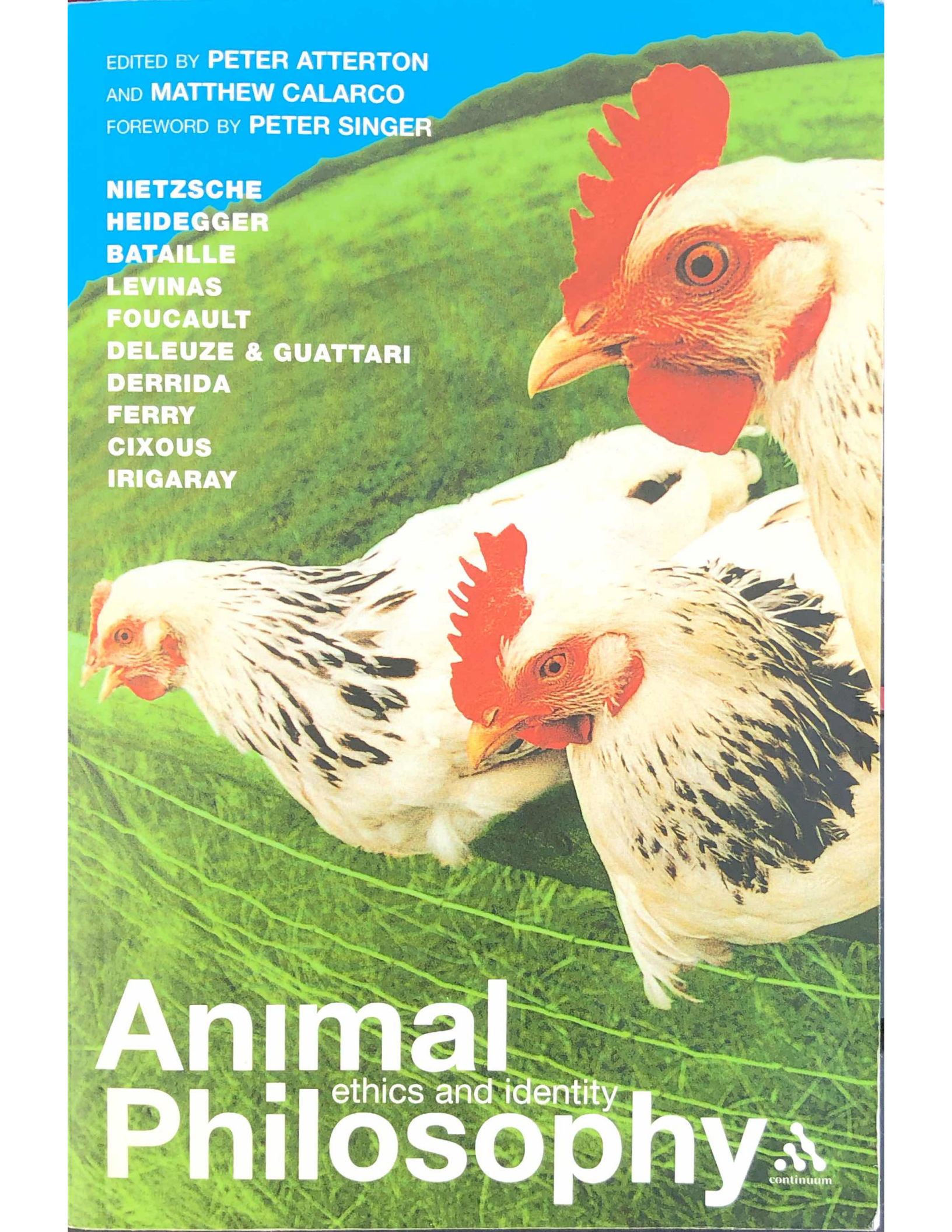


EDITED BY **PETER ATTERTON**  
AND **MATTHEW CALARCO**  
FOREWORD BY **PETER SINGER**

**NIETZSCHE**  
**HEIDEGGER**  
**BATAILLE**  
**LEVINAS**  
**FOUCAULT**  
**DELEUZE & GUATTARI**  
**DERRIDA**  
**FERRY**  
**CIXOUS**  
**IRIGARAY**



**Animal**  
ethics and identity  
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## THE ANIMAL THAT THEREFORE I AM (MORE TO FOLLOW)\*

Jacques Derrida

What animal? The other.

I often ask myself, just to see, *who I am* – and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment.

Whence this malaise?

I have trouble repressing a reflex dictated by immodesty. Trouble keeping silent within me a protest against the indecency. Against the impropriety that comes of finding oneself naked, one's sex exposed, stark naked before a cat that looks at you without moving, just to see. The impropriety [*malséance*] of a certain animal nude before the other animal, from that point on one might call it a kind of *animalséance*: the single, incomparable and original experience of the impropriety that would come from appearing in truth naked, in front of the insistent gaze of the animal, a benevolent or pitiless gaze, surprised or cognizant. The gaze of a seer, visionary, or extra-lucid blind person. It is as if I were ashamed, therefore,

Have you ever  
seen an  
animal  
"seeing" you,  
naked or not?

\* This article represents the first part of a ten-hour address Derrida gave at the third Cerisy-la-Salle conference devoted to his work, in July 1997. The title of the conference was "L'animal autobiographique"; see *L'animal autobiographique: Autour de Jacques Derrida*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (Paris: Galilée, 1999); Derrida's essay appears on pages 251–301. Later segments of the address dealt with Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lacan, and Levinas, as note 1 explains and as other allusions made by Derrida suggest. The Lacan segment ("And Say the Animal Responded?") is included in Cary Wolfe, ed., *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 121–46.

The French title of Derrida's article is "L'animal que donc je suis (à suivre)." An obvious play on Descartes's definition of consciousness (of the thinking animal as human), it also takes advantage of the shared first-person singular present form of *être* (to be) and *suivre* (to follow) in order to suggest a displacement of that priority, also reading as "the animal that therefore I follow after." Throughout the translation "I am" has, very often, to be read also as "I follow," and vice versa. I have adopted the formula "I am (following)," except where the context, or demands of fluency, dictate a choice of one or the other possibility. – Trans.



naked in front of this cat, but also ashamed for being ashamed. A reflected shame, the mirror of a shame ashamed of itself, a shame that is at the same time specular, unjustifiable, and unable to be admitted to. At the optical center of this reflection would appear this thing – and in my eyes the focus of this incomparable experience – that is called nudity. And about which it is believed that it is proper to man, that is to say foreign to animals, naked as they are, or so it is thought, without the slightest inkling of being so.

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

Ashamed of what and before whom? Ashamed of being as naked as an animal [*bête*]. It is generally thought, although none of the philosophers I am about to examine actually mention it,<sup>1</sup> that the property unique to animals and what in the final analysis distinguishes them from man, is their being naked without knowing it. Not being naked therefore, not having knowledge of their nudity, in short without consciousness of good and evil.

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

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

The animal, therefore, is not naked because it is naked. It doesn't feel its own nudity. There is no nudity "in nature." There is only the sentiment, the affect, the (conscious or unconscious) experience of existing in nakedness. Because it is naked, without existing in nakedness, the animal neither feels nor sees itself naked. And it therefore is not naked. At least that is what is thought. For man it would be the opposite, and clothing derives from technics. We would therefore have to think shame and technicity together, as the same "subject." And evil and history, and work, and so many other things that go along with it. Man would be the only one to have invented a garment to cover his sex. He

would only be a man to the extent that he was able to be naked, that is to say to be ashamed, to know himself to be ashamed because he is no longer naked. And knowing *himself* would mean knowing himself to be ashamed. On the other hand, because the animal is naked without consciousness of being naked, modesty would remain as foreign to it as would immodesty. As would the knowledge of self that is involved in that.

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

Before the cat that looks at me naked, would I be ashamed like an animal that no longer has the sense of nudity? Or on the contrary, like a man who retains the sense of his nudity? Who am I therefore? Who is it that I am (following)? Whom should this be asked of if not of the other? And perhaps of the cat itself?

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

An animal looks at me. What should I think of this sentence? The cat that looks at me naked and that is truly a little cat, *this* cat I am talking about, which is also a female, isn't Montaigne's cat either, the one he nevertheless calls "my [pussy]cat" [*ma chatte*] in his *Apology for Raymond Sebond*.<sup>2</sup> You will recognize that as one of the greatest pre- or anti-Cartesian texts on the animal. Later we will pay attention to a certain evolution from Montaigne to Descartes, an event that is obscure and difficult to assign a date to, to identify even, between two configurations for which these proper names are metonymies. Montaigne makes fun of "man's impudence with regard to the beasts," of the "presumption" and "imagination" shown by man when he claims to assign them or refuse them certain faculties (*A*, 331, 330). Contrary to that he deems it necessary to recognize in animals a "facility" in forming letters and syllables. This capacity, Montaigne confidently assures us, "testifies that they have an inward power of reason which makes them so teachable and determined to learn" (*A*, 340). Taking man to task for "carv[ing] out their shares to his fellows and companions the animals, and distribut[ing] among them such portions of faculties and powers as he sees fit," he asks, and the question refers from here on not to the animal but to the naïve assurance of man:



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

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

The 1595 edition adds: "We entertain each other with reciprocal monkey tricks. If I have my time to begin or to refuse, so has she hers." (A, 331)

Nor does the cat that looks at me naked, she and no other, the one I am *talking about here*, belong, although we are getting warmer, to Baudelaire's family of cats,<sup>3</sup> or Rilke's,<sup>4</sup> or Buber's.<sup>5</sup> Literally speaking at least, these poets' and philosophers' cats don't speak. "My" pussycat (but a pussycat never belongs) is not even the one *who speaks* in *Alice in Wonderland*. Of course, if you insist at all costs of suspecting me of perversity – always a possibility – you are free to understand or receive the emphasis I just made regarding "really a little cat" as a quote from chapter eleven of *Through the Looking Glass*. Entitled "Waking," this penultimate chapter consists of a single sentence: " – and it really was a kitten, after all"; or as one French translation has it: "and, after all, it really was a little black pussy cat" [*et, finalement, c'était bel et bien une petite chatte noire*].<sup>6</sup>

Although time prevents it, I would of course have liked to inscribe my whole talk within a reading of Lewis Carroll. In fact you can't be certain that I am not doing that, for better or for worse, silently, unconsciously, or without your knowing. . . .

If I say "it is a real cat" that sees me naked, it is in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity. When it responds in its name (whatever *respond* means, and that will be our question), it doesn't do so as the exemplar of a species called cat, even less so of an animal genus or realm. It is true that I identify it as a male or female cat. But even before that identification, I see it as *this* irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, enters this place where it can encounter me, see me, even see me naked. Nothing can ever take away from me the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized. And a mortal existence, for from the moment that it has a name, its name survives it. It signs its potential disappearance. Mine also, and this disappearance, from that moment to this, *fort/da*, is announced each time that, naked or not, one of us leaves the room.

But I must also accentuate the fact that this shame that is ashamed of itself is more intense when I am not alone with the cat in the room. For then I am no longer sure before whom I am so numbed with shame. In fact, is one ever alone with a cat? Or with anyone at all? Is this cat a third person? Or an other in a face-to-face duel? We will return to these questions later. In such moments, on the edge of the thing, in the imminence of the best or the worst, when anything can happen, where I can die with shame or pleasure, I no longer know in whose or in what direction to throw myself. Rather than chasing it away, chasing the cat away, I am in a hurry, yes, in a hurry to have it appear otherwise. I hasten to cover the obscenity of the event, in short to cover myself. One thought alone

keeps me spellbound: dress myself, even a little, or, which amounts to the same thing, run away – as if I were chasing<sup>7</sup> myself out of the room – bite myself, bite my tongue for example at the very moment that I ask myself, Who? But, *Who* then? For I no longer know who I am (following) or who it is I am chasing, who is following me or hunting me. Who comes before and who is after whom? I no longer know where my head is. Madness: " 'We're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad.' " I no longer know how to respond, or even to respond to the question that impels me or asks me who I am (following) or after whom I am (following) and the way I am running.

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

Being *after*, being *alongside*, being *near* [*près*] would appear as different modes of being, indeed of *being-with*. With the animal. But, in spite of appearances, it isn't certain that these modes of being come to modify a preestablished being, even less a primitive "I am." In any case they express a certain order of the being-huddled-together [*être-serré*] (which is what the etymological root, *pressu*, indicates, whence are derived the words *près*, *auprès*, *après*), the being-pressed, the being-with as being strictly attached, bound, enchained, being-under-pressure, compressed, impressed, repressed, pressed-against according to the stronger or weaker stricture of what always remains pressing. In what sense of the neighbor [*prochain*] (which is not necessarily that of a biblical or Greco-Latin tradition) should I say that I am close or near to the animal and that I am (following) it, and in what type or order of pressure? Being-with it in the sense of being-close-to-it? Being-alongside-it? Being-after-it? *Being-after-it* in the sense of the hunt, training, or taming, or *being-after-it* in the sense of a succession or inheritance? In all cases, if I am (following) *after* it, the animal therefore comes before me, earlier than me (*früher* is Kant's word regarding the animal, and Kant will later be called as a witness). The animal is there before me, there close to me, there in front of me – I who am (following) after it. And also, therefore, since it is before me, it is behind me. It surrounds me. And from the vantage of this being-there-before-me it can allow itself to be looked at, no doubt, but also – something that philosophy perhaps forgets, perhaps being this calculated forgetting itself – it can look at me. It has its point of view regarding me. The point of view of the absolute other, and nothing will have ever done more to make me think through this absolute alterity of the neighbor than these moments when I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat.

What stakes are raised by these questions? One doesn't need to be an expert to foresee that they involve thinking about what is meant by living, speaking, dying, being and world as in being-in-the-world or being toward the world, or being-with, being-before, being-behind, being-after, being and following, being followed or being following, there where *I am*, in one way or another, but unimpeachably, *near* what they call the animal. It is too late to deny it, it will have



been there before me who is (following) after it. *After* and *near* what they call the animal and *with* it – whether we want it or not and whatever we do about it.

I must once more return to the malaise of this scene. I ask for your forbearance. I will do all I can to prevent its being presented as a primal scene: this deranged theatrics of the *wholly other that they call animal, for example, a cat*. . . .

\* \* \*

The animal, what a word!

The animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to another living creature [à l'autre vivante].

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

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

Since all these words, in particular “history,” belong in a constitutive manner to the language, interests, and lures of this autobiography, we should not be

overhasty in giving them credence or in confirming their pseudo-evidence. I will therefore not be speaking of an historical turning point in order to name a transformation in process, an alteration that is at the same time more serious and less recognizable than a turning point in the relation to the animal, in the being-with shared by man and by what man calls the animal: the *being* of what calls itself man or the *Dasein* with what he himself calls, or what we ourselves call, what we still dare, provisionally, to name in general but in the singular, *the animal*. However one names or interprets this alteration, no one could deny that it has been accelerating, intensifying, no longer knowing where it is going, for about two centuries, at an incalculable rate and level.

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

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



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

It is in thinking of the source and ends of this compassion that about two centuries ago someone like Bentham, as is well known, proposed changing the very form of the question regarding the animal that dominated discourse within the tradition, in the language of both the most refined philosophical argument and everyday acceptance and common sense. Bentham said something like this:

the question is not to know whether the animal can think, reason, or talk, something we still pretend to be asking ourselves. (From Aristotle to Descartes, from Descartes, especially, to Heidegger, Levinas, and Lacan, this question determines so many others concerning *power* or *capability* [*pouvoirs*] and *attributes* [*avoirs*]: being able, having the power to give, to die, to bury one's dead, to dress, to work, to invent a technique, and so on, a power that consists in having such and such a faculty, thus such and such a power, as an essential attribute.) Thus the question will not be to know whether animals are of the type *zoön logon echon*, whether they *can* speak or reason thanks to that *capacity* or that *attribute* implied in the *logos*, the *can-have* [*pouvoir-avoir*] of the *logos*, the aptitude for the *logos* (and logocentrism is first of all a thesis regarding the animal, the animal deprived of the *logos*, deprived of the *can-have-the-logos*: this is the thesis, position, or presupposition maintained from Aristotle to Heidegger, from Descartes to Kant, Levinas and Lacan). The *first* and *decisive* question will rather be to know whether animals *can suffer*.

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

Once its protocol is established, the form of this question changes everything. It no longer simply concerns the *logos*, the disposition and whole configuration of the *logos*, having it or not, nor does it concern more radically a *dynamis* or *hexis*, this having or manner of being, this *habitus* that one calls a faculty or "power," this can-have or the power one possesses (as in the power to reason, to speak, and everything that that implies). The question is disturbed by a certain *passivity*. It bears witness, manifesting already, as question, the response that testifies to a sufferance, a passion, a not-being-able. The word *can* [*pouvoir*] changes sense and sign here once one asks "can they suffer?" The word wavers henceforth. As soon as such a question is posed what counts is not only the idea of a transitivity or activity (being able to speak, to reason, and so on); the important thing is rather what impels it towards self-contradiction, something we will later relate back to auto-biography. "Can they suffer?" amounts to asking "can they *not be able*?" And what of this inability [*impouvoir*]? What of the vulnerability felt on the basis of this inability? What is this nonpower at the heart of power? What is its quality or modality? How should one account for it? What right should be accorded it? To what extent does it concern us? Being able to suffer is no longer a power, it is a possibility without power, a possibility of the impossible. Mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion, to the possibility of sharing the possibility of this nonpower, the possibility of this impossibility, the anguish of this vulnerability and the vulnerability of this anguish.

With this question – "can they suffer?" – we are not standing on the rock of indubitable certainty, the foundation of every assurance that one could, for example, look for in the *cogito*, in *Je pense donc je suis*. But from another perspective we are here putting our trust in an instance that is just as radical, however different it may be, namely, what is undeniable. No one can deny the suffering, fear or panic, the terror or fright that humans witness in certain animals. (Descartes himself was not able to claim that animals were insensitive to suffering.) Some will still try – this is something else we will come to – to contest



the right to call that *suffering* or *anguish*, words or concepts that they would still reserve for man and for the *Dasein* in the freedom of its being-toward-death. We will have reason to problematize that discourse later. But for the moment let us note the following: the response to the question "can they suffer?" leaves no doubt. In fact it has never left any room for doubt; that is why the experience that we have of it is not even indubitable; it precedes the indubitable, it is older than it. No doubt either, then, for the possibility of our giving vent to a surge of compassion, even if it is then misunderstood, repressed, or denied, held in respect. Before the *undeniable* of this response (yes, they suffer, like us who suffer for them and with them), before this response that precedes all other questions, the problematic changes ground and base. Perhaps it loses all security, but in any case it no longer rests on the old, supposedly natural (its ground) or historic and *artifactual* (its base) foundation. The two centuries I have been referring to somewhat approximately in order to situate the present in terms of this tradition have been those of an unequal struggle, a war being waged, the unequal forces of which could one day be reversed, between those who violate not only animal life but even and also this sentiment of compassion and, on the other hand, those who appeal to an irrefutable testimony to this pity.

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

Here now, in view of another thesis, is the *second hypothesis* that I think must be deduced without hesitation. It concerns or puts into effect another logic of the limit. I will thus be tempted to inscribe the subject of this thesis in the series of three conferences that, beginning with "*Les Fins de l'homme*" and followed by "*Le Passage des frontières*," have been devoted to a properly *transgressal* if not *transgressive* experience of *limitrophy*. Let's allow that word to have both a general and strict sense: what abuts onto limits but also what feeds, is fed, is cared for, raised, and trained, what is cultivated on the edges of a limit. In the semantics of *trephō*, *trophē*, or *trophos*, we should be able to find everything we need to speak about what we should be speaking about in the course of these ten days devoted to the autobiographical animal: feeding, food, nursing, breeding, offspring, education, care and keeping of animals, training, upbringing, culture, living and allowing to live by giving to live, be fed, and grown, autobiographically. *Limitrophy* is therefore my subject. Not just because it will concern what sprouts or grows at the limit, around the limit, by maintaining the limit, but also what *feeds the limit*, generates it, raises it, and complicates it. Whatever I will say is designed, certainly not to efface the limit, but to multiply its figures, to complicate, thicken, delinearize, fold, and divide the line precisely by making it increase and multiply. Moreover, the supposed first or literal sense of *trephō* is just that: transform by thickening, for example, in curdling milk. So it will in no way mean questioning, even in the slightest, the limit about which we have had

a stomachful, the limit between Man with a capital M and Animal with a capital A. It will not be a matter of attacking frontally or antithetically the thesis of philosophical or common sense on the basis of which has been built the relation to the self, the presentation of the self of human life, the autobiography of the human species, the whole history of the self that man recounts to himself, that is to say the thesis of a limit as rupture or abyss between those who say "we men," "I, a man," and what this man among men who say "we," what he *calls* the animal or animals. I won't take it upon myself for a single moment to contest that thesis, nor the rupture or abyss between this "I-we" and what we *call* animals. To suppose that I, or anyone else for that matter, could ignore that rupture, indeed that abyss, would mean first of all blinding oneself to so much contrary evidence; and, as far as my own modest case is concerned, it would mean forgetting all the signs that I have sought to give, tirelessly, of my attention to difference, to differences, to heterogeneities and abyssal ruptures as against the homogeneous and the continuous. I have thus never believed in some homogeneous continuity between what calls *itself* man and what *he* calls the animal. I am not about to begin to do so now. That would be worse than sleepwalking, it would simply be too asinine [*bête*].<sup>8</sup> To suppose such a stupid memory lapse or to take to task such a naïve misapprehension of this abyssal rupture would mean, more seriously still, venturing to say almost anything at all for the cause, for whatever cause or interest that no longer had anything to do with what we claimed to want to talk about. When that cause or interest begins to profit from what it simplistically suspects to be a biologicistic continuum, whose sinister connotations we are well aware of, or more generally to profit from what is suspected as a geneticism that one might wish to associate with this scatter-brained accusation of continuum, the undertaking in any case becomes so aberrant that it neither calls for nor, it seems to me, deserves any direct discussion on my part. Everything I have suggested so far and every argument I will put forward today stands overwhelmingly in opposition to the blunt instrument that such an allegation represents.

For there is no interest to be found in a discussion of a supposed discontinuity, rupture, or even abyss between those who call themselves men and what so-called men, those who name themselves men, call the animal. Everybody agrees on this, discussion is closed in advance, one would have to be more asinine than any beast [*plus bête que les bêtes*] to think otherwise. Even animals know that (ask Abraham's ass or ram or the living beasts that Abel offered to God; they know what is about to happen to them when man says, "Here I am" to God, then consent to sacrifice themselves, to sacrifice their sacrifice or to forgive themselves). The discussion is worth undertaking once it is a matter of determining the number, form, sense, or structure, the foliated consistency of this abyssal limit, these edges, this plural and repeatedly folded frontier. The discussion becomes interesting once, instead of asking whether or not there is a discontinuous limit, one attempts to think what a limit becomes once it is abyssal, once the frontier no longer forms a single indivisible line but more than one internally divided line, once, as a result, it can no longer be traced, objectified, or counted as single and indivisible. What are the edges of a limit that



grows and multiplies by feeding on an abyss? Here is my thesis in three paragraphs:

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

*Animal* is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. These humans are found giving it to themselves, this word, but as if they had received it as an inheritance. They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beings within a single concept: "the Animal," they say. And they have given themselves this word, at the same time according themselves, reserving for them, for humans, the right to the word, the name, the verb, the attribute, to a language of words, in short to the very thing that the

others in question would be deprived of, those that are corralled within the grand territory of the beasts: the Animal. All the philosophers we will investigate (from Aristotle to Lacan, and including Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, and Levinas), all of them say the same thing: the animal is without language. Or more precisely unable to respond, to respond with a response that could be precisely and rigorously distinguished from a reaction, the animal is without the right and power to "respond" and hence without many other things that would be the property of man.

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

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

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

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

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

\* \* \*

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

1. I would like to have the plural of animals heard in the singular. There is no animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single indivisible limit. We have to envisage the existence of "living creatures" whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity. This does not of course mean ignoring or effacing everything that separates humankind from the other animals, creating a single large set, a single great, fundamentally homogeneous and continuous family tree going from the *animot* to the *homo* (*faber*, *sapiens*, or whatever else). That would be an *asinanity*, even more so to suspect anyone here of doing just that. I won't therefore devote another second to the double stupidity of that suspicion, even if, alas, it is quite widespread. I repeat that it is rather a matter of taking into account a multiplicity of heterogeneous structures and limits. Among nonhumans and separate from nonhumans there is an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any



way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance, within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general. From the outset there are animals and, let's say, *l'animot*. The confusion of all nonhuman living creatures within the general and common category of the animal is not simply a sin against rigorous thinking, vigilance, lucidity, or empirical authority; it is also a crime. Not a crime against animality precisely, but a crime of the first order against the animals, against animals. Do we agree to presume that every murder, every transgression of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" concerns only man (a question to come) and that in sum there are only crimes "against humanity"?

2. The suffix *mot* in *l'animot* should bring us back to the word, namely, to the word named a noun [*nomme nom*]. It opens onto the referential experience of the thing *as such*, as what it is in its being, and therefore to the reference point by means of which one has always sought to draw the limit, the unique and indivisible limit held to separate man from animal, namely the word, the nominal language of the word, the voice that names and that names the thing *as such*, such as it appears in its being (as in the Heideggerian moment in the demonstration that we are coming to). The animal would in the last instance be deprived of the word, of the word that one names a noun or name.
3. It would not be a matter of "giving speech back" to animals but perhaps of acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, as something other than a privation.

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

*On the one hand*, the title gives rise to the thought, in the informal form of a playful conversation, a suggestion that would take witty advantage of idiom, that quite simply there are those among humans, writers, and philosophers whose character implies a taste for autobiography, the irresistible sense of or desire for autobiography. One would say, "(s)he's an autobiographical animal," in the same way that one says, "(s)he's a theatrical animal, a competitive animal, a political animal," not in the sense that one has been able to define man as a political animal but in the sense of an individual who has the taste, talent, or compulsive obsession for politics: he who likes that, likes doing that, likes politics. And does it well. In that sense the autobiographical animal would be the sort of man or woman who, as a matter of character, chooses to indulge in or can't resist indulging in autobiographical confidences. He or she who works *in* autobiography. And in the history of literature or philosophy, if it can be suggested in such a summary manner, there are "autobiographical animals," more autobiographical than others, animals for autobiography: Montaigne more than Malherbe, similarly Rousseau, the lyrical and romantic poets, Proust and

Gide, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, Celan, Bataille, Genet, Duras, Cixous; but also (the matter is structurally more rare and more complicated when it comes to philosophy) Augustine and Descartes more than Spinoza, Kierkegaard, playing with so many pseudonyms, more than Hegel, Nietzsche more than Marx. But because the matter is really too complicated (it is our theme after all) I prefer to end the list of examples there. With the problems it poses this connotation of the autobiographical animal must certainly remain present, even if tangential, to our reflections. It will weigh on them with its virtual weight.

But, *on the other hand*, I was not thinking of that usage of the expression "autobiographical animal" in the last instance and in order to get to some bottom of the matter, if there is such a thing. It happens that there exist, between the word *I* and the word *animal*, all sorts of significant connections. They are at the same time functional and referential, grammatical and semantic. Two general singulars to begin with: the *I* and the *animal* designate an indeterminate generality in the singular and by means of the definite article. The *I* is anybody at all; *I* am anybody at all and anybody at all must be able to say "I" to refer to himself, to his own singularity. Whosoever says "I" or apprehends or poses him- or herself as an "I" is a living animal. On the other hand, animality, the life of the living, to the extent that one claims to be able to distinguish it from the inorganic, from the purely inert or cadaverous physico-chemical, is generally defined as sensibility, irritability, and *auto-motricity*, a spontaneity that is given to movement, to organizing itself and affecting itself, marking, tracing, and affecting itself with traces of its self. This *auto-motricity* as auto-affection and relation to itself is the characteristic recognized as that of the living and of animality in general, even before one comes to consider the discursive thematic of an utterance or of an *ego cogito*, more so of a *cogito ergo sum*. But between this relation to the self (this Self, this ipseity) and the *I* of the "I think," there is, it would seem, an abyss.

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

"I": by saying "I" the signatory of an autobiography would claim to point himself out physically, introduce himself in the present [*se présenter au présent*] (*sui*-referential deictic) and in his totally naked truth. And in the naked truth, if



there is such a thing, of his or her sexual difference, of all their sexual differences. By naming himself and responding in his own name he would be saying "I stake and engage my nudity without shame." One can well doubt whether this pledge, this wager, this desire or promise of nudity is possible. Nudity perhaps remains untenable. And can I finally show myself naked in the sight of what they call by the name of animal? Should I show myself naked when, concerning me, looking at me, is the living creature they call by the common, general and singular name of the animal? Henceforth I will reflect (on) the same question by introducing a mirror. I import a full-length mirror [*une psyché*] into the scene. Wherever some autobiographical play is being enacted there has to be a *psyché*, a mirror that reflects me naked from head to toe. The same question then becomes whether I should show myself but in the process see myself naked (that is reflect my image in a mirror) when, concerning me, looking at me, is this living creature, this cat that can find itself caught in the same mirror? Is there animal narcissism? But cannot this cat also be, deep within her eyes, my primary mirror?

The animal in general, what is it? What does that mean? Who is it? To what does that "it"<sup>9</sup> correspond? To whom? Who responds to whom? Who responds in and to the common, general and singular name of what they thus blithely call the "animal?" Who is it that responds? The reference made by this what or who regarding me in the name of the animal, what is said in the name of the animal when one appeals to the name of the animal, that is what needs to be exposed, in all its nudity, in the nudity or destitution of whoever, opening the page of an autobiography, says, "here I am."

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