

Part 1

Bats of Geneva

Chauves-souris de Genève

Murciélagos de Ginebra

Pipistrelli di Ginevra

Fledermäuse von Genf

You are at a point in time where you've never been before. You've just started to step into the unknown. Studying at HEAD, in the most unusual of circumstances. A pandemic is scouring the planet and it doesn't care for borders. It reminds us that we are not countries, and that borders are not walls, but that our condition is *planetary*.

Whether or not you are from Geneva, or its surroundings, you are in a place that harbors a great many hidden secrets. The second half of the 20th century was born in Geneva: it hosts institutions that have played a prominent role in governing the international order that emerged out of the Second World War. Think about the United Nations, for example—co-seated in Geneva and New York. Or think about the banking system—and Switzerland's state of exception internationally as a whole—playing a key part in financial secrecy. Think of some of the anonymous building facades that you may pass by any day, and what is going on behind them. You are in a city that is a boiling secret.

We've been in love with Geneva from day one—a city of squats and Maseratis. Multilingual and polycultural. Old and new. Rural and urban. Not Swiss, not French, not German—made out of something else. Reminiscent of the world that was, yet harboring many secret futures. Unremarkably unforgettable.

Allow us to remind you—ironically, from Amsterdam—that studying in Geneva is no small thing to be doing. It is a major privilege to be here, no matter how troubled our tangled mess has become. The same is true for teaching: that is our privilege, and we thank the department, and HEAD, and you, for making this happen.

You are inside an impeccably maintained building on Rue de l'Encyclopédie. The doors are in RAL colors and could be like the doors of Swiss trains, so reliably clear and clean and crisp and not afraid of giving us

solid, 20th century certainty—we can count on you. Though on a *planet*, you are also inside a *bubble* provided by a very particular configuration of world affairs that is named Switzerland.

We've given you things to read that should open up doors to some outsides.

Not outsides like space or time travel or other lofty things like that, at least not yet, but—closer to home—*outsides to our narrow view as humans*.

The philosopher Thomas Nagel's book *The View from Nowhere* (from 1986) is about that. The idea of a completely disengaged view. Thinking ourselves external from our own subjectivities, bodies, and minds—approaching a non-human, disengaged, or “othered” perspective—has been at the center of a great many philosophical debates, especially in recent years as humanity is confronting what it has done to the planet.

Thomas Nagel has also, in 1974, asked the philosophical question “What Is It Like To Be A Bat?”

Nagel concluded that we, as in we the humans, can never know. The argument, of course, is more complex than that, but this is the summary.

The biologist Frans de Waal added to Nagel's answer by noting that he wouldn't have, couldn't have written without knowing about *echolocation*—a technique used by bats, dolphins and other animals to determine the location of objects, using reflected sound, allows the animals to move around in pitch darkness. The *discovery* of echolocation, de Waal argues, has only happened because there have been scientists who have *tried to* imagine what it is like to be a bat. And they discovered echolocation, the means by which bats “see.”

We start with “bats of Geneva.” This week, find, and photograph bats of Geneva, where they live, and the routes they take, in Geneva. This is research. You start somewhere. Make lots of pictures. Collate the research and draw some conclusions. Work in teams of three, formed by the instructor at home. In the meantime, let's talk about what it's like to be a bat.

Discussing “What Is It Like To Be A Bat?” (class reading by Daniel)

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