

by the Collège de Sociologie betrays its impotence, denouncing the passivity and absence of reaction in the face of war as a form of massive "devirilization," in which men are transformed into a sort of "conscious sheep resigned to the slaughterhouse."⁵ Though in a sense different from the one Kojève had in mind, men had now truly become animals again.

§ 3 Snob

No animal can be a snob.

—Alexandre Kojève

In 1968, on the occasion of the second edition of the *Introduction*, by which time his disciple-rival had been dead six years, Kojève returns to the problem of man's becoming animal. And once again, he does so in the form of a footnote added to the footnote in the first edition (if the text of the *Introduction* is essentially composed from the notes collected by Queneau, then the footnotes are the only part of the text surely from Kojève's hand). That first note, he observes, was ambiguous, because if we accept that at the end of history man "properly so called" must disappear, then we cannot coherently expect that "all the rest" (art, love, play) can remain indefinitely.

If Man becomes an animal again, his arts, his loves, and his play must also become purely "natural" again. Hence it would have to be admitted that after the end of History, men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas, would play as young animals play, and would indulge in love like adult beasts. But one cannot then say that all this "makes Man happy." One would have to say that post-historical animals of the species *Homo sapiens* (which will live amidst abundance and complete security) will be *content* as a result of their artistic, erotic, and playful behavior, inasmuch as, by definition, they will be contented with it.¹

The definitive annihilation of man in the proper sense, however, must also entail the disappearance of human language, and its substitution by mimetic or sonic signals comparable to the language of bees. But in that case, Kojève argues, not only would philosophy—that is, the love of wisdom—disappear, but so would the very possibility of any wisdom as such.

At this point the note articulates a series of theses on the end of history and on the present state of the world, in which it is impossible to distinguish between absolute seriousness and an equally absolute irony. We thus learn that in the years immediately following the writing of the first note (1946), the author understood that the "Hegelo-Marxist end of history" was not a future event but something already completed. After the battle of Jena, the vanguard of humanity virtually reached the end of man's historical evolution. Everything that followed—including two world wars, Nazism, and the sovietization of Russia—represented nothing but a process of accelerated alignment of the rest of the world with the position of the most advanced European countries. Yet now, repeated trips to the United States and Russia, taken between 1948 and 1958 (by which time Kojève had become a high functionary in the French government), convinced him that, on the road toward reaching the posthistorical condition, "the Russians and the Chinese are only Americans who are still poor but are rapidly proceeding to become richer," while the United States has already reached the "final stage of Marxist 'communism.'" ² This then led him to the conclusion that

the "American way of life" was the type of life proper to the post-historical period, the current presence of the United States in the World prefiguring the future "eternal present" of all humanity. Thus, man's return to animality appeared no longer as a possibility that was yet to come, but as a certainty that was already present. ³

In 1959, however, a trip to Japan brought about a further shift in perspective. In Japan, Kojève was able to see with his own eyes a society which, though living in a condition of posthistory, had nevertheless not ceased to be "human."

"Post-historical" Japanese civilization undertook ways diametrically opposed to the "American way." No doubt, there were no longer in Japan any Religion, Morals, or Politics in the "European" or "historical" sense of these words. But *Snobbery* in its pure state created disciplines negating the "natural" or "animal" given which in effectiveness far surpassed those that arose, in Japan or elsewhere, from "historical" Action—that is, from warlike and revolutionary Struggles or from forced Work. To be sure, the peaks (equalled nowhere else) of specifically Japanese snobbery—the Noh theatre, the ceremony of tea, and the art of bouquets of flowers—were and still remain the exclusive prerogative of the nobles and the rich. But in spite of persistent economic and social inequalities, all Japanese without exception are currently in a position to live according to totally formalized values—that is, values completely empty of all "human" content in the "historical" sense. Thus, in the extreme, every Japanese is in principle capable of committing, from pure snobbery, a perfectly "gratuitous" *suicide* (the classical sword of the samurai can be replaced with an airplane or a torpedo), which has nothing to do with the risk of life in a Struggle waged for the sake of "historical" values that have social or political content. This seems to allow one to believe that the recently begun interaction between Japan and the Western World will finally lead not to a rebarbarization of the Japanese but to a "Japanization" of the Westerners (including the Russians).

Now, since no animal can be a snob, every "Japanized" post-historical period would be specifically human. Hence there would be no "definitive annihilation of Man properly so called," as long as there were animals of the species *Homo sapiens* that could serve as the "natural" support for what is human in men. ⁴

The farcical tone, for which Bataille reproached his teacher every time Kojève attempted to describe the posthistorical condition, reaches its peak in this note. Not only is the "American way of life" equated with an animal life, but man's survival of history in the form of Japanese snobbery resembles a more elegant (if, perhaps, parodic) version of that "negativity with no use" that Bataille sought to define, in his certainly more ingenuous way, and that to Kojève's eyes must have seemed in bad taste.

Let us try to reflect on the theoretical implications of this post-historical figure of the human. First of all, humanity's survival of

historical man
1959-1960
Kojève's subject
Snob

its historical drama seems to introduce—between history and its end—a fringe of ultrahistory that recalls the messianic reign of one thousand years that, in both the Jewish and Christian traditions, will be established on Earth between the last messianic event and the eternal life (which is not surprising in a thinker who had dedicated his first work to the philosophy of Solov'yev, itself imbued with messianic and eschatological themes). But what is decisive is that in this ultrahistorical fringe, man's remaining human presumes the survival of animals of the species *Homo sapiens* that must function as his support. For in Kojève's reading of Hegel, man is not a biologically defined species, nor is he a substance given once and for all; he is, rather, a field of dialectical tensions always already cut by internal caesurae that every time separate—at least virtually—"anthropophorous" animality and the humanity which takes bodily form in it. Man exists historically only in this tension; he can be human only to the degree that he transcends and transforms the anthropophorous animal which supports him, and only because, through the action of negation, he is capable of mastering and, eventually, destroying his own animality (it is in this sense that Kojève can write that "man is a fatal disease of the animal").⁵

But what becomes of the animality of man in posthistory? What relation is there between the Japanese snob and his animal body, and between this and the acephalous creature glimpsed by Bataille? Kojève, however, privileges the aspect of negation and death in the relation between man and the anthropophorous animal, and he seems not to see the process by which, on the contrary, man (or the State for him) in modernity begins to care for his own animal life, and by which natural life becomes the stakes in what Foucault called biopower. Perhaps the body of the anthropophorous animal (the body of the slave) is the unresolved remnant that idealism leaves as an inheritance to thought, and the aporias of the philosophy of our time coincide with the aporias of this body that is irreducibly drawn and divided between animality and humanity.

§ 4 *Mysterium disjunctionis*

For anyone undertaking a genealogical study of the concept of "life" in our culture, one of the first and most instructive observations to be made is that the concept never gets defined as such. And yet, this thing that remains indeterminate gets articulated and divided time and again through a series of caesurae and oppositions that invest it with a decisive strategic function in domains as apparently distant as philosophy, theology, politics, and—only later—medicine and biology. That is to say, everything happens as if, in our culture, life were *what cannot be defined, yet, precisely for this reason, must be ceaselessly articulated and divided*.

In the history of Western philosophy, this strategic articulation of the concept of life has a foundational moment. It is the moment in *De anima* when, from among the various senses of the term "to live," Aristotle isolates the most general and separable one.

It is through life that what has soul in it (*l'animale*) differs from what has not (*l'inanimato*).¹ Now this term "to live" has more than one sense, and provided any one alone of these is found in a thing we say that the thing is living—viz. thinking, sensation, local movement and rest, or movement in the sense of nutrition, decay and growth. Hence we think of all species of plants also as living, for they are observed to possess in themselves a principle and potentiality through which they grow and decay in opposite directions. . . . This principle can be sep-

arated from the others, but not they from it—in mortal beings at least. The fact is obvious in plants; for it is the only psychic potentiality {*potenza dell'anima*} they possess. Thus, it is through this principle that life belongs to living things. . . . By nutritive power [*threptikon*] we mean that part of the soul which is common also to plants.²

It is important to observe that Aristotle in no way defines what life is: he limits himself to breaking it down, by isolating the nutritive function, in order then to rearticulate it in a series of distinct and correlated faculties or potentialities (nutrition, sensation, thought). Here we see at work that principle of foundation which constitutes the strategic device par excellence of Aristotle's thought. It consists in reformulating every question concerning "what something is" as a question concerning "through what [*dià ti*] something belongs to another thing." To ask why a certain being is called living means to seek out the foundation by which living belongs to this being. That is to say, among the various senses of the term "to live," one must be separated from the others and settle to the bottom, becoming the principle by which life can be attributed to a certain being. In other words, what has been separated and divided (in this case nutritive life) is precisely what—in a sort of *divide et impera*—allows the construction of the unity of life as the hierarchical articulation of a series of functional faculties and oppositions.

The isolation of nutritive life (which the ancient commentators will already call vegetative) constitutes in every sense a fundamental event for Western science. When Bichat, many centuries later, in his *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort*, distinguishes between "animal life," which is defined by its relation to an external world, and "organic life," which is nothing other than a "habitual succession of assimilation and excretion,"³ it is again Aristotle's nutritive life that marks out the obscure background from which the life of the higher animals gets separated. According to Bichat, it is as if two "animals" lived together in every higher organism: *l'animal existant au-dedans*—whose life, which Bichat defines as "organic," is merely the repetition of, so to

speak, blind and unconscious functions (the circulation of blood, respiration, assimilation, excretion, etc.)—and *l'animal existant au-dehors*—whose life, for Bichat, the only one that merits the name of "animal," is defined through its relation to the external world. In man, these two animals live together, but they do not coincide; the internal animal's {*animale-di-dentro*} organic life begins in the fetus before animal life does, and in aging and in the final death throes it survives the death of the external animal {*animale-di-fuori*}.

It is hardly necessary to mention the strategic importance that the identification of this split between the functions of vegetative life and the functions of relational life has had in the history of modern medicine. The successes of modern surgery and anesthesia are founded upon, among other things, just this possibility of dividing and, at the same time, articulating Bichat's two animals. And as Foucault has shown, when the modern State, starting in the seventeenth century, began to include the care of the population's life as one of its essential tasks, thus transforming its politics into biopolitics, it was primarily by means of a progressive generalization and redefinition of the concept of vegetative life (now coinciding with the biological heritage of the nation) that the State would carry out its new vocation. And still today, in discussions about the definition *ex lege* of the criteria for clinical death, it is a further identification of this bare life—detached from any brain activity and, so to speak, from any subject—which decides whether a certain body can be considered alive or must be abandoned to the extreme vicissitude of transplantation.

The division of life into vegetal and relational, organic and animal, animal and human, therefore passes first of all as a mobile border within living man, and without this intimate caesura the very decision of what is human and what is not would probably not be possible. It is possible to oppose man to other living things, and at the same time to organize the complex—and not always edifying—economy of relations between men and animals, only because something like an animal life has been separated within

the special "animal" & "human" in
man who unity all of the functions
of modern subjects and their own
purification

Animal
External
(Animale-di-fuori)
Internal
(Animale-di-dentro)
Bichat

man, only because his distance and proximity to the animal have been measured and recognized first of all in the closest and most intimate place.

But if this is true, if the caesura between the human and the animal passes first of all within man, then it is the very question of man—and of “humanism”—that must be posed in a new way. In our culture, man has always been thought of as the articulation and conjunction of a body and a soul, of a living thing and a *logos*, of a natural (or animal) element and a supernatural or social or divine element. We must learn instead to think of man as what results from the incongruity of these two elements, and investigate not the metaphysical mystery of conjunction, but rather the practical and political mystery of separation. What is man, if he is always the place—and, at the same time, the result—of ceaseless divisions and caesurae? It is more urgent to work on these divisions, to ask in what way—within man—has man been separated from non-man, and the animal from the human, than it is to take positions on the great issues, on so-called human rights and values. And perhaps even the most luminous sphere of our relations with the divine depends, in some way, on that darker one which separates us from the animal.

for
 animal → human → all. for divine
 human
 animal
 from

§ 5 Physiology of the Blessed

What is this Paradise, but a tavern of ceaseless gorging and a brothel of perpetual bawdiness?

—William of Auvergne

It is a blessed thing to be resurrected.

It is particularly instructive, from this point of view, to read medieval treatises on the integrity and quality of the body of the resurrected. The problem that the Fathers had to confront first of all was that of the resurrected body's identity with the body of the man in life. For the identity of these two bodies seemed to imply that all the matter that had belonged to the body of the dead person must come back to life and take its place once again in the blessed organism. But this is precisely where difficulties arose. If, for example, a thief—who had later repented and been redeemed—had had a hand amputated, would the hand be rejoined to the body at the moment of resurrection? And the rib of Adam, asks Thomas, from which the body of Eve had been formed, will it be resurrected in Eve's body or in Adam's? Moreover, according to medieval science food is transformed into living flesh; in the case of an anthropophagus who has fed on other human bodies, this would have to mean that in the resurrection one single matter would be reintegrated into several individuals. And what about hair and fingernails? And sperm, sweat, milk, urine, and other secretions? If the intestines are resurrected, argues one theologian, they must come back either empty or full. If full, this means that even filth will rise again; if empty, then we will have an organ which no longer has any natural function.

The problem of the identity and integrity of the risen body thus

quickly becomes that of the physiology of blessed life. How should the vital functions of the paradisiacal body be conceived? In order to orient themselves on such an uneven ground, the Fathers had a useful paradigm at their disposal: the Edenic body of Adam and Eve before the Fall. "What God planted in the delights of eternal and blessed happiness," writes Scotus Erigena, "is human nature itself created in His image and likeness."¹ From this perspective, the physiology of the blessed body could appear as a restoration of the Edenic body, the archetype of uncorrupted human nature. This, however, entailed some consequences which the Fathers were not ready to fully accept. To be sure, as Augustine had explained, Adam's sexuality before the Fall did not resemble ours, since his sexual parts could be moved voluntarily just like hands or feet, so that sexual union could occur without the need of any concupiscent stimulus. And Adamic nourishment was infinitely more noble than ours, for it consisted solely of the fruits from the trees of Paradise. But even so, how should we conceive of the use of the sexual parts—or even simply of food—on the part of the blessed?

For if it were allowed that the risen would reproduce by means of sexuality and nourish themselves with food, this would mean that the number and bodily form of men would grow or change infinitely, and that there would be countless blessed ones who had never lived before the resurrection and whose humanity would therefore be impossible to define. The two principal functions of animal life—nutrition and generation—are directed to the preservation of the individual and of the species; but after the resurrection humanity would have reached its preordained number, and, in the absence of death, these two functions would be entirely useless. Furthermore, if the risen were to continue to eat and reproduce, not only would Paradise not be big enough to contain them all, but it would not even hold their excrement—thus justifying William of Auvergne's ironic invective: *maledicta Paradisus in qua tantum cacatur!* [Cursed Paradise in which there is so much defecation!]

Augustine
says that
Adam's
sexual
parts
were
moved
voluntarily

There was, however, a still more insidious doctrine that maintained that the risen would use sex and food not for the preservation of the individual or of the species, but rather (since beatitude consists in the perfect operation of human nature) so that in Paradise all of man, his bodily as well as his spiritual powers, would be blessed. Against these heretics—whom he likens to Muhammadans and Jews—Thomas, in the questions *De resurrectione* that were added to the *Summa theologiae*, forcefully reaffirms the exclusion of the *usus venereorum et ciborum* from Paradise. The resurrection, he teaches, is directed not to the perfection of man's natural life, but only to that final perfection which is contemplative life.

Those natural operations which are arranged for the purpose of either achieving or preserving the primary perfection of human nature will not exist in the resurrection. . . . And since to eat, drink, sleep, and beget pertain to . . . the primary perfection of nature, such things will not exist in the resurrection.²

The same author who had shortly before affirmed that man's sin had in no way changed the nature and condition of animals, now proclaims unreservedly that animal life is excluded from Paradise, that blessed life is in no case an animal life. Consequently, even plants and animals will not find a place in Paradise: "they will corrupt both in their whole and in their parts."³ In the body of the resurrected, the animal functions will remain "idle and empty" exactly as Eden, according to medieval theology, remains empty of all human life after the expulsion of Adam and Eve. All flesh will not be saved, and in the physiology of the blessed, the divine *oikonomia* of salvation leaves an unredeemable remnant.

In medieval theology
the animal does not become
redeemed in paradise

§ 6 *Cognitio experimentalis*

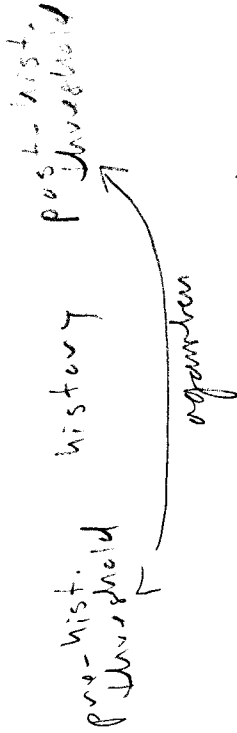
the messianic end of hist
a new / arrived messiah

We can, then, advance some provisional hypotheses about what makes the representation of the righteous with animal heads in the miniature in the Ambrosian so enigmatic. The messianic end of history or the completion of the divine *oikonomia* of salvation defines a critical threshold, at which the difference between animal and human, which is so decisive for our culture, threatens to vanish. That is to say, the relation between man and animal marks the boundary of an essential domain, in which historical inquiry must necessarily confront that fringe of ultrahistory which cannot be reached without making recourse to first philosophy. It is as if determining the border between human and animal were not just one question among many discussed by philosophers and theologians, scientists and politicians, but rather a fundamental metaphysico-political operation in which alone something like "man" can be decided upon and produced. If animal life and human life could be superimposed perfectly, then neither man nor animal—and, perhaps, not even the divine—would any longer be thinkable. For this reason, the arrival at posthistory necessarily entails the reactualization of the prehistoric threshold at which that border had been defined. Paradise calls Eden back into question.

In a passage of the *Summa* bearing the significant heading *Utrum Adam in statu innocentiae animalibus dominaretur* {Whether Adam in the State of Innocence Had Mastery Over the

Thinking the divine
requires a disjunction
between man and animal

Agamben's $a + b = b + a$



But what if post-hist. were to
what was there in a different
pre-hist. class? What if
where is not a bit less
a 1911 transformation,

Animals}, Thomas seems for a moment to come close to the center of the problem, evoking a "cognitive experiment" whose place would be in the relationship between man and animal.

In the state of innocence [he writes] men did not have any bodily need of animals. Neither for clothing, since they were naked and not ashamed, there being no motions of inordinate concupiscence; nor for food, since they fed on the trees of Paradise; nor for means of transport, their bodies being strong enough for that purpose. Yet they needed them in order to draw from their nature an experimental knowledge [*Indigebant tamen eis, ad experimentalem cognitionem sumendam de naturis eorum*]. This is signified by the fact that God led the animals before man, that he might give them a name that designated their nature.¹

We must try to grasp what is at stake in this *cognitio experimentalis*. Perhaps not only theology and philosophy but also politics, ethics, and jurisprudence are drawn and suspended in the difference between man and animal. The cognitive experiment at issue in this difference ultimately concerns the nature of man—or, more precisely, the production and definition of this nature; it is an experiment *de hominis natura*. When the difference vanishes and the two terms collapse upon each other—as seems to be happening today—the difference between being and the nothing, licit and illicit, divine and demonic also fades away, and in its place something appears for which we seem to lack even a name. Perhaps concentration and extermination camps are also an experiment of this sort, an extreme and monstrous attempt to decide between the human and the inhuman, which has ended up dragging the very possibility of the distinction to its ruin.

§ 7 Taxonomies

Cartesius certe non vidit simios.

{Surely Descartes never saw an ape.}

—Carolus Linnaeus

Linnaeus, the founder of modern scientific taxonomy, had a weakness for apes. It is likely that he had had the occasion to see some up close during a period of study in Amsterdam, which was then an important center for trade in exotic animals. Later, having returned to Sweden and become the royal chief physician, he gathered together in Uppsala a small zoo that included various species of apes and monkeys, among which it is said he was particularly fond of a Barbary ape named Diana. The idea that apes, like the other *bruta*, were essentially different from man in that they lacked a soul was something he was not ready to concede easily to the theologians. In a note to the *Systema naturae* he dismisses the Cartesian theory that conceived of animals as if they were *automata mechanica* with the vexed statement: "surely Descartes never saw an ape." In a later writing bearing the title *Menniskans Cousins*, "Man's Cousins," he explains how difficult it is to identify the specific difference between the anthropoid apes and man from the point of view of natural science. Not that he does not see the clear difference that separates man from beast on the moral and religious level:

Man is the animal which the Creator found worthy of honoring with such a marvelous mind and which he wanted to adopt as His favorite, reserving for him a nobler existence; God even sent His only son to save him.

But all this, he concludes,

belongs to another forum; just as the shoemaker sticks to his last, I must remain in my workshop and consider man and his body as a naturalist, who hardly knows a single distinguishing mark which separates man from the apes, save for the fact that the latter have an empty space between their canines and their other teeth.¹

The peremptory gesture with which, in the *Systema naturae*, he assigns *Homo* to the order of the *Anthropomorpha* (which, from the tenth edition of 1758, will be called *Primates*) alongside *Simia*, *Lemur*, and *Vespertilio* (the bat) cannot, therefore, be a surprise. Besides, despite the polemics that his gesture did not fail to provoke, in a certain sense the issue was in the air. Already in 1693, John Ray had distinguished the group of the *Anthropomorpha*, the “manlike” animals, among the quadrupeds. And in general, in the Ancien Régime the boundaries of man are much more uncertain and fluctuating than they will appear in the nineteenth century, after the development of the human sciences. Up until the eighteenth century, language—which would become man’s identifying characteristic par excellence—jumps across orders and classes, for it is suspected that even birds can talk. A witness as credible as John Locke refers to the story of the Prince of Nassau’s parrot—which was able to hold a conversation and respond to questions “like a reasonable creature”—more or less as a certainty. And even the physical demarcation between man and the other species entailed zones of indifference in which it was not possible to assign certain identities. A serious scientific work such as Peter Artedi’s *Ichthyologia* (1738) still listed sirens next to seals and sea lions, and Linnaeus himself, in his *Pan Europaeus*, classifies sirens—which the Danish anatomist Caspar Bartholin called *Homo marinus*—together with man and apes. On the other hand, the boundary between the anthropoid apes and certain primitive populations was also anything but clear. The first description of an orangutan by the doctor Nicolas Tulp in 1641 emphasizes the human aspects of this *Homo sylvestris* (which is the meaning of the Malay expression *orang-utan*); and we must wait until Edward Tyson’s treatise *Orang-Outang, sive Homo Sylvestris: or, the Anatomy of a Pygmy*

(1699) for the physical difference between ape and man to first be posed on the solid grounds of comparative anatomy. Though this work is considered a sort of incunabulum of primatology, the creature that Tyson calls a “Pygmy” (and which is anatomically distinguished from man by thirty-four characteristics, from apes and monkeys by forty-eight) nevertheless represents for him a sort of “intermediate animal” between ape and man, to whom it stands in a relation symmetrically opposite to that of the angel.

The animal of which I have given the Anatomy, [writes Tyson in the dedication to Lord Falconer] coming nearest to Mankind; seems the Nexus of the Animal and the Rational, as your Lordship, and those of your High Rank and Order for Knowledge and Wisdom, approaching nearest to that kind of Beings which is next above us; Connect the Visible, and Invisible World.²

And one look at the complete title of the treatise is enough to realize how the boundaries of the human were still threatened not only by real animals but also by creatures from mythology: *Orang-Outang, sive Homo Sylvestris: or, the Anatomy of a Pygmy Compared with that of a Monkey, an Ape, and a Man. To which is added, a Philosophical Essay Concerning the Pygmies, the Cynocephali, the Satyrs, and Sphingees of the Ancients. Wherein it Will Appear that They are all Either Apes or Monkeys, and not Men, as Formerly Pretended.*

In truth, Linnaeus’s genius consists not so much in the resoluteness with which he places man among the primates as in the irony with which he does not record—as he does with the other species—any specific identifying characteristic next to the generic name *Homo*, only the old philosophical adage: *nosce te ipsum* {know yourself}. Even in the tenth edition, when the complete denomination becomes *Homo sapiens*, all evidence suggests that the new epithet does not represent a description, but that it is only a simplification of that adage, which, moreover, maintains its position next to the term *Homo*. It is worth reflecting on this taxonomic anomaly, which assigns not a given, but rather an imperative as a specific difference.

An analysis of the *Introitus* that opens the *Systema* leaves no

doubts about the sense Linnaeus attributed to his maxim: man has no specific identity other than the ability to recognize himself. Yet to define the human not through any nota characteristic, but rather through his self-knowledge, means that man is the being which recognizes itself as such, that man is the animal that must recognize itself as human to be human. Indeed, Linnaeus writes that, at the moment of birth, nature has thrown man "bare upon the bare earth," unable to know, speak, walk, or feed himself, unless all this is taught to him (*Nudus in nuda terra . . . cui scire nichil sine doctrina; non fari, non ingredi, non vesci, non aliud naturae sponte*). He becomes himself only if he raises himself above man (*o quam contempta res est homo, nisi supra humana se erexit*).³

In a letter to a critic, Johann Georg Gmelin, who objected that in the *Systema* man seemed to have been created in the image of the ape, Linnaeus responds by offering the sense of his maxim: "And nevertheless man recognizes himself. Perhaps I should remove those words. Yet I ask you and the entire world to show me a generic difference between ape and man which is consistent with the principles of natural history. I most certainly do not know of any."⁴ The notes for a reply to another critic, Theodor Klein, show how far Linnaeus was willing to push the irony implicit in the formula *Homo sapiens*. Those who, like Klein, do not recognize themselves in the position that the *Systema* has assigned to man should apply the *nosce te ipsum* to themselves; in not knowing how to recognize themselves as man, they have placed themselves among the apes.

Homo sapiens, then, is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human. In line with the taste of the epoch, the anthropogenic (or—taking up Furio Jesi's expression—we might say anthropological) machine is an optical one (as is, according to the most recent studies, the apparatus described in *Leviathan*, the introduction to which perhaps provided Linnaeus with his maxim, *nosce te ipsum*, or "read thyself," as Hobbes translates this "saying not of late understood"). It is an optical machine constructed of a series of mirrors in which man, looking at himself,

C7 recognition and the specimen

anthropomorphic animal
Taxonomies
C7 are that
27
At the end of
now.

sees his own image already deformed in the features of an ape. *Homo* is a constitutively "anthropomorphic" animal (that is, "resembling man," according to the term that Linnaeus constantly uses until the tenth edition of the *Systema*), who must recognize himself in a non-man in order to be human.

In medieval iconography, the ape holds a mirror in which the man who sins must recognize himself as *simia dei* {ape of God}. In Linnaeus's optical machine, whoever refuses to recognize himself in the ape, becomes one: to paraphrase Pascal, *qui fait l'homme, fait le singe* [he who acts the man, acts the ape]. This is why at the end of the introduction to the *Systema*, Linnaeus, who defined *Homo* as the animal that is only if it recognizes that it is not, must put up with apes disguised as critics climbing on his shoulders to mock him: *ideoque ringentium Satyrorum cachinnos, meisque humeris insilientium cercopithecorum exultationes sustinui* [that is why I endured the derisive laughter of snarling satyrs and the exultation of monkeys leaping onto my shoulders].

§ 8 Without Rank

The anthropological machine of humanism is an ironic apparatus that verifies the absence of a nature proper to *Homo*, holding him suspended between a celestial and a terrestrial nature, between animal and human—and, thus, his being always less and more than himself. This is clear in Pico's oration, that "manifesto of humanism" that continues improperly to be called *de hominis dignitate*, even though it does not contain the term *dignitas*, which simply means "rank," and could not in any case refer to man. The paradigm that it presents is anything but edifying. For the central thesis of the oration is that man, having been molded when the models of creation were all used up (*iam plena omnia* [scil. *archetipa*]; *omnia summis, mediis infimisque ordinibus fuerant distributa*), can have neither archetype nor proper place (*certam sedem*) nor specific rank (*nec munus ullum peculiare*).¹ Moreover, since he was created without a definite model (*indiscretæ opus imaginis*), he does not even have a face of his own (*nec propriam faciem*)² and must shape it at his own discretion in either bestial or divine form (*tui ipsius quasi arbitrarius honorariusque plastes et fctor, in quam malueris tute formam effingas. Poteris in inferiora quae sunt bruta degenerare; poteris in superiora quae sunt divina ex tui animi sententia regenerari* [as the free and extraordinary maker and molder of yourself, you may shape yourself into whatever form you prefer. You can degenerate into the lower things, which are brutes; you

can regenerate, in accordance with your soul's decision, into the higher things, which are divine).³ In this definition of man by his lack of a face, the same ironic machine is at work that three centuries later will prompt Linnaeus to classify man among the *Anthropomorpha*, the "manlike" animals. Insofar as he has neither essence nor specific vocation, *Homo* is constitutively nonhuman; he can receive all natures and all faces (*Nascenti homini omnifaria semina et omnigenae vitae germina indidit Pater* [in the man being born, the Father implanted seeds of every sort and sprouts of every kind of life]),⁴ and Pico can ironically emphasize his inconsistency and unclassifiability by defining him as "our chameleon" (*Quis hunc nostrum chameleonta non admiretur?* {who would not wonder at this chameleon of ours?}).⁵ The humanist discovery of man is the discovery that he lacks himself, the discovery of his irreducible lack of *dignitas*.

To this transience and inhumanity of the human corresponds Linnaeus's registration within the species *Homo sapiens* of the enigmatic variant *Homo ferus*, a variant that seems to belie the characteristics of the most noble of the primates point for point: it is *tetrapus* (walks on all fours), *mutus* (without language), and *hirsutus* (covered with hair). The list that follows in the 1758 edition identifies this creature personally: Linnaeus is speaking of the *enfants sauvages*, or wolf-children, of whom the *Systema* records five appearances in less than fifteen years: the youth of Hannover (1724), the two *pueri pyrenaeici* (1719), the *puella transisalana* (1717), and the *puella campanica* (1731). At the time when the sciences of man begin to delineate the contours of his *facies*, the *enfants sauvages*, who appear more and more often on the edges of the villages of Europe, are the messengers of man's inhumanity, the witnesses to his fragile identity and his lack of a face of his own. And when confronted with these uncertain and mute beings, the passion with which the men of the Ancien Régime try to recognize themselves in them and to "humanize" them shows how aware they are of the precariousness of the human. As Lord Monboddo writes in his preface to the English version of the *Histoire d'une jeune fille sauvage, trouvée dans les bois à l'âge de dix ans*, they knew

perfectly well that "*reason and animal sensation, however distinct we may imagine them, run into one another by such insensible degrees, that it is as difficult, or perhaps more difficult, to draw the line betwixt these two, than betwixt the animal and vegetable.*"⁶ Though it will not be the case for much longer, the features of the human face are here so unsure and aleatory that they are always in the process of being undone and erased like those of a transitory being: "Who knows," writes Diderot in the *Rêve de d'Alembert*, "whether this misshapen biped a mere four feet in height, which is still called man in polar regions, but which would very soon lose that name if it went just a little more misshapen, is not the image of a passing species?"⁷

§ 9 Anthropological Machine

Homo aldus primigenius Haeckelii . . .
{Haeckel's speechless, earliest-born man . . . }

— Hans Vaihinger

In 1899 Ernst Haeckel, professor at the University of Jena, published with Kröner of Stuttgart *Die Welträtsel*, "The Enigmas of the World," which intended, against every dualism and every metaphysics, to reconcile the philosophical pursuit of truth with the advances of the natural sciences. Despite the technicality and breadth of the problems it dealt with, in a few years over 150,000 copies of the book were in print, and it became a sort of gospel of scientific progressivism. The title contains more than an ironic allusion to the lecture given by Emil Du Bois-Reymond a few years earlier at the Academy of Sciences in Berlin, in which the renowned scientist had listed seven "enigmas of the world," declaring three of them "transcendental and unsolvable," three solvable (though not yet solved), and one uncertain. In the fifth chapter of his book, Haeckel, who believes he has cleared away the first three enigmas with his own doctrine of substance, concentrates on that "problem of problems" that is the origin of man, and that in some ways encompasses Du Bois-Reymond's three solvable, though not yet solved, problems. And here too he believes he has definitively resolved the question by means of a radical and coherent application of Darwinian evolutionism.

Thomas Huxley, he explains, had already shown how the theory of "the 'descent of man from the ape' is a necessary consequence of Darwinism";¹ but it is just this certainty that imposed the diffi-

cult task of reconstructing the evolutionary history of man on the basis of both the results of comparative anatomy and the findings of paleontological research. To this task Haeckel had already, in 1874, dedicated his *Anthropogenie*, in which he reconstructed the history of man from the fish of the Silurian up through the man-apes, or Anthropomorphs, of the Miocene. But his specific contribution—of which he was rightly proud—is to have hypothesized as a form of passage from the anthropoid apes (or man-apes) to man a peculiar being that he called “ape-man” (*Affenmensch*) or, since it was without language, *Pithecanthropus alalus*:

From the Placentals in the earliest Tertiary period (the Eocene) arise the first ancestors of the primates, the semi-apes, from which, in the Miocene, develop the true apes, and more precisely, from the Catarrhines, first come the dog-apes (the *Cynopithec*i) and then the man-apes (the Anthropomorphs); from one branch of the latter, during the Pliocene period, arises the ape-man without speech (the *Pithecanthropus alalus*), and from him, finally, speaking man.²

The existence of this *pithecanthropus* or ape-man, which in 1874 was merely a hypothesis, became a reality when in 1891 a Dutch military doctor, Eugen Dubois, discovered on the island of Java a piece of skull and a femur similar to those of present-day man, and, to Haeckel's great satisfaction (Dubois was an enthusiastic reader of Haeckel) baptized the being to whom they had belonged *Pithecanthropus erectus*. This, Haeckel peremptorily affirmed, “is in truth the much-sought ‘missing link,’ supposed to be wanting in the evolutionary chain of the primates, which stretches unbroken from the lowest Catarrhines to the highest-developed man.”³

The idea of this *sprachloser Urmensch*—as Haeckel also defines him—entailed, however, some aporias of which he does not seem to have been aware. In reality, the passage from animal to man, despite the emphasis placed on comparative anatomy and paleontological findings, was produced by subtracting an element that had nothing to do with either one, and that instead was presupposed as the identifying characteristic of the human: language. In

identifying himself with language, the speaking man places his own muteness outside of himself, as already and not yet human.

It fell to a linguist, Heymann Steinthal—who was also one of the last representatives of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, which had sought to apply the methods of modern science to the study of Judaism—to lay bare the aporias implicit in Haeckel's theory of the *Homo alalus* and, more generally, those of what we can call the modern anthropological machine. In his studies on the origin of language, Steinthal had himself advanced, many years before Haeckel, the idea of a prelinguistic stage of humanity. He had tried to imagine a phase of man's perceptual life in which language has not yet appeared, and he had compared this with the perceptual life of the animal; he then tried to show how language could spring from the perceptual life of man and not from that of the animal. But this is precisely where an aporia appeared which he would only fully realize some years later.

We have [he writes] compared this purely hypothetical stage of the human soul with that of the animal, and have in the first discerned, in general and in all respects, an excess of forces. We then had the human soul apply this excess to the formation of language. We have thereby been able to show why language originated from the human soul and its perceptions, and not from that of the animal. . . . But in our description of animal and human souls we have had to leave aside language, the possibility of which we were precisely supposed to prove. It first should have been shown whence stems the force by means of which the soul forms language; this force which has the ability to create language obviously cannot stem from language. For this reason we have invented a stage of man that precedes language. But of course, this is only a fiction; for language is so necessary and natural for the human being, that without it man can neither truly exist nor be thought of as existing. Either man has language, or he simply is not. On the other hand—and this justifies the fiction—language nevertheless cannot be regarded as already inherent in the human soul; rather, it is by this time a production of man, even if not yet a fully conscious one. It is a stage of the soul's development and requires a deduction from the preceding stages. With it, true and proper human activity begins; it is the bridge that leads from the ani-

mal kingdom to the human kingdom. . . . But why the human soul alone builds this bridge, why man alone and not the animal progresses through language from animality to humanity: this is what we wanted to explain through a comparison of the animal with the animal-man. This comparison shows us that man, as we must imagine him, that is, without language, is indeed an animal-man [*Tier-Mensch*] and not a human animal [*Menschen-tier*], and is always already a species of man and not a species of animal.⁴

What distinguishes man from animal is language, but this is not a natural given already inherent in the psychophysical structure of man; it is, rather, a historical production which, as such, can be properly assigned neither to man nor to animal. If this element is taken away, the difference between man and animal vanishes, unless we imagine a nonspeaking man—*Homo alalus*, precisely—who would function as a bridge that passes from the animal to the human. But all evidence suggests that this is only a shadow cast by language, a presupposition of speaking man, by which we always obtain only an animalization of man (an animal-man, like Haeckel's ape-man) or a humanization of the animal (a man-ape). The animal-man and the man-animal are the two sides of a single fracture, which cannot be mended from either side.

Returning to his theory some years later, after having learned of Darwin's and Haeckel's theses, which by then were at the center of scientific and philosophical debates, Steinhilber is perfectly well aware of the contradiction implicit in his hypothesis. What he had tried to understand was why man alone and not the animal creates language; but that was tantamount to understanding how man originates from animal. And this is precisely where the contradiction arises:

The prelinguistic stage of intuition can only be one, not double, and it cannot be different for animal and for man. If it were different, that is, if man were naturally higher than the animal, then the origin of man would not coincide with the origin of language, but rather with the origin of his higher form of intuition out of the lower form which is the animal's. Without realizing it, I presupposed this origin: in reality, man with his human characteristics was given to me through creativity.

ation, and I then sought to discover the origin of language in man. But in this way, I contradicted my presupposition: that is, that the origin of language and the origin of man were one and the same; I set man up first and then had him produce language.⁵

The contradiction that Steinhilber detects here is the same one that defines the anthropological machine which—in its two variants, ancient and modern—is at work in our culture. (Insofar as the production of man through the opposition man/animal, human/inhuman, is at stake here, the machine necessarily functions by means of an exclusion (which is also always already a capturing) and an inclusion (which is also always already an exclusion). Indeed, precisely because the human is already presupposed every time, the machine actually produces a kind of state of exception, a zone of indeterminacy in which the outside is nothing but the exclusion of an inside and the inside is in turn only the inclusion of an outside.)

On the one hand, we have the anthropological machine of the moderns. As we have seen, it functions by excluding as not (yet) human an already human being from itself, that is, by animalizing the human, by isolating the nonhuman within the human: *Homo alalus*, or the ape-man. And it is enough to move our field of research ahead a few decades, and instead of this innocuous paleontological find we will have the Jew, that is, the non-man produced within the man, or the *némort* and the overcomatose person, that is, the animal separated within the human body itself.

The machine of earlier times works in an exactly symmetrical way. If, in the machine of the moderns, the outside is produced through the exclusion of an inside and the inhuman produced by animalizing the human, here the inside is obtained through the inclusion of an outside, and the non-man is produced by the humanization of an animal: the man-ape, the *enfant sauvage* or *Homo ferus*, but also and above all the slave, the barbarian, and the foreigner, as figures of an animal in human form.

Both machines are able to function only by establishing a zone of indifference at their centers, within which—like a “missing link” which is always lacking because it is already virtually pres-

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ent—the articulation between human and animal, man and non-man, speaking being and living being, must take place. Like every space of exception, this zone is, in truth, perfectly empty, and the truly human being who should occur there is only the place of a ceaselessly updated decision in which the caesurae and their rearticulation are always dislocated and displaced anew. What would thus be obtained, however, is neither an animal life nor a human life, but only a life that is separated and excluded from itself—only a *bare life*.

And faced with this extreme figure of the human and the inhuman, it is not so much a matter of asking which of the two machines (or of the two variants of the same machine) is better or more effective—or, rather, less lethal and bloody—as it is of understanding how they work so that we might, eventually, be able to stop them.

↳ political imperative

§ 10 Umwelt

No animal can enter into relation with an object as such.

—Jakob von Uexküll

It is fortunate that the baron Jakob von Uexküll, today considered one of the greatest zoologists of the twentieth century and among the founders of ecology, was ruined by the First World War. To be sure, even before that, as an independent researcher first in Heidelberg and then at the Zoological Station in Naples, he had earned himself a fairly good scientific reputation for his studies of the physiology and nervous system of invertebrates. But once left without his familial inheritance, he was forced to abandon the southern sun (though he kept a villa on Capri, where he would die in 1944, and where Walter Benjamin would stay for several months in 1924) and integrate himself into the University of Hamburg, founding there the Institut für Umweltforschung, which would make him famous.

Uexküll's investigations into the animal environment are contemporary with both quantum physics and the artistic avant-gardes. And like them, they express the unreserved abandonment of every anthropocentric perspective in the life sciences and the radical dehumanization of the image of nature (and so it should come as no surprise that they strongly influenced both Heidegger, the philosopher of the twentieth century who more than any other strove to separate man from the living being, and Gilles Deleuze, who sought to think the animal in an absolutely nonanthropo-

§ 16 Animalization

Men are animals, some of whom raise their own kind.

—Peter Sloterdijk

Heidegger was perhaps the last philosopher to believe in good faith that the place of the *polis* (the *polos* {pole}) where the conflict between concealedness and unconcealedness, between the *animalitas* and the *humanitas* of man, reigns) was still practicable, and that it was still possible for men, for a people—holding themselves in that risky place—to find their own proper historical destiny. He was, that is, the last to believe (at least up to a certain point, and not without doubts and contradictions) that the anthropological machine, which each time decides upon and recomposes the conflict between man and animal, between the open and the not-open, could still produce history and destiny for a people. It is likely that at a certain point he realized his error, and understood that a decision that responded to a historical mission of being was nowhere possible. Already in 1934–35, in the course on Hölderlin in which he attempts to reawaken the “fundamental emotional tonality of Dasein’s historicity,” he writes that “the possibility of a great disruption [*Erschütterung*, the same term that describes the animal’s being exposed in something unconcealed] of historical existence of a people has disappeared. Temples, images, and customs are no longer capable of taking on the historical vocation of a people in order to compel it in a new task.”¹ By this point, post-history was beginning to knock on the doors of a concluded metaphysics.

Today, at a distance of nearly seventy years, it is clear for anyone who is not in absolutely bad faith that there are no longer historical tasks that can be taken on by, or even simply assigned to, men. It was in some ways already evident starting with the end of the First World War that the European nation-states were no longer capable of taking on historical tasks and that peoples themselves were bound to disappear. We completely misunderstand the nature of the great totalitarian experiments of the twentieth century if we see them only as a carrying out of the nineteenth-century nation-states' last great tasks: nationalism and imperialism. The stakes are now different and much higher, for it is a question of taking on as a task the very factual existence of peoples, that is, in the last analysis, their bare life. Seen in this light, the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century truly constitute the other face of the Hegelo-Kojevian idea of the end of history: man has now reached his historical *telos* and, for a humanity that has become animal again, there is nothing left but the depoliticization of human societies by means of the unconditioned unfolding of the *oikonomia*, or the taking on of biological life itself as the supreme political (or rather impolitical) task.

It is likely that the times in which we live have not emerged from this aporia. Do we not see around and among us men and peoples who no longer have any essence or identity—who are delivered over, so to speak, to their inessentiality and their inactivity {*inoperosità*}—and who grope everywhere, and at the cost of gross falsifications, for an inheritance and a task, *an inheritance as task*? Even the pure and simple relinquishment of all historical tasks (reduced to simple functions of internal or international policing) in the name of the triumph of the economy, often today takes on an emphasis in which natural life itself and its well-being seem to appear as humanity's last historical task—if indeed it makes sense here to speak of a "task."

The traditional historical potentialities—poetry, religion, philosophy—which from both the Hegelo-Kojevian and Heideggerian perspectives kept the historico-political destiny of peoples awake, have long since been transformed into cultural spectacles

past history

past history

and private experiences, and have lost all historical efficacy. Faced with this eclipse, the only task that still seems to retain some seriousness is the assumption of the burden—and the "total management"—of biological life, that is, of the very animality of man. Genome, global economy, and humanitarian ideology are the three united faces of this process in which posthistorical humanity seems to take on its own physiology as its last, impolitical mandate.

It is not easy to say whether the humanity that has taken upon itself the mandate of the total management of its own animality is still human, in the sense of that *humanitas* which the anthropological machine produced by deciding every time between man and animal; nor is it clear whether the well-being of a life that can no longer be recognized as either human or animal can be felt as fulfilling. To be sure, such a humanity, from Heidegger's perspective, no longer has the form of keeping itself open to the undisclosed of the animal, but seeks rather to open and secure the not-open in every domain, and thus closes itself to its own openness, forgets its *humanitas*, and makes being its specific inhibitor. The total humanization of the animal coincides with a total animalization of man.

past history
(substantive)
past history
(substantive)

humanity
past history
biological life
genome
global economy
humanitarianism
ideology

§ 17 Anthropogenesis

Let us try to state the provisional results of our reading of Western philosophy's anthropological machine in the form of theses:

1. Anthropogenesis is what results from the caesura and articulation between human and animal. This caesura passes first of all within man.
2. Ontology, or first philosophy, is not an innocuous academic discipline, but in every sense the fundamental operation in which anthropogenesis, the becoming human of the living being, is realized. From the beginning, metaphysics is taken up in this strategy: it concerns precisely that *meta* that completes and preserves the overcoming of animal *physis* in the direction of human history. This overcoming is not an event that has been completed once and for all, but an occurrence that is always under way, that every time and in each individual decides between the human and the animal, between nature and history, between life and death.
3. Being, world, and the open are not, however, something other with respect to animal environment and life: they are nothing but the interruption and capture of the living being's relationship with its disinhibitor. The open is nothing but a grasping of the animal not-open. Man suspends his animality and, in this way, opens a "free and empty" zone in which life is captured and abandoned {*ab-bandonata*} in a zone of exception.

4. Precisely because the world has been opened for man only by means of the suspension and capture of animal life, being is always already traversed by the nothing; the *Lichtung* is always already *Nichtung*.

5. In our culture, the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man. That is to say, in its origin Western politics is also biopolitics.

6. If the anthropological machine was the motor for man's becoming historical, then the end of philosophy and the completion of the epochal destinations of being mean that today the machine is idling.

At this point, two scenarios are possible from Heidegger's perspective: (a) posthistorical man no longer preserves his own animality as undisclosable, but rather seeks to take it on and govern it by means of technology; (b) man, the shepherd of being, appropriates his own concealedness, his own animality, which neither remains hidden nor is made an object of mastery, but is thought as such, as pure abandonment.

a) posthist man < take on the animal
"govern" w/ tech.
b) from "appropriates" his own
concealedness
pure abandonment

§ 18 Between

All the enigmas of the world seem slight to us compared to the tiny secret of sex.

— Michel Foucault

Several of Benjamin's texts propose an entirely different image of the relationship between man and nature and between nature and history: an image in which the anthropological machine seems to be completely out of play. The first is the letter of December 9, 1923, to Rang on the "saved night." Here nature, as the world of closedness (*Verschlossenheit*) and of the night, is opposed to history as the sphere of revelation (*Offenbarung*). But to the closed sphere of nature Benjamin—surprisingly—also ascribes ideas as well as works of art. Indeed, these last are defined

as models of a nature that awaits no day, and thus no Judgement Day; they are the models of a nature that is neither the theater of history nor the dwelling place of man. The saved night [*Die gerettete Nacht*].¹

The link that Paul's text on the *apokaradokia tēs ktiseōs* established between nature and redemption, between creature and redeemed humanity, is here shattered. Ideas—which, like stars, "shine only in the night of nature"—gather creatural life not in order to reveal it, nor to open it to human language, but rather to give it back to its closedness and muteness. The separation between nature and redemption is an ancient Gnostic motif; and this led Jacob Taubes to place Benjamin alongside the Gnostic Marcion. But in Benjamin, the separation follows a peculiar strat-

egy, one that is at antipodes with Marcion's. What in Marcion, as in the majority of the Gnostics, arose out of an undervaluation and condemnation of nature as the work of the bad Demiurge, here leads instead to a transvaluation which sets it up as the archetype of *beatitudo*. The "saved night" is the name of this nature that has been given back to itself, whose character, according to another of Benjamin's fragments, is transience and whose rhythm is beatitude. The salvation that is at issue here does not concern something that has been lost and must be found again, something that has been forgotten and must be remembered; it concerns, rather, the lost and the forgotten as such—that is, something unsavable. The saved night is a relationship with something unsavable. For this reason, man—insofar as he is "at some stages" also nature—appears as a field traversed by two distinct tensions, by two different redemptions:

To the spiritual *restitutio in integrum*, which introduces immortality, corresponds a worldly restitution that leads to the eternity of a downfall, and the rhythm of this worldly existence which eternally passes away—passes away in its totality, in its spatial but also in its temporal totality—the rhythm of messianic nature, is happiness.²

In this singular gnosis, man is the sieve in which creatural life and spirit, creation and redemption, nature and history are continually discerned and separated, yet nevertheless continue to conspire toward their own salvation.

In the text that concludes *Einbahnstraße* and bears the heading *Zum Planetarium*, Benjamin seeks to outline modern man's relationship with nature as compared to ancient man's relationship with the cosmos, which had its place in the ecstatic trance. For modern man the proper place of this relationship is technology. But not, to be sure, a technology conceived, as it commonly is, as man's mastery of nature:

The mastery of nature (so the imperialists teach) is the sense of all technology. But who would trust a cane wielder who proclaimed the mastery of children by adults to be the sense of education? Is not edu-

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cation, above all, the indispensable ordering of the relationship between generations and therefore mastery (if we are to use this term) of that relationship and not of children? And likewise technology is the mastery not of nature but mastery of the relation between nature and humanity. It is true that men as a species completed their evolution thousands of years ago; but humanity as a species is just beginning its.³

What does "mastery of the relation between nature and humanity" mean? That neither must man master nature nor nature man. Nor must both be surpassed in a third term that would represent their dialectical synthesis. Rather, according to the Benjaminian model of a "dialectic at a standstill," what is decisive here is only the "between," the interval or, we might say, the play between the two terms, their immediate constellation in a non-coincidence. The anthropological machine no longer articulates nature and man in order to produce the human through the suspension and capture of the inhuman. The machine is, so to speak, stopped; it is "at a standstill," and, in the reciprocal suspension of the two terms, something for which we perhaps have no name and which is neither animal nor man settles in between nature and humanity and holds itself in the mastered relation, in the saved night.

A few pages earlier in the same book, in one of his densest aphorisms, Benjamin evokes the uncertain image of this life that has freed itself from its relation with nature only at the cost of losing its own mystery. What severs—not solves—this secret bond that ties man to life, however, is an element which seems to belong totally to nature but instead everywhere surpasses it: sexual fulfillment. In the paradoxical image of a life that, in the extreme vicissitude of sensual pleasure, frees itself of its mystery in order to, so to speak, recognize a nonnature, Benjamin has set down something like the hieroglyph of a new in-humanity:

Sexual fulfillment delivers the man from his mystery, which does not consist in sexuality but which in its fulfillment, and perhaps in it alone, is severed—not solved. It is comparable to the fetters that bind

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him to life. The woman cuts them, and the man is free to die because his life has lost its mystery. Thereby he is reborn, and as his beloved frees him from the mother's spell, the woman literally detaches him from Mother Earth—a midwife who cuts that umbilical cord which the mystery of nature has woven.⁴

§ 19 *Desœuvrement*

In the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna there is a late work by Titian (defined by some, indeed, as his *ultima poesia*, something of a farewell to painting) known as the *Nymph and Shepherd*. The two figures are represented in the foreground, immersed in a dark country landscape; the shepherd, seated facing us, holds a flute in his hands as if he had just taken it from his lips. The nymph, nude and represented from the back, lies stretched next to him on a leopard's skin, a traditional symbol for wantonness and libido, showing her full and luminous hips. With a studied gesture, she turns her pensive face toward the viewers, and with her left hand lightly touches her other arm in a sort of caress. A little further in the distance, there is a tree that has been struck by lightning, half dry and half green, like the tree in the allegory of Lot, against which an animal—a "bold goat" according to some, but perhaps a fawn—dramatically rears up, as if to nibble at its leaves. Still higher, as is often the case in the late, impressionist Titian, one's gaze becomes lost in a vivid mass of painting.

Faced with this enigmatic *paysage moralisé* immersed in an atmosphere of both exhausted sensuality and subdued melancholy, scholars have been left perplexed, and no explanation has seemed complete. To be sure, the scene is "too much fraught with emotion to be an allegory," and yet "this emotion is too restrained and somber for any of the suggestions proposed."¹ It seems obvi-