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Suspended Animation: Thinking and Animality in Neurocultural Selfhood

Everyday events sometimes call our sense of selfhood into question. They trigger reactions and behaviors that have more to do with territory, survival, and animal communication than with meaning, intention, identity, or thought. Reactions of fear, flight, or attachment can occur anytime: at a political event, in the theater or art gallery, at work, or on the street. This essay analyzes a strange form of self-improvement literature animated by such events. The literature assembles knowledges and techniques of selfhood based on scientific models of animal behavior, cognition, and physiology. Many forms, practices, and ideas of communication, sociality, values, law, ethics, and technology blur the lines between humanity and animality. Many examples in different domains could be cited here, but all of them transform and represent the everyday experience of living as a set of responses to be analyzed, monitored, and regulated through cognitive, behavioral, and neurophysiological models of animality. Giorgio Agamben's work allows one thread of this development to be unraveled and evaluated. Agamben analyzes how concepts of life underpin political formations and forms of power. Crucially, he frames *thinking* as a form-

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of-life. This framing provides ways of situating animalization in relation to thinking (as well as in relation to responsibility, ethics, politics, and futurity). Since thinking or thought retains a special privilege in animalized accounts of personhood, self, and relation to others, the connections that Agamben makes between thinking and life have special importance. Any shift in thinking about thought or in practices of thinking deeply affects experiences of self, body, others, and collective life. Agamben's work demonstrates why affirming animality remains difficult for those who like to think of themselves as human. It articulates an important question: in what way can we become animals?

Animalization as Everyday Experimental Sensibility

The literature analyzed in this essay forms a loose corpus situated at the boundary between books on popular science, personal development, and cultural theory. In his best-selling book *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*, Malcolm Gladwell asks, "What would happen if we if took our instincts seriously?"[1] Taking instincts seriously in itself is not new. Since the nineteenth century, large parts of the psy-disciplines (psychology, psychoanalysis, cognitive science) and the life sciences have been devoted to that. Gladwell answers that taking "our instincts seriously" means attending to "the very smallest components of our everyday lives—the content and origin of those instantaneous impressions and conclusions that spontaneously arise whenever we meet a new person, confront a complex situation or have to make a decision under conditions of stress" (*B*, 16). We can take this call to heed our instincts in different ways. For instance, we might regard it as reaffirming biological determinism. However, Gladwell and others situate biology and animality in everyday senses of self. They highlight everyday scenarios (in the classroom, on the street, in a gallery, at home) and suggest that understanding biological explanations of them changes selfhood. In *Mind Wide Open: Why You Are What You Think*, another recent best-selling nonfiction book on thinking, Steven Johnson suggests, "Knowing something about the brain's mechanics—and particularly *your* brain's mechanics—widens your self-awareness as powerfully as any therapy or meditation or drug. Brain science has become an avenue for introspection, a way of bridging the physiological reality of your brain with the mental life you already inhabit."[2] There is much to analyze here. Almost every word in this brief passage—*knowing*, *brain mechanics*, *self-awareness*,

and so on—opens onto vistas of debate, contention, politicized struggle, and power. The political theorist William Connolly goes even farther, by saying, "Thinking is neurocultural."[3]

Rather than being concerned with neurophysiology or cognitive psychology as scientific enterprises, Gladwell, Johnson, and Connolly draw from those fields practically oriented ideas about selfhood in everyday life. They look for elements to weave together in "technologies of self"[4] that can rapidly react, feel, invent, intuit, and organize themselves in networked capitalism. Johnson, like many others, sees brain science as a way of delineating how thinking overflows the discursive, logical, rational, or representational. The connection to brain science affirmed here is not to a classic scientific model or to a determinist or reductionist account of self or culture, as might be found in contemporary evolutionary psychology.[5] These accounts inculcate a quasi-experimental relation to self by borrowing from specific scientific disciplines and knowledges, combined with television nature documentary–style narrative, brain-imaging techniques, therapeutic interventions, and dietary and pharmaceutical regimens. Media, technology, everyday life, and science intermingle here. Connolly connects the different components in this experimental sensibility when he writes, "Today a dense series of loops and counterloops among cinema, TV, philosophy, neurophysiology, and everyday life enable people to explore the relation between thinking and affect more readily" (*N*, 67). While the precise character of the "loops and counterloops" among media, science, and everyday life merit more description, here the key problem is to explain how animalization makes these loops feasible.

Animality in Everyday Action

At one level, Agamben's *The Open* parallels the literature discussed above.[6] Johnson, Gladwell, and Connolly (although Connolly's account diverges radically in theory) connect thinking and animality at a practical, quasi-popular level. They combine science and quotidian anecdotes to prove that responses, feelings, intuitions, or various kinds of memory are animal reactions developed to solve problems of survival. Agamben's work also connects thinking to animality. However, it scales up thinking to a historico-philosophical and political level. The practical, quasi-popular level understands thinking as something that can be modified, enhanced, and rendered more flexible or adaptable by reference to scientific knowledges

of animal behavior, cognition, and neurophysiology. As Nigel Thrift argues, these modifications serve very precise economic functions.[7] Similarly, at the historico-philosophical level of Agamben's account, the machinery that produces the very possibility of any experience of boredom, pleasure, everyday life, and thinking hinges on animality, as we will see. However, Agamben's work differs decisively. It allows us to ask whether the loops between neurophysiology and everyday life, between animality and thinking more broadly, can be smooth or uneventful.

In *The Open*, Agamben argues that any concept of humanity must both exclude *and* include animal nature. A logic of exclusion-inclusion drives the history of philosophical, religious, legal, political, scientific, and artistic concepts of the human in the West. Departing from an analysis of political sovereignty developed in *Homo Sacer*,[8] Agamben formulates this logic as the "anthropological machine" (*O*, 80). This mechanism generates figures of the human by dividing or cutting between human and animal. Yet, at each moment, the anthropological machine teeters on the verge of breakdown. "The motor of the historical becoming of the human" has repeatedly produced humanity in tension with animality (*O*, 80).

How does the anthropological machine produce any historical becoming of the human? Like the machinery of Kafka's penal colony, the machine that Agamben describes performs a series of topological operations on the living. It cuts living elements apart (for instance, body and soul) *and* folds this cut back into the living in order to produce the human. It divides animality from ideas, practices, and discourses of being human, and yet, it also includes animality within them. Because the anthropological machine constantly reinscribes animal-human difference within the human, figures of humanity cannot stabilize. The machine intermittently injects new breaks and separations. In the history of Western ideas of the living, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Carolus Linnaeus, and Ernst Haeckel represent significant philosophical and scientific articulations of the same discursive machinery. The different versions of the exclusion-inclusion share the folded topology:

> Inasmuch as the production of the human by the opposition man/animal, human/inhuman is in play in it, the machine functions necessarily by an exclusion (which is also and always already a capture) and an inclusion (which is always and already an exclusion). It is precisely because the human is, in effect, each time already presupposed that the machine produces in reality a kind of state of exception, a zone of

> indetermination where the outside is only the exclusion of the inside and the inside, in its turn, only an exclusion of the outside. (*O*, 37)

As in *Homo Sacer*, Agamben calls this space of included-exclusion a "state of exception." In both older and newer versions, the anthropological machine generates a "zone of indetermination," or state of exception, in which human and animal remain or become indistinguishable. The zone takes different forms, but it always posits the existence of something not yet human that is already human. For instance, late-nineteenth-century accounts of human evolution solved the problem of the "missing link" by envisaging the virtual existence of prelinguistic humans.

No one lives only in the zone of indetermination. The state of exception precipitates from incessant cleaving, rearticulating, dislocating, and displacing of human and animal lives. Given the topological kinks of the anthropological construct, there is no prospect of simply putting humanity and animality back together again. Rather than trying to reunite these elements or substances (as have many philosophical projects during the last centuries and as does the literature under analysis here), Agamben seeks to extract the dynamics of their constant division: "We must, on the contrary, learn to think man [*sic*] as what results from the disconnection of these two elements [body and soul] and examine not the metaphysical mystery of their conjunction, but the practical and political mystery of the separation" (*O*, 16). Practical and political decouplings or disconnections of animal bodies and human souls produce the human. In whatever sense, human life reiterates that dividing and breaking apart, more or less incessantly, in many places and ways (asleep, waiting, watching, playing, fighting, and so on).

Biological Thinking and the Democratic Value of Life

Agamben's account would help situate the literature of animalized or neurocultural selfhood if it could highlight the strategies that literature adopts. How does the anthropological machine help explain practical redefinitions of selfhood? For Agamben, "thinking" appears surprisingly often as a cardinal concern. At first glance, the idea of thinking developed in Gladwell's, Johnson's, and Connolly's work does not seem to fit very well with Agamben's account of the anthropological machine. Their accounts displace thinking away from conscious, logical, rational, reflective registers toward "the very smallest components of our everyday lives" (*B*, 16). Think-

ing is presented as something mundane, dispersed, variable, fragmentary, and transient. In this respect, their accounts very much echo long-standing philosophical criticisms of the separation of soul from body in Western thought (often originally attributed to Descartes). Do they not continue the reappraisal of thinking that Nietzsche, Freud, Martin Heidegger, or Jacques Derrida undertook?

In contrast to the philosophical critiques of mind-body dualism, the accounts of neurocultural and animalized selfhood draw on the life sciences. According to Agamben, Western political life and thought have long orbited a nucleus of animality, or "bare life." The term "bare life," or *zoē*, sourced from Aristotle, takes many guises in Agamben's work of the last decade. In general, it refers to an "incorruptible fallenness"[9] or "mere living" outside politics, norms, or judgment (*HS*, 2). According to *Homo Sacer*, modern power, today in the guise of biopolitics, persistently probes bodies at the level of "mere living." It works to subsume bare life within organized forms of life (such as modes of subjectivation or selfhood) in order to constitute itself as sovereign, constituted power.

Despite their name, the life sciences provide no direct access to (bare) life. For Agamben, they hover ambivalently on the fringes of the zone of indetermination. On this fringe, forms-of-life, organized by norms and institutions, sheer away from bare life, as Agamben notes: "Biological life, which is the secularized form of [bare] life and which shares its unutterability and impenetrability, thus constitutes the real forms-of-life literally as forms of survival: biological life remains inviolate in such forms as that obscure threat that can suddenly actualize itself in violence, in extraneity, in illnesses, in accidents."[10] On the one hand, biological lives capture the living in forms (anatomy, physiology, ecology, biochemistry, and so on). On the other hand, biological life retains something of the "unutterability and impenetrability" of bare animal life. Any turn to neurophysiology or behavioral sciences finds itself enmeshed in a complex weave of forms, norms, and exceptional events (violence, extraneity, illnesses, and accidents). These scientific knowledges supply diverse resources for social and political contests over living bodies. The animalizing accounts of thinking could extend what biological life sciences start. Outside the laboratory or the clinic, they could help render "real forms-of-life" as "forms of survival." So, while responding to a stranger, an artwork, or a political event might at first seem to lie a long way from biology, when explained in terms of a primitive or older part of the brain evolved to quickly produce fight-or-flight

responses, art and politics entail forms of survival. From this perspective, popular accounts of everyday life as instinct, reaction, or survival tactic capture and exclude bare life. They, too, produce the human, even as they seek to overcome the modernist separation between mind and body.

Neurochemistry and Democracy: No Value Other Than Life

What happens to the unutterability of bare life in the animalizing accounts of selfhood? Popular accounts such as Gladwell's and Johnson's, but also academic work such as Connolly's, present certain behaviors and physiological responses as politically useful and potentially democratic. For instance, Johnson writes, "Our mental modules are implicated in political issues" (*MWO*, 213). In order to understand why "our brain's faculties may create too much resistance," we need more comprehensive accounts of "self in society" (*MWO*, 214). Hence, Johnson proposes: "There is no convincing reason a comprehensive account of self in society couldn't be built by a consilient chain: neuroscientists explain how the brain's underlying electrochemical networks function; evolutionary psychologists explain how and why those networks create channels of 'prepared learning' or instinct; . . . political theorists and moral leaders explore the best ways to structure society to reconcile those patterns of group behaviour with individual needs" (*MWO*, 214). At the base of the envisaged "comprehensive account of self in society" lies neurochemistry and, just above, evolutionary accounts of "prepared learning." In identifying and delineating the implication of brains in politics, all three authors bring certain aspects of self to the fore. Many of the examples of "rapid cognition" or snap decisions Gladwell uses come from the politicized domains of electoral politics, law enforcement, or military strategy. When they put forward a concrete site of a neurochemical-evolutionary-political-moral self in society, they typically settle on the well-known behaviors such as the fight-or-flight response. This, as Johnson writes, is partly because "learning to be afraid turns out to have been one of the most studied behavioural patterns of the twentieth century" (*MWO*, 53). Behavioral sciences value fear responses because so much can be learned from them. That is, fear heavily dramatizes the staying alive or survival of life. The neurocultural accounts value such responses as "a kind of thinking." Johnson notes: "Once again, a lack of discrimination has a potentially adaptive value. In life-or-death situations, you never know where relevant information might lie. . . . This, too, is a kind of thinking"

(*MWO*, 59). This "thinking" is not linguistic, logical, rational, conscious, or even unconscious.

Many of the examples of rapid fearful cognition come from law enforcement because researchers in the life sciences have examined such responses carefully. Now these examples can become part of what Johnson calls "self-awareness" through a scientifically inflected process of personal development. The fight-or-flight response, Connolly suggests, "allows us to explore how thinking itself can sometimes modify the microcomposition of body/brain processes, as a new pattern of thinking becomes infused into body/brain processes" (*N*, 8). How can modularized, fragmentary, and partial fear responses be democratic? The account of the neurochemical-animal self in society enhances democracy by expanding the primary locus of political agency, personhood. It can think about itself more comprehensively; it can understand feelings of fear, intimations of threat, and obscure anxieties as adaptations, as forms of survival, and above all as potentially legitimate forms of thought in their own right.

These suggestions aim to enhance truth and justice. Even if these responses can fit somehow within democratic understandings of citizenship, justice, or deliberation, *zoē*'s inherently unstable position within modern democracy troubles their success. In terms of Agamben's account, they also participate in another wider process. On the one hand, as Agamben points out, "Modern democracy presents itself from the beginning as a vindication and liberation of *zoē*, and . . . it is constantly trying to transform its own bare life into a way of life and to find, so to speak, the *bios* of *zoē*" (*HS*, 9). On the other hand, the transformation of bare life into political form is not unique to democracy. Agamben claims directly that democracy and totalitarianism converge at a "historico-philosophical level" (*HS*, 10). Both know "no value . . . other than life itself" (*HS*, 10). Furthermore, he insists that only by holding on to the idea of their "inner solidarity" can "new realities and unforeseen convergences" be sensed and understood (*HS*, 10). Hence, while the animalized accounts of thinking vindicate and liberate bare life, they also transform *zoē* into a way of life or a form-of-life. In so doing, they affirm no value other than life itself.

Techniques of Transforming *Zoē*

How do the animalizing accounts transform *zoē*? Practically, they begin by *naming*. Johnson suggests learning to name chemicals and brain regions:

"If you spend some time exploring this new world, you will end up with a set of conceptual building blocks to use when thinking about how your brain works: some of them specific chemicals, some of them localized regions, some of them broader patterns of interaction between regions or chemicals" (*MWO*, 184). Naming never simply denominates. As Judith Butler argues, "To be named by another is traumatic: it is an act that precedes my will, an act that brings me into a linguistic world in which I might then begin to exercise agency at all."[11] Naming substantiates, organizes, distributes, and lays the groundwork for regulation, in this case of a sense of self oriented by biological and behavioral knowledges. For instance, Gladwell has the reader imagine going into a psychologist's office to take a language test: make four-word sentences out of some five-word sets. The sets include words like *worried*, *old*, *Florida*, and *lonely*. Presenting ten-word samples as a test for the reader, Gladwell remarks, "After you finished that test—believe it or not—you would have walked out of my office and back down the hall more slowly than you walked in. With that test, I affected the way you behaved. . . . You thought that I was just making you take a language test. But, in fact, what I was also doing was making the big computer in your brain—your adaptive unconscious—think about the state of being old" (*B*, 53). The imagined experiment sets a scene. In this scene, things take place on a largely inaccessible level (that Gladwell somewhat problematically terms the "big computer in your brain"). According to Gladwell, the language test and its aftermath—walking more slowly—show that the adaptive unconscious "picked up some clues that we're in an environment that is really concerned about old age" (*B*, 58). In trying to transform bare life into way of life, the test brings to light the penumbra of instantaneous impressions and conclusions that accompany an explicit cognitive task.

Yet visiting a psychologist's office to take such a test is not a neutral situation. Test situations generate anxieties. The norms and techniques of the psy-disciplines institute and structure the event. The imagined test in the book embeds language-thought within modes of address, compliance, norms, and performance. Taking this test, even in the literary form offered by a book on popular science, places the experience in a specific register. As Nikolas Rose puts it, "The colloquial designations, the simple examples, the dissection of recognizable moves: all these provide a means of rendering our own experiences in social transactions into thought and making them amenable to management."[12] The features that Gladwell's imagined test seeks to bring to light, and to render recognizable for readers, rely on a

preexisting familiarity. Psychological testing interpellates subjects and correlates them into norms in educational, employment, medical, therapeutic, or pastoral settings. Because subjects are accustomed to being tested, they quickly recognize the structures and forces framing their responses. The test results—walking down the hallway more slowly—rely on this prior incorporation of test instruments to do the work. The test makes something recognizable (walking down the hall more slowly as the trace of a bodily modification wrought by the adaptive unconscious) because the psy-disciplines have already formed and articulated life as *bios*. Moreover, the experience of aging itself carries much biopolitical baggage. It is not one example among others. Readers may recognize the fact that multiple, autonomous adaptive behaviors shadow conscious cognitive tasking. Yet any such recognition relies on the framing provided by the prior formations that subtly corporealizes language and pervasively, ineluctably politicizes life itself.

The Territories and Behaviors of Everydayness

The experiments, situations, tests, tricks, and naming, however, do not exhaust the *bios* of *zoē*. Beyond the techniques of behavioral self-experimentation stands a more forceful attempt to overcome any separation between human and animal. For instance, Connolly contends, "Although human culture is in fact composed of essentially *embodied* beings implicated in complex patterns of action, and although some brain nodules in the human brain network are shared with other animals, cultural theorists haunted by determinist images of nature are pressed to dismiss, ignore, or degrade the corporeal layering of language, perception, and thinking in human nature" (*N*, 62). This formulation, echoed in other recent academic and nonacademic work in cultural theory and popular science, begins with commonalities between animal and human. In another example that joins animal and human, Johnson suggests, "When we sense emotional complexity in other mammals, we're detecting the existence of the limbic system operating in their brains" (*MWO*, 205). Both writers emphasize patterns of action and biological structures common to animals and humans.

At the juncture of human and animal, Agamben's exploration in *The Open* of the way Heidegger thought about differences between animal and human life again heads in a different direction. Rather than reinforcing or collapsing their separation, Heidegger's work represents for Agamben an

attempt to take the animal-human separation to its historical limit. This attempt ultimately puts any separation in doubt. Heidegger's thought approaches the zone of indetermination without collapsing animal and human differences. If Agamben, via Heidegger, can sustain this movement, then an important dimension of contemporary selfhood can be reevaluated without collapsing all values and all separations.

Agamben tells how Heidegger departs from the basic concept of *territory* developed by the early-twentieth-century ethologist Jakob von Uexküll.[13] Heidegger took from von Uexküll the notion that animal time and space differs from human time and space. Animals live in milieus, humans live in worlds. As Agamben says, "We too often imagine that the relations that a particular animal maintains with things in their milieu take place in the same time as those which link us to things in our human world" (*O*, 40). An animal habitat consists of a system of marks that trigger perceptions and channel them into particular ways of moving through and marking out a space. Territorial limits are signaled by marks left by other animals or, in the case of some birds, by song. The relation between an animal and its environment consists of this interlocking between marks or signs and corresponding capacities to react to them in an environment. Animal milieus, according to von Uexküll, effectively shut animals in. The milieu consists of a selection of marks in close structural coupling with the senses and motor capacities of the animal in question. What falls through the sieve of these marks forms no part of the animal's milieu.[14]

The tight coupling between territory and behavior figures in the contemporary literature on animalizations of thinking. These accounts (and again Johnson's book is exemplary) take two things from it. First, they reiterate the connection between milieu and action-reaction. Second, they treat this connection as something to be experienced and acted on. People can become more sensitive to or conscious of the connection between trigger and reaction. They can also, perhaps, modify the connection. Fear, as mentioned above, and love-attachment commonly appear as the most important sites of intervention examined in these accounts. Johnson's book describes a life-threatening event that happened to the author and his partner in their Manhattan apartment. In his story of the shattering of a large window during a storm, Johnson contends that fear and his memory of that response link certain marks (the sound of wind) to reactions: "This is the body's fear response, an orchestral mix of physiological instruments launching with masterful speed and precision. . . . Feeling it kick in is one of the best ways

to experience your brain and body as an autonomous system, operating independently of your conscious will" (*MWO*, 49). For Johnson, the sound of wind triggers bodily changes—tensing of muscles, sweating, shivering, eye movements, and so on.

Importantly, this trigger has also become a way for him to experience his own "brain and body as an autonomous system." Similarly, for Connolly, fear reactions offer a particularly quotidian site for the modification of thinking: "In this instance the relatively slow, complex process of perception gives way to the lightning-fast, crude processing of the amygdala. . . . Let's call the emergency percept *infra-perception*, because of its speed and its processing of information without visual imagery. It happens all the time, as when you turn your car in a flash on the road or freeze suddenly while walking in the woods" (*N*, 27). Perception, feeling (of fear), and reaction happen constantly, even during sleep. They are always available. However, they work without visual imagery and beneath the threshold of perception. It is hard to become conscious of them except in unusual situations, when something actually frightening occurs. The interlocking of milieu and reaction or behavior means that this "kind of thinking" has its own specificity. A sound or a flash of movement triggers a cry and a lurch sideways in response. The transition from trigger to response outstrips conscious perception or intended action. Reactions triggered by specific sensed features of a situation sweep over "intention" and "perception." Because it does not rely on language, fully formed images, or sound-images, it is fast. How, then, can the technologies of self-thinking bring it to bay?

From Excitement to Boredom

Agamben's reading of Heidegger suggests that bringing this "kind of thinking" into awareness is fraught. Because animals allegedly unify perception, action, and milieu, Heidegger famously argued that animals are "poor-in-world."[15] They do not act, they behave. Borrowing one of von Uexküll's examples, Heidegger describes how milieus lock animals in. An experimenter cuts off the abdomen of a bee and then puts the bee on the edge of a bowl of honey. The bee observes neither the superabundance of honey nor the absence of its abdomen. It just sips the honey (*O*, 52). A circuit of pulsional drives prevents the bee from seeing the catastrophe or responding to what happened. The world, Heidegger suggests, can only absorb or daze animals. Animals cannot relate to the world or things as such. Being dazed

or captivated, as Agamben notes, is the basic state, the fundamental mood, of animals. This state flows from functional coupling between perceptions, a milieu understood as a system of marks or triggers that drive behaviors. It differs from human existence. Although we can be absorbed in things, we don't have to be. We act, and we have and make worlds, the argument runs, because we don't have to, because we can not do. Not having to act or do, not having to make, in short, being essentially indeterminate, grounds radical contingency, being-open, and having a world.

The amputee bee's state of absorption resonates in the recreational neuroscience texts. Experiences of love and attachment epitomize absorption for Johnson. In his book, he contrasts the fight-or-flight response to an equally or perhaps more important alternative: tend and befriend. Again, an animal model is crucial: "The prairie vole, a small rodent indigenous to the midwestern plains of the United States, is one of the natural world's great romantics. After mating, most voles remain monogamously attached to their partner for life, raising children together in a rodent version of domestic bliss" (*MWO*, 111). The prairie vole, subject of intensive laboratory investigation, teaches us about the neurochemistry of absorption, attachment, and feeling. The prairie vole's brain, in particular, turns out to be particularly instructive. "Domestic bliss" hinges on a single molecule, oxytocin: "For most people, I suspect, the neuroscience of personal connection will have more intimate revelations as we come to understand and recognize the chemicals that trigger these powerful feelings. Not just because it's intellectually interesting to know that your feelings of attachment are partially instigated by oxytocin, but also because the chemistry's effects go beyond the primary emotion itself—altering your memory, your immediate attention, your evaluation of people and environments" (*MWO*, 130). The "intimate revelations" in his account tell of his partner nursing her newborn baby in a downtown Manhattan apartment on September 11, 2001. Her calmness represents for Johnson an existential counterweight to the nervy fight-or-flight response. Oxytocin lends durability to feeling: "In other words, it's possible that oxytocin does not create the visceral pleasure of love and attachment, but it does enable that pleasure to last longer than it normally would" (*MWO*, 132). Like knowing about the amygdala's rudimentary decision-making, knowledge of oxytocin affects how we inhabit our worlds—"your memory, your immediate attention, your evaluation of people and environments." Knowing that chemicals such as oxytocin coincide with feelings of attachment affirms animality at species and indi-

vidual levels: "Knowing something about your brain chemistry at such a moment connects you both to the individual neuronal assemblage in your brain that creates the image of your child and to the evolutionary history of feeling, the history of all your ancestors and their parental emotions" (*MWO*, 211). The state of absorption or captivation that Johnson attributes to oxytocin resembles the absorption that Agamben finds of interest in Heidegger.

Agamben does not equate animal absorption with the human history of feeling. Instead, through the state of captivation or dazedness (*Benommenheit*), he attempts to envisage what would happen if the anthropological machining of human-animal differences halted. Absorption exposes and expels animals into the world. Although animals only have habitats or territories, they are also, as Heidegger puts it, "expulsed" (pulsionally expelled) toward something other than themselves (*O*, 61). Their very being exposes or expels animals outside themselves. They still somewhat lack a world in this exposure, yet they engage with what absorbs them—the marks, the triggers and stimuli, that which locks in their perceptions and behaviors. In its milieu or habitat, "the animal is outside of being" (*O*, 91). This exposure or expulsion holds for Agamben an extraordinary potential: it opens the possibility of moving outside the historical impasse of anthropologization.

Agamben quickly rules out one interpretation of what this might mean: "To render inoperative the machine that governs our conception of man will therefore mean no longer to seek new—more effective or more authentic—articulations" of human-animal composites (*O*, 92). Most of the materials of neurocultural-animal selfhood risk becoming efficacious. Instead, he suggests, it would be better "to show the central emptiness, the hiatus that—within man—separates man and animal, and to risk ourselves in this emptiness: the suspension of the suspension, Shabbat of both animal and man" (*O*, 92). The weekend state of animal dazedness both sedates and animates.

Like the lasting feelings Johnson describes, the fundamental mood of animals—absorbed or dazed—is much closer to boredom than excitement. For Heidegger, profound boredom occurs when the world refuses to open itself to a constitutively open being (*Dasein*, a person). Agamben suggests that Heidegger's reading of the existentially profound state of boredom cannot ever be fully distinguished from the dazed state of animality. Conceptually and ontologically, boredom actually coalesces with the state of being dazed (*O*, 65). As Agamben concludes, "Dasein is simply an animal

who has learnt to be bored, who has been woken from its own dazedness and to its own dazedness" (*O*, 70). The mystery of the separation between animal and human lives does not rest on any essential difference such as language, rationality, capacity for invention, and so on. It lies in a zone of half-awake indetermination, between being dazed and being bored. The "banal, quotidian mysticism" he affirms comes from being dazed.[16] Effectively, Agamben, via Heidegger, folds the line between animal and human within the human in a way that emphasizes its mutability. Humans plunge into this dazed world-opening animal absorption but veer away from it frequently.

Waking and Thinking as Form-of-Life

It often seems that we must preserve thinking itself as part of human selfhood at all costs. Yet, if the technologies of animalized selfhood have any purchase, thinking cannot remain what it was. It works beneath "direct reflective regulation," as Connolly puts it (*N*, 112). Nerve-racking, stressful, or traumatic scenes—police shootouts, severe weather events, brain scans, attacks, art auctions—abound in these accounts. Thinking occurs in wild or violent events. Does the folding-inward human-animal separation in the zone of indetermination suggest any other trajectory? At the end of his discussion of Heidegger, Agamben poses two possibilities: "At this point, two scenarios are possible from Heidegger's perspective: (a) posthistorical man no longer preserves his own animality as undisclosable, but rather seeks to take it on and govern it by means of technology; (b) man, the shepherd or being, appropriates his own concealedness, his own animality, which neither remains hidden nor is made an object of mastery, but is thought as such, as pure abandonment" (*O*, 80). On the one hand, in alternative (a), the biopolitical containment of life as bare life needs to manage animality. Examples of that management litter the biomedical sciences and psy-disciplines. Johnson, Gladwell, and perhaps also Connolly take on animality through behavioral and neurotechnical practices of various kinds (MRI brain scans, biofeedback, drug and dietary regimens, and so on). Alternative (b), on the other hand, grapples with thinking itself as pure abandonment. Thinking comes close to the dazed state that lies at the heart of animality.

Animality, for Agamben, has to be "thought as such, as pure abandonment" in order to avoid either hiding or managing it. Thinking abandon-

ment is not abandoning thinking. What would thinking be if not a startled bark into wakefulness that happens now and then? Would it be placid attachment? At the end of *Homo Sacer*, Agamben asks what to do politically, ethically, and ontologically about "bare life" and answers: "This biopolitical body that is bare life must itself instead be transformed into the site for the constitution and installation of a form of life that is wholly exhausted in bare life and a *bios* that is only its own *zoē*. Here attention will also have to be given to the analogies between politics and the epochal situation of metaphysics" (*HS*, 188). Why this injunction? Why would anyone especially want a form of life that is "exhausted in bare life," especially given that bare life is the included other that has become the principle on which biopolitical sovereignty pivots? Why must the analogies between politics and the "epochal situation of metaphysics" receive attention?

Agamben envisages the emergence of a field of research on the fringes of the biopolitical terrain occupied by politics, philosophy, medico-biological sciences, and jurisprudence. This fringe would not cut bare life into form and matter, into *bios* and *zoē*. Here, however, thought or thinking is crucial because life and form-of-life coincide in it. By contrast, the animalizing accounts attempt to identify the forms of thought that imbue life and to subject them to regulation. In an essay titled "Form-of-Life," Agamben asserts, "Thought is form-of-life, life that cannot be separated from its form; and anywhere the intimacy of this inseparable life appears, in the materiality of corporeal processes and habitual ways of life no less than in theory, there and only there is there thought."[17] Thought that can think a form-of-life that is nothing but its own existence, "a *bios* that is only its own *zoē*," would itself be a form-of-life. The connective hyphens are important. Thinking would no longer seize a historical destiny (as in Heidegger) or radically distinguish the necessary and the contingent (as, for instance, in most Enlightenment and social constructionist accounts). Nor would thinking service the increasingly fine-grained biopolitical management of ecological, economic, and political-cultural systems. Rather, thought would live, occasionally or intermittently, as *bios* and *zoē* inseparably.

An ultraminimalist, almost sedated mood pervades Agamben's alternative. As in Johnson's, Gladwell's, and Connolly's accounts, for Agamben, thought as form-of-life inhabits quotidian life. The contingencies of everyday life have been a constant theme in cultural and social theory over the last half century for various reasons (beginning, perhaps, with Benjamin, running through situationist-influenced and then feminist thought). In

Agamben's work, everyday life undergoes a further vitalization. Its radical contingency wells up along the fault lines of indetermination, where *bios* uncontrollably coincides with its own *zoē*. In the language of his earlier work, "The contingent is not simply the non-necessary, that which can not-be, but that which, being the *thus*, being only its mode of being, is capable of the *rather*, can not not-be."[18] This zone in which something becomes "its mode of being" cannot be thought except as thought by thinking itself. By virtue of its own singularity or "thusness," thinking can never become an object or a subject. In this respect, it diverges in principle at least from the techniques advocated by Connolly, Gladwell, and Johnson. If they all seek to heighten or render salient nonintentional, nonreflective thought through exceptional situations, thought as form-of-life dismantles the privilege of exceptional, shocking, or jarring events.

We have no example of form-of-life apart from thinking. Moreover, thinking leads a quotidian, not a transcendent, life. This means that it must involve, as Agamben says, "everyday zones, a very banal, quotidian mysticism."[19] Agamben's analysis of animality seeks to afford an understanding of what this quotidian life might mean. A version of bare life as everydayness can be reevaluated if we can show how separations between forms of life and life itself, or bare life, are practically produced.

Conclusion

There are many ways to sense and make sense of "our animality" or "our biological nature." Agamben provides an extremely broad account of the formation of subjectivity and political power around life. History—Western history, at least—is a constantly refashioned separation between human and animal. Any sense of humanity more or less openly depends on the twisted topology of that separation. Biological life and life as survival appear as recent versions of the excluding inclusion of bare life as forms-of-life. As biomedical sciences and politics become increasingly entwined, we can expect increasingly intimate experimental syntheses of life and power to appear.

At a more fine-grained level, Agamben offers ways of analyzing some aspects of the emerging syntheses of scientific, political, and practical life. The main features of the analysis offered here have concerned what Johnson, Gladwell, and Connolly regard as different kinds of thinking. Thinking itself begins to function as the pivotal component in the modified version

of the anthropological machine. When patterns of fear, insecurity, love, and attachment come to be seen as kinds of thinking, physiological and psychological understandings of them as survival instincts or biochemical processes have to be put together with everyday experiences. Different aspects of that putting together—naming in language, practices of testing, and so on—coalesce as technologies of a thinking self.

It is important not to treat these animalizing experiments in thought solely as objects of criticism. Because they are quotidian forms of separation, they make it possible to begin to see what is at stake in the entwining of biomedical and political life. Like Agamben's readings of Heidegger, in which the structural couplings between perception, movement, and milieu also push to the limit conceptions of what it is to have a world, the animalization of thought, in its attempts to structurally couple self-awareness and biomedical knowledge, shows why it is hard to make animality present as such. (The proximity between absorption-abandonment and boredom-wakefulness that Agamben finds in Heidegger is key to this argument.) Why can't we just accept our own animality? "Our animality" cannot be thought as such because thought itself is put in question by animality. Thinking as "form-of-life," something that Agamben valorizes strongly, is not very far away from management of animality. Almost the only difference is that it does not keep scientific thinking outside the frame in the way that popular and some academic accounts do.

Agamben's own affirmation of animality as a response to the "total management of biological life" (*O*, 77) rests on thinking the abandonment, exposure, and dazed feeling of animality as such. Across a wide spectrum of his work, he posits thinking as form-of-life as a way to activate a politically progressive relation to contemporary biopolitical power. Of all the animal figures mentioned in *The Open*, the tick that hibernated in a Rostock laboratory for eighteen years before waking to feed again is one of the most striking (*O*, 70). The tick woke without knowing much about where it was or about what had happened. Hibernation and suspended animation are states, however, that involve a change in immediate relations to the environment.

Notes

1 Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005), 16. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number as *B*.

2 Steven Johnson, *Mind Wide Open: Why You Are What You Think* (Hammondsworth, UK: Penguin, 2004), 17. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number as *MWO*.

3 William E. Connolly, *Neuropolitics: Thinking, Culture, Speed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number as *N*.

4 Michel Foucault, *The Essential Works of Foucault: 1954–1984*, vol. 1, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997).

5 Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Viking, 2002).

6 Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 37. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number as *O*.

7 Nigel Thrift, "Re-inventing Invention: New Tendencies in Capitalist Commodification," *Economy and Society* 35:2 (2006): 279–306.

8 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number as *HS*.

9 Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 40.

10 Giorgio Agamben, "Form-of-Life," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 154.

11 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), 38.

12 Nikolas S. Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1999), 254.

13 Jakob von Uexküll, *Streifzüge durch die Umwelten von Tieren und Menschen: Ein Bilderbuch Unsichtbarer Welten* (*Expeditions through Animal and Human Environments: A Picture Book of Invisible Worlds*) (Berlin: Springer, 1934).

14 This closed and stable functional unity of mark, perception, or action raises all kinds of questions and gives rise to twentieth-century life sciences such as ethology and ecology. If ethology studies how signs, territories, perceptions, and actions mesh for particular animal worlds, ecology studies how the different closed milieus overlap and intersect.

15 Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeil and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

16 Giorgio Agamben, "'I am sure you are more pessimistic than I am . . .': An Interview with *Vacarme*," trans. Jason Smith, *Rethinking Marxism* 16.2 (2004): 115–24, at 118.

17 Agamben, "Form-of-Life," 156.

18 Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 105.

19 Agamben, "'I am sure you are more pessimistic than I am . . . ,'" 118.