



The Parasite

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Contents

Translator's Preface		vii
Translator's Introduction		ix
<i>I. Interrupted Meals</i>	<i>Logics</i>	
Rats' Meals	Cascades	3
Satyrs' Meals	Host/Guest	15
Diminishing Returns	The Obscure and the Confused	17
Decisions, Incisions	The Excluded Third, Included	22
The Lion's Share	The Simple Arrow	26
Athlete's Meals	Difference and the Construction of the Real	28
Picaresques and Cybernetics	The New Balance	34
	Pentecost	40
<i>II. More Interrupted Meals</i>	<i>Technique, Work</i>	
Rats' Dinner	Diode, Triode	51
	Logic of the Fuzzy	56
	The Master and the Counter-Master	58
More Rats' Meals	Machines and Engines	61
	The Means, the Milieu	66
	Spaces of Transformation	71
Lunar Meals		74
Meals of the Lord in Paradise		77
	Work	86
Insects' Meals		91
	Energy, Information	94
	The Gods, the Perpetual Host	98

Interlude
Full-Length Portrait of the Parasite

Confessed Meals	103
Jean-Jacques, Lawmaker's Judge	116
Noises	121
Music	129

III. Fat Cows and Lean Cows *Economy*

Salad Meals	Stercoral Origin of Property Rights	139
Meals of Satire	Exchange and Money, the Exact and the Fuzzy	147
Meals among Brothers	Theory of the Joker	155
Meals of Chestnuts	The Sun and the Sign	165
The Cows Come out of the River	Stocks	175
Cows Eat Cows	Theory of the Line	182
	The Best Definition	190
	Of Sickness in General	197

IV. Midnight Suppers *Society*

Impostor's Meals	Analyze, Paralyze, Catalyze	201
The Proper Name of the Host	Masters and Slaves	209
	Theory of the Quasi-Object	224
The Empty Table	On Love	235
The Devil	On Love	246
	The Worst Definition	252

Stories, Animals	255
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Satyrs' Meals

Host/Guest

Everyone knows that satyrs have the tail and two legs of a goat. And being a goat, even half a goat, even the rear end, is really something. These dangerous beings live in forests, where they accompany Pan, the son of Hermes, the god of panic, the mother of all, the prince of fear and of wholes. Wild, they live in their lairs.

Having followed the procession of Dionysos or having been on the lookout for nymphs, they go home, ragged, to eat a good dinner with their wives and children on the mossy rocks. They're seldom seen like that, solid citizens, the way La Fontaine shows them, a family picture, all around the dinner table. Satyrs too wind up thinking about eating. No rugs, no shelter, no Persian carpet—here we are back in the fields. Can fear come to corrupt a wild den?

It is raining; a passer-by comes in. Here is the interrupted meal once more. Stopped for only a moment, since the traveller is asked to join the diners. His host does not have to ask him twice. He accepts the invitation and sits down in front of his bowl. The host is the satyr, dining at home; he is the donor. He calls to the passer-by, saying to him, be our guest. The guest is the stranger, the interrupter, the one who receives the soup, agrees to the meal. The host, the guest: the same word; he gives and receives, offers and accepts, invites and is invited, master and passer-by. The traveller, the homebody, the fixed and the moveable, client and hostler, here and there—city and country, for example. He is the object as well, for in the exchange of the word we cannot see where the exchange of the thing is. An invariable term through the transfer of the gift. It might be dangerous not to decide who is the host and who is the guest, who gives and who receives, who is the parasite and who is the

table d'hôte, who has the gift and who has the loss, and where hostility begins within hospitality. Who hasn't trembled with fear in a shady hotel? Shady, obscure, badly lit. We like to know where we step. Again the same word, host and guest, active and passive, full of outrage and of generosity, of hatred and good-will. A word which hints at the inviter and the invited, the person warming himself by the fire and the one frozen from the cold rain, heat and cold.

The guest cools the soup and warms his hands; the host invites the traveller and sends him on his way, asks him in, asks him to sit down and eat and then asks him to leave, sends him away: don't sleep here, he says. The host, the guest, breathes twice, speaks twice, speaks with forked tongue, as it were. I don't know who the passer-by is or who the satyr is. Both are the host, the guest. And from one mouth they breathe and say yes and no. The traveller, moreover, interrupts the meal of his host; the satyr, moreover, interrupts the meal of his guest. Who cooled the soup, who spoke, but who didn't eat. The two rats here look alike. I would not be at all surprised if the passer-by's overcoat hid his tail and his goat's legs. Excluded even before he parasited the satyr.

But the excluded one, just a while ago, was making his way through the countryside; the passer-by goes out again in the rain that, as far as we know, never stops, beating incessantly on the roof of the host and guest. That noise too interrupted a process: a trip. And from this noise comes the story. Hosts and parasites are always in the process of passing by, being sent away, touring around, walking alone. They exchange places in a space soon to be defined.

There are some black spots in language. The field of the host is one such dark puddle. In the logic of exchange, or really instead of it, it manages to hide who the receiver is and who the sender is, which one wants war and which one wants peace and offers asylum. In the satyr's den, the host interrupts the guest and vice versa, and this is another black theorem. Or the non-zero sum of two things with opposite signs but the same value. We saw this shadow a short while back: we don't know what belongs to the system, what makes it up, and what is against the system, interrupting and endangering it. Whether the diagram of the rats is generative or corrupting.

Athlete's Meals _____

Difference and the Construction of the Real

Rarely is an object of praise in and of itself worth the trouble—with the exception, of course, of the gods and a tender mistress. La Fontaine adds the king, for alimentary reasons. And thus for him, the fable is over before it starts; he has paid the king with this word and he eats. How do you praise a champion? He is only what he is, once you have said that he won the race. You can speak of him only by evoking the gods, giants, heroes of the games. This is what Simonides the Elder does, just like some newspaper reporter. He spoke of Castor and Pollux; it was no hyperbole, that is to say, no exaggeration, but a parable.* He throws himself aside, the fabulist says. He makes a distance, a difference [*écart*]. We are indefinitely on the side, the proof of which is the fact that the word *parole* (speech, word) derives, I don't know how, from this parable, parabola. Between the word and the thing a parasite makes one move aside. The parable was the divine word; Castor and Pollux always return. No, I cannot speak without a god or a mistress, who are always present in the distances of my words. No one ever totally speaks of the thing; it is written in serious books—a Philadelphia lawyer [*Gascon*] † knows that and a Greek, even more so. Why are we always on the side? Let's see. I have never really understood all the fine points of the morality of lying nor what is currently being said about the referent. You would have to speak only—and always—of algebra. Simonides spoke, parabolically, of twins. The Dioscuri. The praise was,

**Parabole*, in the French, means both "parable" and "parabola." —Trans.

†The French has *Gascon*, that is to say, a native of Gascony; proverbially, Gascons are wangers, sly and slightly unscrupulous. —Trans.

as was necessary, outside the discourse. Professors also judge things to be outside the subject, a proof that they know better than I do where the line is drawn. Scissors and knives. Simonides thought that an example was necessary. You will more easily understand it if you know that his athlete was a wrestler and that the gods of the fable were twins. Wrestlers are well aware of twin forces: my hand, your hand, your arm, my arm, our equilibrium. One of them will win if he throws himself to one side of this equilibrium. Then the other one is pinned. Wrestling: twins who have braced themselves, then a distance at the end between the winner and the loser beneath him. A distance which in the end could be considered a parabola. Consequently, the wrestling match: the parable of the twins. And inevitably, Castor and Pollux enter the picture. This is the example, the poet says. And well he does. Again a double and a twin, bearing a difference. There is even one known language in which *champion* and *example* are the same word. Better yet, *example* is a word whose prefix says "difference" and whose root says "buying" and "selling." As if it were a way of getting out of exchange, something taken away, something removed from the purchase. Like a distance from the equilibrium of the payment, like a parable of twins. The example elevates combats; La Fontaine says that Simonides said so. This elevation says the same thing again.* We will never be able to finish measuring on the same scale all the words used in this calculation of glory. I am measuring the "too much" [*trop*] of the beginning of the fable.

Simonides, however, sliced the thing up by speaking of the champion in one third of the text and of the Twins in the other parts. A trunk, a tail, and a head. A text in three parts is well-balanced, they say. In the poem at least, the athlete's adversary was missing, while each of the brothers had his own. The figures are exact: the double is split without deciding exactly. A text in three parts—a dialectic—has a forked tongue and the head of a viper. The twin thesis and antithesis divinely produce the athletic synthesis: the synthesis waits for its adversary or its double in the wrestling match. A good show, in truth, where mythology gives birth to dialectic.

Simonides sells this triangle to the athlete who recognizes only one of its sides. The estimate and the contract promised a talent, but the champion takes care of only one-third of it; the gods, he says, have

*I like the example here, so close to praise [*éloge*]. I ask you, says Socrates to the Sophist, for some definitions; you give me praise and examples. Later on, Socrates says that he too sells them.

to pay for their publicity. The moral of this story is an exact reckoning and quite clear. Here there is a difference relative to the estimate, relative to the balance sheet, relative to the balance of equilibrium; the series of differences begins again, from *parole*-parable-parabola to example, to wrestling. The debit balance takes these depreciations into account. I am still measuring the "too much," the athlete calculates it, and the fable writes it down.

But the story is not over even if the moral has already been told. We know that after business is over there is a feast, like a supplement to the palavering about the combats and to the signatures on the treaties. It is the meal that is cut short, the interrupted banquet, that of the Stone Guest. Come dine with me, says the Hercules of the fairgrounds. It is not the thought that he owed something to Simonides, for the accounts have already been adjusted; but you have to say "thank you," *merci, gracias*, and the like. "Thank you" is said when everything else is said, when there is nothing left to say about the treaties and the contracts. "Thank you" is also said when everything is written. Such speaking and giving outside writing. The thank-you of gratitude and the free giving [*gré*]-Simonides does not want to lose that in addition to what he owed and lost. For there is what is owed and what is freely given. They have two different kinds of logic and two different economies, and perhaps two ways of living as well. In the logic and economy of the law and of possession, exchange reigns, weighing and measuring, figuring out the balance; in the logic and economy of the freely given, exchange is not there. In one group, owing dominates; in another, the freely given. Two incomparable societies. In the second, there are lots of communal meals, lots of invitations to feasts, repasts, banquets.

I am thinking of a story barely indicated by the fable. Among modern men, here and now, be they poets or fighters, known or unknown, the freely given occurs only after the owing, the feast after the payment; maybe they fear losing, besides what is owed them, the thanks of praise, freely given. Exchange first; the celebrations, if possible, later. Business before pleasure. For the gods, the situation is the inverse; the given comes before the owed: the Twins appear, thanking the poet first and then, in payment for his verse, warn him of an imminent danger. Exchange word for word, praise for warning. Thank you; we'll talk later of payment: this is certainly the world upsidedown. The world turns in one direction; history has its economy where exchange is fundamental: it is called the meaning of history. It stops a moment, turns in the other direction, and in this new (hi)story, exchange appears after everything was freely given. It is not a new story; on the contrary, it is an ancient one, lost in the dark recesses of memory; it is the story of the gods. Now I understand why the gods were always eating and

drinking. Now I understand why the meal was interrupted—by the see-saw of history. By a catastrophe that I still do not really understand. The societies of giving have disappeared; even in antiquity they were thought to be divine. They have left a place for the collectives of giving and having. There are only barely perceptible traces of the history of giving in texts and on monuments. Since then, we have been caught up in economic history, a time of calculation of exchanges and of making up for losses. Does this history have an outside? That is precisely the subject of this book. I have not finished yet. When history and time are measured by the calculation of exchanges and brought back to this calculation, I fear that here and there there will be some insolvents. People who can give nothing but their children, their muscles, their bodies, a pound of flesh. It is a time of death and a history of death. People who can give only their life and their bodies, bit by bit. How many times have men sent up a cauldron filled with scattered limbs to the table of the gods? I can only give my approach to death; I can only pay with my courage in the face of this shadow; I can only write of its immediacy. This time and history are invaginated around nothingness. They need a zero to be calculated; there has to be a nothingness for their metaphysics. Now I understand why the gods seemed immortal to men; at least I think I know what ambrosia did not contain.

Let's return to the banquet of men, always interrupted. So who are the gods? The ones whose meals are never interrupted. The immortal is the eternal reveller. Look at Simonides at the banquet: he eats and drinks as he pleases, quite in the position of a parasite. He stuffs himself and gets drunk for his freely given verse; he pays his select table companions and their good food in word. But someone disturbed the dinner. At the door of the room, they heard a noise. Simonides runs off, but no one else follows him. No one of the cohort misses a bite. But the cohort is wrong, for its members are about to die.

For the first time we know who knocks at the door, who makes a noise behind the door-frame. The gods. Who warn us to move, for the sky is about to fall. The Twins run off; Simonides follows them. They move to one side, parabolically.

The word is made flesh. The difference becomes static. A pillar is missing, and it is cast aside. Everything is soon cast aside: the *parole-parabola-parable*, the example, the elogy, the owed and the freely given, the poet and the gods, the column and the coping. We always calculate the too much. The too much and the *para*. Parabola, parable, parasite. The parasite pays in parables. Here, the list of differences, their order, title, or collection.

A pillar missing, and we pass from the logical to the material,

from the word to the flesh, to stone, from the word to its referent. Who is avenged? The divine being, the poet, or the thing itself? You don't live in language and words for very long before the object comes back once, before a foot is suddenly missing. Before the real falls down on your head. I am thinking of a triangular room, with a ceiling with three architraves, ogees, bays—that is all predicted by the calculation of the static, by the word, the logical. Had the triclinium been square, a missing column would not necessarily have been an irreparable tragedy, for the cantilever could have resisted. But a column is missing, and the ceiling finds nothing to lean on. It had three beams, like the elogy, three feet, three supports, three theses, like the discourse. Two for the twin gods, one for you, mortal, who one day, one night, one evening, will be missing. Two stable columns, one unstable one. Triangle: the elementary link of static equilibrium, of the distribution of space, of the arrangement of positions, of topology, of measure, of the immobile arrangement of forces, of the syllogism, of reason. Material, logical. Do away with one of the feet of the tripod, everything collapses; cross out a thesis, a term, everything vanishes. Everything falls on the athlete's feet; the guests are crippled. A miracle is sought, and the miracle is just that the same distance is kept between small energies and large and that the real world is thus comprehensible. That the parable of the parasite and the paralysis of the guest are quite precisely parallel. The next day, the athlete as well as the guests are cast aside, lame. They are missing a pillar; they need walking sticks. Like the old man in the riddle of the Sphinx. Like Hephaistos. Those who limp are the discoverers; inclination is the beginning of the world.

One can never praise enough; here is the list of excess, fault, difference. It appears in the logic of reasoning, in calculation, in accounting; it appears in language, in words and in poems, in parables and paraphrase; it appears in order, plans, space; it appears in exchange and in money, in what is owed and what is freely given, pay doubled once more, that of the poet and that of the gods, the cursed part; it appears at the edge of the beam, at the top of the threatening pillar, in the cantilever and the coping; it appears now in physical systems, in the difficult equilibrium between stone and marble; it appears in living systems, walking, running like the crippled, fighting twins until one of the pillars of the struggle gives way and makes a winner a loser, paralytic in his body and the elementary paradigm of the social group in combat.

I count this impressive advance as a knowledgeable construction of the real, just like those the classical age often made.

The prefix *para* is counted, calculated, weighed in its difference from equilibrium. But it is also placed and situated. When the column

holds the beam up, one line goes to the end of the second; here, the vertical joins the edge of the horizontal. That makes a right angle at the top. In any case, it makes an angle and a top. Move the pillar, mark a cantilever—a loss or difference, *para*. In the diagram, the line no longer goes to the end of the second line, but to another spot along the way. The parasite has a relation with the relation and not with the station. And it puts the relation in the form of a cantilever. The simplest diagram appears. *Static*, in English: parasite.

In one word and not only in one prefix, the whole text and the whole story. Then and then only can it be understood that it is an origin for the art of memory. The discourse, the course taken [*parcours*], is of canonical simplicity: it is deductive, it constructs reality, it constructs the real by starting with the difference. In a variety bestrewn with simple arrows, the difference is in the place of the inclination.

Picaresques and Cybernetics ————— ————— *The New Balance*

The parasite is invited to the *table d'hôte*; in return, he must regale the other diners with his stories and his mirth. To be exact, he exchanges good talk for good food; he buys his dinner, paying for it in words. It is the oldest profession in the world. Traces of it are found in the oldest documents. There are a thousand known variations on this law of justice—rarely simple and often complicated—practiced in social, friendly, tribal, and familial everyday life, just like in the oldest comedy or the most recondite story. For example, the sponger pays in morals and the host gives, filled with guilt by this great yet imaginary duty. The moral is one discourse among many, some sort of specie that is legal tender. Each society allows a linguistic specie that can be exchanged advantageously for food. Influential and powerful groups are able to diffuse a forced lexicon in that way. Today it is economic, just as it was humanist not long ago, Voltairean before that, and religious a long time ago.

A vagrant, dying of hunger, found himself one evening at the kitchen window of a well-known restaurant. The aromas were delicious. He filled himself on them and that calmed his hunger pangs a bit. One of the scullions discovered the trick and, quickly coming outside, demanded money for what could be called the service rendered. The passer-by and the scullion were about to fight over their disagreement when a third person came by who offered to settle the matter. Give me a coin, he said. The wretch did so, frowning. He put the coin down on the sidewalk and with the heel of his shoe made it ring a bit. This noise, he said, giving his decision, is pay enough for the aroma of the tasty

dishes. The roast is the thing eaten, and an aroma comes from it. The coin is the thing exchanged, and a sound comes from it. If the coin is worth the roast, then the sound of the coin is worth the aroma of the food. And he returned the coin to the passer-by. Justice is done.

An old tale that demonstrates a wise bit of knowledge. We are hollow and empty; we cannot fill ourselves with air and with sound. We need something substantial to mend us. Two positions and two orders: substances and solids here, and there air and sound. According to this bit of wisdom, if there is to be an exchange, it must be of the same order. That is philosophy, the justice of the stomach. Solid for solid, substance for substance, and meal for coin of the realm; elsewhere, air for sound and vice versa. There are infrastructures—a serious matter—and there are superstructures where hot air is sold. The consistent and the diffuse. Every author and every language notes this division in its own way. And the heavy philosophers consecrate it.

The parasite invents something new. Since he does not eat like everyone else, he builds a new logic. He crosses the exchange, makes it into a diagonal. He does not barter; he exchanges money. He wants to give his voice for matter, (hot) air for solid, superstructure for infrastructure. People laugh, the parasite is expelled, he is made fun of, he is beaten, he cheats us; but he invents anew. This novelty must be analyzed. This sound, this aroma, passing for money or roast.

A paralytic was crawling about on hands and knees. Was it our athlete, wounded? A few steps away from a sumptuous repast, Tantalus, you can die of hunger if you are unable to move. He was collapsing in misery, rotting away in a black corner. One fine day, he saw a blind man who was bumping into a thousand obstacles and who thereby almost broke his neck. He could die by falling into a well if its lip were low and seemed to be a step and if his outstretched arms only touched the air. The paralytic calls him and offers to strike a bargain. The blind man will carry him and the cripple will be the guide. The two of them form one normal person.

An old tale that pushes the wise bit of knowledge out. You laughed at the parasite, but you do not laugh at the exchange of legs for eyes. Nevertheless: The blind man gives solidity, force, transportation, power that can be calculated in calories produced by such and such a food from a meal. In other words, energy on the normal scale. What does the cripple give in exchange in this new picture? He speaks, and that is that. He announces obstacles, he watches, he proposes a direction. Perched on the shoulders of a black force, he clarifies it and illuminates it. Soon we will have to say that he directs it, that he gives the force orders. After all, the contract he proposed to the blind man was a

parasitic pact. For he pays in information, in energy on the microscopic level. He offers words for the force—yes, his voice, air, for a solid substance. Worse yet, he takes control and governs.

The parasite invents something new. He obtains energy and pays for it in information. He obtains the roast and pays for it with stories. Two ways of writing the new contract. He establishes an unjust pact; relative to the old type of balance, he builds a new one. He speaks in a logic considered irrational up to now, a new epistemology and a new theory of equilibrium. He makes the order of things as well as the states of things—solid and gas—into diagonals. He evaluates information. Even better: he discovers information in his voice and good words; he discovers the Spirit in the wind and the breath of air. He invents cybernetics. The blind man and the cripple are a crossed association of the material and the logical, an exchange of the solid for a voice—that is the oldest story of the rudder [*gouvernail*]. And if the bolt of lightning governs the universe, here it is the look and the invitation to create a slant. The person who limps is the inclination. He is the difference, and he says so.

There are several fine balances in this. First of all, not all voices bear information; not all winds bear tidings. Not all smooth talkers are invited to dine: good *raconteurs* are distinguished from tiresome brag-garts and from stubborn cavillers. The king of Prussia could choose; he preferred Voltaire, and the tsarina, Diderot. They would not have invited the ridiculous Jean-François Rameau. There is a market for good words, sometimes at a fixed price. Bad money often chases out the good. But this balance is evolved, sophisticated; it is useless at first.

Let us return to the paralytic, that is to say, to the governor. The one with energy, the producer of movement, can sometimes distinguish the useful message in the voices of the wind. Yet his blindness forbids him from ever regulating the message's usefulness. The cripple, perched atop his blind stare, could make him fall into a ditch. The blind man must trust the cripple. And the latter could be anyone. For the blind man cannot choose his mahout. Of course, he can distinguish messages from noise, but his lack of control allows him to be lied to. I shall warn you about all obstacles, and I shall lead you where you want to go. And so he goes quite like a sheep.

From that point on, anyone who wants to sit on the shoulders of an athlete does not want him to see well. He who likes to command can do so, but on one condition: the eyes of the producers, of the energetic and the strong, have to be poked out. Those who have energy necessarily cannot have information; thus, those with information can do without energy. Information is as precious as it is rare. Thus this

rarity has to be provoked. The blind man and the paralytic already established these theorems and the new balance as well. They began with symbiosis, but that did not last very long. The parasite came back.

The balance of rarity functions perfectly in a space or an environment without information. Here the first signal that appears is worth all the money in the world, is worth life itself. The first bolt of lightning that inclines in chaos. The first olive branch in the beak of the dove on the flooded plains. Afterwards follows all the meaning. And history itself is derived from this spark. Begin with the black box, night, blindness.

Thus you have to begin by removing all sources of information for the workers and producers. Horses are trained by putting blinders on them. Calves and chickens are placed in the dark, in school, as if they were simple, small men. You have to begin by dividing the work. The manual laborer has to be blind in relation to the paralyzed intellectual. The helmsman has no porthole; he hears his master's voice, he listens, he repeats, and he obeys. Just like the blind man a while back, who followed a voice. One furnishes energy; the other, information. One gives the force to work; the other, the directions. Matter and voice. Again this is an iniquitous exchange, but it works in history and not only in comedy. They must have found the parasitic diagonal very serious. They must have found the new balance intelligent. For the division surges up and makes a system very quickly: the intellectual producer is blind relative to the administrative paralytic and blinded by him, and so forth. This cybernetics gets more and more complicated, makes a chain, then a network. Yet it is founded on the theft of information, quite a simple thing. It is merely necessary to edit the laws and to withdraw knowledge from the greatest number. In the end, power is nothing else. It is measured on this balance. It is the relation and literally the balance beam between the loci in which information is stocked and those from which it is withdrawn. Who put out whose eyes? Where is knowledge located, and from what space is it absent? It is true enough that the division of manual and intellectual functions more or less matches the old relation of city and country, for example; this is what the rats show us.

This power, which could be called bureaucratic, seems to me to be stronger and stabler than that of force, which is never strong enough, or that of law, which is never just enough. It is based on knowledge, and worse yet, on information, on the signal, almost at the level of a reflex. Yet its genesis is paradoxical. That of strong powers is simple: it is a question of violence and death, warfare, muscles, and strategy. That of just powers is simple as well: it is a question of faith and of sacrifices, of martyrs and fanatics. Nothing out of the ordinary, nothing rare,

nothing rare, nothing ridiculous. Here, the ancestor is a parasite. He is ridiculous, a joke. He claims to exchange his daring words for good food. But he is the only one we hear at the table. He is the only one we see on stage in Plautus. Him and his loud voice. Everyone laughs. By what miracle does everyone suddenly cry then? In the meanwhile, the master has lost the power to exclude him. He is there, well entrenched. Ruins the father, screws the mother, leads the children, runs the household. We can no longer do without him; he is our system itself: he commands, he has the power, his voice has become that of the master, he speaks so he is heard everywhere, no one else can talk. From the *table d'hôte* to the table of Orion—now he is on the shoulders, the master, Zeus-like. How could this have happened? How could the producers have suddenly been blinded? What hit them?

The producer plays the contents, the parasite, the position. The one who plays the position will always beat the one who plays the contents. The latter is simple and naive; the former is complex and mediated. The parasite always beats the producer. The producer, always attentive to the game of the things themselves, supposes that the other does not cheat, since the things themselves are fine but loyal, as physicists say.

The one who plays the contents plays the object. He is an artisan; he is a scientist as well, but it is only the mastery of the world, subtle, wily, but not cheating. The one who plays the position plays the relations between subjects; thus, he masters men. And the master of men is the master of the masters of the world.

Some are of fire and some of location. Some whose word is of fire and some whose word is location. Those of location without fire are the masters—the cold ones. Those of fire without location burn madly, so strongly that around them, objects change as if in a furnace or near a forge. Flame of fire in the wind; the wind comes from where it will, blows where it will to stir up the fire. They are not the masters; they can be the slaves, but they are the beginnings. They are the noise of the world, the sounds of birth and of transformations.

To play the position or to play the location is to dominate the relation. It is to have a relation only with the relation itself. Never with the stations from which it comes, to which it goes, and by which it passes. Never to the things as such and, undoubtedly, never to subjects as such. Or rather, to those points as operators, as sources of relations. And that is the meaning of the prefix *para-* in the word *parasite*: it is on the side, next to, shifted; it is not on the thing, but on its relation. It has relations, as they say, and makes a system of them. It is always mediate and

never immediate. It has a relation to the relation, a tie to the tie; it branches onto the canal.

There are those of sources and those of canals.

The whole question of the system now is to analyze what a point, a being, and a station are. They are crossed by a network of relations; they are crossroads, interchanges, sorters. But is that not analysis itself: saying that this thing is at the intersection of several series. From then on, the thing is nothing else but a center of relations, crossroads or passages. It is nothing but a position or situation. And the parasite has won.