I am alone. Says he or says she. I am alone. Let’s hear this sentence all alone, followed by a silence without appeal, or a final period. I am alone. Not: I am alone in being able to do this or that, to say this or that, to experience this or that, but “I am alone,” absolutely. “I am alone” does moreover mean “I am” absolute, that is absolved, detached or delivered from all bond, *absolutus*, safe from any bond, exceptional, even sovereign. Taken on its own, this declaration: “I am alone” can, successively or simultaneously, in a given pragmatic situation, with a given intonation, signify sadness or joy, deploration or triumph: “I am alone,” alas, or “I am alone,” thank God, alone at last, etc.

I know a sentence that is still more terrifying, more terribly ambiguous than “I am alone,” and it is, isolated from any other determining context, the sentence that would say to the other: “I am alone with you.” Meditate on the abyss of such a sentence: I am alone with you, with you I am alone, alone in all the world. Because we’re always talking about the world, when we talk about solitude. And the relation of the world to solitude will be our subject this year. I am alone with you in the world. That could be either the most beautiful declaration of love or the most discouraging despair-inducing testimony, the gravest attestation or protestation of detestation, stifling, suffocation itself: it would be all right to be alone, if at least I could be alone without you. Being alone with myself.

I am alone with myself.

Am I for all that bored? What does “I’m bored” mean? The French expression “je m’ennuie” is difficult to translate into many languages, with the exception of German where one can say *sich langweilen*. And *die Lang(e)weile* will even, no doubt, be at the center of our seminar this year, especially *das Sichlangweilen* that Heidegger talks about in a seminar from 1929–30.¹

But what does “s’ennuyer” mean? What does the relation to self of the “s’ennuyer” signify? To be bored [s’ennuyer] does not necessarily mean to bore oneself [s’ennuyer soi-même]. To bore oneself is something quite different from simply being bored, contrary to what [French] grammar might lead you to believe.

Can beasts be bored?

Can the sovereign be bored? Can he not be bored? “The King is amused [le roi s’amuse],” they say sometimes, but also “The King is bored.” Is one always bored because one is alone or else can one be bored as a group, with others, intersubjectively, as the other guy would say, or else do people bore each other, which is something else, or again, which is something still quite different and almost the contrary, do people sometimes miss each other [s’ennuie-t-on parfois l’un de l’autre]? Was Robinson Crusoe bored? Was he even alone, this man, because this man is a man, a human and a male human (not a woman), let’s never forget it; nothing equivalent or similar, analogous, was ever, to my knowledge (but I may be wrong) written about a woman alone: like an island in an island. Was Robinson Crusoe bored? Was he even alone: when, how, to what extent, up until what moment? For the moment I’ll abandon these questions on the high seas, we’ll see where they come ashore, but you can sense that they are not simple questions of language or one particular language, of semantics or translation.

And I come back to my first words:

“I am alone.” Says he or says she. “I am alone.”

Could someone (male or female) be alone who could not say or feel an “I am alone”? Could he be alone? Could she be alone? Could one say of him or her that he or she is alone? And could one say of whomever can neither feel nor speak this solitude that he or she is not alone, meaning — meaning

von Herrmann (Frankfurt-am-Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1992 [1979]). This course was given at the University of Freiburg-im-Breisgau during the 1929–30 winter semester. [Translator’s note: Martin Heidegger, The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995); references will henceforth be given in the text in the form “(H, German page number/English page number).” I have very occasionally made some slight modifications to the translation for the sake of consistency with the translation Derrida uses or improvises.]

[2. [Translator’s note:] This common saying in French gives its title to a play by Victor Hugo (Le roi s’amuse, 1832), which is the basis for Verdi’s opera Rigoletto. The play is variously translated into English as The King’s Diversion or The King Amuses Himself.]
what? Is not alone in a given social bond or else, which is something quite different, is not alone in the sense that there is not even a social bond yet, no being with the other, no community allowing, precisely, the experience or even the manifestation of solitude? So many formidable questions.

Before even proposing to you a sort of protocol for this year’s seminar, let’s now, by way of an exergue, try out a few sentences, try them out like warm-up notes for one’s voice or vocal chords. You will see that these sentences already have a consonance, a resonance with the first of my sentences today: “I am alone” and if I add the complement that often rounds off the “I am alone,” i.e. “I am alone in the world,” we’ll be even closer to what will be the protocol of this year’s seminar. In it we shall be speaking of the world, of world in every sense, of every world, no less.

Three or four sentences, then, to seek a first accord between us.

*First, a sentence in question form: “What is an island?” [Qu’est-ce qu’une île?]*

What is an island? [Qu’est une île?]

If you hear [entendez] this sentence, or these sentences come to you borne by the wind or an echo: “Qu’est-ce qu’une île? Qu’est une île,” if you hear them in French, if you hear them without reading them, you think you understand them, but you are not sure.

So long as you do not read them, so long as you do not have access to how they are spelled (une île: how do you write “il(e)”?), you cannot be sure, without context, almost totally isolated as you are, as though on an island, or a peninsula [presqu’île], you cannot be sure of hearing what you hear, i.e. of understanding what comes to your ears. An “il” [Une “il”] can designate that insular thing one calls an island [une île], the island of beauty,5 Treasure Island, Belle-Isle or the Ile de Groix. Or The Island of Despair, as Robinson Crusoe nicknames it on the very opening page of his journal. You remember, of course, that first page of The Journal, dated September 30, 1659:

I poor miserable Robinson Crusoe, being shipwreck’d during a dreadful Storm, in the offing, came on Shore on the dismal unfortunate Island, which I call’d the Island of Despair, all the rest of the Ship’s Company being

3. [Translator’s note:] Both of these are standard question forms in French (the second a little dated and more formal); both would be translated as “What is an island?”

4. [Translator’s note:] “L’île de beauté” is a standard French way of referring to the island of Corsica.
drown’d, and my self almost dead. All the rest of that Day I spent in afflict-
ing myself at the dismal Circumstances I was brought to, viz I had neither Food, House, Clothes, Weapon, or Place to fly to, and in Despair of any Re-
lief, saw nothing but Death before me, either that I should be devoured by wild Beasts, murder’d by Savages, or starv’d to Death for Want of Food. At the Approach of Night, I slept in a Tree for fear of wild Creatures; but slept soundly tho’it rained all Night.5

You already sense that in this single quotation, in this paragraph that opens Robinson’s Journal, we have all the material we need for our seminar: the reference to wild beasts, to human “Savages” or “wild Creatures,” the reduction of the narrator to a state of savage nature, almost that of a beast, since he has no house, clothes or weapon.6 And he is scared (he sleeps in a tree, having no house, “for fear of wild Creatures”): he <is> scared, that is his basic feeling, like Hobbes’s man for whom fear is the primary passion, the one that originally leads to the foundation of the state and to that alli-
ance, that “covenant” that, as we were recalling last year, can be signed only among men, according to Hobbes, and with neither God nor beasts.7 Daniel Defoe, we know, was a reader of Hobbes, among others.

But “Qu’est-ce qu’une île?” “Qu’est une île ?” can also be a play on words artificially misusing homophony: “une ‘il,’” feminine conjoined with masculine, the conjunction of an indefinite feminine article (une) and the masculine personal pronoun (il), une which is il. La bête and le souverain, a beast that is a sovereign, for example. Last year we insisted a good deal on the sexual difference between the beast and the sovereign8 but also on a cer-
tain analogy between the beast and9 the sovereign, the beast that sometimes seems to be the sovereign, like the beast that is outside or above the law.


6. During the session, Derrida added, “he has nothing of what is habitually called ‘what is proper to man.’”

7. See Jacques Derrida, La bête et le souverain, I (2001–2), ed. Michel Lisse, Marie-

8. See La bête et le souverain, I, session 1.

9. In the typescript, “La bête est le souverain. [The beast is the sovereign.]” [Translator’s note: The Beast and the Sovereign, I, plays explicitly on the homophony of “est” and “et” in this phrase.]
Qu’est-ce qu’une île?

Qu’est une île?

Let’s leave this question isolated, abandon it for a while, leave it floating in the air that is carrying it: we have heard it borne by the wind but we have not yet read it. And let’s continue to stroll on the shore where we have just set foot. We would then stumble, second, on another sentence, a second sentence, then, as though written on a pebble. This time the sentence is not only audible, like the others, but appears to be legible in that it is written. It appears to be legible, but perhaps it is not so, in the sense we give to “read” and “legible.” That sentence would be:

“The beasts are not alone.”

Let’s act as though the seminar were now starting this way, on an island, in an island, starting with this sententious aphorism: “The beasts are not alone.”

We would encounter this sentence too without a context. As though on an island, isolated as though on an island on which we had just come ashore. It would be preceded or followed by no other sentence. It would have the authority and cutting edge of an aphorism, i.e. a sentence that is separated, dissociated, insularized, a verdict, a judgment in the form S is P, subject + predicate, a sententia inscribed in stone, given over, entrusted to a stone found on the beach, on an island where we would have just come ashore. And we would keep turning over and over this polished stone and its enigmatic sentence (“The beasts are not alone”) in order to find the beginning, the end, its hidden meaning, perhaps the signature. “The beasts are not alone.” It would look like an encrypted telegram during wartime, or an encoded signal designed to reassure or worry, and that we would be trying to decipher. We would find nothing and spend an infinite amount of time, or at least a very long time, for example a year’s seminar, trying to interpret, translate, i.e. project all the possible meanings of this assertion the form of which is as dogmatic as it is negative, the negative grammar of this assertion: “The beasts are not alone.”

Start and you’ll see that one year might not be enough to make a complete inventory of all the meanings and all the possible implications of these five words of everyday language, which are beginning to look like the title
of a novel we have not yet opened. You would have to read the novel to find out what the title was announcing. The seminar would be that novel. “The beasts are not alone”: *S is P*, proposition, subject, copula and predicate, an assertion, of course, but negative in form: “The beasts are not alone,” and we should not forget to emphasize the generic or specific plural: “The beasts are not alone,” and not “The beast is not alone.” So let’s say that it’s engraved on a stone, abandoned or placed deliberately on the shore of an island and that we stumbled upon it, that we tripped over it as though it were a stumbling block. Hang onto the stone, it’s the example Heidegger takes when, in a seminar that is nowadays quite well known and to which we shall return, he compares the relations to the world of the inanimate, the animal, and man (“The stone has no world,” he says, *der Stein ist weltlos*, “The animal is poor in world,” *das Tier ist weltarm*, “Man is world-configuring or world-forming,” *der Mensch ist weltbildend*) ([H, 261/176](#)). The stone is an example of a lifeless thing, and is the only example Heidegger gives in that series. After which, he gives no further example, he says in a general way, with no examples, “the animal” and “man.” Why does he take the example of an inanimate thing, why a stone and not a plank or a piece of iron, or water or fire? One of the reasons, no doubt, is that the generality “inanimate,” with no example, would have raised the question of life, which Heidegger does not wish to raise here as such, and which would leave hovering the ambiguity of vegetables and plants, which are more animate and living than the stone, and about which one might wonder what Heidegger would have said (the plant, and therefore wood, for example, living wood if not dead wood—but then what is to be said about the dead animal or the dead man, the cadaver?): would Heidegger have said that the plant is *weltlos* like the stone or *weltarm* like the living animal? Let’s leave it there for now: the question will catch up with us later. When he takes up again his three questions, Heidegger says at a given moment that the subject of the comparative examination comprises: material things (*materiellen Dinge* ([Stein]) [stone]), animal (*Tier*), man (*Mensch*) ([H, 263/177]).

So we stumble on this stone. That’s what it is to stumble, to hit against an obstacle, generally a stone that interrupts one’s progress and obliges one to lift one’s foot. This stumbling block [*pierre d’achoppement*] that speaks to us as if to say “The beasts are not alone” would also set us going and determine the pace of this seminar that, while trying everything in order to get past it, would find itself constantly going round in circles and winding up having to think that in the dry economy of its five words and three functions (subject, copula, attribute), in its negative and plural form, this stumbling block will have become an unavoidable touchstone.
Take note that the point will not merely be to explore the semantics of a discourse, the meaning of each of these words (“beasts,” “are,” “alone,” etc.), but also all the rhetorics and pragmatics, i.e. all the concrete situations, all the contexts, all the gestures that can determine and transform the sense, meaning, or sought-after effect in the inscription of this sentence that one imagines only a human could have written (for example in French) and that only a human could stumble upon while trying to decipher it, like a Robinson Crusoe setting foot for the first time on his Island of Despair.

To give only one example among ten thousand of what I mean here by rhetoric, pragmatics, or discursive gesture, one might imagine (one hypothesis among a thousand) that the unknown and invisible signatory, perhaps never to be identified, perhaps dead for an indeterminate length of time, might have meant, and said: “I am a friend of the beasts, there are all over the world friends of the beasts, the beasts are not alone. The beasts must not be alone, long live the struggle for the beasts, the struggle goes on.”

But you can just as well imagine his adversary meaning: “The beasts are not alone, they do not need us, or else they do not need friends, etc.,” or else “there are already enough of them, too many, even, and they have too many allies and hidden accomplices in this war we have had to wage on them all this time, our war against bestiality and the axis of evil.” Those are one or two hypotheses among a thousand others as to the interpretation of this petrified statement that we are here abandoning to its solitude (for it is, like this stone, isolated, insularized, forlorn, singularly solitary). This statement is itself like an island. It is an island that for its part is both bounded by the sea and infinite. Shores without shores. One never gets to its shore. And among all the things we do not know, is whether the sentence is signed “he” or “she,” by a man or a woman, which would not be without some impact on its meaning.

These sentences are exergues: I have not yet reached the protocol of this seminar. But before even introducing more directly and less elliptically this year’s seminar, especially for those who are following it for the first time, you can already sense that it will have to do with island, insularity, loneliness (it will, if you like, be a seminar on solitude: what do “being alone” and “I am alone” mean?). But as being alone also means being singular, unique, exceptional, set off, separated, we shall have also to say that if the beasts are not alone, a sovereign is always alone (that is both his absolute power and his vulnerability, or his infinite inconsistency). The sovereign is alone insofar as he is unique, indivisible and exceptional, he is the being of exception who, as Schmitt says — and this is his definition of the sovereign — decides
on the exception and has the exceptional right to suspend right, thus standing, in his own way, as we were saying last year, like the beasts or the werewolf, outside the law, above the law. The sovereign is alone in exercising sovereignty. Sovereignty cannot be shared, it is indivisible. The sovereign is alone (sovereign) or is not.

Third. The third sentence will be a question: “What do beasts and men have in common?” Even before attempting to respond to this question, we have to notice that these two plurals (beasts, men) are asymmetrical and problematical. Not only because the questioner (i.e. we ourselves) spontaneously and dogmatically classes him or herself among men who are not beasts, in such a manner that the question is posed only from the point of view and the supposed power, the being-able-to-question of the supposed questioner, so-called man; but above all asymmetrical and problematical in that the two plurals do not correspond to two classes or two species, to two comparable sets. All men are supposed to belong to the same species or the same genus, the human species, the human race, whereas the beasts—even if they belong to the animal realm, the realm of living beings, like man, “the beasts” designates a set with no other unity, any more than that of said animal which has no other supposed unity than a negative one, or one supposed to be negative: namely that of not being a human being. But there is no other positively predicable unity between the ant, the snake, the cat, the dog, the horse, the chimpanzee—or the sperm whale. One can moreover, in all good sense, say at least three different if not incompatible things, according to the chosen angle, about the community or otherwise of the world.

1. Incontestably, animals and humans inhabit the same world, the same objective world even if they do not have the same experience of the objectivity of the object. 2. Incontestably, animals and humans do not inhabit the same world, for the human world will never be purely and simply identical to the world of animals. 3. In spite of this identity and this difference, neither animals of different species, nor humans of different cultures, nor any animal or human individual inhabit the same world as another, however close and similar these living individuals may be (be they humans or animals), and the difference between one world and another will remain always unbridgeable, because the community of the world is always constructed, simulated by a set of stabilizing apparatuses, more or less stable, then, and never natural, language in the broad sense, codes of traces being designed, among all living beings, to construct a unity of the world that is always de-

10. See La bête et le souverain, I, session 1, pp. 37–38 [pp. 16–17].
constructible, nowhere and never given in nature. Between my world, the “my world,” what I call “my world”—and there is no other for me, as any other world is part of it—between my world and any other world there is first the space and the time of an infinite difference, an interruption that is incommensurable with all attempts to make a passage, a bridge, an isthmus, all attempts at communication, translation, trope, and transfer that the desire for a world or the want of a world, the being wanting a world will try to pose, impose, propose, stabilize. There is no world, there are only islands. That is one of the thousand directions in which I would be <tempted> to interpret the last line of a short and great poem by Celan: “Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen,”11 a poem of mourning or birth that I do not have time to read with you: the world has gone, the world has gone away, the world is far off, the world is lost, there is no world any more (to sustain us or ground [fonder] the two of us like a ground [sol]), I must carry you (either in me as in mourning, or else in me as in birth (for tragen is also said of the mother carrying a child, in her arms or in her womb). We are weltlos, I can only carry you, I am the only one who can and must carry you, etc.; but are we weltlos, without world, as Heidegger says of the stone and the material thing that they are weltlos?—clearly not. So how are we to think the absence of world, the non-world? A non-world that is not immonde [filthy, revolting]? But scarcely have I said that than I must—it is time to do so since we are going to talk a lot about the world this year—call or recall your attention to this anything but insignificant collusion between at least two senses of the Latin mundus, between the adjective mundus and two nouns mundus, from which the French monde clearly comes. The adjective mundus (a, um) means proper, clean, elegant (by opposition with immundus: immonde, dirty, impure, foul, abject); and the noun immundus means the absence of ornament; the verb mundo, mundare means to clean, to purify, as in French émonder means to clean, to take away impurities or dead branches, parasites, etc. This, then, in the lineage of the adjective mundus (proper). Now there are two masculine nouns, mundus, mundi, one of which means

the world, the universal, the globe, or the sky, or the inhabited world, sometimes hell, and later, in Christian culture, the created world, the secular world (we shall go back over all this); the other noun mundus, mundi, a homonym and quasi-synonym means toiletries (especially women’s), ornaments, finery; but these two apparently different meanings or uses are intrinsically linked, as in the Greek cosmos, which also means the world, but also arrangement, cosmetic decoration. The world as totality of beings is also an order that is appropriate, proper, a good arrangement, a harmony or a beauty. So that the immonde, while not being absence of world, in the sense of Weltlosigkeit, is nonetheless not totally foreign to this meaning. Of course these semantic data are Greco-Latin, and I do not believe they are to be found in Welt or world. At least to my knowledge, and even if the idea of order or system, or organized whole, is implicitly present in both words (Welt and “world”: OED: “organised system of the universe.”)

Once we have taken this type of precaution, once we have given up on saying anything sensible and acceptable under the general singular concept of “the” beast or “the” animal, one can still assert at least that so-called human living beings and so-called animal living beings, men and beasts, have in common the fact of being living beings (whatever the word “life,” bios or zoë, might mean, and supposing one has the right to exclude from it vegetables, plants and flowers); and whatever the difficulty we have in thinking, conceiving life, the limits of life, becoming-alive or dead, we can believe that these living beings have in common the finitude of their life, and therefore, among other features of finitude, their mortality in the place they inhabit, whether one calls that place world or earth (earth including sky and sea) and these places that they inhabit in common, where they co-habit, and inhabiting and co-habiting meaning things that are perhaps still problematic, and different from one living being to another, taking into account what one understands by world or earth; similarly all these finite, and therefore mortal, living beings have a certain relation to death, whatever the interpretations we give (huge problems) of their respective relations to death, and even if, following Heidegger, we were to say (which I never do) that animals do not die, properly speaking, and have no relation, properly speaking, to death as such. Without entering again into this zone of questioning (I have done so elsewhere and will do so again) no one will deny (even

12. [Translator’s note:] Here and in the next sentence, the word “world” is in English in Derrida’s text.

Heidegger does not deny) that all living beings, humans and animals, have a certain experience of what we call death. Indeed Robinson names death three times on the first page of his journal:

... on the dismal unfortunate Island, which I call'd the Island of Despair; all the rest of the Ship's Company being drown'd, and myself almost dead. All the rest of that Day [...], saw nothing but Death before me, either that I should be devour'd by wild Beasts, murther'd by Savages, or starv'd to Death for Want of Food. (RC, 65)

So our seminar will have as its horizon not only the questions of solitude, loneliness, insularity, isolation and therefore exception, including the sovereign exception. It will have as its horizon the questions of what “inhabit,” “cohabit,” “inhabit the world” mean—and therefore the question of what world means. The world as a great traditional theme of metaphysics, and of theology, the world as presupposition of what is today called globalization [mondialisation], but also the world of phenomenological and ontological meditations, from Husserl to Heidegger, in the knowledge (I’ll come back to this in a moment) that Heidegger, precisely, inscribed his treatment of the animal in an analysis of the world, to which we shall be returning as closely as possible (“this is the famous proposition I was mentioning a moment ago, that of the 1929–30 seminar entitled Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit, currently translated as World, Finitude, Solitude, and the triple proposition, the triple thesis (for Heidegger, unusually for him, presents this as theses), the triple thesis around which we shall not cease turning this year (“the stone is without world, the animal is poor in world, man is world-configuring”), this triple “thesis” responds, as it were, to one of the three questions of the book, world, finitude and loneliness, isolation, solitude (die drei Fragen: Was ist Welt? Was ist Endlichkeit? Was ist Vereinzelung?).

The second chapter of Part II, “The Beginning of Metaphysical Questioning with the Question of World,” in §42, which announces the three guiding theses (“the stone is without world,” “the animal is poor in world,” “man is world-configuring”), opens thus: “We begin with the first of our three questions: What is world?” (“Wir beginnen mit der ersten der drei Frage: Was ist Welt?”) (H, 261/176).
We shall return in detail to the trial or process [le procès ou le processus] of this questioning as to the world. Heidegger’s solitude. Gadamer notes in one of his essays entitled “Destruction and Deconstruction,”16 that when he, Gadamer, was himself a student, Heidegger, then a young professor, had burst into the realm of thought by the power of his language; and that, for example, writes Gadamer, “Already in 1920, as I myself can testify, a young thinker — Heidegger to be exact — began to lecture from a German university podium on what it might mean to say ‘es weltet’: it worlds [it makes world, it worldifies, becomes world, globalizes itself (in a sense very different from the current usage of the vocabulary of globalization, but perhaps always naively presupposed by it)],” Gadamer adds that this “was an unprecedented break with the solid and dignified, but at the same time scholasticized, language of metaphysics that had become completely alienated from its own origins. What Heidegger was doing signaled a profound linguistic event in its own right, and at the same time the achievement of a deeper understanding of language in general.”17

Later, as you know, for example in his Introduction to Metaphysics (1935), Heidegger will go further — to the point of saying, for example, that Die Welt weltet,18 or, more precisely, that in certain conditions, keine Welt mehr weltet, the world no longer worlds, no longer globalizes, etc. He even says that the originary welten, the becoming-world, the originary worlding (“le mondant,” as G. Kahn translates it) das ursprüngliche Weltende, die physis, falls to the rank of a model for imitation, when the being becomes an object. Remember that for Heidegger — because we’ll need to think seriously about this — physis is not yet objective nature but the whole of the originary world in its appearing and in its originary growing [poussée origininaire]. It is toward this originary “world,” this physis older than the objective nature of the natural sciences or of post-Cartesian metaphysics that we must turn our thought in order to speak anew and differently about the being-in-the-world of man or of Dasein and animals, of their differential

17. Ibid., p. 103.
relation to this world that is supposed to be both common and not common to them.

So much for the exergues and the first accords we are looking for. I move now to the protocol. Given that the title of this seminar, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, has not changed since last year, and that its general perspective and problematic remain the same, I owe you a few, very preliminary explanations as to the new orientation that I nonetheless want to give it, the new rules, methods, techniques, and ways of doing things that I would like to try out.

I shall, of course, have to talk in at least two directions at once: on the one hand, toward those who do me the friendship and honor of having followed this seminar for more than one year and who therefore followed last year’s, and on the other, toward those who are here for the first time. And so, on the one hand, what I am going to do will take into account last year’s premises, which some of you will recognize. But I shall not go back, I shall not propose any rhetorical transition, and I’ll do my best to make the seminar that’s starting now intelligible without those premises and thus as independent as possible in its beginning and its developments. On the other hand, instead of having many points of focus and approaching many problematic motifs, many corpuses, as I did last year, I shall do my best to gather our reflection and our readings around two great texts, to isolate like islands two texts that in my view are major texts, which we shall read as closely as possible, as faithfully but, as always, as freely as possible. We shall read them as faithfully and as freely as possible but on the one hand doing our best to keep to our heading [cap], if you will, the heading nicknamed by our title, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, if indeed there is a heading, and the point of a heading, for with a problematic sovereignty it is the figure of the heading, the cap, the caput, the head, the captain of the ship, the chief, the capital that we are questioning, and not only that of another heading but of an other of the heading. But in keeping the heading in view, if not at bay, we shall read these two texts according to an economy that I do not yet see clearly. As one year will not suffice for us to do more, we shall only sketch out a selective reading — and therefore a finite and insufficient reading — of these two texts; and I would be quite unable today to say if one of

the two will be read in the margins of the other. It is quite possible that both of them, given their difference, the radical heterogeneity of the one to the other, and given that everything separates and isolates them one from the other—their period, their status, their language—it is quite possible that we shall have to read both of them in the margin, the one in the margin of the other and both of them in the margin of the text or the path traced out by this seminar itself.

So as not to make you wait any longer, the two works I isolate thus—you’ve seen them coming.

**First.** First corpus. On the one hand we have *Robinson Crusoe*, by Daniel Defoe, which you have all read but that I ask you to reread, as I have, while thinking about the subject of our seminar, *The Beast and the Sovereign*. The idea and the desire to reread this book more than fifty or sixty years after a first childhood reading came to me from one of my American students, John Williams, whom I thank here, who had of his own accord linked his reading of this book to the seminar I gave last April at Irvine, on the beast and the sovereign.²⁰ Even if I do not reread this book the way he did—very intelligently, moreover—without him I would not have had the desire and the pleasure of rediscovering this book—but as though for the first time, with new eyes—this book and its history, its precursors and its descendants. You know that this book appeared in 1719; Defoe was already fifty-nine and had published a great deal (in particular, in 1710, an *Essay upon Public Credit* that Marx cites several times in *Capital*, once on the law of capitalist accumulation,²¹ another time to accuse Malthus of having plagiarized Defoe).²² This fiction that *Robinson Crusoe* remains had as a referent or real, non-fictional springboard the memoirs of Alexander Selkirk, a Scottish seaman. Not a model, but a sort of basic plot or pretext. We’ll have a lot to say about its political context and its reception (by Rousseau, Marx, etc.). But today I shall isolate, to give you the measure of its singularity and of the way it has been evaluated in our modernity, two exceptional judgments, those of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.

²⁰ Derrida gave the seminar *The Beast and the Sovereign, I* at UC Irvine in April 2002.


²² Ibid., p. 644, n. 75 [p. 766, n. 6].
Both grant an extraordinary and incommensurable place both to Defoe and to the event of this book, which was often held to be the first novel in English.

As to Defoe the novelist, Joyce writes the following, which is very political, very preoccupied with nationality, national independence and primacy in literature—and it looks as though in the lines I am going to read that Joyce was congratulating Defoe for emancipating English literature, for making it accede to a certain national sovereignty. Just before, Joyce had noted that until Defoe, the “great English nation” had been reflected only in variegated, not to say alienated, fashion, for example in Shakespeare whose heroes are “a boorish peasant; a strolling player; a tatterdemalion, half lunatic half fool; a gravedigger.” All Shakespeare’s heroes are métèques, who come “from over the seas and over the mountains”: “Othello, a Moorish leader; Shylock, a Venetian Jew; Caesar, a Roman; Hamlet, a prince of Denmark; Macbeth, a Celtic usurper; Juliet and Romeo, residents of Verona.” The only true and authentic Englishman is Falstaff, “the fat knight of the monstrous belly.” And Joyce continues by denouncing Chaucer, whose *Canterbury Tales* are no more than a version of the *Decameron*, and Milton, whose *Paradise Lost* is supposedly a transposition of the *Divine Comedy*.

Finally Defoe came:

[Defoe was] the first English author to write without imitating or adapting foreign works, to create without literary models and to infuse into the creatures of his pen a truly national spirit, to devise for himself an artistic form which is perhaps without precedent.24

So you have noticed Joyce’s emphasis on the national character, the nationalist virtue, even, of this work (reread and emphasize “English . . . foreign works, truly national spirit”). Joyce knew all about the history of nations and nationalisms in languages and literature. And this remark puts us on the track of a political or even theologico-political reading of *Robinson Crusoe*, not to mention the problematic of sovereignty that we will systematically select in it. What’s more, this is not Joyce’s only political judgment on *Robinson Crusoe*. Joyce also reads in *Robinson Crusoe* both the representation of a national type, the national type of a rational animal that an Eng-


24. Ibid.
lishman is (and Joyce knew what he was talking about when he spoke in English about the English) and the prefiguration of an imperialist, colonialist sovereignty, the first herald of the British empire, the great island setting off to conquer other islands, smaller islands (like Ireland) but above all islands bigger than it, like Africa, New Zealand or Australia (although Joyce does not name them here). Listen to him. (Read and comment on politics <in> Joyce)

The true symbol of the British conquest is Robinson Crusoe, who, cast away on a desert island, in his pocket a knife and a pipe, becomes an architect, a carpenter, a knifegrinder, an astronomer, a baker, a shipwright, a potter, a saddler, a farmer, a tailor, an umbrella-maker, and a clergyman. He is the true prototype of the British colonist, as Friday (the trusty savage who arrives on an unlucky day) is the symbol of the subject races. The whole Anglo-Saxon spirit is in Crusoe: the manly independence; the unconscious cruelty; the persistence; the slow yet efficient intelligence; the sexual apathy; the practical, well-balanced religiousness; the calculating taciturnity. Whoever rereads this simple, moving book in the light of subsequent history cannot help but fall under its prophetic spell.

Saint John the Evangelist saw on the island of Patmos the apocalyptic ruin of the universe and the building of the walls of the eternal city sparkling with beryl and emerald, with onyx and jasper, with sapphire and ruby. Crusoe saw only one marvel in all the fertile creation around him, the print of a naked foot in the virgin sand. And who knows if the latter is not more significant than the former?25

This is taken from a lecture that Joyce never published in his lifetime, the manuscript and typescript of which are preserved in the USA (at Buffalo and Cornell) where they were published in 1964. We know that Joyce was a great admirer of Defoe—he had read all of him and owned his complete works, which was true, he used to say, of only three other authors in the world: Flaubert, Ben Jonson, and Ibsen. And—this is interesting from the national and nationalist point of view—he called Robinson Crusoe the English Ulysses (not Irish but English, the English counterpart to any Ulysses, I suppose his in particular).26 Moreover Robinson Crusoe is very present in Joyce’s Ulysses. For example in the fourteenth part, during a monologue of Bloom’s in which there is much talk of mourning and burial,

of gravediggers in *Hamlet*, but also of whoever always digs his own grave, Bloom adds: “We all do [dig our own grave]. Only man buries. No ants do.” First thing strikes anybody.” [An error by Joyce who thinks like everyone else that beasts do not die in the proper sense, do not wear mourning and do not bury.] Bloom continues: “Bury the dead. Say Robinson Crusoe was true to life. [Another translation, in the Pléiade, has “était un homme de la nature”.] Well then Friday buried him. Every Friday buries a Thursday if you come to look at it.”

*O, poor Robinson Crusoe
How could you possibly do so?*

Other works of Defoe’s are also at work in *Ulysses*, such as *Moll Flanders* behind Molly.

Virginia Woolf, in a long article that serves as an introduction to one of my editions of *Robinson Crusoe* (Modern Library Classics [New York: Random House, 2001]) — an Introduction that I cannot quote at length here, as one should — [Virginia Woolf] explains that *Robinson Crusoe* is a “masterpiece” not only because Daniel Defoe was able to maintain and impose his own perspective on us in a consistent way, but because, in doing so, he annoys us, “thwarts us and flouts us at every turn” (RC, xiv). And to show this, she describes the way our expectation is disappointed: we expect an experience of solitude, of isolation far from humans, on a remote island with only sunrises and sunsets. But everything we are shown is anything but states of mind and solitude. There is no sunrise or sunset, no soul or solitude, only “a large earthenware pot” (RC, xiv). And Virginia Woolf tells us in two pages everything there is not, everything that does not exist on this island and in this book: God, nature and death: “God does not exist,” and a little later, “Nature does not exist,” and further on “Death does not exist. Nothing exists except an earthenware pot. Finally, that is to say, we are forced to drop our own preconceptions and to accept what Defoe himself wishes to give us” (RC, xv).


This is false, of course, as we shall see, and it sounds like the (just as false) newspaper descriptions you see of deconstruction today: “Nothing exists, not God, not nature, not death, and we must drop our own preconceptions.”30 It is false but it is interesting to see someone read Robinson Crusoe as a sort of “deconstruction” creating a desert, on an island, a desert island, deserted by humans, by the human, creating a desert, then, of all our habits of thought and all our prejudices, all our preconceptions.

Instead of adding a second corpus to this one (I’ll specify which one in a moment), we could have been content to read Robinson Crusoe (one year would not have sufficed). In doing so, we would have followed Rousseau’s advice, the advice given in Emile. The first book, “the first that my Emile will read,” the “only one” that “for a long time will compose his entire library,” will be Robinson Crusoe.31 There too, there’s a sort of tabula rasa, the island as desert, the phenomenological deconstruction of all prejudices and socio-cultural stratifications, and a naive, native, natural originary return to the things themselves before all the historical perversions of taste, and the social and inegalitarian dissimulations and simulacra, everything Rousseau here calls “prejudices.” And it will be, as you’ll hear, Robinson before Friday, or more precisely before Friday is no longer sufficient for him. In the long passage I am going to read, the preceptor begins by saying “I hate books,” which means that the exception made for Robinson Crusoe will consist in holding this book to be both the first and only book worthy of the name, and a non-book. As, on the other hand, among all the virtues of this book, there will be that of serving for, I quote, “both amusement and instruction,” you can always conclude that I have chosen this text for this year because it is the first book and it is not a book, but the world itself, but above all because it amuses me and I hope will amuse us, and I find it even more amusing, even if some may find this in dubious taste, to read it with one hand, with in the other hand a book as different, heterogeneous or even as allergic to it as a particular seminar of Heidegger’s on world, finitude, solitude and the animal, about which I shall talk to you in a moment. Here then is one of Rousseau’s reverential references to Robinson Crusoe in Book III of Emile: (Read and comment on pp. 238–40 of Emile (photocopy))

30. [Translator’s note:] The words “drop our own preconceptions” are in English in the text.

I hate books: they only teach you how to talk about what you do not know. It is said that Hermes engraved on columns the elements of the sciences, so as to shelter his discoveries from a flood. If he had imprinted them firmly in men’s heads, they would have been preserved there by tradition. Well-prepared brains are the monuments in which human knowledge is most securely engraved. Would there not be some means of bringing together all these lessons scattered in all these books, of bringing them under a common object that would be easy to see, interesting to follow, and that could serve as a stimulus, even at this age? If one can invent a situation in which all the natural needs of man are shown to the mind of a child in sensory form, and in which the means of providing for these same needs develop successively with the same facility, it is by the vivid and naïve depiction of this state that one must give his imagination its first exercise.

Oh, ardent philosopher, I already see your imagination light up. Do not go to any expense: this situation has already been found, it has been described, and without wishing to wrong you, described much better than you could describe it yourself, or at least with more truth and simplicity. Since we absolutely must have books, there is one that to my mind provides the most felicitous treatise of natural education. This book is the first that my Emile will read; it is the only one that for a long time will compose his entire library, and it will always have a distinguished place in it. It will be the text to which all our conversations on the natural sciences will serve merely as commentary. During our progress it will serve as a test for the state of our judgment; and, so long as our taste is not spoiled, reading it will always please us. What then is this marvelous book? Is it Aristotle? Is it Pliny? Is it Buffon? No: it is Robinson Crusoe.

Robinson Crusoe on his island, deprived of the assistance of his fellows and the instruments of all the arts, and nevertheless providing for his subsistence and his preservation, and even procuring for himself a kind of well-being: there is an object that is interesting for all ages, and that there are a thousand ways to make agreeable to children. This is how we make real the desert island that at first served me as a point of comparison. This state is not, I agree, that of social man: most probably it is not to be that of Emile; but it is on the basis of this state that he must appreciate all others. The surest way of rising above prejudices and ordering one’s judgments on the true relations of things is to put oneself in the place of a man who is isolated, and judge everything as this man must himself judge everything, with respect to his own utility.

This novel, with all its surplus fat removed, and beginning with Robinson’s shipwreck near his island, and ending with the arrival of the vessel that comes to rescue him, will be both Emile’s amusement and his instruction during the period of which we are speaking here. I want his head to be turned by it, for him to be constantly occupied with his castle, his goats,
his plantings; that he learn in detail, not in books, but with things, all one needs to know in such a case; that he think himself to be Robinson; that he see himself clothed in animal skins, wearing a large bonnet, carrying a big saber, the whole grotesque outfit of the character, except for the parasol, which he will not need. I want him to worry about the measures to be taken, if this or that were to be lacking, to examine the conduct of his hero, to seek to see if he has omitted anything, whether there was not something better he could have done; to mark attentively all his mistakes, and to profit from them so as not to fall into them himself in a similar case; for do not doubt that he has the project of setting up a comparable establishment; this is the true castle in the air of that happy age, in which one knows no happiness other than the necessary, and freedom.

What a resource this folly is for a skilful man, who knew how to give rise to it only to turn it to good use! The child, in a hurry to stock up for his island, will be even keener to learn than the master is to teach. He will want to know everything that is useful, and only that; you will no longer need to guide him, you will only have to hold him back. What is more, let us hasten to set him up on this island, while he limits his happiness to it; for the day is approaching when, if he does still want to live there, he will no longer want to live there alone, and when Friday, who now scarcely moves him, will no long be sufficient for him.32

But to link firmly our reading to come of Robinson Crusoe to our problematic of sovereignty, I shall cite another text of Rousseau’s that this time invokes Robinson Crusoe not as the experience of an exceptional insular originarity that is freed from all prejudices, but rather <as> sovereign mastery, <as> the monarchy of a Robinson who commands everything on his island, on an island during the time he lives on it alone, the sole inhabitant of his world. This passage is to be found at the end of Chapter II of the first book of the Social Contract, just before the chapter on the Right of the Stronger that we read closely last year, just after the critiques of Gro-tius, Hobbes and Aristotle that we also read last year.33 What does Rousseau say, not without irony? He says that he has avoided talking about a certain number of natural or mythical sovereigns, as it were: Adam or Noah, King Adam or Emperor Noah, avoided doing so through moderation, for, from filiation to filiation, he could have judged himself to be the natural inheritor of this King and this Emperor and consider himself to be “the legitimate king of the human race.” And this is when he mentions Robinson Crusoe:

32. Ibid., pp. 238–40.
33. La bête et le souverain, I, session 1, pp. 33, 42–43 [pp. 11, 20–21].
I have said nothing of King Adam, nor of Emperor Noah, the father of three great monarchs who divided up the universe, as did the children of Saturn, that people thought they recognized in them. I hope you will appreciate this moderation; for descending directly from one of these princes, and perhaps from the elder branch, what do I know but if, by verification of title, I might not find myself the legitimate king of the human race? However this may be, one cannot disagree that Adam was the sovereign of the world, like Robinson of his island, so long as he was its only inhabitant, and what was convenient in this empire was that the monarch, assured of his throne, need fear neither rebellion, nor war, nor conspirators.34

This absolute political sovereignty, “Adam sovereign of the world like Robinson of his island,” this absolute sovereignty of man over the entire world, i.e. a sovereignty without obstacle and therefore without enemy—and therefore, Schmitt would say, without politics—this sovereignty which is absolute because it is pre-political, the hyperbolical, pre-political or ultra-political sovereignty that is the prize of solitude or isolation, of loneliness or of absolute insularity (all of this before Friday), is sovereignty before the nation-state, the sovereignty of the free and self-determined, self-determining individual, that of the citizen without a state or of the citizen before citizenship, or again of a citizen who is, all alone and immediately, the state itself, the sovereignty of the state-of-citizen, of the citizen-state. Although it corresponds here to a myth or a legend, to a dated literary fiction, the structure that it describes, and that Rousseau describes here, does correspond to what we still think of today when we speak of the absolute freedom of the citizen, who decides sovereignly, for example in a voting booth [isoloir] (the booth is an island), as to his political choice, a freedom and a sovereignty held to be inalienable in democracy, whatever the contradiction or the conflicts between this supposed sovereignty of the citizen subject to the law and the sovereignty of the nation-state.

Now I invite you to reread the whole of Rousseau’s Discourse on the Origin of Inequality . . . Not only the pages from the first part on the animal and savage man (do read those pages to which we could—though we won’t—devote this whole seminar), but especially reread, even before the preface, that sort of initial statement that Rousseau addresses to the Republic of Geneva (Rousseau who was also, as we should not forget, the author, between 1760 and 1769, of a Project for a Constitution for Corsica, a work

requested of him by Corsican notables after the praise he had given the
inhabitants of that island in the *Social Contract*, at a time when the whole
of Europe had its eyes turned toward the history of that island, which was
for a long time under the authority of Genoa and traversing war after war
of, let’s say, liberation; and this project of Rousseau’s starts from the fact
that “the Corsican people are in that happy state that makes a good insti-
tution possible,” especially by reason of the insularity and the size of the
island, what Rousseau calls “the advantageous situation of the Island of
Corsica and the happy nature of its inhabitants.”

He recommends democracy for it, an almost closed economy, the quasi-disappearance of imports
and money—all that reduced to a minimum; there too you can reread this
enthralling utopia with an eye turned to *Robinson Crusoe.* In any case, to
come back to this pre-political sovereignty of the citizen, in the *Discourse on
the Origin of Inequality among Men*, Rousseau describes what was basically
always his political dream, namely a country or a state in which sovereign
and people would be a single person, and he calls this “democracy” (and
this identification of people and sovereign, the sovereignty of the people, is
indeed the very concept of democracy, or at least of what is named by the
name *demokratia*). But what does “person” mean, once the sovereign and
the people are but one? Is it a new definition of person itself, the only po-

titical or politico-juridical definition of the person (beyond the individual),
or else is it the insular utopia of an individual alone enough on an island to
be both the sovereign and all the people gathered together, concentrated
or reduced to a single individual, a Robinson on his arrival at the Island of
Despair? In any case, Rousseau presents it as a dream of failed origin rather
than one of lost origin, a nostalgia for the country that did not see his birth,
a melancholy, rather, the mournful sigh of not having been born where he
would have wished to be born. And right in the middle of a series of para-
graphs beginning with “I would have wished,” “if I had had to choose my
place of birth, I would have chosen a society limited by the extent of human
faculties” (and so within reach of sight, hearing and grasp), “I would have
wished to live and die free,” I would therefore have wished that nobody
in the state,” etc., “I would not have wished to live in a recently instituted
republic,” etc., and among all these conditionals in “I would have wished,”
<I would have wished to be born” (for this is someone telling us how


and where he would have wished to be born and nothing is more desperate than an “I would have wished to be born,” “this is where and how I would have wished to be born if I had been born how I would have wished to be born.” How can one ever think and write, seriously, responsibly, “I would have wished to be born”? What “I” can ever conjugate the verb “to be born” in this tense and mood: “I would have wished”? It cannot be the same I, because an I cannot speak of its birth in this tense and mood. Unless only an “I” can do so, say it and think it, however empty and impossible this saying and thinking may seem to remain, this “I” that says and thinks in this way, and signs an “I would have wished to be born.” In any case Rousseau knows how to use the rhetoric of this simulacrum to define, in sum, his politics, no less, and his concept of state, sovereign, citizen and person. And this paragraph is not far from what Marx will call a Robinsonade. So Rousseau writes in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men*, well before even the preface and before that first part that I am asking you to reread because it is very rich as to the animal, the wolf we talked so much about last year, the bears, the negroes and the savages who “are so little concerned about the fierce beasts they might meet in the woods” (this is where Rousseau defines the man who has left the state of nature, “the man who thinks” as a “depraved animal”)—well, long before the preface and the first part, in the *envoi* that dedicates the *Discourse* to the Republic of Geneva, addressing himself to those he calls “Magnificent, highly honored and Sovereign Lords,” Rousseau explains where he would have wished to be born, to live and die free:

I would have wished to be born in a country where the sovereign and the people could have but one and the same interest, so that all the movements of the machine could tend only to the common good; which being impossible, unless the people and the sovereign are one and the same person, it follows that I would have wished to be born in a democratic government, sagely tempered.38

Which means, among other things, that, given that the Robinsonian dream or ideal — basically that of an absolute identification of the sovereign and the people in a single person, a unique and thus lone person, solitary, exceptional—is inaccessible, what is called “a democratic government, sagely tempered” is the best expedient, the least bad approximation. And the “I would have wished” does not only concern the Robinsonade of a

38. Rousseau, *Discours*, p. 112.
single person, embodying at once, all alone, in solitude, irreplaceable, the
sovereign and the people—a hyperbolic and as it were pre-political dream
and nostalgia. The “I would have wished” even bespeaks nostalgia, home-
sickness for the country in which Rousseau was not born, i.e. the country
of that expedient that would be, in politics this time, a truly democratic
government. And Rousseau goes on to speak of a salutary and gentle yoke,
which subjects one to the law without alienating one’s liberty (“I would
have wished to live and die free, i.e. so subject to the laws that neither I nor
anyone else could shake their honorable yoke, that salutary, gentle yoke [. . .]
I would have wished, then, that no one in the state be able to declare
himself above the law . . .” 39. What would a sovereign be who was not above
the laws, and who would not have the right, as Schmitt would say, to sus-
pend right—that is the question that is posed again and again. Is Rous-
seau’s dream, his “I would have wished,” political or pre-political? 40

This whole historical configuration, this epochal ensemble—I don’t
know what to call it, let’s say this constructed world, this Bildung of the world,
this Weltbild or Weltanschauung—in which Rousseau recognizes himself in
Robinson Crusoe, recognizes in him a brother, and not only the Rousseau
of the Discourse, of the “I would have wished,” but the Rousseau of the So-
cial Contract that I was quoting just now, this world or this epoch of the
world that goes well beyond the period of the eighteenth century, in that the
fascination exercised by Robinson Crusoe will survive for a long time; a fas-
cination exercised not only on Joyce or Woolf but on every child and adult
the world over—you know that this configuration (I’ll content myself with
just a reminder) that this configuration, then, this systematic ensemble for
which I cannot find a name, was, indeed, treated by Marx as a historical
structure, a structure both socio-economical and metaphysico-ideological

39. Ibid.
40. During the session, Derrida added “or ultra-political.”
41. Karl Marx, “Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy,” in Grundrisse,
Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmond-
Rousseau’s *Social Contract* — you’ll find the most visible and even spectacular expression of this at the beginning of the Introduction to the *Critique of Political Economy* (1857). Marx’s point is serious. It translates an ambition that is difficult to measure, if not immeasurable, for it consists, among other things, in trying to refer, or even reduce, no less, what he calls “insipid fictions,” here literary fictions (like *Robinson Crusoe*, and Marx’s thesis is a thesis on literature as superstructure) or philosophico-political fictions like Rousseau’s *Discourse* or the *Social Contract*, to aesthetic superstructures at once significant, symptomatic and dependent on what they signify, namely merely a phase in the organization of material production and the “anticipation of [European] bourgeois society which had been preparing itself since the sixteenth and which in the eighteenth century was taking giant strides towards maturity.” Which is not entirely incompatible with — although it is fundamentally different from — what Joyce says, when he sees in *Robinson Crusoe* a prophetic politico-economical prefiguration of British imperialism. I am going to read these few lines from Marx, at the beginning, then, of this Introduction to the *Critique of Political Economy*: Rousseau and the Robinsonade, as you will hear, go together in it. Marx announces that he will treat of production, and primarily of material production. And he writes:

The object before us, to begin with, *material production*.

Individuals producing in society — hence socially determined individual production — is, of course, the point of departure. The individual and isolated hunter and fisherman, with whom Smith and Ricardo begin, belongs among the unimaginative conceits of the eighteenth-century Robinsonades, which in no way express merely a reaction against over-sophistication and a return to a misunderstood natural life, as cultural historians imagine. As little as Rousseau’s *contract social*, which brings naturally independent, autonomous subjects into relation and connection by contract, rests on such naturalism. This is the semblance, the merely aesthetic semblance, of the Robinsonades, great and small. It is, rather, the anticipation of “civil society,” in preparation since the sixteenth century and making giant strides towards maturity in the eighteenth.

[. . .]

Only in the eighteenth century, in “civil society,” do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity. But the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social (from this standpoint, general) relations. The human being is in the most literal sense a *ζῶον πολιτικόν*, not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the
midst of society. Production by an isolated individual outside society—a rare exception which may well occur when a civilized person in whom the social forces are already dynamically present is cast by accident into the wilderness—is as much an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living together and talking to each other.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 83–84.}

This is not Marx’s only ironic or aggressive reference to Robinsonade and all the Robinsons. There is at least one other furtive and playful allusion to Robinson and his Friday in Capital. This (reread it) is the extraordinary Chapter 10 on “The Working Day” in the third section of Book I; a chapter almost all of the material of which is borrowed from contemporary English economics. The point for Marx is to denounce both the way factory owners violated or got around an English law regulating the working day of women and adolescents, or even children (the working day being then limited to ten hours), and the way the judges, the County Magistrates\footnote{[Translator’s note:] In English in the text.} (some of whom were also factory owners) became their objective accomplices by not pursuing them in law. Marx then cites the case of a certain Robinson, a cotton mill owner who, although prosecuted, was acquitted thanks to the presence on the jury of one of his relatives, a man named Eskrigge, himself a cotton mill owner. Marx then talks of this Eskrigge as the relative, if not the Friday of this Robinson (\textit{ein Individuum namens Robinson, ebenfalls Baumwollspinner, und wenn nicht der Freitag, so jedenfalls der Verwandte des Eskrigge}).\footnote{Marx, \textit{Das Kapital}, p. 306 [pp. 401–2: “an individual named Robinson, also a cotton-spinner, and if not Eskrigge’s Man Friday at least his relative”].}

Naturally, beyond all the questions it leaves open as to the status of these fictions (literary or not),\footnote{In the typescript, this parenthesis closes a few words later, after “restance.”} and their staying power [\textit{restance}], this Marxist interpretation of the Robinsonade, this critical interpretation of individualist and asocial isolationism, of insularism as a symptom of the development of capitalist society, is not homogeneous with, but is not incompatible with other readings either. I am thinking for example of the way Deleuze, in the appendix chapter to \textit{Logic of Sense} entitled “Michel Tournier and the World without Others,” which I invite you to reread (it is also published as the postface to Tournier’s book \textit{Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique})—[the way, then, that Deleuze] wonders “what is the meaning of the fiction ’Robinson’”? The answer comes fast: “A world without others.”\footnote{Gilles Deleuze, \textit{Logique du sens} (Paris: Minuit, 1969), p. 370; trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale as \textit{Logic of Sense} (London: Athlone Books, 1990; reprinted Con-}
reply is then worked out into a theory of perversion that at this point in Deleuze’s itinerary owes much to Lacan (and recognizes the fact) and, as he says, Lacan’s “school,” which, he recalls, insists precisely on the need to “understand perverse behavior on the basis of a structure” that displaces desire, makes it detach its cause (the Cause of desire) from its object, disavows sexual difference “in the interests of an androgynous world of doubles,” and annuls the other in a “‘Beyond the other, or an Other than the other’ [un Autre qu’au trui].”47 The sadist does not make the other suffer because he wishes to make the other suffer but because he deprives the other of his alterity, of his “quality of otherness.” Against a phenomenology judged to be “hasty” which refers voyeurism or exhibitionism, as perversions, to the presence of the other, in truth, from the point of view of structure, one should say the opposite. It is because the other-structure is lacking that these perversions come about. “The world of the pervert is a world without other, and thereby a world without possibility. The other is what possibilitizes [. . .]. All perversion is autruicide, altricide, a murder of possibilities. But altricide is not committed by perverse behavior, it is presupposed in the perverse structure.”48 A proposition that, if it were followed by effects, would, I believe, upset the whole of penal law. But let’s leave that there. Deleuze hurries to add that this perversion is not constitutional but linked to an adventure, to a story that can be both the story of a neurosis and the proximity of a psychosis. Conclusion: “We must imagine Robinson to be perverse; the only Robinsonade is perversion itself.”49

These are the last words of this chapter, the last sentence that, by associating the adjective “only” to “Robinsonade” (“the only Robinsonade is perversion itself”), leaves open the possibility of not reducing the book Robinson Crusoe to a Robinsonade, nor even to Robinson Crusoe himself, in his insular solitude, isolated from his history, his past, his future, the process of his socialization, his relation to many others, including slaves and animals. But that will be our story.

Since I am coming to the end of this introductory and scarcely even preliminary session, I’d really like, faced with so many possible readings of Robinson Crusoe (and there are certainly more still than those I’ve just schematically mentioned), [I’d really like] carefully to delimit, and thus also

47. Ibid., p. 371 [p. 319].
48. Ibid., p. 372 [p. 320].
49. Ibid.
limit, like an island in an island, the territory of our seminar and the center
of gravity that we shall have to constitute as much as to privilege, that is
also to restrict—namely, let’s say, the beast and the sovereign in Robinson
Crusoe. As for the beast, it is easy and it goes without saying, even though
we have said little about it until now. The book is a long discussion between
Robinson and so many beasts. And the theater of that discussion is, indissocably, a theater of solitary sovereignty, of the assertion of mastery (of self,
over slaves, over savages and over beasts, without speaking—because the
point is precisely not to talk about them—without speaking of women). One
archi-preliminary example: even before arriving at the island, and all
the stories about the slave trade, there is the episode of the Moor thrown
into the sea and of the young boy50 Xury, also a Muslim, whom Robinson
keeps on board and whom Robinson (his master, then), asks to pledge an
oath of fidelity, and to do so according to Islamic law, which would bind
him the more; an oath to recognize Robinson’s sole sovereignty over the
swearing subject:

Xury, if you will be faithful to me I’ll make you a great Man, but if you
will not stroak your Face to be true to me, that is, swear by Mahomet and
his Father’s Beard, I must throw you into the Sea too; the Boy smil’d in my
Face and spoke so innocently that I could not mistrust him; and swore to be
faithful to me, and go all over the World with me. (RC, 21)

This is almost immediately followed—I leave you to go and see—by
the episode during which the first proof given by Xury will be to obey Rob-
inson and go kill in dangerous circumstances a terrifying lion whose paw
he will offer to Robinson—who skins it and keeps the skin, a huge skin
put out to dry in the sun and on which Robinson later sleeps. As for the
auto-affirmation of sovereignty by Robinson himself, I’ll content myself
with reading two other passages to which we shall have to return the better
to reinscribe them in the time and consequence of the narrative.

It would have made a Stoick smile to have seen, me and little Family sit
down to Dinner; there was my Majesty the Prince and Lord of the whole
Island; I had the Lives of all my Subjects at my absolute Command. I could
hang, draw, give Liberty, and take it away, and no Rebels among all my
Subjects.

Then to see how like a King I din’d too all alone, attended by my ser-
vants, Poll, as if he had been my Favourite, was the only Person permitted
to talk to me. My Dog who was now grown very old and crazy, and had

50. [Translator’s note:] Derrida adds the English word “boy” in brackets.
found no Species to multiply his Kind upon, sat always, at my Right Hand, and two Cats, one on one Side of the Table, and one on the other, expecting now and then a Bit from my Hand, as a Mark of special Favour.

But these were not the two Cats which I brought on Shore at first, for they were both of them dead, and had been interr’d near my Habitation by my own Hand; but one of them having multiply’d by I know not what Kind of Creature, these were two which I had preserv’d tame, whereas the rest run wild in the Woods, and became indeed troublesom to me at last; for they would often come into my House, and plunder me too, till at last I was obliged to shoot them, and did kill a great many; at length they left me with this Attendance, and in this plentiful Manner I lived; neither could I be said to want any thing but Society, and of that in some time after this, I was like to have too much. (RC, 137)

My Island was now peopled, and I thought my self very rich in Subjects; and it was a merry Reflection which I frequently made, How like a King I look’d. First of all, the whole country was my own meer Property; so that I had an undoubted Right of Dominion. 2dly, My People were perfectly subjected: I was absolute Lord and Law-giver; they all owed their Lives to me, and were ready to lay down their Lives, if there had been Occasion of it, for me. It was remarkable too, we had but three Subjects, and they were of three different Religions. My Man Friday was a Protestant, his Father was a Pagan and a Cannibal, and the Spaniard was a Papist: However, I allow’d Liberty of Conscience throughout my Dominions: But this is by the Way. (RC, 222)

Next time we shall return to the continent, toward the land of continental philosophy, there to open in our own way Heidegger’s great and formidable seminar (especially where it concerns poverty of world, the animal), but beginning at the beginning, namely a sentence from Novalis that Heidegger quotes and comments upon. This sentence states that philosophy is really a nostalgia, a homesickness (Heimweh), a drive to be everywhere at home, in one’s house: “Die Philosophie ist eigentlich Heimweh, ein Trieb überall zu Hause zu sein” (H, 7/5). Heidegger says of this sentence that it is remarkable and clearly romantic, but he also wonders if there is still today something like nostalgia or homesickness. Has this word Heimweh not become incomprehensible today, in everyday life? And then here perhaps is a rhetorical prefiguration of the animal that will come on stage only much later in the course of the meditation and of the seminar, Heidegger at this
point accusing the city dweller, the man of the town, of being merely the ape of civilization (Affe der Zivilization); he wonders whether this ape has not, when all is said and done, long ago rid himself of nostalgia (“Denn hat nicht der heutige städtische Mensch und Affe der Zivilisation das Heimweh längst abgeschafft?”) (H, 7/5).

Then we shall link on to this with the three questions Heidegger intends to gather into one: What is world (Welt)? What is finitude (Endlichkeit)? What is loneliness, isolation or solitude (Vereinzelung, Einsamkeit)? This Vereinzelung (this loneliness, this isolation, this insularity) is not the stiffening of a little ego puffing itself up before what it takes to be the world. It is rather through loneliness, becoming-alone, the endurance of solitude (Vereinsamung) that man comes for the first time into proximity with what is essential in every thing, in proximity to the world (in die Nähe . . . zur Welt), Was ist diese Einsamkeit, wo der Mensch je wie ein Einziger sein wird? [What is this solitude, where each human being will be as though alone?] (H, 8/6).

Solitude of man, question of man as the only living being capable of being alone and approaching the world as such. The stone is not alone. Will we say of the beast that it is alone (given that it is poor in world)? Or that it is somewhat alone? To relaunch all these questions, and to link them with the question of sovereignty, we shall dwell at the beginning of the next session on the word walten (to rule violently) which we can rightly say dominates the beginning of the seminar and everything in it that concerns physis.