

## INTRODUCTION

IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY, a very special kind of hunt is said to have taken place in France on the grounds of the royal chateau of Amboise. King Louis XI, who had been offered “the dreadful pleasure of a manhunt,” set out in pursuit of a convict wearing the “hide of a freshly killed stag.” Released on the grounds and quickly caught by the royal pack of hounds, the man was “torn to pieces by the dogs.”<sup>1</sup>

To write a history of manhunts is to write one fragment of a long history of violence on the part of the dominant. It is also to write the history of the technologies of predation indispensable for the establishment and reproduction of relationships of domination.

The manhunt must not be understood here as a metaphor. It refers to concrete historical phenomena in which human beings were tracked down, captured, or killed in accord with the forms of the hunt; these were regular and sometimes large-scale practices whose forms were first theorized in ancient Greece, long before their enormous expansion in the modern period in conjunction with the development of transatlantic capitalism.

The French noun *la chasse* is defined here as “the action of hunting, pursuing, particularly with regard to animals,”<sup>2</sup> but the corresponding verb (*chasser*) also means “chasing out by means of violence or coercion, forcing to leave a certain place.” There is a hunt of pursuit and a hunt of expulsion; hunting that captures

and hunting that excludes. These two operations are distinct but may enter into a relationship of complementarity: hunting human beings, tracking them down, often presupposes that they have been previously chased out, expelled, or excluded from a common order. Every hunt is accompanied by a theory of its prey that explains why, by virtue of what difference, of what distinction, some men can be hunted and others not. The history of man-hunting is thus a history not only of the techniques of tracking and capture but also of procedures of exclusion, of lines of demarcation drawn within the human community in order to define the humans who can be hunted.

However, the hunter's triumph—and his pleasure—would be less intense if the human hunted were not *nonetheless* a human. The supreme excitement and at the same time the absolute demonstration of social superiority is, in fact, to hunt beings whom one knows to be men and not animals. That is because, as Balzac put it in a formula that can serve here as an axiom, "So the hunt for men is superior to the other class of hunting by all the distance that there is between animals and human beings."<sup>3</sup> Thus, this distance has to be recognized at the same time that it is denied. And therein lies its peculiar challenge: to succeed in erasing the distance between the human hunted and the animal prey, not theoretically but practically, in the act of capture or putting to death. Recognizing the humanity of the prey and at the same time challenging it in practice are thus the two contradictory attitudes constitutive of the manhunt.

If there is an animalization here, it is perhaps in the sense in which Hannah Arendt writes that man "can be fully dominated only when he becomes a specimen of the animal-species man":<sup>4</sup> total domination, a horizon that is difficult to attain, and thus does not involve the animalization of human beings in the sense

in which they would cease to be “humans,” but rather the reduction of their humanity to *human animality*—an animality that always remains full of its own redoubtable resources.

The main problem has to do with the fact that the hunter and the hunted do not belong to different species. Since the distinction between the predator and his prey is not inscribed in nature, the hunting relationship is always susceptible to a reversal of positions. Prey sometimes band together to become hunters in their turn. The history of a power is also the history of the struggles to overthrow it.