

end. The depopulation of the prey is immediate, brutal, explosive. I am willing to admit that we began with hunting, but this first stage, like the first seconds of the universe, was so short, so limited, that it is not worth the trouble of talking about it. From the dawn of time, there are no more prey.

Our relation to animals is more interesting—I mean to the animals we eat. We adore eating veal, lamb, beef, antelope, pheasant, or grouse, but we don't throw away their "leftovers." We dress in leather and adorn ourselves with feathers. Like the Chinese, we devour duck without wasting a bit; we eat the whole pig, from head to tail; but we get under these animals' skins as well, in their plumage or in their hide. Men in clothing live within the animals they devoured. And the same thing for plants. We eat rice, wheat, apples, the divine eggplant, the tender dandelion; but we also weave silk, linen, cotton; we live within the flora as much as we live within the fauna. We are parasites; thus we clothe ourselves. Thus we live within tents of skins like the gods within their tabernacles. Look at him well-dressed and adorned, magnificent; he shows—he showed—the clean carcass of his host. Of the soft parasite you can see only the clean-shaven face and the hands, sometimes without their kid gloves.

We parasite each other and live amidst parasites. Which is more or less a way of saying that they constitute our environment. We live in that black box called the collective; we live by it, on it, and in it. It so happens that this collective was given the form of an animal: Leviathan. We are certainly within something bestial; in more distinguished terms, we are speaking of an organic model for the members of a society. Our host? I don't know. But I do know that we are within. And that it is dark in there.

Hosts and parasites. We live, in the city or in the country, in the space of the two rats. Their fabulous feast is this book. A book that is oral and aural, about famine and murders, about knowledge and bondage. Both in the fable and in this book, it is a question of physics, of certain exact sciences, of certain techniques of telecommunications, a question of biophysics and of certain life sciences, of parasitology, a question of culture and of anthropology, of religions and literatures, a question of politics, of economics. I am not sure of the order in which these distinctions appear. But La Fontaine must have made them, just like Aesop, Horace, and Boursault. In another language, but what does it matter?

Stations and paths together form a system. Points and lines, beings and relations. What is interesting might be the construction of the

system, the number and disposition of stations and paths. Or it might be the flow of messages passing through the lines. In other words, a complex system can be formally described (that of Leibniz, for example) and then a system in general. Or, one might have understood what is carried within the system, naming the carrier Hermes. One might have sought the formation and distribution of the lines, paths, and stations, their borders, edges, and forms. But one must write as well of the interceptions, of the accidents in the flow along the way between stations—of changes and metamorphoses. What passes might be a message but parasites (static) prevent it from being heard, and sometimes, from being sent. Like a hole in a canal that makes the water spill into the surrounding area. There are escapes and losses, obstacles and opacities. Doors and windows close; Hermes might faint or die among us. An angel passes.\* Who stole the relation? Maybe someone, somewhere in the middle, made a detour. Does a third man exist? It is not only a question of the logical. What travels along the path might be money, gold, or commodities, or even food—in short, material goods. You don't need much experience to know that goods do not always arrive so easily at their destination. There are always interceptors who work very hard to divert what is carried along these paths. Parasitism is the name most often given to these numerous and diverse activities, and I fear that they are the most common thing in the world.

One has to speak of Prometheus from the bird's-eye view—that of the eagle. Prometheus is one and the same as this greedy creature who finally, at the end of an evolutionary process, made its nest within the thoracic cavity of the producer in chains, now devoured.

Saying that this system includes the telephone, the telegraph, television, the highway system, maritime pathways and shipping lanes, the orbits of satellites, the circulation of messages and of raw materials, of language and foodstuffs, money and philosophical theory, is a way of speaking clearly and calmly. And looking to see who or what intercepts these different flows is also a way of speaking clearly and calmly. It is a complicated way of speaking, but it is really an easy way. I shall answer the question, for it can be answered.

And if the system in question were the collective as such? What relations do we really have with each other? How do we live together? What really is this system which collapses at the slightest noise? Who or what makes this noise? Who or what prevents me from hearing whom, from eating with whom, from sleeping with whom? How can I love,

\*"Un ange passe" is said of a sudden silence during a conversation. —Trans.

whom should I love? Whom could I love and who will love me? Who forbids love?

Is this noise both the collective and the sound coming from the black box?

Look again at the diagram based on the story of the rats, paying attention to the succession of parasites in stepladder formation, and ask yourself if it is something added to a system, like a cancer of interceptions, flights, losses, holes, trapdoors—if it is a pathological growth in some spot or if it is quite simply the system itself. The rats climb onto the rug when the guests are not looking, when the lights are out, when the party's over. It's nighttime, black. What happens would be the obscure opposite of conscious and clear organization, happening behind everyone's back, the dark side of the system. But what do we call these nocturnal processes? Are they destructive or constructive? What happens at night on the rug covered with crumbs? Is it a still active trace of (an) origin? Or is it only a remainder of failed suppressions? We can, undoubtedly, decide the matter: the battle against rats is already lost; there is no house, ship, or palace that does not have its share. There is no system without parasites. This constant is a law. But how so?

Someone once compared the undertaking of Descartes to the action of a man who sets his house on fire in order to hear the noise the rats make in the attic at night. These noises of running, scurrying, chewing, and gnawing that interrupt his sleep. I want to sleep peacefully. Good-bye then. To hell with the building that the rats come to ruin. I want to think without an error, communicate without a parasite. So I set the house on fire, the house of my ancestors. Done correctly, I rebuild it without a rat. But in order to do that, as a mason I must work without sleeping, without turning my back, without leaving for a moment, without eating. But at night, the rats return to the foundation. I was thinking yesterday, What did you do in the meantime? You slept, if you please, you ate, dreamt, made love, and so forth. Well, the rats came back. They are, as the saying goes, always already there. Part of the building. Mistakes, wavy lines, confusion, obscurity are part of knowledge; noise is part of communication, part of the house. But is it the house itself?

☞ A system is often described as a harmony. Maybe it's the same word, the same thing. In fact, what use is it to discuss matters, what use is it to be concerned with a system in disequilibrium, a system that does not function right? Yet we know of no system that functions perfectly, that is to say, without losses, flights, wear and tear, errors, accidents,