

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Ecce animot. Neither a species nor a gender nor an individual, it is an irreducible living multiplicity of mortals, and rather than a double clone or a portmanteau word, a sort of monstrous hybrid, a chimera waiting to be put to death by its Bellerophon.

Who was Chimera or what was Chimera?

Chimaera was, as we know, the proper name of a flame-spitting monster. Its monstrousness derived precisely from the multiplicity of animals, of the *animot* in it (head and chest of a lion, entrails of a goat, tail of a dragon). *Chimaera* of Lycia was the offspring of Typhon and Echidne. As a common noun *echidna* means serpent, more precisely, a viper and sometimes, figuratively, a treacherous woman, a serpent that one cannot charm or make stand up by playing a flute. *Echidna* is also the name given to a very special animal found only in Australia and New Guinea. This mammal lays eggs, something quite rare. Here we have an oviparous mammal that is also an insectivore and a monotreme. It only has one hole

(*mono-trema*) for all the necessary purposes, urinary tract, rectum, and genitals. It is generally agreed that the echidna resembles a hedgehog. Along with the platypus, the five species of echidna make up the family of monotremes.

As the child of Typhon and Echidne, Chimaera interests me therefore because chimerical will be my address³⁸ and I shall gradually explain the reasons for it. In the first place, it concerns my old and ambivalent attachment to the figure of Bellerophon, who puts Chimaera to death. He deserves a ten-day conference alone. He represents, as is well known, the figure of the hunter. He follows. He is he who follows. He follows and persecutes the beast. He would say: I am (following), I pursue, I track, overcome, and tame the animal. Before Chimaera the animal in question was Pegasus, whom he held by the bit, a "golden bit given to him as a present by Athene." Holding him by the bit he makes him dance, he orders him to do some dance steps. I underline in passing this allusion to the choreography of the animal in order to announce that, much later, we will encounter a certain animal danceness³⁹ from the pen of Lacan. Pegasus, archetypal horse, son of Poseidon and the Gorgon, is therefore the half-brother of Bellerophon, who, descending from the same god as Pegasus, ends up following and taming a sort of brother, an other self: I am half (following) my brother, it is as if he says finally, I am (following) my other and I have the better of him, I hold him by the bit. What does one do in holding one's other by the bit? When one holds one's brother or half-brother by the bit?

There was also the matter of a dead animal between Cain and Abel. And of a tamed, raised, and sacrificed animal. Cain, the older brother, the agricultural worker, therefore the sedentary one, submits to having his offering of the fruits of the earth refused by a God who prefers, as an oblation, the first-born cattle of Abel, the rancher.

God prefers the sacrifice of the very animal that he has let Adam name—in order to see. As if between the taming desired by God and the sacrifice of the animal preferred by God the invention of names, the freedom accorded Adam or Ish to name the animals, was only a stage "in order to see," in view of providing sacrificial flesh for offering to that God. One could say, much too hastily, that giving a name would also mean sacrificing the living to God. The fratricide that results from it is marked as a sort of second original sin, in this case twice linked to blood, since the murder of Abel follows—as its consequence—the sacrifice of the animal that Abel had taken it upon himself to offer to God. What I am here venturing to call the second original sin is thus all the more linked to an

apparition of the animal, as in the episode of the serpent, but this time it seems more serious and more consequential.

On the one hand, in fact, Cain admits to an excessive fault: he kills his brother after failing to sacrifice an animal to God. This fault seems to him unpardonable, not simply wrong but excessively culpable, too grave. But isn't a wrongdoing always excessive, in its very essence? As a form of default in the face of an imperative necessity [*le défaut devant le "il faut"*]? "Cain said to Jehovah: 'My fault is too great to bear'" (Dhormes). "My wrong is too great to carry" (Chouraqui).⁴⁰

This excess will be paid for in two ways: by his flight, of course, for Cain is said to be "hunted," "expelled," tracked, persecuted ("you have expelled me," "you have chased me out," Cain says to God); but also by means of the flight of the one who feels pursued, by the shameful hiding of himself, by the veil of yet another nakedness, by the avowal of that veil ("I shall hide myself from before you. I shall be a fugitive and flee on earth and it will come to pass that whoever happens upon me will kill me" [Dhormes]; "I shall veil myself before you. I shall move and wander throughout the earth and whoever finds me will kill me" [Chouraqui]).⁴¹ There is thus a crime, shame, distancing, the retreat of the criminal. He is at the same time put to flight, hunted, and condemned to shame and dissimulation. He must hide his nakedness under a veil. A little as though it followed a second original sin, this ordeal follows the murder of a brother, it is true, but it also follows the test to which he has been put by a God who prefers the animal offering of Abel. For God had put Cain to the test by organizing a sort of temptation. He had set a trap for him. Jehovah's language is indeed that of a hunter. As if he were a nomad shepherd farmer, such as Abel, "herder of cattle" [*pâtre d'ovins*], or "shepherd of small animals" [*pasteur de petit bétail*], as opposed to the sedentary agriculturist, the "cultivator of the ground" [*cultivateur du sol*], "the servant of the soil" [*serviteur de la glèbe*] that was Cain, who made his offering from the "fruits of the earth" or of the "soil." Having refused Cain's vegetable offering, preferring Abel's animal offering, God had exhorted a discouraged Cain not to lose face, in short, to be careful not to fall into sin, not to fall victim to the wrongdoing that was waiting for him around the corner. He encouraged him to avoid the trap of temptation and to once more tame, dominate, govern:

So Jehovah said to Cain: "Why do you feel anger and why is your visage downfallen? If you act well, will you not pick yourself up? If you do not act well Sin lurks at your door [I emphasize this word lurks (*est tapi*), referring to sin, like an animal lying in wait in the

shadow, waiting for its prey to fall into the trap, a victim prey to temptation, a bait or lure]: its force is coming toward you but have dominion over it.” (Dhormes)⁴²

The word *lurk* also appears in the otherwise very different Chouraqui translation: “at the opening fault lurks; its passion is yours. Govern it.”⁴³ By killing his brother Cain falls into the trap; he becomes prey to the evil *lurking* in the shadow like an animal.

However, *on the other hand*, the paradoxes of this manhunt follow one after the other as a series of experimental ordeals: “in order to see.” Having fallen into the trap and killed Abel, Cain covers himself with shame and flees, wandering, hunted, tracked in turn like a beast. God then promises this human beast protection and vengeance. *As if* God had repented. *As if* he were ashamed or had admitted having preferred the animal sacrifice. *As if* in this way he were confessing and admitting remorse concerning the animal. (This moment of “repentance” of “retraction,” “going back on oneself”—there is an immense problem of translation here, unlimited stakes in the semantics that I leave aside for the moment—is not the only such moment; there is at least one other at the time of the Flood, another animal story.⁴⁴) So God promises seven vengeance, no more nor less. He vows to take revenge seven times on anyone who kills Cain, that is to say, the murderer of his brother, he who, after this second original sin, has covered the nakedness of his face, the face that he lost before Him.

This double insistence upon nudity, fault, and default at the origin of human history and within sight or perspective of the animal cannot not be associated once more with the myth of Epimetheus and Prometheus: first, man receives fire and technology to compensate for his nakedness, but not yet the art of politics; then, from Hermes this time, he receives shame or honor and justice (*aidos* and *dikē*), which will permit him to bring harmony and the bonds of friendship (*desmoi philias*) into the city (*polis*).

In comparing Genesis with the Greek myths once more, still within sight and perspective of the animal, of fault and of nakedness, I am not speculating on any hypothesis derived from comparative history or the structural analysis of myth. These narratives remain heterogeneous in status and origin. Moreover, I don’t hold them to be causes or origins of anything whatsoever. Nor verities or verdicts. Simply and at least I hold them to be two symptomatic translations, whose internal necessity is confirmed all the more by the fact that certain characteristics partially overlap from one translation to the other. But translation of what?

Well, let us say of a certain “state,” a certain situation—of the process, world, and life obtaining among these mortal living things [*vivants à mort*] that are the animal species, those other “animals” and humans. Its analogous or common traits are all the more dominant given that their formalization, to which we are devoting ourselves here, will allow us to see appear in every discourse concerning the animal, and notably in Western philosophical discourse, the same dominant, the same recurrence of a schema that is in truth invariable. What is that? The following: what is proper to man, his subjugating superiority over the animal, his very becoming-subject, his historicity, his emergence out of nature, his sociality, his access to knowledge and technics, all that, everything (in a nonfinite number of predicates) that is proper to man would derive from this original fault, indeed, from this default in propriety, what is proper to man as default in propriety—and from the imperative necessity that finds in it its development and resilience. I’ll try to show this better later, from Aristotle to Heidegger, from Descartes to Kant, from Levinas to Lacan.

Let us return to Bellerophon. He didn’t trouble me only because he gained the upper hand with respect to his animal brother or half-brother (Pegasus), or only because he vanquished Chimaera and so confirmed his mastery as hunter-tamer. Rather, all of Bellerophon’s exploits can be deciphered *from top to bottom* as a history of modesty, of shame, of reticence, of honor, to the extent that he is linked to modest decency (*aischunē* this time and not just *aidon*). That allows us to make explicit in advance the fact that the truth of modesty will, in the end, be our subject. The ordeals that constitute the story of Bellerophon are well known. They are all destined to put to the test his sense of modesty. Because he has resisted the shameless advances of Stheneboea, the wife of his host, Proetus, king of Argos; because he is accused by that shameless woman, also called Antea, of having sought to seduce her or take her violently during the hunt, he is condemned to death by her husband. But out of respect for the laws of hospitality, the latter cannot himself put his rival to death. He therefore sends Bellerophon to his father-in-law, king of Lycia, bearing a letter that, instead of recommending him to his future host, prescribes his execution. (This is the story, before the event, of Hamlet sent to England by his stepfather who entrusts to him a letter that is a death sentence. Hamlet escapes the trap. I make this allusion to Hamlet in order to recall in passing that that play is an extraordinary zoology: its animal figures are innumerable, which is somewhat the case all through Shakespeare—more to follow.) Bellerophon thus carries with him, without knowing it, a verdict in the

form of a death-letter whose truth escapes him. He becomes its unconscious purveyor [*facteur*]. But his second host begins sheltering the postman before unsealing the letter; he is therefore obliged in turn, as if held by a potential bit, to respect the laws of hospitality and so defer the execution of the sentence. Instead he submits Bellerophon to a new series of hunting, war, and combat ordeals. It is in that context that the hunt of the Chimaera takes place. The Chimaera was said to be “invincible,” of a divine race and in no way human (*theion genos, oud’anthrōpon*, says the *Iliad* in bk. 6, l. 180): a lion in front, a serpent behind, a goat in the middle, its breath spouting frightening bursts of flamboyant flame (*chimaera, deinon apopneiousa puros menos aithomenoio*).

As we shall understand, that is not how Descartes describes the Chimaera whose existence has to be excluded at the moment of “I think therefore I am,” in part four of the *Discourse on Method* (“we can distinctly imagine a lion’s head on a goat’s body without having to conclude from this that a chimera exists in the world”⁴⁵).

What is this “world?” We will later ask what “world” means. In passing we can consider whether we should take seriously the fact that in his description of the Chimaera Descartes forgets the serpent. Like Homer, he names the lion and goat, but he forgets the serpent, that is to say, the behind. The serpent (*drakōn*, dragon) is the animal’s behind, the part that is at the same time the most fabulous, the most chimerical, like the dragon, and also the most cunning: the cunning genius of the animal, the evil genius as animal, perhaps. A question concerning the serpent again, concerning evil and shame.

The final episode is not recounted by Homer but by Plutarch. It again puts Bellerophon to the test of nakedness. It is the seventh and last test. Once more Bellerophon falls prey, if I might suggest, to women. In a movement of shame or modesty (*hyp’aischunēs*) before women he backs down from his outrage at the hounding persecution to which he is victim, perpetrated by his father-in-law Iobates. Having decided to destroy the city with the help of Poseidon, his father, he advances on it followed by a wave that threatens to engulf everything. But the women come at him, offering themselves to him shamelessly. Their behavior is doubly indecent, for they expose themselves in all their nakedness and they offer their bodies, prostituting themselves, for sale. They try to seduce him in exchange for being saved. Faced with this pornography Bellerophon weakens. He doesn’t give in to their shameless advances, quite the contrary; he gives in to the impulse of his own shame and backs down before the immodesty of these women. He pulls back, retreats in shame (*hyp’aischunēs*) faced with the shameful conduct of these women. So the wave recedes

and the city is saved. This movement of shame, this reticence, this inhibition, this retreat, this reversal is, no doubt, like the immunizing drive, the protection of the immune, of the sacred (*heilig*), of the holy, of the separate (*kadosh*) that is the very origin of the religious, of religious scruple. I have tried to devote several essays to analyzing that, relating it to what Heidegger calls *Verhaltenheit*, restraint, in his *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Contributions to Philosophy)*. As I tried to do in “Faith and Knowledge,” where I sought to account for all the paradoxes of the auto-immunitary, I might have been tempted today, had I the time, which I don’t, to turn the spotlight once more on this terrible and always possible perversion by means of which the immune becomes auto-immunizing, finding there some analogical or virtual relation with auto-biography.



Autobiography, the writing of the self as living, the trace of the living for itself, being for itself, the auto-affection or auto-infection as memory or archive of the living, would be an immunizing movement (a movement of safety, of salvage and salvation of the safe, the holy, the immune, the indemnified, of virginal and intact nudity), but an immunizing movement that is always threatened with becoming auto-immunizing, like every *autos*, every ipseity, every automatic, automobile, autonomous, auto-referential movement. Nothing risks becoming more poisonous than an autobiography, poisonous for oneself in the first place, auto-infectious for the presumed signatory who is so auto-affected.

Ecce animot, as I was saying before this long digression. In order not to damage French ears too sensitive to spelling and grammar I won’t repeat the word *animot* too often. I’ll do it several times but each time that, henceforth, I say “the animal” [*l’animal*] or “the animals” [*les animaux*] I’ll be asking you to silently substitute *animot* for what you hear. By means of the chimera of this singular word, the *animot*, I bring together three heterogeneous elements within a single verbal body.

1. I would like to have the plural *animals* heard in the singular. There is no Animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single, indivisible limit. We have to envisage the existence of “living creatures,” whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity. This does not, of course, mean ignoring or effacing everything that separates humankind from the other animals, creating a single large set, a single grand, fundamentally homogeneous and continuous family tree going from the *animot* to the *homo* (*faber, sapiens*, or whatever else). That would be an *asinanity*, even more

so to suspect anyone here of doing just that. I won't therefore devote another second to the double *asinanity* of that suspicion, even if, alas, it is quite widespread. I repeat that it is rather a matter of taking into account a multiplicity of heterogeneous structures and limits: among nonhumans, and separate from nonhumans, there is an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance, within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general. From the outset there are animals and, let's say, *l'animot*. The confusion of all nonhuman living creatures within the general and common category of the animal is not simply a sin against rigorous thinking, vigilance, lucidity, or empirical authority, it is also a crime. Not a crime against animality, precisely, but a crime of the first order against the animals, against animals. Do we consent to presume that every murder, every transgression of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" concerns only man (a question to come), and that, in sum, there are crimes only "against humanity"?

2. The suffix *mot* in *l'animot* should bring us back to the word, namely, to the word named a noun [*nommé nom*]. It opens onto the referential experience of the thing *as such*, as what it is in its being, and therefore to the stakes involved in always seeking to draw the limit, the unique and indivisible limit held to separate human from animal, namely, the word, the nominal language of the word, the voice that names and that names the thing *as such*, such as it appears in its being (as in the Heideggerian moment of this demonstration that we are coming to). The animal would in the last instance be deprived of the word, of the word that one names a noun or name.

3. It would not be a matter of "giving speech back" to animals but perhaps of acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, and as something other than a privation.

Ecce animot, that is the announcement of which I am (following) something like the trace, assuming the title of an autobiographical animal, in the form of a risky, fabulous, or chimerical response to the question "But as for me, who am I (following)?" which I have wagered on treating as that of the autobiographical animal. That title, which is itself somewhat chimerical, might surprise you. It brings together *two times two* alliances, as unexpected as they are irrefutable.

On the one hand, it gives rise to the thought, in the informal form of a playful conversation, a suggestion that would take witty advantage of

idiom, that quite simply there are those among humans, writers, and philosophers whose character implies a taste for autobiography, the irresistible sense of or desire for autobiography. One would say "(s)he's an autobiographical animal," in the same way that one says "(s)he's a theatrical animal," a competitive animal, a political animal, not in the sense that one has been able to define man as a political animal but in the sense of an individual who has the taste, talent, or compulsive obsession for politics: he who likes that, really likes doing that, likes politics. And does it well. In that sense the autobiographical animal would be the sort of man or woman who, as a matter of character, chooses to indulge in or can't resist indulging in autobiographical confidences. He or she who works *in* autobiography. And in the history of literature or philosophy, if it can be suggested in such a summary manner, there are "autobiographical animals," more autobiographical than others, animals for autobiography: Montaigne more than Malherbe, similarly Rousseau, the lyric and romantic poets, Proust and Gide, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, Celan, Bataille, Genet, Duras, Cixous; but also (the matter is structurally more rare and more complicated when it comes to philosophy) Augustine and Descartes more than Spinoza, Kierkegaard, playing with so many pseudonyms, more than Hegel, Nietzsche more than Marx. But because the matter is really too complicated (it is our theme, after all) I prefer to end the list of examples there. With the problems it poses, this connotation of the autobiographical animal must certainly remain present, even if tangential, to our reflections. It will weigh on them with its virtual weight.

But, *on the other hand*, I was not thinking in the last instance of that usage of the expression "autobiographical animal" in order to get to some bottom of the matter, if there is such a thing. It happens that there exist, between the word *I* and the word *animal*, all sorts of significant connections. They are at the same time functional and referential, grammatical and semantic. Two general singulars to begin with: the "I" and the "animal," both preceded by a definite article, designate an indeterminate generality in the singular. The "I" is anybody at all; "I" am anybody at all, and anybody at all must be able to say "I" to refer to herself, to his own singularity. Whosoever says "I" or apprehends or poses herself as an "I" is a living animal. By contrast, animality, the life of the living, at least when one claims to be able to distinguish it from the inorganic, from the purely inert or cadaverous physico-chemical, is generally defined as sensibility, irritability, and *auto-motricity*, a spontaneity that is capable of movement, of organizing itself and affecting itself, marking, tracing, and affecting itself with traces of its self. This *auto-motricity* as auto-affectation

and relation to itself is the characteristic recognized as that of the living and of animality in general, even before one comes to consider the discursive thematic of an utterance or of an *ego cogito*, more so of a *cogito ergo sum*. But between this relation to the self (this Self, this ipseity) and the I of the "I think," there is, it would seem, an abyss.

The problems begin there, we suspect, and what problems they are! But they begin where one attributes to the essence of the living, to the animal in general, this aptitude *that it itself is*, this aptitude to being itself, and thus the aptitude to being capable of affecting itself, of its own movement, of affecting itself with traces of a living self, and thus of *autobiographing* itself as it were. No one has ever denied the animal this capacity to track itself, to trace itself or retrace a path of itself. Indeed, the most difficult problem lies in the fact that it has been refused the power to transform those traces into verbal language, to call to itself by means of discursive questions and responses, denied the power to efface its traces (which is what Lacan will deny it, and we will come back to everything that that implies). Let us set out again from this place of intersection between these two general singulars, the animal (*l'animot*) and the "I," the "I's," the place where in a given language, French, for example, an "I" says "I." Singularly and in general. It could be anyone at all, you or I. So what happens there? How can I say "I" and what do I do thereby? And in the first place, me, what am I (following) and who am I (following)?

"I": by saying "I" the signatory of an autobiography would claim to point himself out physically, introduce himself in the present [*se présenter au présent*] (*sui*-referential deixis) and in his totally naked truth. And in the naked truth, if there is such a thing, of his or her sexual difference, of all their sexual differences. By naming himself and answering for his name, he would be saying "I stake and engage my nudity without shame." One can well doubt whether this pledge, this wager, this desire or promise of nudity is possible. Nudity perhaps remains untenable. And can I finally show myself naked in the sight of what they call by the name of "animal"? Should I show myself naked when, concerning me, looking at me, is the living creature they call by the common, general, and singular name *the animal*? Henceforth I shall reflect (on) the same question by introducing a mirror. I import a full-length mirror [*une psyché*] into the scene. Whenever some autobiographical play is being enacted there has to be a *psyché*, a mirror that reflects me naked from head to toe. The same question then becomes whether I should show myself but in the process see myself naked (that is, reflect my image in a mirror) when, concerning me, looking at me, is this living creature, this cat that can find itself caught in the

same mirror? Is there animal narcissism? But cannot this cat also be, deep within her eyes, my primary mirror?

The animal in general, what is it? What does that mean? Who is it? To what does that "it"⁴⁶ correspond? To whom? Who responds to whom? Who responds in and to the common, general, and singular name of what they thus blithely call the "animal"? Who is it that responds? The reference made by this what or who regarding me in the name of the animal, what is said in the name of the animal when one appeals to the name of the animal, that is what it would be a matter of exposing, in all its nudity, in the nudity or destitution of whoever, opening the page of an autobiography, says "here I am."

"But as for me, who am I (following)?"

[.....]