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Cary Wolfe, Editor



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And Say the Animal Responded?

Jacques Derrida

Translated by David Wills

Would an ethics be sufficient, as Levinas maintains, to remind the subject of its being-subject, its being-guest, host or hostage, that is to say its being-subjected-to-the-other, to the Wholly Other or to every single other?

I don't think so. It takes more than that to break with the Cartesian tradition of the animal-machine that exists without language and without the ability to respond.¹ It takes more than that, even within a logic or an ethics of the unconscious which, without renouncing the concept of the subject, somehow claims to "subvert" that subject.

By evoking this Lacanian title, "the subversion of the subject," we therefore move from one ethical disavowal to another. I have chosen, in this context, to trace that movement by following the paths that have just been opened, those of the other, of witnessing, and of the "signifiers without signifieds" that Levinas associates with the "simian." In Lacan's 1960 text, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," a certain passage names "the animal" or "an animal," in the singular and without any further details. It perhaps marks what is at one and the same time a step beyond and a step this side of Freud with respect to the relations among the human, the unconscious, and the *animot*.² This remarkable passage at first gives the impression, and raises hope, that things are going to change, notably concerning the concept of communication or information that is assigned to what one

calls the animal, the animal in general. It is thought that “the animal” is capable only of a coded message or of a meaning that is narrowly indicative, strictly constrained; one that is fixed in its programming. Lacan begins by taking to task the platitude of the “modern theory of communication.” It is true that at that point he is talking about the human subject and not the animal, but he writes the following, which seems to announce, or allow one to hope for, a further note:

The Other as previous site of the pure subject of the signifier holds the master position, even before coming into existence, to use Hegel’s term against him, as absolute Master. For what is omitted in the platitude of modern information theory is the fact that one can speak of a code only if it is already the code of the Other, and that is something quite different from what is in question in the message, since it is from this code that the subject is constituted, which means that it is from the Other that the subject receives even the message that he emits.³

Following a digression, we will come back to this page of “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious.” It *poses* (and I emphasize the word *poses* because it puts forward in the form of a thesis, or presupposes without providing any proof) the idea of an animal characterized by an incapacity to *pretend to pretend* (*feindre de feindre*) or to *erase its traces*, an incapacity that makes it unable to be a “subject,” that is to say, “subject of the signifier.”

The digression I shall now make will allow us to identify in earlier texts by Lacan places where, it seems to me, they announce *at the same time* a theoretical mutation and a stagnant confirmation of inherited thinking, its presuppositions and its dogma.

What still held out hope for a decisive displacement of the traditional problematic was, for example, the taking into account of a specular function in the sexualization of the animal that can be identified, from 1936 on, in “the mirror stage.” Such an idea was quite rare at the time. And that was the case even if—this amounts to a massive limitation—the passage through the mirror according to Lacan forever immobilized the animal within the snare of the imaginary, depriving it of any access to the symbolic, that is to say to the law and to whatever is held to be proper to the human. The animal will never be, as man is, “prey to language.” Later, in “The Direction of the Treatment,” we read: “It must be posited that, produced as it is by any animal at the mercy of language [*en proie au langage*], man’s desire is the desire of the Other” (*Écrits*, 264). (This figure of the prey symptomatically and recurrently characterizes the “animal” ob-

session in Lacan at the very moment when he insists so strongly on dissociating the anthropological from the zoological; man is an animal but a speaking one, and he is less a beast of prey than a beast that is prey to language.) There is no desire, and thus no unconscious, except for the human; it in no way exists for the animal, unless that be as an effect of the human unconscious, as if the domestic or tamed animal translated within itself the unconscious of man by some contagious transfer or mute interiorization (the terms of which would, moreover, still need to be taken into account). Being careful to distinguish the unconscious drive from what limits the animal, namely, instinct or what is “genetic,” in “Position de l’inconscient” Lacan holds that the animal could not itself have an unconscious, an unconscious of its own, if such a thing could be said and if the logic of the expression did not sound ridiculous. But, to begin with, it perhaps seems ridiculous to Lacan himself, because he writes that “in the propaedeutic experience one can illustrate the effect of enunciation, or at least some effect of language, and of human language, by asking the child if he can imagine the unconscious in the animal.”⁴

Each word of this sentence deserves critical examination. Its thesis is clear: the animal has neither unconscious nor language, nor the other, except as an effect of the human order, that is, by contagion, appropriation, domestication.

No doubt the acceptance of sexualizing specularity in the animal is a remarkable advance even if it captures the *animot* in the mirror, and even if it keeps the hen pigeon or migrating locust in captivity within the imaginary. Referring to the effects of a Gestalt proven by a “biological experimentation” that is utterly refuted by the language of “psychic causality,” Lacan nevertheless credits that theory with recognizing that “the maturation of the gonad in the hen pigeon” relies on the “sight of a fellow creature,” that is to say another pigeon of either sex. And that is true even to the extent that a simple mirror reflection will suffice. It is also sufficient for a migrating locust to perceive a similar visual image in order to evolve from a solitary to a gregarious state. Lacan states, in a way that is for me significant, that this is a move from the “solitary to the gregarious form,” and not to the social form, as if the difference between *gregarious* and *social* were the difference between animal and human. This motif, and the words *gregarious* and even *gregariousness*, reappear forcefully in the context of animality some ten years later, in “Propos sur la causalité psychique” (1946).⁵ Moreover, this is a text at the end of which Lacan declares Descartes to be unsurpassable. The analysis of the specular effect in the pigeon is developed further in that text but it still works in the same

direction: according to research by Harrison (1939) the ovulation of the hen pigeon is produced by the simple *sight* of a form evoking another member of the species, of a visual reflection in short, even in the absence of an actual male.⁶ It is indeed a matter of a specular gaze, by means of an image and a visual image, rather than identification by means of odor or sound. Even if the mating game is physically preempted by a sheet of glass, and even if the couple consists of two females, ovulation still takes place. It happens after twelve days when the couple is heterosexual, if we can use the term, and after a period of up to two months for two females. A mirror is all it takes.⁷

One of the interesting things about this interpretation is that, after all, as with Descartes, and according to the tried and true biblical and Promethean tradition that I keep coming back to, it relates the fixity of animal determinism within the context of information and communication to a type of originary perfection of that animal. Conversely, if “human knowledge has greater autonomy than animal knowledge in relation to the field of force of desire”⁸ and if “the human order is distinguished from nature,”⁹ it is paradoxically because of an imperfection, because of an originary fault in man, who has, in short, received speech and technics only inasmuch as he lacks something. Here I am speaking of what Lacan situates at the center of his “mirror stage,” namely, the “fact of a real *specific prematurity of birth* in man” (4; Lacan’s italics). The lack tied to this prematurity would correspond to the “objective notion of anatomical incompleteness of the pyramidal system,” to what embryologists call “*fetalization*,” and which, Lacan recalls, is linked to a certain “intra-organic mirror” (ibid.). An autotelic specularity of the inside is thus linked to a lack, to a prematurity, to an incompleteness of the little man.

I have just referred, rather quickly, here on the threshold of “The Subversion of the Subject,” to a limited but incontestable advance recognized by Lacan. But that has to be registered with the greatest caution. For not only is the animal held within the imaginary and unable to accede to the symbolic, to the unconscious, and to language (and hence, still following our general thread, to autobiographical auto-deixis),¹⁰ but the description of its semiotic power remains determined, in the *Discours de Rome* (“The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” 1953), in the most dogmatically traditional manner, fixed within Cartesian fixity, within the presupposition of a code that only permits *reactions* to stimuli and not *responses* to questions. I refer to the “semiotic” system and not to “language,” for Lacan also refuses the animal language, recognizing in its case only a “code,” the “fixity of coding,” or a “system of

signalling.” These are other ways of naming what, within a cognitivist problematic of the animal that often repeats the most worn-out truisms of metaphysics even as it appears to resist them, is called the “prewired response [*réponse précâblée*]” or “prewired behavior.”¹¹

Lacan is so precise and firm in accrediting the old, yet modernized topos of the bee that he seems, if I might say, not to have a clear conscience. I detect an unavowed anxiety underneath the authority of this new, yet so old, so old discourse concerning the bee. Lacan claims to be relying on what he blithely calls the “animal kingdom” in order to critique the current notion of “language as a sign” as opposed to “human languages.” When bees appear to “respond” to a “message,” they do not respond but react; they merely obey a fixed program, whereas the human subject responds to the other, to the question posed by the other. This discourse is quite literally Cartesian. Later, as we shall see, Lacan expressly contrasts *reaction* with *response* in conformity with his opposition between human and animal kingdom, and in the same way that he opposes nature and convention:

I shall show the inadequacy of the conception of “language as a sign” by the very manifestation that best illustrates it in the animal kingdom, a manifestation which, if it had not recently been the object of an authentic discovery, it seems it would have been necessary to invent for this purpose.

It is now generally admitted that when the bee returns to the hive from its honey-gathering it indicates to its companions by two sorts of dance the existence of nectar and its relative distance, near or far, from the hive. The second type of dance is the most remarkable, for the plane in which the bee traces the figure-of-eight curve—which is why it has been called the “wagging dance”—and the frequency of the figures executed within a given time, designate, on the one hand, exactly the direction to be followed, determined in relation to the inclination of the sun (on which bees are able to orient themselves in all weathers, thanks to their sensitivity to polarized light), and, on the other hand, the distance, up to several miles, at which the nectar is to be found. And the other bees respond to this message by setting off immediately for the place thus designated.

It took some ten years of patient observation for Karl von Frisch to decode this kind of message, for it is certainly a code, or system of signalling, whose generic character alone forbids us to qualify it as conventional.

But is it necessarily a language? We can say that it is distinguished from language precisely by the *fixed* [my italics, J. D.] correlation of its signs to the reality that they signify. For in a language signs take on their value

from their relations to each other in the lexical distribution of semantemes as much as in the positional, or even flecational, use of morphemes, in sharp contrast to the *fixity* [my italics again, J. D.] of the coding used by bees. And the diversity of human languages (*languages*) takes on its full value from this enlightening discovery.

Furthermore, while the message of the kind described here determines the action of the *socius*, it is never retransmitted by it. This means that the message remains *fixed* [my italics still, J. D.] in its function as a relay of the action, from which no subject detaches it as a symbol of communication itself. (84–85)

Even if one were to subscribe provisionally to this logic (to which I do not in fact object in the slightest, although I would want to reinscribe it differently, beyond any simple opposition between animal and human), it is difficult to reserve, as Lacan does, the differentiability of signs for human language only, as opposed to animal coding. What he attributes to signs that, “in a language” understood as belonging to the human order, “take on their value from their relations to each other” and so on, and not just from the “fixed correlation” between signs and reality, can and must be accorded to any code, animal or human.

As for the absence of a response in the animal-machine, as for the trenchant distinction between *reaction* and *response*, there is nothing fortuitous in the fact that the most Cartesian passage of all is found following the discourse on the bee, on its system of information, which would exclude it from the “field of speech and language.” It is indeed a matter of the constitution of the subject as human subject to the extent that the latter crosses the frontier of information to gain access to speech:

For the function of language is not to inform but to evoke.

What I seek in speech is the response of the other. What constitutes me as subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I utter what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to reply to me. . . .

If I now place myself in front of the other to question him, there is no cybernetic computer imaginable that can make a *reaction out of what the response is*. The definition of response as the second term in the “stimulus response” circuit is simply a metaphor sustained by the subjectivity imputed to the animal, a subjectivity that is then ignored in the physical schema to which the metaphor reduces it. This is what I have called putting the rabbit into the hat so as to be able to pull it out again later. *But a reaction is not a response.*

If I press an electric button and a light goes on, there is no response except for *my* desire. (86; translation modified, *my* italics [J. D.], except for Lacan's "*my* desire")

Once again, we are not concerned with erasing every difference between what we are calling *reaction* and what we commonly call *response*. It is not a matter of confusing what happens when one presses a computer key and what happens when one asks a question of an interlocutor. We are even less concerned with attributing to what Lacan calls "the animal" what he also calls a "subjectivity" or an "unconscious" such as would, for example, allow us to put the said animal in an analytic situation (even if such analogous scenarios cannot be completely excluded for *certain* animals, in *certain* contexts—and if time permitted we could imagine some hypotheses that would allow us to refine that analogy). My hesitation concerns only the purity, the rigor, and the indivisibility of the frontier that separates—already with respect to "us humans"—reaction from response; and as a consequence, especially, the purity, rigor, and indivisibility of the concept of responsibility that ensues. The general concern that I am thus formulating is aggravated in at least three ways:

1. when one is required to take account of an unconscious that should prevent us having any immediate and conscious assurance of the freedom presupposed by any notion of responsibility;
2. especially when—and this is singularly the case for Lacan—the logic of the unconscious is founded on a logic of repetition which, in my opinion, will always inscribe a destiny of iterability, hence some automaticity of the reaction in every response, however originary, free, deciding [*décisoire*] and a-reactional it might seem;
3. when, and this is true of Lacan in particular, one gives credence to the materiality of speech and to the corporality of language.

Lacan reminds us of this on the following page: "Speech is in fact a gift of language, and language is not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but body it is" (87). Yet in the interval he will have founded all "responsibility," and to begin with all psychoanalytic responsibility, thus all psychoanalytic ethics, in the distinction, that I find problematic, between *reaction* and *response*. He will even have founded there—and this is precisely what I wish to demonstrate—his concept of the *subject*:

Henceforth the decisive function of my own response appears, and this function is not, as has been said, simply to be received by the subject as acceptance or rejection of his discourse, but really to recognize him or to

abolish him as subject. Such is the nature of the analyst's *responsibility* whenever he intervenes by means of speech. (87; translation modified)

Why do the stakes here seem to be so much higher? In problematizing, as I have done, the purity and indivisibility of a line between reaction and response, and especially the possibility of tracing such a line, between the human *in general* and the animal *in general*, one risks—anxiety about such an idea and the subsequent objections to it cannot but be forthcoming—casting doubt on all responsibility, every ethics, every decision, and so on. To that I would respond—for it is indeed a matter of responding—with what follows, schematically, by means of principles, with three points.

1. *On the one hand*, casting doubt on responsibility, on decision, on one's own being-ethical, seems to me to be—and is perhaps what should forever remain—the unrescindable essence of ethics: decision and responsibility. Every firm knowledge, certainty, and assurance on this subject would suffice, precisely, to confirm the very thing one wishes to disavow, namely, the reactivity in the response. I indeed said “to disavow” [*dénier*], and it is for that reason that I situate disavowal at the heart of all these discourses on the animal.

2. *On the other hand*, far from erasing the difference—a nonoppositional and infinitely differentiated, qualitative, and intensive difference between reaction and response—it is a matter, on the contrary, of taking that difference into account within the whole differentiated field of experience and of a world of life-forms. And that means refraining from reducing this differentiated and multiple difference, in a similarly massive and homogenizing manner, to one between the human subject, on the one hand, and the nonsubject that is the animal in general, on the other, by means of which the latter comes to be, in another sense, the nonsubject that is subjected to the human subject.

3. *Finally*, it would be a matter of developing another “logic” of decision, of the response and of the event—such as I have also attempted to deploy elsewhere and which seems to me less incompatible than one might think with what Lacan himself, in “The Subversion of the Subject,” maintains concerning the code as “code of the Other.” He refers to that Other as the one from whom “the subject receives even the message that he emits” (305). This axiom should complicate the simple distinction between *responsibility* and *reaction*, and all that follows from it. It would, therefore, be a matter of reinscribing this *difference* between reaction and response, and hence this historicity of ethical, juridical, or political re-

sponsibility, within another thinking of life, of the living, within a different relation of the living to their selfness [*ipséité*], to their *autos*, to their own autokinesis and reactional automaticity, to death, to technics or to the mechanical [*machinique*].

Following this digression, if we are now to come to the later text titled “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” we will indeed follow this same logic and these same oppositions, namely, that between the imaginary and the symbolic, between the specular capture of which the animal is capable and the symbolic order of the signifier to which it does not have access. At the juncture between imaginary and symbolic is played out the whole question of autobiography, of autobiography in general no doubt, but also that of the theoretician or of the institution within whose history the theoretician articulates and signs his discourse on juncture, that is to say Lacan’s discourse as autobiographical analysis. (Although we cannot undertake this within the limits constraining us here, it would be necessary to give back a more accurate perspective, some years after the War, with all the accompanying ideological stakes, to the whole essentially anthropological design of the period with respect to its claim to transcend every *positive* anthropology and every metaphysical and humanist anthropocentrism. And especially, in a most legitimate way, to transcend biologism, physicalism, behaviorism, geneticism, and so on. For Heidegger as for Lacan and many others, it was above all a matter of relying on a new *fundamental* anthropology and of rigorously responding to the question and answering for the question “What is the human?”)

In “The Subversion of the Subject” the refining of the analysis is brought to bear on other conceptual distinctions. They seem to me as problematic as those we have just analyzed, and, moreover, they remain indissociable from them. I am concerned in particular with what appears as a parenthesis (“Observe, in parentheses . . .”), but a parenthesis that is to my mind capital. It relates to the testimonial dimension in general, that is to say to what subtends the problematic we are dealing with here. Who witnesses [*témoigne*] to what and for whom? Who proves, who looks, who observes whom and what? What is there of knowledge, of certainty, and of truth?

Observe, in parentheses, that this Other, which is distinguished as the locus of Speech, imposes itself no less as witness to the Truth. Without the dimension that it constitutes, the deception practised by Speech would be indistinguishable from the very different pretence to be found in physical combat or sexual display [*parade*]. (305)

The figure of the animal comes to the surface therefore in this difference between pretense [*feinte*] and deception [*tromperie*]. There is, according to Lacan, a clear distinction between what the animal is capable of, namely, strategic pretense (suit, pursuit, or persecution, in war or in seduction), and what it is incapable of and incapable of witnessing to, namely, the deception of speech [*la tromperie de la parole*] within the order of the signifier and of Truth. The deception of speech, of course, means, as we shall see, lying (and the animal would not properly know how to lie according to common sense, according to Lacan and to many others, even if, as one knows, it understands how to pretend); but more precisely, deception involves lying to the extent that, in promising what is true, it includes the supplementary possibility of telling the truth in order to lead the other astray, in order to have him believe something other than what is true (we know the Jewish story recounted by Freud and so often quoted by Lacan: “Why do you tell me that you are going to X in order to have me believe you are going to Y whereas you are indeed going to X?”). According to Lacan, the animal would be incapable of this type of lie, of this deceit, of this pretense in the second degree, whereas the “subject of the signifier,” within the human order, would possess such a power and, better still, would emerge as subject, instituting itself and coming to itself as subject *by virtue of this power*, a second-degree reflexive power, a power that is *conscious* of being able to deceive by pretending to pretend. One of the interests of this analysis derives, no doubt, from the fact that in this essay Lacan gives much importance—in any case, more than anyone else in philosophy and more than he himself does in earlier writings—to the capacity to pretend that he attributes to what he still calls “the animal,” “an animal,” to what he nicknames here its “*dancity*” [*dansité*] with an “a.”¹² *Dansity* refers to the capacity to pretend by means of a dance, lure, or parade, by means of the choreography of the hunt or seduction, the parade that is indulged in before it makes love or the movement of self-protection at the moment it makes war, hence all the forms of the “I am (following)” or “I am followed” that we are tracking here.¹³ But in spite of what Lacan thus accords or lends to the animal, he keeps it within the imaginary or presymbolic (as we noted in the “mirror stage” and following the examples of the hen pigeon or migrating locust). He keeps “the animal” prisoner within the specularly of the imaginary; he keeps it more than the animal keeps itself in such captivity, speaking in this regard of “imaginary capture.” Above all, he keeps “the animal” within the first degree of pretense (pretense without pretense of pretense) or, which here amounts to the same thing, within the first de-

gree of the trace: the capacity to trace, to leave a track, and to track, but not to distract the tracking or lead the tracker astray by *erasing* its trace or covering its tracks.¹⁴

An important “But” will, in effect, fold this paragraph in two (“But an animal does not pretend to pretend” [305]). A balance sheet separates the accounting of what has to be accorded the animal (pretense and the trace, inscription of the trace) and what has to be denied it (deception, lying, pretense of pretense, and erasing of traces). But—what the articulation of the “But” perhaps leaves undetected, discreetly in the shadows, among all the traits that are listed, is a reference to life, to the “vital.” Everything accorded the animal is conceded on the grounds of “vital situations,” even though one would be tempted to conclude that the animal, whether hunter or game, is held to be incapable of an authentic relation to death or of testifying to an essential mortality in the heart of Truth or Speech. The animal is a living creature that is only living, as it were an “immortal” living thing. As Heidegger states—Lacan is here closer to him than ever—and, as we shall see, this is especially the case in terms of what binds the *logos* to the possibility of “deceiving” or “being deceived,” the animal does not die.¹⁵ For the same reason, moreover, it would also be ignorant of mourning, the tomb and the cadaver, which for Lacan constitutes a “signifier”:

Observe, in parentheses, that this Other, which is distinguished as the locus of Speech, imposes itself no less as witness to the Truth. Without the dimension that it constitutes, the *deception* practised by Speech would be indistinguishable from the very different *pretense* to be found in physical combat or sexual display [*parade*]. Pretense of this kind is deployed in imaginary capture, and is integrated into the play of approach and rejection that constituted the original dance, in which these two *vital* situations find their rhythm, and in accordance with which the partners ordered their movements—what I will dare to call their “dancity” (*dansité*). Indeed, animals, too, show that they are capable of such behaviour when they are being hunted; they manage to put their pursuers off the scent [*dépister*]¹⁶ by making a false start. This can go so far as to suggest on the part of the game animal the nobility of honoring the element of display to be found in the hunt. [Of course, that is only a figurative and anthropomorphic suggestion, like a “rabbit in the hat,” for it will immediately be made clear by the ensuing “But” that honor and nobility, tied to vouching for one’s word or the gift of speech (*la Parole donnée*) and to the symbolic, is precisely what the animal is incapable of. An animal does not give its

word and one does not give one's word, or attribute speech to the animal, except by means of a projection or anthropomorphic transference. One can't lie to an animal either, especially by pretending to hide from it something that one shows it. Isn't that patently obvious? True enough, though it remains to be seen (*Voire.*). In any case it is this whole organization of Lacan's discourse that we are calling into question here.] *But an animal does not pretend to pretend.* He does not make tracks whose deception lies in the fact that they will be taken as false, while being in fact true ones, ones, that is, that indicate his true trail. *Nor does an animal cover up its tracks, which would be tantamount to making itself the subject of the signifier.*¹⁷

What does it mean to be (the) subject of/to the signifier, that which the animal is here reputed to be incapable of? What does it signify? Let us first note in passing that this confirms the old (Adamic and Promethean) theme of the animal's profound innocence, its incapacity with respect to the "signifier," to lying and deceit, to pretended pretense, which gets linked here, in a way that is also very traditional, to the theme of a cruelty that does not recognize itself as such; the cruel innocence, therefore, of a living creature to whom evil is foreign, living anterior to the difference between good and evil.¹⁸

But to be subject of the signifier also means, still yet, two indissociable things that are coupled within the subjectivity of the subject. The subject of the signifier is subject(ed) to the signifier. Lacan never stops insisting on the "dominance . . . of the signifier over the subject" and over "the symbolic order that is constitutive for the subject."¹⁹ The "subject" does not have mastery over it. Its entry into the human order of the law presupposes this passive finitude, this infirmity, this lack that the animal does not suffer from. The animal does not know evil, lying, deceit. What it lacks is precisely the lack by virtue of which the human becomes subject of the signifier, subject subjected to the signifier. But to be subject of the signifier is also to be a subjecting subject, a subject as *master*, an active and deciding subject of the signifier, having in any case sufficient mastery to be capable of pretending to pretend and hence of being able to put into effect one's power to destroy the trace. This mastery is the superiority of man over the *animot*, even if it gains its assurance from the privilege constituted by a defect [*défaut*], a lack [*manque*], or a fault [*faute*], a failing [*défaillance*] that derives both from the generic prematurity of birth and from the castration complex, which Lacan designates, in a text I shall shortly cite, as the Freudian and scientific (or at least nonmythological) version of original sin or the Adamic fall.

It is there that the passage from imaginary to symbolic is determined as a passage from animal to human order. It is there that subjectivity, as order of the signifier from the place of the Other, appears as something missed by or lacking in the traditional philosophy of the subject, as a matter of relations between human and animal. That is at least what Lacan alleges at the moment he subtly reintroduces an anthropocentric logic and strongly reinforces the *fixism* of the Cartesian *cogito* as a thesis on the animal-machine in general:

All this has been articulated only in a confused way even by professional philosophers. But it is clear that Speech begins only with the passage from “pretence” to the order of the signifier, and that the signifier requires another locus—the locus of the Other, the Other witness, the witness Other than any of the partners—for the speech that it supports to be capable of lying, that is to say, of presenting itself as Truth.

Thus it is from somewhere other than the Reality that it concerns that Truth derives its guarantee: it is from Speech. Just as it is from Speech that Truth receives the mark that establishes it in a fictional structure. (305–6)

This allusion to a “structure of fiction” would refer us back to the debate concerning “The Purloined Letter.”²⁰ Without reopening it to that extent, let us note here the reflective sharpness of the word *fiction*. The concept it leads us toward is no longer merely that of the *figure* or simple *feint* but the reflexive and abyssal concept of a *feigned feint* or *pretended pretense*. It is by means of the power to pretend a pretense that one accedes to Speech, to the order of Truth, to the symbolic order—in short, to the order of the human.

(Even before detailing once more the principle behind the reading being attempted here, I would at least like to advance a hypothesis. Although Lacan often repeats that there is no Other of the Other [e.g., 316]; although for Levinas, on the other hand, and from another point of view, the question of justice is born from this request of the third [party] and from another of the other who would not be “simply one’s fellow [creature],”²¹ one wonders whether the common if disavowed implication of these two discourses on the other and the third did not in fact amount to locating at least an instance of the animal, of the animal-*other*, of the other *as animal*, of the living-mortal-*other*, of the non-fellow in any case, the non-brother [divine or animal, here inseparable], in short of the ahuman combining god and animal according to whatever theo-zoomorphic possibilities there are that properly constitute the myths, religions, idolatries, and even sacrificial practices within the monotheisms that claim to break

with idolatry. Moreover, the word *ahuman* does not scare Lacan because, in a postscript to “The Subversion of the Subject,” he notes that he was in no way insulted by the epithet *ahuman* that one of the participants in the conference attributed to his talk [324].)

What is Lacan doing when he holds that “the signifier requires another locus—the locus of the Other, the Other witness, the witness Other than any of the partners”? In order to break with the image and with the likeness of a fellow must not this beyond of partnership—thus beyond the specular or imaginary duel—be at least situated in a place of alterity that is radical enough to break with every identification of an image of self, with every fellow living creature, and so with every fraternity or human proximity, with all humanity?²² Must not this place of the Other be *ahuman*? If this is indeed the case, then the *ahuman*, or at least the figure of some—in a word—*divinanimality*, even if it were to be felt through the human, would be the quasi-transcendental referent, the excluded, foreclosed, disavowed, tamed, and sacrificed foundation of what it founds, namely, the symbolic order, the human order, law, and justice. Is not this necessity performed secretly in Levinas and in Lacan, who, moreover, cross paths so often in spite of all the differences in the world? That is one of the reasons why it is so difficult to utter a discourse of mastery or of transcendence with regard to the animal and to simultaneously claim to do it in the name of God, in the name of the name of the Father or in the name of the Law. Must not one recognize Father, Law, Animal, and so on, as being, in the final analysis, the same thing—or, rather, indissociable figures of the same Thing? One could conjoin the Mother within that juncture and it would probably not change anything. Nietzsche and Kafka perhaps understood that better than the philosophers or theoreticians, at least those who belong to the tradition that we are trying to analyze here.

Once more, of course, my prime concern is not to mount a frontal attack on the logic of this discourse and what it implies vis-à-vis the Lacan of the period of the *Écrits* (1966). For the moment, I shall have to leave in suspense the question of whether, in later texts or in the seminars (published or unpublished, accessible or inaccessible), the armature of this logic came to be explicitly reexamined—especially since the oppositional distinction between imaginary and symbolic that forms the very axiomatics of the discourse on the animal seems to be progressively abandoned, if not repudiated, by Lacan. As always, I am trying to take account of the strongest systematic organization of a discourse in the form in which it comes together at a relatively determinable moment of that process. The texts distributed over a thirty-year period and collected

within a single volume, solidly bound to its own integrity [*relié à soi*], namely, the *Écrits*, provide us in this regard with a reliable purchase on that process and allow us to follow its tracks. Among the published and accessible texts that follow the *Écrits*, I think that one would have, in particular, to try to follow the path that leads, in an interesting but continuous way, to the analyses of animal mimetism, for example, those that still work from the perspective of the gaze precisely, of the image and the “seeing oneself looking,” being seen looking even by a can of sardines that does not see me. (“To begin with, if what Petit-Jean said to me, namely, that the can did not see me, had any meaning, it was because in a sense, it was looking at me, all the same. It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated—and I am not speaking metaphorically.”)²³

Instead of objecting to this argument, therefore, I would be tempted to emphasize that the logical, and thus rational, fragility of certain of its articulations should induce us to recast in a general way the whole conceptual framework.

It seems difficult in the first place to identify or determine a limit, that is to say an indivisible threshold between pretense and pretense of pretense. Moreover, even supposing that that limit were conceptually accessible, something I do not think is so, one would still have to know in the name of what knowledge or what testimony (knowledge is not the same as testimony) it would be possible to calmly declare that the *animal in general* is incapable of pretending pretense. Lacan does not invoke here any ethological knowledge (whose increasingly spectacular refinement is proportional to the refinement of the *animot*), nor any experience, observation, or personal attestation that would be worthy of credence. The status of the affirmation that refuses the pretense of pretense to the animal is that of a simple dogma. But there is no doubt a dissimulated motivation to this humanist or anthropocentric dogmatism, and that is the probably obscure but indisputable feeling that it is indeed difficult, even impossible, to discern between pretense and a pretense of pretense, between an aptitude for pretense and an aptitude for the pretense of pretense. How could one distinguish, for example, in the most elementary sexual parade or mating game, between a feint and a feint of a feint? If it is impossible to provide the criterion for such a distinction, one can conclude that every pretense of pretense remains a simple pretense (animal or imaginary, in Lacan’s terms), or else, on the contrary, and just as likely, that every pretense, however simple it may be, gets repeated and repositied undecidably, in its possibility, as pretense of pretense (human or symbolic

in Lacan's terms). As I shall make clear in a moment, a symptomatology (and, of course, a psychoanalysis) can and must conclude with the possibility, for every pretense, of being pretense of pretense, and for every pretense of pretense of being a simple pretense. As a result, the distinction between lie and pretense becomes precarious, likewise that between speech and truth (in Lacan's sense), and everything he claims to separate from it. Pretense presupposes taking the other into account; it therefore supposes, simultaneously, the pretense of pretense—a simple supplementary move by the other within the strategy of the game. That supplementarity is at work from the moment of the first pretense. Moreover, Lacan cannot deny that the animal takes the other into account. In his article "On a Question Preliminary to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis" (1957–58), there is a remark that goes in that direction and which I would have liked to insert into this network in a careful and patient manner: putting it at the same time into tension, if not in contradiction, with Lacan's discourse on the imaginary capture of the animal (thereby deprived of the other, in short), and into harmony with the discourse on pathology, evil, lack, or fault that marks the relation to the other as such in the human, but which is already announced in the animal:

To take up Charcot's formula, which so delighted Freud, "this does not prevent [the Other] from existing" in his place O.

For if he is taken away, man can no longer even sustain himself in the position of Narcissus. As if by elastic, the *anima* springs back on to the *animus* and the *animus* on to the animal, which between S and *o* sustains with its *Umwelt* "external relations" noticeably closer than ours, without, moreover, one being able to say that its relation with the Other is negligible, but only that it does not appear otherwise than in the sporadic sketches of neurosis. (*Écrits*, 195; translation modified)

In other words, the animal resembles the human and enters into relation with the Other (in a more feeble manner, and by reason of a more "restricted" adaptation to the milieu) only to the extent of being ill, of a neurotic defect that brings it closer to man, to man as failure [*défaut*] of the premature and still insufficiently determined animal. If there were a continuity between animal and human orders, as between animal psychology and human psychology, it would follow this line of evil, of fault and defect. Lacan, moreover, has argued against insisting on a discontinuity between the two psychologies (animal and human), *at least as psychologies*: "May this digression at least obviate the misunderstanding that we could thus have provided the occasion for in the eyes of some, that of

imputing to us the doctrine of a discontinuity between animal psychology and human psychology that is far from being what we think.”²⁴ What does that mean? That the radical discontinuity between animal and human, the absolute and indivisible discontinuity that he, however, confirms and compounds, no longer derives from the psychological as such, from *anima* and *psychē*, but instead from the appearance of a different order.

On the other hand, an analogous (not to say identical) conceptual undecidability comes to trouble the opposition that is so decisive for Lacan between leaving tracks [*tracer*] and covering one’s tracks [*effacer ses traces*]. The animal can trace, inscribe, or leave a track or trace, but, Lacan adds, it “does not cover up its tracks, which would be tantamount to making itself the subject of the signifier.” But there again, supposing one can trust the distinction, Lacan does not justify by means of either testimony or some ethological knowledge this affirmation that “the animal,” as he calls it, the animal in general does not cover its tracks. Apart from the fact that, as I have tried to show elsewhere (and this is why so long ago I substituted the concept of trace for that of signifier), the structure of the trace presupposes that *to trace* amounts to *erasing a trace* as much as to imprinting it, all sorts of sometimes ritual animal practices, for example, in burial and mourning, associate the experience of the trace with that of the erasure of the trace. A pretense, moreover, and even a simple pretense, consists in rendering illegible or imperceptible a sensible trace. How can it be denied that the simple substitution of one trace for another, the marking of their diacritical difference in the most elementary inscription—which capacity Lacan concedes to the animal—involves erasure as much as it involves the imprint? It is as difficult to assign a frontier between pretense and pretense of pretense, to have an indivisible line pass through the middle of a feigned feint, as it is to assign one between inscription and erasure of the trace.

But let us take this further and pose a type of question that I would have wished, had I the time, to pose generally. It is less a matter of asking whether one has the right to refuse the animal such and such a power (speech, reason, experience of death, mourning, culture, institution, technics, clothing, lie, pretense of pretense, covering of tracks, gift, laughter, tears, respect, and so on—the list is necessarily without limit, and the most powerful philosophical tradition within which we live has refused the “animal” all those things) than of asking whether what calls itself human has the right to rigorously attribute to man, which means therefore to attribute to himself, what he refuses the animal, and whether he can ever possess the *pure, rigorous, indivisible* concept, as such, of that

attribution. Thus, were we even to suppose—something I am not ready to concede—that the “animal” were incapable of covering its tracks, by what right could one concede that power to the human, to the “subject of the signifier”? Especially from a psychoanalytic point of view? Granted, every human can, within the space of doxic phenomenality, have *consciousness* of covering its tracks. But who could ever judge the effectivity of such a gesture? Is it necessary to recall that every erased trace, in consciousness, can leave a trace of its erasure whose symptom (individual, or social, historical, political, and so on) will always be capable of ensuring its return? And is it necessary, above all, to remind a psychoanalyst of that? And to recall that every reference to the capacity to erase the trace still speaks the language of the conscious, even imaginary ego? (One can sense all the virtual consequences crowding in here from the side of the question posed by this colloquium, namely, autobiography.)

All this will not amount to saying (something I have developed at length elsewhere) that the trace cannot be erased. On the contrary. A trace is such that it is always being erased and always able to be erased [*Il appartient à une trace de toujours s'effacer et de toujours pouvoir s'effacer*]. But the fact that it can *be* erased [*qu'elle s'efface*], that it can always be erased or erase itself, and that from the first instant of its inscription, through and beyond any repression, does not mean that someone, God, human, or animal, can be its master subject and possess the power to erase it. On the contrary. In this regard, the human no more has the *power* to cover its tracks than does the so-called animal. To *radically* erase his traces, that is to say by the same token to *radically* destroy, deny, put to death, even put himself to death.

But let us especially not conclude, therefore, that the traces of the one and of the others are ineffaceable, or that death and destruction are impossible. Traces erase (themselves), like everything else, but the structure of the trace is such that it cannot be in anyone's *power* to erase it, and especially not to “judge” its erasure, even less by means of a constitutive power assured of being able to erase, performatively, what erases itself. The distinction might appear subtle and fragile but its fragility renders fragile all the solid oppositions that we are in the process of tracking down [*dé-pister*], beginning with that between symbolic and imaginary which underwrites finally this whole anthropocentric reinstatement of the superiority of the human order over the animal order, of the law over the living, and so on, wherever such a subtle form of phallogocentrism seems in its way to testify to the panic Freud spoke of: the wounded reaction not to humanity's *first* trauma, the Copernican (the Earth revolves around the sun), nor its *third*

trauma, the Freudian (the decentering of consciousness under the gaze of the unconscious), but rather to its *second* trauma, the Darwinian.

Before we leave, provisionally, Lacan's text, I would like to define a task and proffer a reminder. The task is one that would involve us, from the vantage of everything that we have here inscribed under the sign of the Cartesian *cogito*, in closely analyzing Lacan's references to Descartes. As is the case with references to Hegel, with which it is often associated, the appeal to Descartes, to the Cartesian *I think*, was constant, determinant, complex, and differentiated. Within that rich network and that wide-reaching process, a first signpost is set by our problematic. It can be found in the pages immediately following the paragraph on the difference between the nonpretending pretense of the animal and the pretending pretense of the human capable of erasing its own traces. Lacan shares out both praise and criticism.

On the one hand, the "Cartesian *cogito* did not fail to recognize" what is essential, namely, that the consciousness of existence, the *sum*, is not immanent to it but transcendent, and thus beyond specular or imaginary capture. That amounts to confirming that an animal *cogito* would remain a captive of the identificatory image, a situation that could be formalized by saying that the animal accedes to the ego [*moi*] only by lacking the I [*Je*], but an I that itself accedes to the signifier only from the perspective of a lack: the (animal) self lacks the lack. For example, Lacan writes:

From this point on, the ego is a function of mastery, a play of presence, of bearing (*prestance*), and of constituted rivalry [all traits that are not refused the animal]. In the capture to which it is subjected by its imaginary nature, the ego masks its duplicity, that is to say, the consciousness in which it assures itself of an incontestable existence (a naivety to be found in the meditation of Fénelon) is in no way immanent in it, but, on the contrary, is transcendent, since it is supported by the unbroken line of the ego ideal (which the Cartesian *cogito* did not fail to recognize). As a result, the transcendental ego itself is relativized, implicated as it is in the *méconnaissance* in which the ego's identifications take root. (*Écrits*, 307)

But, *on the other hand*, therefore, the *ego cogito* gets dislodged from its position as central subject. It loses its mastery, its central power, it becomes subject subjected to the signifier.

The imaginary process extends thus from the specular image all the way to "the constitution of the ego by way of subjectification by the signifier" (*ibid.*). That seems to confirm that the becoming-subject of the ego passes by way of the signifier, Speech, Truth, and so on, that is to say by

losing its immediate transparency, consciousness as consciousness of the self identical to itself. Which ends only in an apparent paradox: the subject is confirmed in the eminence of its power by being subverted and brought back to its own lack, meaning that animality is on the side of the conscious *ego* whereas the humanity of the human subject is on the side of the unconscious, the law of the signifier, Speech, the pretended pretense, and so on:

The promotion of consciousness as being essential to the subject in the historical after-effects of the Cartesian *cogito* is for me the deceptive accentuation of the transparency of the I in action at the expense of the opacity of the signifier that determines the I; and the sliding movement (*glissement*) by which the *Bewusstsein* serves to cover up the confusion of the *Selbst* eventually reveals, with all Hegel's own rigour, the reason for his error in *The Phenomenology of Mind*. (Ibid.)

The accent on transparency is thus said to be “deceptive” [*trompeuse*]. That not only means a case of “being deceived” by the error, but of “being deceived” by the deceit, or lie, the lying-to-oneself as belief, the “making believe” in the transparency of the ego or of self to itself. Such would be the risk of the traditional interpretation of the Cartesian *cogito*, perhaps that of the autointerpretation of Descartes himself, of his intellectual autobiography, one never knows. Whence the Lacanian promotion of the *cogito* and his diagnosis of the lie, of deceit, and of a deceptive transparency in the very heart of the *cogito*.

“Hegel's rigor,” he says. One would have then to follow the interpretation proposed by Lacan of the struggle between Master and Slave, there where it comes to a “decomposition of the equilibrium of counterpart [*semblable*] to counterpart” (308). The same motif of the “alienating dialectic of Master and Slave” appears in “Variantes de la cure-type” (1955). Animal specularity, with its lures and aberrations, comes to “durably structure the human subject” by reason of the prematurity of birth, said to be a “fact in which one apprehends this dehiscence in the natural harmony, demanded by Hegel as the fecund illness, the happy fault of life, where man, by being distinguished in his essence, discovers his existence” (*Écrits* [French], 345). We could situate the reinscription of the question of the animal, in our reinterpretation of Lacan's reinterpretation of Hegel, at the point where Lacan reintroduces this reminder regarding the imaginary, regarding “specular capture” and the “generic prematuration of birth,” the “danger . . . which Hegel was unaware of” (*Écrits*, 308). There again it is life that is at stake, as Lacan makes clear, and

the passage to the human order of the subject, beyond the animal imaginary, is indeed a question of life and death:

The struggle that establishes this initial enslavement is rightly called a struggle of pure prestige [which means, according to Lacan, that it is no longer animal], and the stake, life itself, is well suited to echo that danger of the generic prematuration of birth, which Hegel was unaware of, and in which I see the dynamic motivation of specular capture. (Ibid.; translation modified)

How should we understand this word *generic*, for it qualifies so forcefully the insistent and determinant concept of “prematuration,” namely, the absolute event without which the whole discourse would lose its “motivation” [*ressort*], as Lacan himself says, beginning with the relevance of the distinction between imaginary and symbolic? Is the “generic” a trait of “humankind” [*du genre humain*] as a kind of animal, or a trait of the human inasmuch as it escapes classification [*genre*], precisely, escaping the generic or the genetic—by means of the defect, precisely, of a certain de-generation [*dé-génération*] rather than de-generacy [*dé-générescence*], by means of a de-generation whose very defect engenders symbolic “generation,” the relation between generations, the law of the Name of the Father, Speech, Truth, Deceit, the pretended pretense, the power to erase one’s traces, and so on?

On the basis of this question, which we shall leave in suspense, as a task, there where it proceeds nevertheless from this traditional logic of the originary defect, I come back to what I announced as a final reminder, namely, what brings together this whole perspectival configuration of the defect within the history of original fault, of an original sin that finds its mythical relay in the story of Oedipus, then its nonmythic relay in the “castration complex,” such as it was formulated by Freud. In the passage that follows, I shall underline lack and defect, and we shall find there again all the stages of our journey, Genesis, the serpent, the question of the I and the “Who Am I (Following)?”—a quotation from Valéry’s *Ébauche d’un serpent* (“the universe is a *defect* in the purity of Non-Being”), and so on:

This is what the subject lacks in order to think himself exhausted by his *cogito*, namely, that which is unthinkable for him. But where does this being, who appears in some way *defective* [*en défaut*] in the sea of proper nouns, originate?

We cannot ask this question of the subject as “I.” He *lacks* everything needed to know the answer, since if this subject “I” was dead, he would

not, as I said earlier, know it. He does not know, therefore, that I am alive. How, therefore, will “I” prove to myself that I am?

For I can only just prove to the Other that he exists, not, of course, with the proofs for the existence of God, with which over the centuries he has been killed off, but by loving him, a solution introduced by the Christian *kerygma*. Indeed, it is too precarious a solution for me even to think of using it as a means of circumventing our problem, namely: “What am ‘I’?”

“I” am in the place from which a voice is heard clamouring “the universe is a *defect* in the purity of Non-Being.”

And not without reason, for by protecting itself this place makes Being itself languish. This place is called *Jouissance*, and it is the *absence* of this that makes the universe vain.

Am I responsible for it, then? Yes, probably. Is this *Jouissance*, the *lack* of which makes the Other insubstantial, mine, then? Experience proves that it is usually forbidden me, not only, as certain fools believe, because of a bad arrangement of society, but rather because of the *fault* (*faute*) of the Other if he existed: and since the Other does not exist, all that remains to me is to assume the *fault* upon “I,” that is to say, to believe in that to which experience leads us all, Freud in the vanguard, namely, to *original sin*. For even if we did not have Freud’s express, and sorrowful avowal, the fact would remain that the myth Freud gave us—the latest-born myth in history—is no more use than that of the forbidden apple, except for the fact, and this has nothing to do with its power as myth, that, though more succinct, it is distinctly less stultifying (*crétinisant*).

But what is not a myth, and which Freud nevertheless formulated soon after the Oedipus complex, is the castration complex. (*Écrits*, 317–18, translation modified)

Notes

This essay is part of an extended lecture given by Jacques Derrida at a conference devoted to his work in 1997 at Cerisy-la-Salle, France, titled “L’Animal autobiographique.” That lecture, from work in progress destined to appear in book form, included analyses of Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Levinas, and Lacan. The introductory outline of that discussion appears as “L’animal que donc je suis” in *L’Animal autobiographique*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (Paris: Galilée, 1999). It appears as “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28: 2 (2002). The essay published here follows a chapter on the animal according to Levinas.—Ed.

1. Earlier in the lecture, in rereading Descartes, I elaborated at length upon what I shall here call the *question of the reply* or *response*, and defined the hegemonic permanence of the “Cartesianism” that dominates the discourse and practice of human or humanist modernity with respect to the animal. A programmed machine such as the animal is said to be incapable not of emitting signs, but rather, according to the fifth part of the *Discourse on Method*, of “responding.” Like animals, machines with “the organs and outward form [*figure*, face] of a monkey . . . could never use words, or put together other signs, as we do in order to declare our thoughts to others. For we can certainly conceive of a machine so constructed that it utters words, and even utters words which correspond to bodily actions causing a change in its organs (e.g. if you touch it in one spot it asks what you want of it, if you touch it in another it cries out that you are hurting it, and so on). But it is not conceivable that such a machine should produce different arrangements of words so as to give an appropriately meaningful answer [*pour répondre*] to whatever is said in its presence, as the dullest of men can do” (René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press], 139, 140).

2. [See “The Animal That Therefore I Am” for extended discussion of this neologism that phonically singularizes the plural of animal (*animaux*)—noting thus the habit of speaking of all animal species as if they were one—and combines it with the word for “word” (*mot*).—*Trans.*]

3. Jacques Lacan, “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 305. [Subsequent references to the Sheridan translation of *Écrits* are given in the text. Other translations from Lacan are my own.—*Trans.*]

4. Jacques Lacan, “Position de l’inconscient,” in *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 834. [The original French version of *Écrits* will be henceforth identified as “*Écrits* (French).”—*Trans.*]

5. See especially *Écrits* (French), 190–91.

6. [*Proceedings of the Royal Society*, Series B (Biological Sciences), no. 845, February 3, 1939, vol. 126.—*Trans.*]

7. See *ibid.*, 189–91, and also 342, 345–46, 452.

8. “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in the psychoanalytic experience” (*Écrits*, 3).

9. Jacques Lacan, “Variantes de la cure-type,” in *Écrits* (French), 354: “For it is fitting to reflect on the fact that it is not only through a symbolic assumption that speech constitutes the being of the subject, but that, through the law of the alliance, wherein the human order is distinguished from nature, speech determines

not only the status of the subject but the coming-into-the-world of its biological being.”

10. [See opening note on the title of the Cerisy-la-Salle conference and of Derrida’s complete lecture, “The Animal That Therefore I Am.”—*Trans.*]

11. Cf. Joëlle Proust, *Comment l’esprit vient aux bêtes. Essai sur la représentation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 150. The same author does all she can to ensure that, in the case of the animal, the very word *response* signifies nothing more than a programmed *reaction*, deprived of all responsibility or even of any responsibility that I would cautiously call “intentional,” given that that word is used with a confidence and an imprudence, not to say a level of phenomenological vulgarity, that is almost laughable. Concerning the syrphid, an insect that is “programmed to seek out females by automatically applying a pursuit trajectory in accordance with a given algorithm in order to intercept the pursued object,” Joëlle Proust cites Ruth Millikan and comments thus: “What is interesting in this type of response is the fact that it is *inflexibly* provoked by certain precise characteristics in the *stimulus* (in the event its size and speed). The insect cannot respond to other characteristics, neither can it exclude targets manifesting characteristics that are incompatible with the desired function. It cannot abandon its course by ‘perceiving’ that it is not following a female. This insect appears not to have any means of evaluating the correctness of its own perceptions. It would therefore seem *exaggeratedly generous* to attribute to it a *properly intentional* capability. It *responds to signs*, but these signs are not characteristic of an independent object; they are characteristic of proximate stimuli. As Millikan states, it follows a ‘proximal rule.’ However, the prewired response aims to bring about the fecundation of a female syrphid, that is to say an object existing in the world” (228–29). I have underlined those words that, more than others, would call for a vigilant reading. The critical or deconstructive reading I am calling for would seek less to reconstitute to the animal or to such an insect the powers that it is not certain to possess (even if that sometimes seems possible) than to wonder whether one could not claim as much relevance for this type of analysis in the case of the human, with respect, for example, to the “wiring” of its sexual and reproductive behavior. And so on.

12. [Pronounced the same as *densité* (density).—*Trans.*]

13. [See “The Animal That Therefore I Am.”—*Trans.*]

14. [*dé-pister le dé-pistage et d’effacer sa trace. Une piste* is a track and *pister* is sometimes used for “to follow (an animal’s) tracks.” However, *dépister*, which looks to have a privative sense, is the more usual word for “to follow tracks.” Here Derrida is giving *dé-pister* that privative sense, following Lacan’s usage as explained in note 15 below.—*Trans.*]

15. Allow me to refer the reader to my *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), especially 35–38 and 74–76.

16. In an important note in the “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter,’” Lacan explains the original usage of the word *dépister* that he is having recourse to here: not to track, follow a scent or tracks, but, on the contrary, as it were, to confuse the issue [*brouiller les pistes*] by covering one’s tracks, *dé-pister*. In the same note he invokes both Freud’s famous text on the “antithetical sense of words,” “primal or not,” the “magisterial rectification” that Benveniste contributed to it, and information from Bloch and Von Wartburg dating the second sense of the word *dépister* from 1875. The question of the antinomic sense of certain words, Lacan makes clear, “cannot be dispensed with [*reste entière*] if one is to bring out the instance of the signifier in all its rigor” (*Yale French Studies* 48 [1975]: 51; translation modified).

And, indeed, I would be tempted to add in order to raise the stakes, especially if, as is the case here, we are to put to the test the axioms of a logic of the signifier in its double relation to the distinction between animal (capture by the imaginary) and human (access to the symbolic and to the signifier) orders, on the one hand, and to another interpretive implementation of undecidability, on the other. The supposedly assured difference between *pister* and *dé-pister*, or rather, between *dépister* (track, or follow a track) and *dé-pister* (cover one’s tracks and purposely lead the hunter off the track), coalesces and underwrites the whole distinction between human and animal, according to Lacan. It would be enough for this distinction to waver for the whole axiomatic to fall apart, in its very principle. That is what we are going to have to make clear.

17. Lacan, *Écrits*, 305. Italics are, of course, mine. Elsewhere I will analyze another text that, obeying the same logic (“the sexual instinct . . . crystallized in a relation . . . that is imaginary”), concerning precisely the stickleback and its “dance of copulation with the female,” introduces the question of death, of the *being already dead*, and not just the being-mortal of the individual as a “type” of the species; not horses but the horse. Cf. *Les écrits techniques de Freud* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 140–41.

18. “If instinct in effect signifies the undeniable animality of man, there seems no reason why that animality should be more docile for being incarnated in a reasonable being. The form of the adage—*homo homini lupus*—betrays its sense, and in a chapter from his *Criticon*, Balthazar Gracian elaborates a fable in which he shows what the moralist tradition means when it holds that the ferocity of man with respect to his fellow surpasses everything animals are capable of, and that carnivorous animals themselves would recoil in horror from the threat to which he exposes all nature. But this very cruelty implies humanity. It is a fellow creature that he has in his sights, even in the guise of a being from a different species” (Jacques Lacan, “Fonctions de la psychanalyse en criminologie,” in *Écrits* [French], 147).

19. Cf. Jacques Lacan, “Le séminaire sur «La Lettre volée»”: “it was necessary to illustrate in a concrete way the dominance that we affirm for the signifier over the subject” (*Écrits* [French], 61 [not in English translation—Trans.]); and “we have decided to illustrate for you today . . . that it is the symbolic order which is constitutive for the subject—by demonstrating in a story the decisive orientation [*détermination majeure*] which the subject receives from the itinerary of a signifier” (*Yale French Studies* 48 [1975]: 40).

20. Cf. Jacques Lacan, “Le Facteur de la vérité,” in *The Post Card*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

21. Emmanuel Levinas, “Paix et proximité,” in *Emmanuel Lévinas* (Paris: Cahiers de la nuit surveillée, 1984), 345. I cited and commented on this in my *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Michael Naas and Pascale-Anne Brault (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

22. A study of the value of “fraternity,” whose tradition and authority I have attempted to deconstruct (in *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins [London: Verso, 1997]), should also be able to identify the credit given to it by Lacan, and that well beyond the suspicion in which the murderous and patricidal brothers are held according to the logic of *Totem and Taboo*. In various places Lacan in effect dreams of *another fraternity*, for example, in these last words from “Agressivity in Psychoanalysis”: “it is our daily task to open up to this being of nothingness the way of his meaning in a discreet fraternity—a task for which we are always too inadequate” (*Écrits*, 29).

23. Jacques Lacan, “The Line and Light,” in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1998), 95. See also, especially, 75.

24. Jacques Lacan, “Situation de la psychanalyse et formation du psychanalyste en 1956,” in *Écrits* (French), 484.