

# THE END OF THINKING

by Giorgio Agamben

*It happens much as when, walking through the woods, we are suddenly struck by the unheard variety of animal voices: trills, whistles, and gurglings; knells as of wood or metal splinters; chirps, whirrs, and whispers: springing immediately from him, each animal his own proper voice. In the end, the cuckoo's double note mocks our silence and reveals the untenability of our being, unique, voiceless amidst the boundless chorus of animal voices. Only then do we attempt to speak, to think.*

*In our tongue, the word thinking bears originally the meaning of anguish, of burning anxiety, as can still be found in the familiar expression "stare in pensiero," to be thoughtful, to worry. The Latin verb pendere, from which the word is derived in the Romance languages, means "to be suspended." St. Augustine employs it in this sense in order to characterize the learning process: "The desire inherent in research ushers from the seeker and, somehow suspended [pendet quodammodo], doesn't rest in the end it seeks but when the seeker and what is sought find each other in unity."*

*What is it that is suspended, what "hangs" in thinking? We can think, in language, solely because language is and is not our voice. There's a pending, an unresolved question in language, and that is, whether language is or is not our voice, the way braying is properly the voice of a donkey and chirping that of a cricket. That is why, when we speak, we can't do without thinking, without keeping the words suspended. Thinking is the pending of the voice in language.*

*(Obviously the cricket cannot think while chirping)*

*When in the evening we walk through the woods, at every step we hear the rustling of invisible animals amidst the bushes that line the path, knowing not whether they are lizards or porcupines, thrushes or snakes. The same happens when we think: what counts is not the path of the words we are traveling, but the indistinct toddling we hear occasionally moving by the edges, a fleeing animal or something suddenly aroused by the noise of our footsteps.*

*The fleeing animal, we've been told, the fleeing rustle we feel through the words, is our voice. We think – we hold the words suspended and ourselves hanging in language – we think because ultimately we hope to find the voice there, in language. Once, we've been told, the voice wrote itself into language. The quest of the voice in language is called thinking.*

