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Georges Bataille and a Materialist Ethics of Experience

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Georges Bataille and a Materialist Ethics of Experience

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Abstract

Georges Bataille and a Materialist Ethics of Experience
By Andrew Ryder

We have seen, in recent decades, a renewed attention to ethics in the humanities. This ethical turn has taken its bearings, in large part, from the emphasis on alterity in the work of Emmanuel Levinas. An unsettling face-to-face encounter that cannot be adequately anticipated by subjectivity or knowledge has become a paradigmatic outlook, one that demands an utmost rigor and responsibility, a refusal to disregard the necessarily foreign character of an object of study in favor of a devouring assimilation to the known. It is this perspective that we find championed in literary studies as much as in any discipline: The ineffaceable singularity of the literary object must overcome any pre-established strategy of reading. This demand for responsibility, the exigency of a commitment to preserve alterity, can always be suspected of slipping into an ultimately patronizing and weakened "respect for difference." It is the contention of this thesis that in order to avoid this charge, it is necessary to insist that if it is Levinas we have to thank for an "ethical turn" in contemporary thought, it is no less the work of Georges Bataille that is indispensable to an inquiry into radical ethics.

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Introduction: The Ethical Turn is Not Yet Material: On the Necessity of Georges Bataille

1. Ethics and Literature

We have seen, in recent decades, a renewed attention to ethics in the humanities.[1] After the apparent failure of the political project of socialism and the scientific ambitions of structuralism, an attention to intersubjectivity and moral stakes has emerged as paramount. In this climate, the work of Georges Bataille might appear to be something of an embarrassment. While highly regarded in France in the 1960s, and subsequently in the North American enthusiasm for "French theory" in the 1980s, Bataille's work, to many readers, seems to induce, if not revulsion, a transgressive frisson: a burst of irresponsible, guilt-laden pleasure. Surely, this is not a thinker for adults; this specialist in the diabolical can teach us very little about our responsibilities to others.

Countering this standard view, I will argue that a close reading of Bataille reveals an author who did not boast much about his morals, but who was constantly concerned with nothing else but the conditions and pitfalls of communication with another. Bataille, like few others, took seriously the difficulty of an encounter with another, and the need to consider this experience as lacking in preconceptions or expectations regarding this other's behavior or character. It is this view of Bataille that can be brought into the orbit of the ethical turn, and could in fact be a means of salvaging it from self-congratulatory piety. Throughout, this study will implicitly relate Bataille's work to one of his great

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[1] Special note should be made of Nouvet, Claire, ed., *Literature and the Ethical Question*, *Yale French Studies* number 79, November 1991. This includes two important translations of work by Bataille. Broad surveys of a variety of perspectives on ethics and its renewed significance include *Mapping the Ethical Turn: A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory*, ed. Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001; *The Turn to Ethics*, ed. Majorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, New York: Routledge, 2000; and *Ethics, Literature, and Theory: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Stephen K. George, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005. Other significant persectives include Miller, J. Hillis, *The Ethics of Reading*, New York: Columbia UP, 1987, and Siebers, Tobin, *The Ethics of Criticism*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.

contemporaries, a man who never mentioned his name or acknowledged reading any of his articles: Emmanuel Levinas.

The ethical turn has taken its bearings, in large part, from the emphasis on alterity in Levinas's work.[2] An unsettling face-to-face encounter that cannot be adequately anticipated by subjectivity or knowledge has become a paradigmatic outlook, one that demands an utmost rigor and responsibility, a refusal to disregard the necessarily foreign character of an object of study in favor of a devouring assimilation to the known. While Levinas saw this project as the emergence of a new and true philosophy and a revitalized metaphysics, it is this perspective that we find championed in literary studies as much as in philosophy departments. For many readers today, the ineffaceable singularity of the literary object must overcome any pre-established strategy of reading.

This demand for responsibility, the exigency of a commitment to preserve alterity, can always be suspected of slipping into an ultimately patronizing and weakened "respect for difference" – in the words of one scathing critic, "a guilt-driven empathy or compassion ultimately indistinguishable from a distanced condescension."[3] It is my contention that in order to avoid this pitfall, it is necessary to insist that if it is Levinas we have to thank for an "ethical turn" in contemporary thought, it is no less Bataille's writing that is indispensable to an inquiry into radical ethics.

2. A Peculiar Materialism

Levinas has been subject to a number of politicized interventions that suspect him of falling short of the radicality of his own project. Among these we must mention Fredric Jameson's contention that "it is ethics itself which is the ideological vehicle and the legitimation of concrete structures of power and domination;" that is, a masking of

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[2] The work of Paul Ricoeur is also of great import in this ethical turn, though I will bracket an account of his hermeneutics in this study. See his *Oneself as Another*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
[3] Hallward, Peter, "Translator's Introduction," in Badiou, Alain, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, London: Verso, 2001, p. xxxv.

the larger historico-political forces in which we are enmeshed.[4] On another front, Simon Critchley writes of the need to appeal to psychoanalysis in order to avoid a self-flagellating moral masochism.[5] It is my contention that common and preliminary to these revisions of Marxist or Freudian derivation is the need to confront Levinas's ethical idealism with a robust materialism. Levinas is often read as a religious thinker. However, the nature of the religion to which Levinas appeals should not be taken for granted. In Jill Robbins's reading, for Levinas, "the relationship to God is, however, not a *credo*, nor is it any kind of ontological assertion. It is the primacy of doing for the other. That is the sole relationship between man and God. In many ways this 'Judaism' is closer to an atheism."[6] This projects aims for a fidelity to an atheistic relation to the other that would most likely scandalize Levinas, but one that is nonetheless in communication with his thought. It is the contention of this project that Levinas's insistence on ethics as first philosophy and the primacy of alterity can be maintained, but requires a grappling not with a supreme good that surpasses being, but with prime matter understood as unyielding, resolute, and troubling. Levinas had himself already noted the significance of base matter to the understanding of evil and the practice of ethics. It is the goal of this project to focus attention on this element of ethics, because it is here that Bataille's intervention can be found, and in this moment that cognitivist appropriations of alterity are most strongly resisted.[7]

It is necessary to rediscover a materialism distinct from and necessary to the historical and dialectical materialisms of orthodox Marxism as well as the metaphysical naturalism of the seventeenth century rationalists. This other materialism, generally first

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[4] Jameson, Fredric, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981, p. 114.
[5] Critchley, Simon, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, London: Verso, 2007, p. 67.
[6] Robbins, Jill, "*Visage, Figure*: Reading Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*," *Yale French Studies* 79: *Literature and the Ethical Question*, ed. Claire Nouvet, New Haven: Yale, 1991, p. 146-147.
[7] See Bataille's article on Levinas, "De l'existentialisme au primat de l'économie," *OC* XI, p. 279-308.

described polemically by its idealist enemies beginning with Plato, posits matter not as a discernible first principle but as a troubling disruption of ideational form, content, and activity.[8] It is this materialism that has become – alongside but distinct from the ethical turn – an increasingly invoked necessity for literature and philosophy. Figures as disparate as Paul de Man and Slavoj Zizek discern the possibility of an essential yet crucially unthinkable role for materiality. However, in order to avoid the idealisms to which materialism is often assimilated, both of them insist on the disruption of substance, rather than taking it as their starting point. Zizek says cryptically that the "only consistent materialist position is that the world does not exist."[9] What Zizek means by this is that a cohesive and total life-world cannot be found; materialism is a name for the awareness of a break between thought and its object. Jacques Derrida identifies in de Man's work a "materiality without matter."[10] In Derrida's gloss, de Man's materiality "is nothing and yet it works […] therefore operates, it forces, but as a force of resistance."[11] This conception of materiality or materialism, I will argue, is indispensable to a radical ethical turn, and further, finds its inaugural thinker in Bataille.

3. De Man and Bataille

De Man and Zizek, whatever their great differences, have a common point of origin in Bataille's materialism, although he is rarely cited by either of them. In a 1983 interview with Stefano Rosso, de Man speaks of being "influenced by all people who generally came from the tradition of Surrealism, specifically Bataille, [and] Blanchot."[12]

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[8] Plato sees the cosmos, as opposed to the world of forms, as essentially illusory, a place that "comes to be and passes away, but never really is." *Timaeus*, p. 28a. More than this, in *Parmenides*, Socrates indicates that hair, mud and dirt have no form at all; p. 130d. Furthermore, he is insistent that the body is essentially an anti-intellectual and deceptive force throughout his work.

[9] Zizek, Slavoj and Glyn Daly, *Conversations with Zizek*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004, p. 97.

[10] Derrida, Jacques, "Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)," *Without Alibi*, Stanford: Standford UP, 2002, p. 151.

[11] Ibid.

[12] "An Interview with Paul de Man," *Resistance to Theory*, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986, p. 119-120. Zizek attempts to position himself with regard to Bataille in *The Parallax View*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006, p. 94-95. I attend to this extensively in the fourth chapter of this study.

He also speaks of "the attraction of people like Bataille, whose relationship to the political (because they were very political) was more complex, more mediated, than in the case of Sartre."[13] While this is an offhand comment, I would wager that this reference to Bataille as a complex political thinker is much more telling than the silence that has greeted it would indicate.[14]

It was, after all, Bataille who first radicalized Marx's materialism in his crucial early pieces, including "Le base matérialisme et la gnose" and "La « vieille taupe » et le préfixe *sur* dans le mots *surhomme* et *surréaliste*."[15] As Bataille wrote in his definition of materialism in the *Encyclopedia Acephalica*,

> La plupart des matérialistes […] ont situé la matière morte au sommet d'une hiérarchie conventionnelle des faits d'ordres divers, sans s'apercevoir qu'ils cédaient ainsi à l'obsession d'une forme *idéale* de la matière, d'une forme qui se rapprocherait plus qu'aucune autre de ce que la matière *devrait être*.[16]

In contrast, "Il est temps, lorsque le mot *matérialisme* est employé, de désigner l'interprétation directe, *excluant tout idéalisme*, des phénomènes bruts […]"[17] It is this contrast between a false, ideologized materialism, governed by pregiven norms, and a more "direct" and "raw" interpretation of "phenomena" that I submit anticipates a distinction later made by de Man. Bataille associates raw phenomena with the fragmented writing we now associate with literature, and it is to literary methods that de Man will

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[13] Ibid.

[14] De Man is an ethically and politically problematic figure as a result of his collaborationist wartime journalism. For a detailed biographical and historical account along with a reading of the figure of guilt in de Man's mature writings, see Felman, Shoshana, "After the Apocalypse: Paul de Man and the Fall to Silence," *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 120-164. While it might seem counterintuitive to appeal to de Man's inheritance from Bataille in the hopes of uncovering the ethical importance of the latter, it is my thesis that attentiveness to materiality is crucial to Bataille's intervention, and de Man's work demonstrates some important consequences of this. Whether de Man's work contains anything like the ethical valence of Bataille's is an entirely different concern.

[15] *OC* I, 220-226, *OC* II, "Dossier de la polémique avec André Breton," p. 93-112.

[16] Bataille, Georges, "Dictionnaire critique," *Documents* no. 3, juin 1929, reprinted Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1991, p. 170.

[17] Ibid.

appeal against ideology. Paradoxically, as de Man notes in his interview, this apparently more direct interpretation of phenomena leads to a more "mediated" approach to politics, a mediation that I will subsequently link to the ethical. First, a description of de Man's debt to Marx, which is in my view a more linguistically sophisticated permutation of the approach initially taken by Bataille.

4. De Man and Marx

De Man wrote penetratingly of the "confus[ion of] the materiality of the signifier with the materiality of what it signifies."[18] He explores this false identification of signifier and signified as a narrative fictionalization of being: "it is very difficult not to conceive the pattern of one's past and future existence as in accordance with temporal and spatial schemes that belong to fictional narratives and not to the world."[19] De Man calls this confusion "ideology;" while ideology confuses the linguistic and the natural, literary readings can oppose this with a kind of materialism, or a materiality. He even links this strategy to the Marx of *The German Ideology*.[20] In this work, Marx argued that

> The 'mind' is from the outset afflicted with the curse of being 'burdened' with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language. Language is as old as consciousness, language *is* practical, real consciousness that exists for other men as well, and only therefore does it also exist for me.[21]

This striking passage calls into question what Marx's scare-quoted "mind" is, if it is something exterior to and burdened by the matter that is language. The answer is that for Marx, mind is something ultimately equal to matter and to language and to nothing else that would be capable of casting off this burden. More than this, this linguistic

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[18] *The Resistance to Theory*, p. 11.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Marx, Karl with Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998, p. 49.

consciousness must be intersubjective – or more than this, *first* exists "for other men," and only subsequently, "for me." In other words, Marxian "mind" is both material, and materially formed by language, as well as *ethical* – inherently the property of another, or plural others. For Marx, Ideas and consciousness are not innate in the mind or gifts of heaven but "interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men – the language of real life."[22]

5. Metonymy and Ideology

It is in a sense a linguistics of this language of real life that Marx strives to formulate. Marx strives to recount, historically, the way that the division of labor, property, and their attendant ideology collude to produce a ruling class and a state. It is the role of ideology in this schema to mask the state's character as an apparatus of class power, covering it in the image of an ideal government for the entirety of the social body. So, as Ernest Laclau argues, borrowing from de Man, that ideology accomplishes a metonymic deception; a power that acts on behalf of a single class appears to act for the good of the whole.[23] It is the nature of political action, in Marx's view, to accomplish this metonymy: "[I]t follows that every class which is aiming at domination," including the proletariat aware of its revolutionary destiny, "must first conquer political power in order to represent its interest in turn as the general interest."[24]

Pre-Marxist historians of a positivist persuasion have believed that ideas of justice and equality were once restricted to an aristocratic master-class, and that these ideas have gradually become universalized by the passage of time. Marx counters this by declaring that all ruling ideas have had a universal dimension, and the current dominant ideas are merely the ideas of the dominant class, the bourgeoisie, which posits "universal" rights of

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[22] Ibid., p. 42.
[23] "[H]egemony is always metonymic." Laclau, Ernesto, "The Politics of Rhetoric," *Material Events. Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*. Cohen, Tom and Barbara Cohen, J. Hillis Miller and Andrzej Warminski, eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. 237.
[24] Ibid., p. 52-53.

life, liberty and property as means of presenting "its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form."[25] It is the failing of historiography that it has never uncovered the material interests of the governing and victorious class; the historian has taken "every epoch at its word and believes that everything it says and imagines about itself is true."[26] So it is the failure of idealist history to take the apparent ideological truths of the political narrative of the dominant class at face value, and it is the necessary materialist maneuver to decouple history from its self-deception.

Laclau points out that hegemony is formed of "component elements and dimensions [which] are articulated by contingent links."[27] He emphasizes the contingency of these links in order to ward off the Jacobin illusion of a metaphoric, totalized, sutured social body – an illusion which Laclau sees as a violent and parasitic strand of Marxism responsible for the various massacres and gulags associated with state socialism. In the service of this project, Laclau draws on de Man's reading of Proust, in which every metaphor is and must be grounded in metonymic transitions.

Laclau, then, would follow a line of reasoning associated with de Man in order to point out that by Marx's own argument, the proletariat, in spite of its universal pretensions, only represents its interest as the general interest as a necessary prelude to the taking of political power. Laclau suggests that Marx has been insufficiently critical in positing that the proletariat would truly and transparently metaphorize, unlike its unworthy feudal and bourgeois predecessors. In place of this utopian imaginary, which corresponds in de Man's sense to ideology, confusing a linguistic reference ("the people") with a possible post-historical reality, Laclau would endorse practices of contingent articulation between various marginalized groups in order to advance conceptions of

[25] Ibid., p. 68.
[26] Ibid., p. 71.
[27] Ibid.

democracy, liberty, and socialism, without mistaking any of these terms as promised final destinations. Derrida appears to endorse a similar line of argument when he speaks of a critical inheritance of Marxism:

> [O]n peut ainsi, par exemple, parler de discours *dominant* ou de représentations et d'ideés *dominantes*, et se référer ainsi à un champ conflictuel hiérarchisé sans nécessairement souscrire au concept de classe sociale par lequel Marx a si souvent déterminé, en particulier dans *L'Idéologie allemande*, les forces qui se disputent l'hégémonie.[28]

6. De Man's Performative Marxism and Formal Materialism

De Man attempts to redefine the notions of materiality and of ideology through a radical fidelity to Marx's text. As Andrzej Warminski conveys it, it is de Man's methodology to subject ideology not to its economic referent but to a critical-linguistic analysis.[29] De Man distinguishes a performative text from a cognitive text.[30] The *German Ideology* of the Marxists, the Marx of the Marxists, is a cognitive text, a text to be taken at its word, which is formed of Marx's emphatic declarations and stated methodology. De Man's performative text, not exterior to but precisely the same as the cognitive text which it unsettles, produces an effect that is different and contrary to Marx's stated concerns. In this conception, Marx interrupts himself, necessarily and mechanically, not even free to recognize his own submission to textual necessity. De Man never wrote his examination of this performative text, but if we are good readers we might imagine how this conflict

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[28] Derrida, Jacques, *Spectres de Marx: L'Éta de la dett, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*, Paris : Galilée, 1993, p. 95-97.
[29] Warminski, Andrzej, "As the Poets Do It," *Material Events*: *Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*. Cohen, Tom and Barbara Cohen, J. Hillis Miller and Andrzej Warminski, eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. 22.
[30] Ibid.

might take place. As de Man himself said regarding his intent to read *The German Ideology*, "What will come out of it, I just do not know."[31]

De Man will seek to redefine materialism as "radical formalism that animates aesthetic judgment in the dynamics of the sublime," a formalization on behalf of Kant opposed to the ideological relapse of Schiller.[32] He will argue that the Kantian moment is effectively impossible, something to be strived for only at great institutional risk, and that we all repeat Schiller's error in positivizing, naturalizing, and ideologizing the gaze of the poet. De Man will then see the totalitarian project as a further misrecognition, a radicalization of the Schillerian illusion, quoting Joseph Goebbel's self-image as political aesthetician, transforming a mass into a people and a people into a state.[33] It is in this aesthetic state, this extreme, radical, murderous aesthetic state that de Man will find his adversary and the product of a virulent aesthetic ideology. This is not the place to go into de Man's re-reading of Kant; it is only important to recognize that de Man sees fascism as an excessive rejection of the possibility of the sublime that enables aesthetic judgment. Or, fascism is the most thoroughgoing form of the ideological confusion denounced by Marx.

7. De Man and Historical Materialism

As previously noted, Marx denounced ideological history for its failure to oppose material events to their ideological masks, which falsely represent the acts of a self-interested class as the will of the whole. For de Man, history is "caused by language or other signs that make something materially happen."[34] In de Man's view, unlike in Marx's, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* was an irreversible historical event, because it

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[31] See Sprinker, Michael, "Art and Ideology: Althusser and de Man," *Material Events*: *Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, Cohen, Tom and Barbara Cohen, J. Hillis Miller and Andrzej Warminski, eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. 33.
[32] de Man, Paul, *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 128.
[33] Ibid., p. 155.
[34] Ibid.

provided the grounds for the sublime that is necessary in order to oppose materiality itself to ideology. Schiller's misreading of Kant was not an event, though at the same time we all argue and reason like Schiller and remain incapable of a truly Kantian perception. De Man puts things differently when he says that history is "the emergence of a language of power out of a language of cognition."[35] This is what we might a call a deconstructive moment; when a performativity of language erupts out of a cognitive knowledge. In the most enigmatic comment of *The German Ideology*, Marx includes a terse note: "There is no history of politics, law, science, etc., of art, religion, etc."[36] In that he has frequently declared that he recognizes only the science of history, this statement has no ready-made or agreed upon interpretation. The most obvious is simply that ideology constantly denies and naturalizes its historical origins. De Man radicalizes this gesture into the argument that "History is therefore not a temporal notion."[37]

This both is and is not Marxist. Marxism, on the one hand, breathes history. A certain Marxism especially codified by the second international relies on a teleological Darwinism; all questions are referred to industrial progress, a referent that is both economic and temporal. This is not a position merely to be caricatured; it is a merit of Marxism to avoid ethical posturing without reference to material possibilities and to demonstrate that attributes of "human nature" appear in radically different forms at different historical moments. There is another Marxist history that is not temporal, just as ideology has no history. This is the constant potential of logical insurrection; this is a moment that does not require an appeal to historical necessity. De Man's notion of historical materialism is not so contrary to this ahistoricized imperative. De Man has

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[35] ibid., p. 189.
[36] *The German Ideology*, p. 101.
[37] de Man, Paul, *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 133.

committed himself to, as Derrida put it, a "mechanistic materiality without materialism and even perhaps without matter."[38]

I would like to relate this deconstructive performativity that becomes a language of power to the Marxist notion of accepting one's historical position and role as subject of historical destiny, as interpellated into a militant position and incapable of reconciliation with capital and nation-state. The language of power is present in, but not precisely equivalent to, the language of cognition. The Marxist position is not one of detached positivism in which a scholar gathers up information and interprets its likely ramifications. Rather, this political moment takes place in a gap between understanding and responsibility that I would relate to ethics. Maurice Blanchot draws attention to this aspect of Marxism when he speaks of Marx's second voice: "Elle ne porte plus un sens, mais un appel, une violence, une decision de rupture."[39] While I do not think that de Man saw it this way, I would locate the specifically linguistic or literary understanding of historical materialism as leading to an ethics, and the most primary ethics, insofar as it interrupts the presence to self of a subject and instead forces an encounter with otherness.

8. Derrida: Ideology and Materialism

Jacques Derrida, in a sense, carried on de Man's project of a deconstructive examination of Marx in his famous *Specters of Marx*. Derrida called for "un messianisme structurel, un messianisme sans religion, un messianique, même, sans messianisme, une idée de la justice [...]"[40] This new international Derrida associates with a certain fidelity to Marx. He notes that deconstruction depends on an undecidability that is beyond the opposition "de l'effectivité, de l'effet, de l'operativité, du travail," Marx's terms that signify materiality, and "les effets de virtualité, de simulacre de « travail du deuil », de

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[38] Quoted in Cohen, Tom, J. Hillis Miller, and Barbara Cohen, "A 'Materiality Without Matter'?," *Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory*, Cohen, Tom and Barbara Cohen, J. Hillis Miller and Andrzej Warminski, eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. xvi.
[39] Blanchot, Maurice, « Les Trois paroles de Marx », *L'Amitié*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 116.
[40] *Spectres de Marx*, p. 102.

fantôme, de revenant, etc.," those terms associated with ideology.[41] It is in the service of escaping this binary that Derrida speaks of Marx himself as a ghost. Marx appears, from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, as a mere ideological error of the past, a ghost, just as Marx spoke of pre-capitalist formations and ideologies as ghosts. Marx intended the characterization of ghostliness to be a criticism, and believed that these ghosts should be exorcised.

Derrida points out that, at the same time, Marx referred to communism itself as a specter in no less famous a text than *The Communist Manifesto*. Derrida discusses Marx's dispute with Max Stirner in *The German Ideology* at great length. Marx criticizes Stirner for fighting ghosts, but his real criticism appears to be only that Stirner is not a very effective ghost slayer.[42] Marx and Stirner are also bonded by their inheritance of the Platonic tradition and Western metaphysics, which consists of the constant differentiation "du vivre et du mourir."[43] Derrida, having overturned this tradition, has also overturned the distinction between ideology and materialism. Derrida, then, will attempt to restore Marx's relevance by accepting his ghosthood, simultaneously overcoming his textual fear, dislike and obsession with the spectral trope.

Marx was never capable of thinking over the gap between matter and ideology; "C'est pourquoi une telle déconstruction n'a jamais été marxiste, pas plus que non marxiste, quoique fidèle à un esprit du marxisme, à l'un d'entre eux du moins car on ne le répétera jamais assez, il y en *plus d'un* et ils sont hétérogènes."[44] Derrida even characterizes deconstruction as a radicalization of Marx; an attempt to think Marxist thought with Marcel Mauss's discovery of the gift economy.[45] From this vantage point, deconstruction is a Marxism without reference to epistemological realism as the

[41] Ibid., p. 126.
[42] Ibid., p. 201-234.
[43] Ibid., p. 236.
[44] Ibid., p. 127.
[45] Ibid., p. 48.

groundings for materialism. Instead, it attempts to imagine a Marxist economy in which the lack of production, Mauss's potlatch, is as effective as production, and hence not ideological but material.

9. Justice and Materialist Ethics

For Derrida, justice requires the "incalculabilité du don et singularité de l'ex-position an-économique à autrui."[46] It was Bataille who first saw this expenditure without reserve as the grounds for relationship to another. He writes that "[e]ach isolated existence emerges from itself by means of the image betraying the error of immutable isolation."[47] In other words, we are taken out of ourselves and confronted with another through an image of error; signs that intimate their own deception. This can be related to the means to which de Man resorts in order to make the reader aware of his or her inevitable ideological confusion. But Bataille insists that "Nous ne pouvons découvrir qu'*en autrui* comment dispose de nous l'exubérance légère des choses."[48] It is Bataille's position, not unlike Blanchot's, Derrida's, or Levinas's, that the failure of the apparently self-enclosed experience of phenomena leads to and is predicated on the encounter with another.

For this reason, Bataille is the crucial starting point for a materialist reinvestigation of the ethical turn. Reading Bataille with this in mind departs from the usual stereotypes about him as a mystic, a self-destructive hedonist in the *poète maudit* tradition, or an unsavory fetishist of historical calamity. The reading here advanced begins with an account of Bataille's approach to the French understanding of phenomenology, as mediated by Alexandre Kojève, at whose lectures Levinas was also present. We will discover that Bataille's ethical thought is at its greatest intensity in his

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[46] Ibid.. Derrida links this to Levinasan ethics, eliding Bataille's innovations as reader of Mauss. See *La parte maudite*, OC VII.
[47] *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Ann Boldt, Albany: SUNY Press, 1988, p. 95.
[48] *OC* V, p. 114.

writings of the 1940s, such as his scandalously under-read "De l'existentialisme au primat de l'économie," the difficult and often ignored *Summa atheologica*, and the fragmentary and only recently published "Critique of Heidegger." It is this Bataille of the 1940s (along with selected formative writings of the 1920s and 1930s) that remains to be discovered. In the 1950s, Bataille attempted to systematize and popularize his insights in the widely read trilogy *The Accursed Share* and, subsequently, *Erotism*. These works, along with his "Hegel, la mort, et le sacrifice," have long formed the basis of an understanding of Bataille's contribution, due in no small part to Jacques Derrida's reliance on the last of these in his seminal account of Bataille's deconstruction of Hegel, "De l'*Économie* restreinte à l'*économie générale*: un Hegelianisme sans réserve." While Derrida wrote sparingly of the proximity between Bataille and Levinas, he chose not to read Bataille as himself a writer of ethics. This reading is not only possible, but also essential to an understanding of Bataille's relevance today.

We can discern in Bataille an awareness of the specificity and singularity of literary expression, as well as the insurmountable core of sexual difference. These are linked in Bataille's work by his comprehensive critique of utility and cognitivism as dominating human life in modernity. The literary must be understood as formally implying ethics, not merely illustrating specific ethical dilemmas, and we must attend, as Bataille did, to its proximity to what Levinas, and following him, Blanchot, called the *il y a*.[49] Contrary to the prevalent caricature of his work as misogynistic, femininity can be found in Bataille's work, particularly "L'apprenti sorcier" and *Madame Edwarda*, as a non-sublatable difference that calls into question self-presence of the subject.[50] This attention to the literary and to femininity provides the necessary complement to Bataille's materialist account of the experience of alterity.

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[49] See Bataille's "De l'existentialisme au primat de l'économie," *OC* XI, p. 279-308.
[50] See *OC* I, "L'apprenti sorcier," and *Madame Edwarda*, *OC* III.

10. Experience

Jacques Derrida draws attention to Levinas' "*recours à l'expérience elle-même*" and, in particular, "ce qu'il y a de plus irréductible dans l'expérience : passage et sortie vers l'autre."[51] I wish to devote my attention to this theme, an experience of alterity common to both Levinas and Bataille. A preliminary to any discussion of experience in Bataille must be a description, or even a definition, of experience in general. Experience is a vital but slippery term in the history of philosophy. It was John Locke who asked "Whence hath the mind all the materials of reason and knowledge?" and answered "in one word, from experience."[52] The essential argument of empiricism is that we begin with a blank slate, to be filled in by the sights and sounds of experience. The Lockean position relies on a singular subject capable of perceiving and examining objects.

It is to the nature of this subject, which Locke takes for granted, that Kant devotes his monumental critique:

> Experience is without doubt the first product that our understanding brings forth as it works on the raw material of sensible sensations. It is for this very reason the first teaching, and in its progress it is so inexhaustible in new instruction that the chain of life in all future generations will never have any lack of new information that can be gathered on this terrain. Nevertheless it is far from the only field to which our understanding can be restricted. It tells us, to be sure, what is, but never that it must necessarily be thus and not otherwise.[53]

Kant goes on to say that experience can only provide *a posteriori* empirical evidence, with true universality requiring the *a priori* principles of rational necessity.[54] Kant's goal

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[51] "Violence et métaphysique," *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris: Seuil, 1967, p. 123.
[52] Locke, John, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser, vol. 1, New York: Dover, 1959. Book II, I. "Of Ideas in General, and Their Origins."
[53] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction, I. "The idea of transcendental philosophy," p. 127. Trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.
[54] Ibid.

is to establish the *a priori* conditions for experience, and to this end he requires consideration of the capacities of a knowing subject. It is from these governing principles, the properties of the transcendental subject, that we can learn the necessities and certainties of our senses, the validity of our experience. We find, then, in Lockean empiricism and in Kantian transcendental idealism, an insistence on the examinations of a subject who receives sense-impressions, and who derives rules and meaning from this data through the activity of reason.

11. Heidegger's *Destruktion* of Experience

Heidegger asserted the destruction of this schema, formulating a new, ontological and phenomenological account of "the things themselves," overcoming the opposition between subject and object.[55] It is Heidegger's argument that all modern philosophy tends to revitalize itself through its emphasis on a primary organizing principle, such as Kant's famous Copernican turn. The *ego cogito*, "the subject, the 'I', reason, spirit, [and] person" serve as "primary guides," but this apparently novel innovation (the modern turn to the subject), for Heidegger, is not the revolution it appears to be.[56] It is provided for by the possibilities of the tradition. In Heidegger's view, the apparently transcendental subject, who provides the foundation for transcendental idealism, is an unquestioned principle taken for granted. Heidegger's claim is that this subject can be interrogated, and found to carry with it its own inheritance from the tradition. Kant's turn to the subject anticipates the centrality of Dasein, but fails to accomplish correct ontology because his subject is still Cartesian, inherited from Scholasticism, which is itself only a misunderstanding and dogmatizing of Aristotle and other ancients.[57]

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[55] Heidegger, Martin, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Introduction, trans. Albert Hofstadter, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982, p. 12
[56] *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1962, p. 22.
[57] Ibid., p. 24.

For this reason, Heidegger carries with him a dismissal of the importance of experience. Following in this belief that an apparently immediate and indispensable description of the source of knowledge – experience – is in fact historicizable and surmountable, Derrida denigrates the term:

> Quant au concept d'expérience, il est ici fort embarrassant. Comme toutes les notion dont nous nous servons ici, il appartient à l'histoire de la métaphysique et nous ne pouvons l'utiliser que sous rature. « *Expérience* » a toujours désigné le rapport à une présence, que ce rapport ait ou non la forme de la conscience. Nous devons toutefois, selon cette sorte de contorsion et de contention à laquelle le discours est ici obligé, épuiser les ressources du concept d'expérience avant et afin de l'atteindre, par déconstruction, en son dernier fond. C'est la seule condition pour échapper à la fois l' « empirisme » et aux critiques « naïves » de l'expérience.[58]

If the word "experience" must refer to a subject-object dichotomy – either Locke's *tabula rasa* subject or Kant's transcendental unity of apperception – it is without meaning in the framework given here by Heidegger or Derrida.

12. *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*

However, what if *experience* did not inevitably correlate to the perceptions of a subject or the examined qualities of an object? What if a word as common in everyday language as experience had other meanings and carried with it other possibilities?

The word "experience" in English translates two separate terms in German and French. German philosophers such as Kant and G.W.F. Hegel speak of *Erfahrung*, and this is how Locke's "experience" is translated.[59] Wilhelm Dilthey, the hermeneuticists, and existentialists use the term *Erlebnis*, which is rendered *le vécu* in French, and sometimes

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[58] *De la grammatologie*, première partie, chapitre 2, "Le dehors ~~est~~ le dedans," p. 89.
[59] Thomas Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault and Historical Reason*, Volume Two, "Experience and the Lived," p. 209.

as "lived experience" in English.[60] *Erfahrung* could be said to be prior to the subject-object distinction, while *Erlebnis* necessarily implies it.

Insofar as Kant and Hegel rely on the power of a constitutive subject, they are speaking of *Erlebnis* while writing *Erfahrung*; an *Erlebnis* is an *Erfahrung* with a subject. In this hypothesis, it was the accomplishment of Dilthey and later hermeneutics and phenomenology to make this necessary subject explicit. The word *Erfahrung* could refer to something else, another kind of event, one not reliant on the subject enshrined by Locke and Kant. There is, then, another kind of *Erfahrung*, a new experience to which post-structuralists might appeal, such as the experience, mentioned by Michel Foucault, from which one emerges transformed.[61] Along these lines, Foucault distinguishes between an experience described by the phenomenologists, an *Erlebnis*, and another valence of experience that he associates with Bataille, Nietzsche, Blanchot and Klossowski, a form of *Erfahrung* radically distinct from Kant's and Hegel's:

> The phenomenologist's experience is basically a certain way of casting an introspective [*réflexif*] glance on some object of lived experience [*du vécu*], on the everyday in its transitory form, in order to grasp meanings [*significations*]. For Nietzsche, Bataille, Blanchot, on the contrary, experience is trying to arrive at a certain point in life that is as close to the 'unlivable' as possible. What this requires is the greatest degree of intensity and of impossibility, at the same time.[62]

For Foucault, phenomenological experience relies on a subject, whereas a more literary experience unsettles this subject, or even renders it no longer a subject:

> [...] phenomenology attempts to recapture the meaning [*signification*] of everyday experience in order to rediscover the sense in which the subject that I am is indeed

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Quoted in Thomas Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault and Historical Reason: Volume Two*, "Experience and the Lived," p. 224.
[62] Ibid.

> responsible, in its transcendental functions, for founding that experience together with its significations. On the other hand, for Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot, experience has the function of wrenching [*arracher*] the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution. This is a project of de-subjectivation.[63]

Foucault associates de-subjectivation with Bataille's experience.[64] For Foucault, this experience also carries with it an essential relationship to alterity.[65] This understanding of experience can be brought into conversation with a later account of experience found in Derrida's work. The material experience of ethics that I strive to elucidate in Bataille's work can be read as common to both this Foucauldian account of de-subjectivation and the Derridean description of an "experience of the impossible."[66]

13. Justice and the Experience of the Impossible

In *Force de loi: Le « Fondement mystique de l'autorité »*, Derrida discusses as second valence of the word experience which he associates with justice. In this controversial piece, Derrida writes that justice, unlike law, is not deconstructible, but is identical to deconstruction.[67] Justice becomes redefined as the inevitable outside to law, which relies on authority; deconstruction is the very occurrence of justice as exterior to or beyond law. It is at this point that Derrida says, "Elle [deconstruction/justice] est possible comme un expérience de l'impossible, là où, même si elle n'existe pas, si elle n'est pas *présente*, pas encore ou jamais, *il y a* la justice."[68] It is necessary to note the emphasis that "*il y a*" justice, because this links Derrida's insight to the *il y a* to which we will pay

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[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] "An experience is something that one has completely alone but can fully have only to the extent that it escapes pure subjectivity and that others can also … go through it themselves." Ibid.
[66] Derrida, Jacques, *Force de loi: Le « Fondement mystique de l'autorité »*, Paris : Galilee, 1994, p. 34-35. This renewed interest in experience on Derrida's part is likely mediated by Jean-Luc Nancy; see his *L'expérience de la liberté*, Paris: Galilée, 1988.
[67] Ibid., p. 14-15.
[68] Ibid., p. 35.

considerable attention as common ground between Levinas and Derrida. In this passage, Derrida links justice to an inexistence, or a potential existence (a potential that is never truly actual), that relies on possibility.

This possibility and (non)existence are given as an impossible experience. It is nothing other than impossible experience to which Bataille devoted himself, and this is the topic of every word of his maddeningly difficult *Summa atheologica*, not to mention his very late work *L'Impossible*.[69] This experience, in contrast to the Lockean and Kantian experiences that rely on a subject who patiently deciphers the sense-data with which he is bombarded, radically unsettles the primacy of the subject in favor of a kind of extreme empiricism. While this is not the place to discuss the distinction between Foucault's de-subjectivation and Derrida's experience of the impossible, we must note that Bataille stands as a predecessor to this account of experience, one that is essential to the ethics of post-structuralism. It is Bataille who first considered experience as requiring the exteriority of "un lien avec ce *lui* obscur."[70]

14. Bataille: Early and Late

Derrida is essential to the reception of Bataille, in particular his classic essay "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale : Un hegelianisme sans réserve."[71] Derrida's article primarily articulates a Hegelian, discursive Bataille, who stands as the frontispiece to the entire deconstructive engagement with Hegel. While Derrida demonstrates familiarity with all of Bataille's work, he draws much of his reading from the 1955 "Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice," to some degree from *Erotism* (1953), and to a lesser extent the *Summa atheologica* work of the early 1940s.[72] While Derrida notes a similarity

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[69] *OC* V, VI; *L'impossible*, Paris: Minuit, 1962.
[70] Bataille, *OC V*, *L'expérience intérieure*, deuxième partie : "Le supplice."
[71] *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris: Seuil, 1967, p. 369-408.
[72] *OC* V, VI, VIII, IX.

between Levinas and Bataille in "Violence et métaphysique," my contention is that they were even closer than Derrida realized.[73]

Derrida tends to interpret sovereignty as a radicalized mastery: an excessively autonomous act. In my reading, Bataille's thought tends toward an unusual sort of heteronymy, to such a degree that alterity and its encounter is crucial. From my perspective, Bataille made efforts to popularize his work in the 1950s, such as in the pieces "Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice" and *Erotism* that Derrida cites. These efforts towards accessibility and systematization occluded the movement toward the other that is more apparent in Bataille's earlier work, which I emphasize in this study. In particular, I read *Madame Edwarda* as an ethical summit for Bataille's work, from which the later material can be seen as a descent. For this reason, I give relatively scant attention to *La parte maudite*, despite its importance and ample coverage in secondary literature. Throughout my study, I read Bataille as an interventionist thinker who draws heavily on interlocution. In particular, I emphasize the importance of the Marquis de Sade, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Pierre Klossowski. To an even greater degree, I insist on the preeminence of concerns found in Heidegger, Alexandre Kojève, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Levinas.

15. Chapter Abstracts

In "Death and Language: Heidegger, Kojève, Bataille," I deal with Bataille's debts to Kojève and Heidegger, and specifically their considerations of the problem of death. I argue that Bataille breaks with both Kojève's and Heidegger's conceptions, instead developing a position that argues for the necessity of literary language in grappling with finitude. I compare this position with Levinas's similar ideas on the *il y a* (an impersonal state of being that precedes and outlives self-consciousness). While

[73] Ibid., p. 151.

Levinas and Bataille are very close in this preoccupation, Bataille advocates its necessity in stronger terms than Levinas, who often sees it, and literature itself, as threats to his ethical project.

"Politics and the Dead God: Freud, Bataille, and the Execution of the King" is focused on Freud's location of the origins of fraternal community in shared complicity in a great sin. Consideration is paid to Freud's analysis of the desire for transgression and its relation to Bataille's work. A literary strategy of reading, however, calls into question the rationalist underpinnings of Freud's endeavor, as well as the model of the omnipotent father as origin and ideal. Bataille suggests a contrary perspective on transgression, one linked to subversion. Where Freud derives the bonds of human civilization from atonement for the murder of the primal father, Bataille proposes a model for community as a headless relation. This alternative conception can be followed to contemporary thought on democracy, which attempts to reconsider the tradition of political philosophy without recourse to a monarchical figure.

"Eroticism, Ethics, and Literature: Bataille's Fiction and the Opening to Alterity" approaches the sizable number of commentators who have seen Bataille as a prototypical pornographer, and hence a misogynist. A more sophisticated derivation of this argument declares that, regardless of the subversive intent and stylistic complexities of Bataille's narratives, he obsessively return to iterations of an essentially Oedipal (and, hence, regressive) fantasy. This thesis departs from these ideas by directing close attention to his notion of the feminine. My contention is that Bataille characterizes the encounter with femininity as an interrupting the identification with any ego ideal. A close reading of Bataille's narrative *Madame Edwarda* demonstrates the intrication of his thought on the literary and the ethical, routed through his consideration of sexual difference.

The final chapter, "Bataille's Experience Outside the Subject: An Intervention in Lacanian Theories of Subjectivity" examines Bataille's work as an impetus for Derrida's understanding of dissemination – a thought that cannot be said to find its origin in a self-conscious subject. It is also one starting point for the novel theory of subjectivity associated with Lacan. This chapter discusses Bataille's idea of *ipseity* (self-sameness) as already an antiphrasis (a name that describes the opposite of its etymological meaning). The opposing directions represented by Derrida and Lacan can each be seen as attempts to grapple with the radical finitude and alterity meditated on by Bataille. The project concludes with attention to the dimension of otherness present in Bataille's work. I characterize his ethics as more radical than conventional tolerance, which relies on the primacy of a free and self-aware subject. At stake here, among other things, is a reading of Hegel's "absolute knowledge": either a teleological completion, as Kojève has it, or an endless self-rending (somehow recognized as such), as in Zizek's reading. A necessary cleaving to Hegelian notions is crucial for a clarification of Bataille's insights, and his position on the "ebullition" of the subject. This final chapter revisits Bataille's notion of the irreducibly literary character of communication in order to better understand what is at stake in contemporary attempts to reinvigorate subjectivity, and what sort of materialism is necessary to animate this new transcendence.

Chapter One: Death and Language: Heidegger, Kojève, Bataille

1. Introduction

Bataille believes that we require a radical understanding of mortality. He derives this claim from the lectures of Alexandre Kojève, and shares this preoccupation with Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas. All four thinkers assert the understanding of mortality as fundamental to any subsequent project. Unexpectedly, each also claims that this apprehension of finitude is bound to the literary use of language. Bataille and Levinas accuse Heidegger of misconceiving the relation between the self and another human being, and locate his political missteps as originating with this error. I will argue that Bataille draws from both Kojève and Heidegger, criticizing each in the language of the other. Last, each of the four has a different way of conceiving the role of matter, with Bataille striving to elucidate it as fundamental to death, alterity, and the literary. These four axes (finitude, the Other, language, and materiality) structure my inquiry.

I will focus on texts from the 1940s that might be described as "pseudo-phenomenological": The *Summa atheologica* and the "Critique of Heidegger." Bataille is often discussed either in purely literary terms, or as a precursor to post-structuralism, with the phenomenological elements of his thought left largely uninterrogated. However, taking Bataille seriously as a thinker in this tradition will not give his contributions over to the philosophers. This is the necessity of the "pseudo-" prefix, which is not derogatory. Bataille's primary concerns – finitude, literature, matter – escape the vocabulary of phenomenology. For Bataille, a phenomenology of death proves to be the death of phenomenology. This approach reveals literature as the place of excess separating Bataille from the phenomenological (and indeed more broadly philosophical) tradition.

2. Alexandre Kojève and the French Reception of Hegel
2A. Death

Bataille credited Kojève's seminars on Hegel, which he attended with great fascination, as crucial to his thought.[74] Kojève advances a radical re-reading of Hegel, focusing almost entirely on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, written in 1807, and contemporary lectures.[75] Hegel had envisioned the *Phenomenology* as the ontogenetic groundwork for the accomplishment of Science. This means that Hegel's real goal is to establish true metaphysics: the laws of dialectics set forth in the *Logic*. The *Phenomenology* is a historical demonstration, a distinction from and incorporation of philosophical predecessors, and an account of how the *Logic* could have come to be discovered by a man named Hegel. Seen on its most ambitious terms, it is meant to account for the totality of historical knowledge in both its abstract form and concrete fulfillment – the explanation of human strivings latent in all historical moments, and the possibilities for their contemporary realization. The *Phenomenology*, then, traces the advent of human self-consciousness in ancient Greece, the discovery of Christianity and the Enlightenment, and history's conclusion with the French Revolution and Napoleon. Hegel had been virtually unknown in the French context, with a ban on his presence in French universities imposed by Leon Brunschvicg. As a result, he had been widely considered to be a raving metaphysician as a philosopher, and his thought of history and the political to be a mere apology for the absolutist Prussian state.[76] Kojève meditates on

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[74] The lectures were conducted from 1933 to 1939. Bataille wrote of being "rompu, broyé tué dix fois : suffoqué et cloué" by the lectures. Surya, "L'Histoire et ses fins, la fin de l'histoire," p. 198. He later wrote, "« Personne autant que lui n'a étendu en profondeur les possibilités d'intelligence (aucune doctrine n'est comparable à la sienne : c'est le sommet de l'intelligence positive. »" *OC V*, *L'expérience intérieure*, p. 128. Levinas was also present, though they do not seem to have met. Other attendees included Maurice Merelau-Ponty, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Jacques Lacan.

[75] Judith Butler suggests that "the *Phenomenology* stops with Chapter 4 for Kojève, for it is there that the structures of desire, action, recognition, and reciprocity are revealed as the conditions for historical life universally." *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, New York: Columbia UP, 1999, p. 64. Ethan Kleinberg agrees with this claim; see *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927-1961*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005, p. 72. These claims leave aside chapter 6, Hegel's analysis of the Terror, which is crucial for Kojève.

[76] Hegel's argument is that the French revolution inaugurates a post-feudal community, which is imposed militarily throughout Europe by Napoleon. Following Napoleon's defeat, Hegel discusses the Prussian state as the culmination of modern man and culture in his *Philosophy of Right*. After Hegel's death, we typically schematize his followers as falling into one of two groups. "Old Hegelians" were arch-conservative

the power of the negative, the dialectic of lordship and bondage, and the revolutionary Terror. These passages allow Kojève to reinvent Hegel as a Marxist, an atheist, and an existentialist. Stuart Barnett describes Kojève's Hegel as "anthropo-thanatological."[77] This label indicates that Kojève views consciousness as depending on a consideration of man; further, man's finitude and mortality; and as requiring a genetic account, rather than being accepted as original. In addition, we will see that Kojève emphasizes the particularly *discursive* nature of man's freedom and mortality, pointing the way to the emphasis on language in post-Sartrean French thought.

It is Kojève's appropriation of insights from Marx and Heidegger that provide the key to his notion of the human relationship with death.

> Heidegger a repris les thèmes hégéliens de la mort; mais il néglige les thèmes complémentaires de la Lutte et du Travail; aussi sa philosophie ne réussit-elle pas à rendre compte de l'Histoire. – Marx maintient les thèmes de la Lutte et du Travail, et sa philosophie est ainsi essentiellement « historiciste »; mais il néglige les thème de la mort (tout en admettant que l'homme est mortel); c'est pourquoi il ne voit pas (et encore moins certains « marxistes ») que la Révolution est non pas seulement en fait, mais encore essentiellement et nécessairement – sanglante (thème hégélien de la Terreur).[78]

These two sentences, published as the final footnote to an appendix, tell us why the revolution announcing the conclusion of history requires blood. For Kojève, as it will be

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defenders of the Bismarckian order, and "young Hegelians" supported revolutionary aims in order to implement greater material equality. Karl Marx is the greatest successor to the latter tradition. See Marcuse, Herbert, introduction to Part II, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, Humanity Books, 1999. Kojève, a self-proclaimed Marxist of the right, achieved much of his enduring fame for returning to the theme of the "end of History." He argued that Stalin and America had each finally realized a worldwide classless society, and that the Japanese were in the midst of a post-historical *dénouement*, an aimless connoisseurship.

[77] *Hegel After Derrida*, ed. Stuart Barnett, New York: Routledge, 1998, "Introduction: Hegel Before Derrida," 24.

[78] *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel. Leçons sur la* Phénoménologie de l'Esprit. Professées de 1933 à 1939 à l'École des Hautes Études. Réunies et publiées par Raymond Queneau, Appendix II. "L'idée de la mort dans la philosophie de Hegel," p. 575. Paris: Gallimard, 1947.

for Bataille, the revolution *means* death.[79] We find in this statement the synthesis between the left and the right Kojève argued was already staring at us, out of Hegel. Marx failed to consider the significance of death adequately, Heidegger neglects history, but supplemented with Hegel, all three tell us that revolution is a confrontation with death, a collective commitment to endure mortality.

2B. The Human Subject

In the lecture "L'idée de la mort dans la philosophie de Hegel," delivered in 1933 and 1934, Kojève argues that Hegel's first innovation, expressed in paragraph 17 of the Preface, regards the identity of Subject and Substance. This is to consider the Subject, the knowing observer of the world, as equiprimordial with Substance, the world as it presents itself it to be known.[80] Paradoxically, Kojève argues that Hegel's subject establishes this knowledge of the totality of substance by first recognizing itself as separate from the world in which it lives. So, in contrast to pre-Kantian metaphysics and post-Kantian idealism, it is impossible to formulate a true philosophy without considering the capacities and restrictions of the being doing the philosophizing.[81] Hegel's great philosophical rivals – the ancients and Spinoza, in particular – imagine that the knowing subject is not crucially distinct from the world that is observed. Man is different, and made so by negativity. Kojève's Hegel argues that this subject is the only agent capable of producing meaning. The Hegelian system depends on negation in order to maintain distinctions. Failing to consider a knowing subject as separate results in the "night in which all cows are black," a self-identity that leaves no place for freedom or even

[79] Bataille declares, along with Kojève but more provocatively, that "sans la compréhension sadique d'une nature incontestable tonitruante et torrentielle, il ne peut y avoir de révolutionnaires, il n'y a qu'une écœurante sentimentalité utopique." "La valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade (I)," Dossier de la polémique avec André Breton, *OC* II, p. 67.
[80] p. 529.
[81] Ibid.

intellectual perception.[82] In Kojève's reading, the Subject on whom Substance (the world, matter, nature) and Science (knowledge and consciousness) depends is defined as Man. Man's self-consciousness is not immediate, but emerges through the historical labor of this critical capacity.

Kojève sees Substance, nature apart from man and from history, as self-identical.[83] It does not change; it is a sort of pantheistic one-ness of everything. It is the action of the Subject to impose distinctions and understanding. Hence, there must be a moment of distinction of Man and subjectivity from Nature and the self-identical. The creation of Man, by himself, is always an activity of negation; the creation of Man is always a separation of the self from everything else.[84] Man is not immediately aware of his negating activity; his discovery of himself as separate from Nature takes place in history. Kojève sees Greek man as completely natural, without freedom, history or individuality.[85]

Kojève argues that Judaism falls short of its true insight by positing man as distinct from, and subject to, God. Christianity makes the advance of identifying the human and the divine, even subjecting God to death in the person of Jesus Christ, but falters in its insight by granting man the possibility of an afterlife.[86] According to Kojève, Hegel's Man does not possess an immortal soul, making Hegel the realization of historical free individuality.[87] Freedom requires separation from the all-encompassing rule of nature. To achieve this freedom, Man must also be mortal: not only finite, as an animal would be, but conscious of finitude. Man achieves self-consciousness when he is

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[82] Paragraph 16 of the preface. Hegel, G.W.F., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977, p. 9. For an alternate translation and explication of this passage, see Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Hegel's Preface to the* Phenomenology of Spirit, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005, p. 94-95.
[83] p. 530. This reading of Substance bears comparison to Sartre's "in-itself." *Being and Nothingness*, Introduction, section VI, "Being-In-Itself," trans. Hazel E. Barnes, Washington Square Press.
[84] Kojève, p. 531.
[85] p. 535.
[86] p. 535. See I Corinthians 15:55.
[87] p. 538.

willing to accept the inevitability of death.[88] Further, man demonstrates that he has mastery over this consciousness by refusing to fear death. Rather, human beings are capable of risking death in full knowledge of the danger of their actions. Men can even kill themselves, demonstrating full acceptance of their mortality and ownership of their own death.[89] Consciousness of death is the grounds for Man's self-recognition. Hegel dramatizes the means of the ontogenesis of this mediated self-consciousness in his famous dialectic of lordship and bondage. This how Hegel envisages Man discovering his own finitude, in a kind of primordial past, that will set the basic problems of human development throughout history. Hegel outlines a problem of self-recognition, and posits struggle and death as its key.[90]

Kojève argues that animal desire is directed at an object necessary for survival. Human desire, in contrast, has the capacity to be aimed at *nothing*. There is no *nothing* in Nature; only Man can posit a lack through his essence as distinct and mortal. Nothing comes into the world, and it comes into the world because Man desires it. Humans certainly have an animal aspect that requires the desire for the necessities of survival; however, the essence of *human* Desire is for an object that surpasses nature and reality, so human desire is itself negativity.[91] Human desire is itself nothing, a pure negative force. Kojève argues that if human desire is aimed at nothing, than desire must be aimed

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[88] p. 539.
[89] This bears comparison to Friedrich Nietzsche, "One perishes by no one but oneself. Only 'natural' death is death for the most contemptible reasons, an unfree death, a death at the *wrong* time, a coward's death. From love of *life* one ought to desire to die differently from this: freely, consciously, not accidentally, not suddenly overtaken." *Twilight of the Idols*, "Expeditions of an Untimely Man," aphorism 36, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, New York: Penguin, 1990. Nietzsche sees this control over one's own free death as specifically anti-Christian, and one might wonder if it is much closer to pre-Christian notions of honor. Kojève would argue that the specific distinction from nature, the embrace of *hybris*, is post-Christian.
[90] This takes place in section A of part IV of the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.
[91] Kojève, p. 12. This concern with the *nothing* and its importance to a conscious subject takes inspiration from Heidegger's formulations of ontological difference: "This Being that we are asking about is almost like Nothing, and yet we are always trying to arm and guard ourselves against the presumption of saying that all beings *are not*. But Being remains undiscoverable, almost like Nothing, or in the end *entirely* so." "The Fundamental Questions of Metaphysics," *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, New Haven: Yale UP, 2000, p. 27 (German pagination).

at another desire.[92]

If desire is the negative, then negation is the outcome of desire. The satisfaction of the desire for nothing could be met only in one's own death or the death of another, requiring the risk of the annihilation of one's nihilating consciousness. The encounter of one human with another, in its essence, must be "une lutte à mort en vue de la « reconnaissance »", a fight for prestige.[93] "Prestige" is a form of self-recognition through another, and, from the perspective of the material, nugatory. The one who fails to risk everything, who prefers the continuation of his concrete existence in the world to a willingness to suffer annihilation, will become a slave, He who avoids death, who prefers to live at the price of higher prestige, is reduced to an effectively animal state of desire (preferring material satisfaction to recognition of finitude). The one who refuses to live in an inferior position, who would have preferred conscious acceptance of death, becomes the Master. This struggle is impossible among animals, because their conflicts only take place over concrete objects.[94] The struggle for recognition is the function of the capacity to put prestige above organic concupiscence; so "c'est cet anéantissement de l'animal qui est la création de l'Homme."[95] This makes Man *qua* Man equivalent to the pure capacity for this risk. If it is Man's essence to purchase self-recognition at the risk of death, it follows that "il est la *mort* incarnée."[96]

2C. The Terror

Kojève declares that the essence of individual freedom is negativity, and the essence of that negativity is the conscious willing of death. The goal of history is the formation of a community of autonomous individuals. These individuals would no longer be bonded together by the inadequate relations of aristocratic Masters, who avoid labor

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[92] p. 13.
[93] p. 14.
[94] p. 565.
[95] p. 565.
[96] p. 569.

and exist only for honor and prestige, and toiling Slaves, who are reduced to the animal condition of putting their organic survival above their properly human capacity for thought. The dissolution of the old class society and the birth of a new society of free and equal individuals will depend on the project of a Revolution. This revolution is itself a negation of the social given, itself a positing of a good higher than the continuing and stable presence of the social whole. The revolution is the act of putting an abstract idea, freedom and equality for everyone, above the existing order.[97] The Revolution corresponds to the realization that "all reality is solely spiritual."[98] A collective subject discovers that the state of the world is subject to its perception; collective responsibility is the consequence of this separation from natural inequality. Hegel appeals to an analogy to the experience of the master-slave dialectic; for freedom and equality to be realized, there must be a struggle for societal self-recognition.[99] Unlike in the instance of a war (in which there is a competing collective consciousness desiring recognition by a subordinate), the revolution is an experience like suicide. There is no external enemy, but rather a demonstration of the will to put words above existence.

For this reason, in 1793, the realization of the ideals of 1789, the Revolution eats its children.[100] The Revolution requires that every person be recognized as an example of the community; this mass redefinition denigrates all particular aims in favor of collective desire.[101] There is then, a mass redefinition, a renewed and total commitment to the abstract. An individual defined as an instant of the whole cannot recognize him- or

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[97] p. 557.
[98] *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 584.
[99] This is discussed in section III, "Absolute Freedom and Terror", of part B of chapter 6 of *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The relationship between the dialectic of lordship and bondage and the Terror is in some ways analogous to the relationship between individual authenticity and Being-towards-death, discussed by Heidegger in division II, chapter 1, and authentic *Mit-sein*, in division II, chapter 5.
[100] "[A]u cours de la deuxième étape d'une Révolution véritable, c'est-à-dire vraiment *négatrice* du donné social, elle doit nécessairement se manifester en tant que mort violente collective ou « Terreur »." Kojéve, p. 557.
[101] "[E]ach individual consciousness raises itself out of its allotted sphere," but "grasps all spheres as the essence of this will, and therefore can only realize itself in a work which is a work of the whole." Paragraph 585, chapter VI, *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

herself in the universal work. The relationship between the individual and the universal becomes a negation of the individual's existence. When one is guillotined, execution is only a by-product of a death that has already taken place; insofar as they are committed to the abstract community, everyone is dead. Everyone is absolutely free, no longer under the reign of necessity and subtracted from the world, so execution is only the loss of a bet that has already been made.[102]

The imagined community, being a product of the Understanding, sees no need to submit its aims to the exigencies of Reason. "*Being suspected*" becomes equivalent to "*being guilty*," and the political imaginary is given free reign.[103] The Jacobins commit themselves to total freedom and equality, rather than making themselves kings. As Maurice Blanchot puts it, the thought of Saint-Just and Robespierre "est froide, implacable, elle a la liberté d'une tête coupée."[104] Hegel sees this event as traumatic but necessary a kind of collective self-crucifixion and *felix culpa*: the world of human culture will be "rejuvenated by the fear of the lord and master [death]."[105] For Hegel, the human force of Understanding will be provided with its referent in reality, a something to be interpreted by this nothing. Following the same logic, the mechanism of self-consciousness requires a moment of looking death in the face, the struggle for pure prestige, but only to contribute to the subsequent self-recognition and identity of master and slave. The community must pass through an analogous trial, but as a precondition for an existence comprised of free and equal individuals.

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[102] "The sole work and deed of universal freedom is therefore *death*, a death too which has no inner significance or filling, for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water." Chapter VI, paragraph 590.
[103] Paragraph 591.
[104] Blanchot, Maurice. "La littérature et le droit à la mort," *La part du feu*, Paris: Gallimard, 1949, p. 377.
[105] Paragraph 594.

3. Heidegger's Critique of the Experience of Death

Kojève considers Heidegger and Hegel to be consonant on the importance of death. He makes note of Heidegger in two footnotes. In addition to his comment on the Terror, he affirms identity between Heidegger and Hegel on finitude:

> [Heidegger] n'ajoute, au fond, rien de nouveau à l'anthropologie de la PhG (qu'on n'aurait, d'ailleurs, probablement jamais comprise si Heidegger n'avait pas publié son livre); mais l'athéisme ou le finitisme ontologique y sont implicitement affirmés d'une façon parfaitement conséquente.[106]

For Kojève, it is Heidegger's contribution to have clarified Hegel's understanding of human finitude. While something about death would have remained unnoticed without Heidegger's tutelage, it remains Hegelian nonetheless. No doubt Heidegger's statement about the "**freedom towards death**" attendant to *Dasein* was foremost in Kojève's mind.[107] This statement seems redolent of the capacities of Kojève's human subject: Freedom purchased with the risk of suicide. It presents a snag for Kojève that this is not what Heidegger has in mind. Heidegger dismisses the philosophical tropes of "experience" and subjectivity because both fall short of the radicality of death. It is ironic that where Kojève believed he had found the locus of agency – the sacrifice of one's life – Heidegger asserts the dissolution of any such autonomous subject.

Hegel and Kojève insist on death as a confrontation, a struggle with a murderous other. Heidegger, in contrast, never stops reminding us that anxiety towards death is "'in the face of' that potentiality-for-Being which is one's ownmost, non-relational, and not to be outstripped."[108] For Heidegger, my death is mine alone. Even if I were to be murdered in a Hegelian scenario, my killer would be only casually related to the true problem – the

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[106] "La dialectique du réel et la méthode phénoménologique," p. 527.
[107] *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1962, division II, section 1, p. 266 (German pagination).
[108] Ibid., p. 251.

essential death which was bound to be visited on me from some source or other, and which is ultimately a potential that is inside of me; not a danger posed by some hazard. Kojève has read this passage and criticizes Heidegger for neglecting struggle and work. However, Heidegger's comments on the peculiarity of any intellectual consideration of mortality present a greater obstacle to the pulverizing graft of Hegel's duel onto Heidegger's finitude that is crucial to Kojève's argument.[109] Heidegger declares that a phenomenological account of death will always fall short of the truth of dying. Even in Dasein's authentic death, it is apart from "an Experience of its factical demising."[110] To attempt to discuss the significance of death as freely chosen as against one that is merely incidental, as Kojève does, is for Heidegger a presupposing of the concept of death. Heidegger's outlook would see Kojève's weighing of different sorts of death as against one another, determining one as the bearer of a historical goal and the other as accidental, to be deficient in its consideration of the nature of what death *is*.[111]

Heidegger makes clear that suicide is not the issue: "if this were done, Dasein would deprive itself of the very ground for an existing Being-towards-death."[112] Losing in the struggle for life eliminates the capacity to consider death. One might argue that Heidegger is merely stating the obvious point that if one loses in the struggle for life, one is deprived of the capacity to stare death in the face. More than this, he dissociates Being-towards-death from "brooding over death," specifying that this is a means to "weaken it by calculating how we are to have it at our disposal."[113] His Being-towards-death does not reduce death to something we can master. While Kojève's notion of man as death

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[109] *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 575.
[110] *Being and Time*, p. 247.
[111] Heidegger's lack of appetite for such valuations is indicated explicitly in the "Letter on Humanism," in which he writes of preferring instead to think "against values," not as an assertion of "valuelessness and nullity," but rather an attempt "to bring the clearing of the truth of Being before thinking, as against subjectivizing beings into mere objects." Trans. Frank A. Capuzzi with J. Glenn Gray. *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993, p. 251.
[112] *Being and Time*, p. 261.
[113] ibid.

incarnate indicates the possibility of a heroic checkmating, Heidegger describes finitude as an ineffable vanishing point, the "*possibility of impossibility*."[114]

4. Bataille and Death

Bataille's consideration of death emerges in the space between Kojève and Heidegger. From Heidegger, Bataille takes the inappropriable radicality of death; this is clear in a section of *L'expérience intérieure* titled "La mort est en un sens une imposture."[115] Bataille restores the difficulty of Heidegger's death to Kojève's usage of it. It is the necessary failure in the contest with death and the impossibility of rendering it our servant that will emerge as the grounds for Bataille's theories of the literary and of alterity.

> Tant que je vis […] je prends part à ce qui, de toute nécessité, existe, à ce que rien ne peut retirer. Le moi=qui=meurt abandonne cet accord : lui, véritablement, aperçoit ce qui l'entoure comme un vide et soi-même comme un défi à ce vide; le moi=qui=vit se borne à pressentir le vertige où tout finira (beaucoup plus tard).[116]

The consideration of the "moi=qui=meurt" carries with it the impossibility of winning in any staring contest with the void. However, Bataille endorses a Kojèvo-Hegelian belief in finitude as bringing with it separation from the fullness of nature. The "moi=qui=meurt" takes a Kojèvian distance from the world and discovers death through relations with others, but also borrows a Heideggerian insistence on the unthinkable obstacle of finitude. *L'expérience intérieure* tells us that "Séduction, puissance, *souveraineté*, sont nécessaires au moi=qui=meurt : il faut être un dieu pour mourir."[117] While Kojève endorses a man-God equation, Calvary achieved through struggle and death, the power to

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[114] *Being and Time*, p. 262.
[115] *OC* V, p, 83-91. Bataille re-wrote the text from an earlier draft, "Sacrifices," which is included in *OC* I, p. 87-96.
[116] *OC* V, p. 85-86. The equals signs (=) in the phrase "moi=qui=meurt" is a stylistic idiosyncrasy omitted from the English translation.
[117] Ibid., p. 86.

be a God indicated by Bataille is seduction. This activity is absent from Kojève's and Heidegger's analyses, providing us with a clue as to the distance Bataille takes from both of them.

The attention to seduction has a connotative relationship to sexual passion. Seduction bears the most obvious comparison, in Kojève's discourse, to love, which Kojève names as essentially human, but subordinate to the risk of death as the real locus of freedom.[118] Heidegger famously ignores love, later specifying its subsumation in his consideration of *Sorge* (care).[119] However, Bataille here speaks not of love but seduction, which has a much more physical than spiritual connotation. Not only is seduction aimed at the body, it also has an etymological relationship to refusal and escape, especially from servitude.[120] Bataille here emphasizes a relationship to an implicit other (one cannot, after all, seduce oneself); further, he implies a physical, rather than intellectual connection to that other; and advocates desertion of the duties of servitude, rather than violent confrontation with the master. In addition to Hegel's philosophical mastery, Bataille appears to have felt an intense need to escape the preeminence of Heidegger's thought.

While much has been written on Bataille and Hegel, little regard has been given to Bataille's reading of Heidegger.[121] This neglect can be attributed to a number of causes. Desire to extricate Bataille from the suspicion of Nazi sympathy is one reason, the impression that Frenchmen of his generation had only a sketchy knowledge of Heidegger is another.[122] To be sure, there are few allusions to Heidegger in Bataille's

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[118] *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, "La dialectique du réel et la méthode phénoménologique," footnote, p. 514.
[119] See *Zollikon Seminars*: *Protocols – Conversations – Letters*, trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay, conversations with Medard Boss, 1961-1972, July 14, 1969, Zollikon, p. 286.
[120] In 1526, the verb "seduce" meant "to persuade a vassal, etc., to desert his allegiance or service;" from Latin, seducere, "lead away, lead astray." "seduce." *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Douglas Harper, Historian. 26 Oct. 2008. <Dictionary.com http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/seduce>.
[121] The recognition of Bataille's importance to the reading of Hegel is partly owed to the prestige of Derrida's "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale," *L'écriture et la différence*, p. 369-408.
[122] Bataille's opponents exploited his debts to Heidegger. Boris Souvarine referred to Bataille as a follower of that "nazi fuligineux" Heidegger. See Surya, IV, « J'aime l'ignorance touchant l'avenir », p. 298.

work, in contrast to his obsession with Hegel.[123] Bataille himself claimed that "sans avoir jamais eu pour Heidegger, autre chose qu'un attrait énervé, il m'arrivait de le lire (c'est vrai, sauf exception, pas en allemand)," in 1943.[124]

However, Stefanous Geroulanos's research indicates that Bataille read *What Is Metaphysics?* at some point in the 1930s, and *Sein und Zeit* in January 1934.[125] Bataille was made aware of Heidegger's work, prior to Hegel's, by attending courses taught by Alexandre Koyré.[126] Kojève's lectures only deepened this interest. While Bataille's writings on Heidegger are sparse, he did write a fragmentary "Critique of Heidegger."[127] It was never finished and is pockmarked with crossed-out passages, attesting to the anxiety accompanying Bataille's attempt to overcome such a compelling thinker.[128] Subtitled "Critique of a philosophy of fascism," the notes present an early recognition of the political problems attendant to any Heideggerian inheritance.[129] Bataille set forth a project to distinguish himself from Heidegger and from fascism, and to establish links between Heidegger's ontology and his political choices.

Bataille begins his notes with a consideration of love, which he defines as "The fact of chance/the existence of one and of the other/how the being isolated by love is nevertheless rejected,/at each moment in [~~the orbit~~] the system of the general/tear [déchirement] of being (further on, we will discuss how/the various tears of being

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Likewise, Habermas can hardly intend flattery when he compares the two. For a historicized account of Heidegger's reception and distinct readings, see Kleinberg, Ethan, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927-1961*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005.

[123] Michel Surya has claimed that Bataille had little interest in Heidegger, having read more of Jaspers and Husserl. *Georges Bataille : La mort à l'œuvre*, p. 291.

[124] *OC* IV, p. 365.

[125] Geroulanos, p. 10-11. *What Is Metaphysics?* was translated in 1931. There are accounts that Heidegger said that Bataille was "la meilleure tête pensante française," but this is unconfirmed, and Bataille seems to have believed that Heidegger had him mixed up with Blanchot. "À Jérôme Lindon, Orléans, le 31 janvier [19]62", *Choix de lettres*, *1917-1962*, édition établie, présentée et annotée par Michel Surya, Paris: Gallimard, p. 582.

[126] These courses were conducted between 1931 and 1933. Geroulanos, p. 10-11.

[127] Written as a project for an appendix at some point between 1934 and 1937, this is not included in his complete works, but translated into English by Geroulanos, in 2006.

[128] On the other hand, he includes plans for a "Critique of society" and a "Critique of God," so his confidence was apparently not in short supply. "Critique of Heidegger," p. 27.

[129] p. 25.

connect back to each other)."[130] This consideration, in the opening pages of a critique, draws our attention to the omission of love in *Being and Time*. Bataille argues that Heidegger neglects love, which is bound to the consideration of the aleatory, to rejection, and sundering from being. While Heidegger would claim that he had been misunderstood, I will argue that Bataille presents a genuine challenge to Heideggerian thought. This challenge is comparable to that of Levinas, but distinct in its demand for an experience of escape and of intimacy, linked to a peculiar variety of materialism.

In these notes, Bataille speaks of a constant theme in his work: "—The world of homogeneity and the necessity of exit [*sortie*]."[131] This exit is what Bataille will also call *sovereignty*: "What happens when life frees itself from degradation."[132] Bataille specifies that this process of liberation is accompanied by anxiety, in Heidegger's sense, but also by "tumult, and the impression of being torn."[133] Bataille pays considerable attention to the notion of intentionality, which he argues is linked, but not reducible, to what he calls homogeneity.[134] Being torn, however, is something distinct from intentionality, and from Bataille's characterization of Heidegger.

Bataille speaks of *le moi*, the "I am there," which Heidegger famously calls *Dasein*.[135] Bataille argues that *le moi* carries with it intentionality, but an intention that "conflicts with itself [*elle se discorde*] when achieving intentional form. Yet it cannot exist without intention."[136] *Le moi*, unlike Dasein, apprehends objects intentionally – it is not always-already thrown into a world of beings. *Le moi* is brought into existence by intention, but also led into self-contradiction thereby. Bataille does not endorse one of Heidegger's departures from Husserl. Heidegger argues that existence is always being-in-

[130] ibid. He also scribbles a comment about Freud in the margin, which will be addressed subsequently in this study.
[131] p. 26.
[132] ibid.
[133] ibid.
[134] ibid.
[135] Bataille's "le moi" follows Husserl's usage of *das Ich* and Sartre's translation as *le moi*.
[136] p. 26.

the-world, thrown into a mood-inflected environment of objects ready-to-hand, and that as a result the language of the ego and of intentionality can be discarded. Bataille, in contrast, maintains the language of intention and of ego. This has the upside of refusing to view the "I am there" as always-already in the world; the self can be considered as predating this immersion. Bataille continues: "The ego [*le moi*] is thus only revealed by intention, albeit too much – and in its development, it is further revealed by the critique of the intentionality of the ego, by the support [*supportation*] of improbability, by a betrayal of all intentionality."[137] In other words, Bataille takes intention to be a teleological bearer of identity.

Bataille's ego comes into view when it takes for itself a task in the world, and yet the assumption of this project diminishes its truth. To enter into the world is to be in conflict with oneself. Being-in-the-world conceals a more radical separation.[138] The self before intentionality is a pure essence, lacking any project. However, this pre-intentional self only appears *after* its acceptance of a teleological goal. In other words, the ego or essential self reveals itself by its contradiction with the task it inevitably bears. The self is always-already torn, because it does not exist without an intention, while at the same time not fully existent insofar as this necessary intention diminishes its freedom and potential. This self is not only existent prior to action in the world, in the primordial past, but subsequent to the end of all such action. This is why Bataille names it *le moi=qui=meurt*.[139]

The original self is the self that dies. This self, repudiating all tasks and activities, is resonant with the one that is revealed by the universal execution of Hegel's Terror. The *moi=qui=meurt* is without project and depersonalized. Bataille puts this paradoxically

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[137] ibid.
[138] As argued earlier, the radical separation of the subject is Kojève's thesis, and not at all Heidegger's.
[139] p. 26.

and succinctly: "Being outside: what the ego exists for."[140] *Le moi*'s true "purpose" is the "outside." That is, an absolute absence of purpose, an interruption of the teleological. This self is distinct from Heidegger's, in that it depends on intentionality, rather than being already Thrown. Further, this is self is distinct from the intentionality on which it depends.[141] The self is capable of experiencing an intimate tearing; the tearing of bearing an intention that estranges the self from its initial and final absence from any work. This tearing is linked to the negativity Kojève locates in Hegel, and particularly the project-less negativity of the already-dead citizen of the Terror. Unlike for Heidegger, both intentionality and negativity are essential to Bataille's conception of existence.

Geroulanos notes that Bataille only mentions Heidegger's name twice in these notes, once in the title.[142] The second mention is parenthetical, when Bataille indicates the "Impossibility of existing for oneself – which amounts to saying: dying (Heideggerian transcendence)."[143] Bataille here states that an existence for oneself, a non-conflictual existence, would require a repudiation of project. However, because the self appears through its intentionality and its individualization, such an escape would require the act of dying. This act is impossible for the self, as Heidegger understood. Bataille affirms Heidegger's emphasis on death as an impossibility. Our attention will now rest on a commentator who emphasizes the kinship between Bataille and Heidegger.

5. Habermas's Identification of Bataille with Heidegger

In 1984, Jürgen Habermas made a contribution to the handful of articles addressing the relationship between Bataille and Heidegger. Habermas declares equivalence between Bataille's transgression and Heidegger's transcendence.[144]

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[140] p. 27.
[141] For this reason, Bataille's *moi* is different from Husserl's *das Ich*.
[142] ibid.
[143] ibid.
[144] "The French Path to Postmodernity: Bataille between Eroticism and General Economics," *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, eds. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, p. 169.

Habermas speaks of a "common project" between Bataille and Heidegger. They share desires to overcome modernity, to discard Occidental rationalism, and to outstrip subjectivism.[145] Habermas admits the distinction that Bataille's objection to rationalization is primarily ethical, whereas Heidegger's is more ontological.[146] It is my contention that Bataille takes a more "ontological" approach in the "Critique of Heidegger" piece, as well as in the *Summa athelogica* writings. However, it is correct that Bataille's difference from Heidegger is essentially an ethical one, whatever Bataille's recourse to the language of ontology.

Habermas notes two genuine points of discord between Bataille and Heidegger, both of which he quickly makes inconsequential. The first of these is their contrary approaches to the surpassing of subjectivity. Heidegger renders the subject "dethroned and disempowered in favour of a super-foundationalist dispensation of Being," whereas, in Bataille's work, "spontaneity is given back its outlawed drives."[147] This distinction, between surrender and liberation, is the essence of Bataille's departure from Heidegger. This is why "not *Being* but *sovereignty*" is privileged in Bataille's work, leading to a "proximity (unthinkable for Heidegger) to Nietzsche's aesthetically inspired concept of freedom and superhuman self-assertion."[148] Habermas links the difference between sovereignty and Being to Nietzsche, and he is correct in doing so, while he is reductive to the point of being wrong in applying the adjective "aesthetic." While Habermas argues that Bataille is more Nietzschean than Heidegger, he relies on a Heideggerian reading of Nietzsche. The assertion that Nietzsche's worldview is essentially aestheticist is a Heideggerian contention that Bataille would dispute.[149]

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[145] p. 168-169.
[146] p. 169.
[147] p. 169-170.
[148] p. 170.
[149] Volume I of Heidegger's *Nietzsche* is entitled *The Will to Power as Art*. Trans. David Farrell Krell, San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1991. See also "Nietzsche's Word: 'God Is Dead,'" *Off the Beaten Track*,

Habermas argues, rightly, that Bataille is closer to Nietzsche than Heidegger. Notwithstanding this, his attempt to convey the link between Bataille and Nietzsche errs in cleaving too closely to the Heideggerian reading: "For Bataille, as for Nietzsche, there is a convergence between the self-aggrandizing and meaning-creating will-to-power and a cosmically moored fatalism of the eternal return of the same."[150] Habermas gives Nietzsche entirely over to Heidegger when he identifies the will to power with self-aggrandizement and meaning-creation.[151] Heidegger is far from Bataille when he states equivalence between will-to-power and will to mastery. Further, Bataille's eternal return has nothing in common with Heidegger's final guarantor of metaphysics, or what Habermas aligns with a cosmic pessimism.

Habermas speaks to the point when he notes a common "anarchist trait" between Bataille and Nietzsche.[152] Their "thought is aimed against any authority whatsoever, even against the holy," while "for Heidegger, who repeats this thesis [the death of God] in noble tones, it loses all radicality."[153] Even though Heidegger denies God as an ontic entity, "the ontologically restored event of revelation hovers ambiguously about the grammatical place left unoccupied by the demolished God-projection."[154] Habermas sets forth a distinction between Bataille the anarchist and Heidegger the fascist, with the aim of uniting them in their incoherence. Habermas allocates to Heidegger an aristocratic nostalgia for God. This is a place ready to be filled in by the "hero" spoken of in *Being*

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ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002, p. 180-181. Bataille's disagreement with the aestheticist position is detailed in the final section of this chapter.

[150] Ibid.

[151] While this is argued at length in volume I of *Nietzsche*, Heidegger is most succinct in his analysis of will to power and its distinction from self-affirmation in "Nietzsche's Word: 'God Is Dead,'" *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002, p. 174-177.

[152] p. 170.

[153] ibid.

[154] ibid.

and Time, one who will turn out to be the Führer.[155] This sovereign is one that is emphatically different from anything Bataille has in mind.

Habermas indicates that in modernity, there is nothing left to profane. As a result, "Bataille oscillates between an incoherent reattachment to the Hegelian project of a dialectic of enlightenment, on the one hand, and an unmediated juxtaposition of scholarly analysis and mysticism, on the other."[156] It is a refrain in criticisms of Bataille to point out his attachment to a sacred against which he must continually blaspheme.[157] From Habermas's perspective, Heidegger's open place of universal authority is ready for some fascistic sovereign, tantalizing us. Bataille lies in wait at the same opening, ready to mock and reject that divine gap. To Habermas, both have missed the only politico-philosophical point worth making; that is, the founding of a rational community of mutual understanding. It is my contention that what Habermas takes to be a gap for the divine term in Bataille is instead a recurrent fascination with alterity. The blasphemed God, for Bataille, is an apparent transcendence that is always soiled by its material character. This material character is one that is revealed by an unusual attention to language.

6. Death and Literature

With confidence that its obviousness must make it epiphenomenal, Habermas mentions "the obvious differences between erotic writing and scholarly essays on one side, philosophical investigation and Being mysticism on the other."[158] This difference, the difference of style, is to Habermas a superficial one. Where Bataille appears risqué

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[155] Heidegger writes of an "authentic repetition of a possibility of existence that has been – the possibility that Dasein may choose its hero," "grounded existentially in anticipatory resoluteness." Part II, section V, p. 385.
[156] Ibid.
[157] This diagnosis of incoherent reattachment is the Hegelian criticism of Bataille, first made by Sartre and repeated by Zizek, and in an altered form, by Foucault and Agamben. See Sartre, Jean-Paul, "Un nouveau mystique," *Situations I*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971; Zizek, Slavoj, *The Parallax View*, chapter 2: Building Blocks for a Materialist Theology, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006, p. 94-95; Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*, part five, Right of Death and Power over Life, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage, 1990, p. 150; Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, part two: Homo Sacer, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford: Stanford UP, p. 112-113.
[158] p. 168.

and Heidegger sanctified, Habermas sees this as a distraction from their complicity. Habermas thinks so little of this difference that he is comfortable, even after this realization, of collapsing together Bataille's and Heidegger's style, declaring that Foucault's characterization applies equally to each of them.[159] While Habermas sees the style of both men as accepting an extra-philosophical "ordeal," Bataille criticizes Heidegger's remnants of philosophical language.

Bataille thinks more of his own stylistic difference from Heidegger than Habermas does. Indeed, it is necessary to elucidate how this difference in style is crucial to Bataille's distance from Heidegger, and from the metaphysical tradition. Bataille states this implicitly in his "Critique of Heidegger": "In the moment when I write, I breathe with all my strength, and I breathe free. [~~Free to love~~.–]"[160] Recall that Bataille states his difference from Heidegger, on the very first page, as his attention to the problem of love. Bataille here ties this to strength, to freedom, and to writing. We find in Bataille that all his strength becomes apparent, not in a concrete endeavor, but in writing. This is the moment of freedom, and the possibility of love; both these terms rest on a certain understanding of language, and specifically of literary language, rather than the philosophical approach taken by Heidegger.

Bataille's understanding of literature also inherits ideas from Kojève. Kojève's subject imposes meaning through the negative, related to the consciousness of finitude. Kojève also believes that this negative carries with it necessary mediation: Discourse, or language.

> [Homme] révèle un à un, par des mots isolés ou des discours partiels, les éléments constitutifs de la totalité, en les *séparant* de celle-ci pour pouvoir le faire, et c'est seulement l'ensemble de son discours étendu dans le temps qui peut révéler la

[159] "His experience and his knowledge become an ordeal, a deliberate drawing and quartering of that which speaks in philosophical language." ibid.
[160] p. 26.

réalité totale, même simultanée.[161]

The discovery of the world takes place sequentially and in pieces. Further, it is mediated; revelation through language requires a term with no direct relation to the world itself, but necessary to discover that very world. Hegel-Kojève asserts that this linguistic mediation relies on death, that "la révélation discursive de l'Être n'est possible que si l'être révélateur ou parlant est essentiellement fini ou mortel."[162] Why is language, the means of revealing the natural world, intrinsically related to the negative and to mortality? Kojève takes the example of a dog. This dog has an existence in the world, but its distinction from other animals that we give different names is not immediately given by nature; its name is a human creation. This is language's separating force, the ability to distinguish the concept "dog" from an actually existing dog.[163] Words have no natural relation with the object they represent.[164] To give a name is to establish a genus and to detach from the *hic et nunc*. Rather than a singular example, we have in addition the concept of a dog, removed from this living and breathing dog.

Kojève believes that this mediation and discovery through language requires mortal man, because only a being capable of imagining the removal from existence of this dog, could be capable of forging the concept in excess of this possibility (its name). Heidegger will make a similar point, decades later, in his 1959 *On the Way to Language*: "Mortals are they who can experience death as death. Animals cannot do this. But animals cannot speak either. The essential relation between death and language flashes up

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[161] p. 542.
[162] p. 539.
[163] p. 545.
[164] This emphasis on the arbitrariness of the signifier could be related to Ferdinand Saussure: "No one disputes the principle of the arbitrary nature of the sign, but it is often easier to discover a truth than to assign to it its proper place." Part One, Chapter I, "Nature of the Linguistic Sign," *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959, p. 68. Kojève's schema makes the finite subject the center of discourse, however, whereas Saussure's semiology does not rely on "Man." Kojève also presents a strong historicism, while Saussure brackets the diachronic.

before us, but remains still unthought."[165] Heidegger notes a relationship that is essential, but declares it ahead of us, not deriving it or following its consequences.

In the 1940s, Bataille was very close to the literary critic and thinker Maurice Blanchot; they drew from one another's work intensively. For this reason, it is worthwhile to appeal to Blanchot's literary appropriation of Kojève's ideas in order to better understand Bataille's views on language. Blanchot meditates on the relationship between language and death, applying Kojève's insight to a feminine image in order to explore its ramifications:

> [Q]uand je dis « cette femme », la mort réelle est annoncée et déjà présente dans mon langage; mon langage veut dire que cette personne-ci, qui est là, maintenant, peut être détachée d'elle-même, soustraite à son existence et à sa présence et plongée soudain dans un néant d'existence et de présence.[166]

Blanchot endorses Kojève here on the count that language relies on death and announces it. Blanchot's mediation through language means that a woman encountered through linguistic mediation exists outside the world of nature. He argues that encountering another person through the mediation of language involves a contact with death more radical than the struggle for recognition. I do not need to threaten the life of a woman to whom I refer, it is enough to allude to her presence through language to exit the bounds of everyday existence and enter a type of death.[167]

Hegel's discourse is boundless and absolute.[168] Language is capable of asserting anything, discussing impossible objects, constructing agrammatical formulations, and taking on absurd meanings in new contexts. Hegel's goal is to construct the Notion,

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[165] Quoted in Derrida, Jacques, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993, p. 35. Here Heidegger feels comfortable characterizing death as an experience, which reflects a redefinition of the term on his part.
[166] "La littérature et le droit à la mort," *La part de feu*, Paris: Gallimard, 1949, p. 313.
[167] Blanchot's *récit L'arrêt de mort*, written contemporaneously with "La littérature et le droit à la mort," is dedicated to this possibility (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).
[168] According to Kojève, p. 542.

which is the real building block of existence. This requires correspondence between the negating force of discourse and objects in the world. Without discourse and human negation, we just have raw dumb immediacy, and without reference, we have imaginative excess.[169] The Understanding requires subsequent Reason, which supplies the abstraction of language with its bearings in the world. There are two occasions in the Hegelian schema in which this settling of accounts with reality does not take place. We have discussed the historical moment of the Terror; in this analysis, literary language also carries with it an uncanny encounter with absolute freedom and death.

This is why Bataille speaks of the freedom of writing in his critique of Heidegger. At issue is a consideration of language as either labored, as it is Hegel and as Bataille believes it is Heidegger, or workless, as he believes its complicity with death renders it. A link between literary writing and an unusual understanding of death takes place in his *L'expérience intérieure*, at the conclusion of the second part: "Le supplice."

> Rire, rêve et, dans le sommeil, les toits tombent en pluie de gravats … ne rien savoir, à ce point (non d'extase, de sommeil) : ainsi m'étrangler, énigme insoluble, accepter de dormir, l'univers étoilé ma tombe, glorifié, gloire constellée d'astres sourds, inintelligibles et plus loin que la mort, terrifiants (le non-sens : le goût d'ail qu'avait l'agneau rôti).[170]

This parenthetical "taste of garlic" appears to be exactly what Bataille is after: a nonsense we will find absent from any of Heidegger's phenomenological analyses. We find here evoked the dreams found in the sleep of death to which *Hamlet* alludes: the prospect of a

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[169] As Hegel famously puts it, "The activity of dissolution is the power and work of the *Understanding*, the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power." Paragraph 17 of the "Preface."
[170] *OC* V, p. 76. The garlic image and its lunar connection has a number of precedents in the poetic tradition, and must be a result of the crescent shape of garlic cloves. For example, Federico García Lorca writes of "Garlic of dying silver/the waning moon places/heads of yellow hair/on the yellow towers," in "Dead from Love," *Selected Poems*, trans. Martin Sorrell, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007, p. 123. A similar image appears in the first of T.S. Eliot's four quartets. I owe these references to Geoffrey Bennington. Bataille's alteration to this tradition is in his invocation of the taste of garlic as carrying with it a remembrance of dead animal flesh that has been consumed, thereby undoing the apparent sublimation produced by roasting.

further unknown, on the other side, that Bataille finds expressed at the limits of language's expressive capacity.[171] The ability to produce this effect is one inherent to Bataille's fragmentary style. We will never find Heidegger writing like this, whatever the encomium to poetry that is his later work. Bataille's linking of poetry, this specifically nonsensical poetry, to a shore on the opposite side of death evokes Levinas's notion of the *il y a*. This is appropriate, because gives poetic and artistic examples in order to approach painful Being.[172] My reading of Levinas's literary qualities, and Bataille's reception of these ideas, is greatly indebted to Jill Robbins's authoritative treatment in *Altered Reading*.

7. The *il y a*

The thesis of Levinas's *De l'existence à l'existant* is that existence in general precedes any particular being.[173] While we "exerce déjà sur l'être la domination même que le sujet exerce sur l'attribut," we are always capable of looking back over our shoulder to a preexistent period, prior to our individualization.[174] Levinas describes an impersonal Being that precedes us and will survive us, and that he identifies with matter and with evil.[175] In contrast to Heidegger, who considers evil to be a defect and anxiety over impending death to be essential, Levinas emphasizes a "mal foncier."[176] Levinas

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[171] Hamlet's famous soliloquy takes place in act III, scene I of the play. Levinas makes a similar allusion in order to evoke the *il y a* in *De l'existence à l'existant*, "Existence sans monde," Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2004, p. 101.
[172] These include a reading of Baudelaire's poem "Le Squelette laboureur." Introduction, p. 49. Robbins points out "an utter intrication of art and the *il y a*." Jill Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature*, Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999, chapter 6, "Art, Philosophy, and the *Il y a*," p. 93.
[173] Seconde édition augmentée, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2004. "Introduction," p. 15. First published 1947.
[174] P. 16. Levinas calls the process of individualization into the world "l'hypostase."
[175] "Le mal de l'être, le mal de la matière de la philosophie idéaliste, devient le mal d'être," p. 19. "Derrière la luminosité des formes […] la matière est le fait même de l'*il y a*," "Existence sans monde," p. 92.
[176] p. 20. Bataille points out that the distinction from Heidegger is not clear. Heidegger's ontological difference indicates that Being in general is nearly nothing, and "the nothing", as such, is the form of Being *qua* Being. Levinas "lie l'angoisse à l'être, et non plus au néant. Mais le néant de Heidegger n'est-il pas l'être finalement?" "De l'existentialisme au primat de l'économie," p. 290. Levinas speaks of "mal foncier" on p. 21 of the same text: "[P]ar elle-même, et non pas en vertu de sa finitude, que l'existence recèle un tragique que la mort ne saurait résoudre."

argues that Being is already suffering.[177] He identifies the experience of the *il y a* with horror, and contrasts this to Heidegger's "anxiety."[178] For Levinas, "L'horreur n'est en aucune façon une angoisse de mort."[179] It is an awareness of the Being that continues after death. After mortality remains an evil, unthinkable substance.

Bataille read and reviewed *De l'existence à l'existant*.[180] In this review, Bataille considers thought beyond philosophy, suggested by Søren Kierkegaard's "cri" against Hegelian science.[181] Bataille argues that modern existentialists, including Heidegger, are not faithful to Kierkegaard's cry.[182] For Bataille, the language of Heidegger's "philosophie est pénible, il est gluant. Il y a, me semble-t-il, à la base une hésitation. La pensée existentialiste est toujours fuyante mais n'achève jamais en elle-même l'anéantissement de la pensée."[183] Despite this criticism, Bataille commends Heidegger for synthesizing atheism and religious experience.[184] This is high praise from Bataille, whose *Summa atheologica* writings had this goal. Bataille writes that Heidegger's "enseignement procède de l'investigation la plus sensée que l'on ait faite, des sphères du profane et du sacré, du discursif et du mythique, du prosaïque et du poétique."[185] This opposition and intertwining between sacred and profane, and prose and poetry, is at the center of Bataille's concerns. In this moment, Bataille seems to support Habermas's argument, recognizing Heidegger as his *semblable*. At one point, he seems to exonerate

[177] "Il est le mal d'être," p. 28.
[178] "Existence sans monde," p. 98.
[179] p. 99.
[180] Included in the 1947 *Critique*, under the title "De l'existentialisme au primat de l'économie." *OC* XI, p. 279-308. Bataille's essay was Levinas's first review. Jill Robbins, "Art, Philosophy, and the *Il y a*," p. 92.
[181] p. 282. "Une existence pathétique exprimée avec force se substituerait à la position de la vérité philosophique," p. 283.
[182] Following Jean Wahl's *Petit histoire de « l'existentialisme »*, which he reviews in this article along with Levinas.
[183] p. 160.
[184] p. 285.
[185] ibid.

Heidegger's political missteps, in a footnote removed from the corrected version.[186]

8. Passion and the Authentic

Bataille proceeds from this praise to a series of vehement criticisms, directly in line with those made a decade earlier in his "Critique of Heidegger." Bataille argues that Heidegger's place for the sacred is identical with the realm of the *authentic*.[187] Heidegger's authenticity is always thrown into the world and always-already embodied in a state of affairs. For this reason, whatever Heidegger's commonalities with Kierkegaard in their commitment to the singular as against science, the two are distinct. This is because of the former's characteristic "misère," opposed to Kierkegaard's "passion."[188] Unlike Heidegger's, "l'authenticité de Kierkegaard était inapplicable au monde, c'était une consumation si intense de la vie qu'elle laissait à l'arrière-plan le développement de la connaissance."[189] In contrast, while Heidegger starts from the position of the individual *Dasein*, he characterizes the modes of being according to an authentic relationship with objects and their adequate discernment. For this reason, Bataille "voit mal chez Heidegger ce qui répondit à la passion de Kierkegaard, criée comme folle."[190] Whatever Heidegger's criticisms of rationalism's forgetfulness of Being, his tone and his values confine him to the realm of the already-given and the sanity of recognition.

This is an *ad hominem* criticism on Bataille's part, but one that is appropriate to the personal nature of Heidegger's thought. Bataille declares that, for Heidegger, "l'authentique en lui est conscience de l'authentique, ou nostalgie de rares moments authentiques, que suit une vie d'études professorales, adonnée à la *connaissance* de

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[186] Robbins translation, footnote 5 – "One accuses him [Heidegger] on the political level and perhaps one forces it: between that which is held to be unspeakably foul and the pardonable error, there are but differences in degree."
[187] p. 285.
[188] ibid.
[189] ibid.
[190] Ibid.

l'authentique."[191] The biographical differences between Heidegger and Bataille ("petit bourgeois" against "bohemian," to speak of caricatures), dismissed by Habermas as masks, are here revealed as consequential. Heidegger's refusal to commit himself to consideration of the extraordinary experiences that Bataille sees as crucial to the breaking point of subjectivity render Heidegger's perspicuous critique of the history of that subject moot. Bataille leaps from this criticism of the tedium and lack of imagination of Heidegger's biography to deduce the cause of his political folly:

> Cette vie ne semble pas *dominée* par une injustifiable passion. [Deleted from the corrected *OC* text: "One cannot be surprised by a slippage, which is not necessary but possible, from the authentic to Hitlerism."[192]] Ce qui semble avoir dominé Heidegger fut sans doute le désir intellectuel de révéler l'être (l'être, non l'existence) par le discours (par le langage philosophique).[193]

This evocative, too-brief passage, later redacted, links several claims. Heidegger is accused of timidity and careerism in his personal life, contributing both to his support for Hitler and his need to display Being in the language of philosophy. How might these attributes be related? Bataille claims that Heidegger prefers authenticity to passion. Heidegger's goal is a proper recognition of being, through language, and not the radical *repudiation* in which Bataille locates his version of the sacred. Heidegger himself would not agree that he is deficient in passion. Rather, as we have mentioned, it is essential for the assumption of authenticity to wrench oneself from the illusions of *das Mann* and embrace an "*impassioned* **freedom towards death**."[194] However, when Heidegger defines what he means by passion, his is not at all consonant with Bataille's.

In volume I of *Nietzsche,* Heidegger states that "Passion has nothing to do with

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[191] ibid.
[192] Robbins translation, p. 161.
[193] ibid.
[194] *Being and Time*, part II, section I, p. 266. Emphases in original.

sheer desire. It is not a matter of the nerves, of ebullition and dissipation."[195] Rather than ebullition, Heidegger's passion is a "lucidly gathering grip on beings."[196] Heidegger associates ebullition with affect and with infatuation, which are "blind, fickle, and susceptible."[197] While passion is a "reaching out and opening up of oneself," it is not a "seizure that blindly agitates us."[198] These thoughts are of a piece with Heidegger's 1963 comments on mania:

> The manic human being, urged to ramble erratically from one subject to another, wants to gobble up everything. […] It is not a letting oneself be drawn, but rather a snatching of and a seizing on. The manic human being even outruns being-ahead-of by not reflecting on what he can be authentically. Therefore, being-ahead-of-itself is inauthentic. The inauthentic always has the appearance of the authentic.[199]

In other words, it is of utmost importance to Heidegger that the mistaken authenticity of mania not be confused with the essential authenticity of passion. He associates passion with resolute anticipation of death, and also with perceptive and mature love.[200]

Heidegger associates this understanding of passion with values exemplified in Nietzsche, symbolized by the eagle and the serpent. According to Heidegger, the eagle represents pride, which is "the fully developed resolution of one who maintains himself at the level of his own essential rank, a rank to which his task appoints him. Pride is the

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[195] *Nietzsche: Volume I: The Will to Power as Art*, trans. David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991. p. 48. Bataille may have discussed some of Heidegger's comments at these lectures with people who had attended them. He demonstrates passing knowledge of Heidegger's work on Hölderlin, delivered contemporaneously with the Nietzsche lectures (1936), in footnote 5 of "De l'existentialisme au primat de l'économie."
[196] ibid.
[197] ibid.
[198] ibid.
[199] *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols – Conversations – Letters*. Ed. Medard Boss. Trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2001. Conversations with Medard Boss, 1961-1972. p. 174.
[200] Strangely, Heidegger argues that love shares its perceptiveness with hatred, both of which are to be distinguished from infatuation. *Nietzsche: Volume I*, p. 48.

assurance of one who no longer confuses himself with anyone else."[201] The serpent represents discernment.[202] We can clearly see that Heidegger's notion of pride, however, also rests on discernment more than anything else: the recognition of the proper rank according to task, the certainty of individual distinction from *das Mann*.

Bataille had already criticized the figure of the eagle in advance, in his "La « vieille taupe » et le préfixe *sur* dans le mots *surhomme* et *surréaliste*."[203] In this early article, Bataille associates himself with Marxist materialism as against the sovereign virility of the eagle.[204] Bataille argues that the eagle is aligned with imperialism, "un libre développement du pouvoir autoritaire particulier," and metaphysical ideals.[205] Bataille opposes Marx's old mole, from the *Communist Manifesto*, "dans les entrailles du sol," and Zarathustra's " « sens de la Terre »," to the prideful eagle.[206] Zarathustra's love for the earth carries with it the "fait primordial" that "la bourgeoisie ayant tué Dieu, il en résulterait tout d'abord un désarroi catastrophique, le vide et même un appauvrissement sinistre."[207] This landscape is where Bataille chooses to think.

9. Materialism and the *il y a*

The sense of the earth, which Bataille locates in Marx and Nietzsche both, appeals to his particular sense of materialism. This materialism also corresponds, in some ways, to the *il y a*. Levinas associates the *il y a* with "l'absence de Dieu," as well as with the primitive, pre-Judeo-Christian sacred.[208] He also explicitly identifies this godless, evil, sacred, excessive being with matter.[209] Levinas declares that Heidegger is unaware of the

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[201] *Nietzsche: Volume Two: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, trans. David Farrell Krell, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991, p. 46.
[202] ibid.
[203] *OC* II, "Dossier de la polémique avec André Breton," p. 93-112.
[204] p. 96.
[205] ibid.
[206] p. 102, p. 97.
[207] p. 102.
[208] *De l'existence à l'existant*, "Existence sans monde," p. 99.
[209] Levinas's sympathy with Marxism is dissociated from any materialism; he prefers to speak of its sincerity in its ethical goals. *De l'existence à l'existant*, "Le monde," p. 69.

horror of the *il y a*. Heidegger begins with Beings already thrown into the world and their anxiety at the prospect of their dissolution into nothingness, and who purchase authenticity by anticipating this eventuality. Levinas, in contrast, argues that an essential problem is indicated by a more profound horror. This horror is not in the face of nothingness, but at the intuition of impersonal being that precedes us, and which lies in wait for us just following the moment of our deaths.

Bataille embraces this horror and valorizes it. He argues on behalf of something like Levinas's *il y a* – a desolate, post-divine landscape of meaninglessness – for the failure of Heidegger's conception of Dasein, which remains all-too-subjective in its insertion into Being. Bataille and Levinas interpret this immediate entry into Being as an authority over it. Bataille's fascination with matter (in all its evil) reveals the necessity of the *il y a* for Levinas's post-Heideggerian outlook. Whatever horror is attendant to Levinas's consideration of impersonal Being, this impersonal-existence-in-general is crucial to his distinction from Heidegger.

The theme of perception is central to these relations of endorsement and critique. Levinas argues that Heidegger fails properly to conceive of evil. Heidegger imagines it to be privative, an impending nothingness, where it is for Levinas a superfluous abundance. Implicitly, it is clear that Levinas believes that Heidegger strayed into evil in his political choice because of this failure adequately to perceive the nature of evil. However, it is the nature of the *il y a* to *be imperceptible*. The *il y a* can only be glanced at through poetry or through art, and to be written of, if it is to be written of at all, in an evocative, literary style. In other words, a commitment to lucid perception, vital to Heidegger's authenticity, by its goals and methods will necessarily fail to grasp the *il y a*, which is the dissolution of any such certain apprehension. A commitment to perception walls off the imperceptible.

Bataille chooses to criticize Levinas's characterization of the *il y a* as remaining too close to the descriptive realm of philosophical language. From Bataille's perspective, Levinas remains all-too-phenomenological, and hence, too close to the discursive revelation Bataille identifies with Heidegger's authenticity. Bataille's gesture will be towards a different language that does not appeal to discernment, but rather to a tearing from the world. Bataille indicates that Levinas, whatever his distinction from existentialism or his desire to criticize Heidegger, continues to practice philosophical language, and as a result fails to express the force of impersonal Being. "Levinas dit de quelques pages de *Thomas l'obscur* qu'elles sont la description de l'*il y a*. Ce n'est pas tout à fait juste : Levinas décrit et Maurice Blanchot crie en quelque sorte l'*il y a*."[210] He especially draws attention to Levinas's illustrative approach to the work of Maurice Blanchot. Blanchot and Bataille were friends and collaborators, and Bataille had quoted the passages to which Levinas alludes.[211] Consequently, Bataille takes Levinas's commentary to be applicable to his own work.

Levinas draws back from evil on a stylistic level, while their mutual friend Blanchot is capable of tarrying with it (to import Hegelian language). To take the *il y a* seriously is to discard concrete language and to speak in the ambiguity of the literary and to risk meaning nothing. Being beyond death is also beyond being grasped by perception. For this reason, its expression must escape discernment and adequation. The *il y a* interrupts and corrupts the transmission of meaning, and words that speak of it must do the same. It may not be even be correct to say that one "speaks" of the *il y a*. Bataille indicates that literary language moves towards animal sounds and away from human speech: "J'introduis moi-même une équivoque en opposant l'aboiement impénétrable d'un chien – en dépit, ou mieux en raison, de son absence de sens – à l'effroi intelligent

[210] p. 292.
[211] In *L'expérience intérieure*.

de la pensée."[212] In other words, poetry aspires to the quality of barking or howling. The goal would be to dispense with thinking entirely, to instead express an opaque, meaningless shriek.

Bataille appropriates Levinas's term entirely, even asserting that "la pensée de Levinas […] ne diffère pas me semble-t-il de celle de Blanchot et de la mienne."[213] Bataille indicates that the *il y a* is not an object of knowledge, but an experience: Individual, painful, intimate, with "la valeur d'un cri."[214] The experience is so intimate and nonsensical that is apparently non-communicable. Bataille goes on to indicate that experience is always this way – something that could be easily described would no longer have the quality of an experience.[215] Experience, by nature, cannot be "communiquée à titre de connaissance claire, mais seulement en forme de poésie."[216] Contrary to Levinas, who sees this type of experience, the poetry that expresses it, and the sacred which is its attendant quality, as a hazard, Bataille acclaims these themes: "je puis regarder la nuit du non-savoir comme ma délivrance."[217] Jill Robbins points out that, for Levinas, the *il y a* "is associated with horror and suffocation," while for Bataille, "with ecstasy, joy, and celebration."[218] For these reasons, Robbins notes that it is peculiar that Bataille treats the *il y a* as a concept that he can borrow from Levinas, rather than a gap between them.[219]

10. Aestheticism and the Critique of Humanism

It is imperative not to confuse Bataille's endorsement of the *il y a* as a positive dimension of experience, and his valorization of poetry, with romanticism. For this

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[212] p. 291.
[213] Footnote, p. 293.
[214] p. 294.
[215] ibid.
[216] p. 296.
[217] p. 298.
[218] "Art, Philosophy, and the *Il y a*," p. 97.
[219] ibid. Robbins sees this as an erasure of the evident alterity between Bataille's and Levinas's conceptions of the *il y a*, going so far as to says that Bataille does "the same thing to Levinas that Levinas had done to Blanchot" by appropriating and re-evaluating, rather than citing and reading. For this reason, "each is unable to quote the other." "Art, Philosophy and the *Il y a*," p. 99.

reason, Bataille's indication of Heidegger as a romantic is not laudatory.[220] This is clear from Bataille's reading of Jean Wahl, in the same review in which he treats Levinas. Wahl dreamt of "philosophes-poètes," "philosophes par l'origine mais pour liquider un héritage," who "résoudraient sans fin la tension de la recherche philosophique dans celle de l'effusion poétique."[221] Wahl saw Kierkegaard as the first of these, and argued that a greater fidelity to him could be achieved by a poetized version of philosophy. This is not far from the journey towards poetry on which Heidegger embarked, subsequent to *Being and Time*. Bataille does not approve of this aesthetic solution.

Bataille criticizes Wahl for an aestheticism that maintains the coherence of the "philosopher-poet" and his capacity to interact with his situation through art. According to Bataille, Kierkegaard and Rimbaud, who "expriment l'existence dans l'intensité," "ne sont pas détruits par une nécessité dont ils ont *conscience*."[222] Expression is not consciousness, and destruction is not a recognized necessity.[223] Bataille's experience cannot be described as a romantic or aesthetic one, in that, as Robbins puts it, it calls into question "any notion of poetic authority and its concomitant celebration of the creative powers of a subject."[224] Famously, Heidegger later emphasizes such a departure from the subject in his 1947 "Letter on Humanism," intended for the French context and its existentialist (that is, Kojèvian) misreading in particular. This text positing Man as "the shepherd of Being."[225] His Man lets beings Be through language, rather than killing them, as Kojève would have it.

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[220] Robbins, p. 159, footnote 3. "The position of Kierkegaard was romantic; that of Heidegger who appeals to Hölderlin is romantic also." This footnote is deleted from the edition included in the *OC*, but restored in Robbins' translation.
[221] p. 283.
[222] p. 287.
[223] "Bataille calls attention to a structure that differs radically from Wahl's (logical) 'paradox' of an awareness that the price of the affirmation of subjectivity is the destruction of that same subjectivity. It is the difference between what Blanchot calls 'the consciousness of disappearing [*conscience de disparaître*] and consciousness disappearing [*conscience disparaissante*]." Robbins, p. 108. Blanchot's remark is from *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1982, p. 97.
[224] Robbins, ibid.
[225] Heidegger, Martin, "Letter on Humanism," Trans. Frank A. Capuzzi with J. Glenn Gray. p. 217-166. *Basic Writings*. Ed. David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993, p. 234.

Heidegger appears close to Bataille when he argues that grammar is a manifestation of the public. The public realm degrades language, with the purpose of "expediting communication along routes where objectification – the uniform accessibility of everything to everyone – branches out and disregards all limits."[226] The goal of hastening communication eliminates the specificity in favor of the abstract. Instrumental language "stems from the dominance of subjectivity."[227] Even so, Heidegger's clarification or revision remains vulnerable to Bataille's charge of aestheticism. This is because Heidegger's account of man's duty to Being rests on a consideration of discernment of existing beings, rather than on the experience of being torn away from them. While Bataille does not entirely endorse Kojève's more active consideration of Man, he remains much closer to the Kojèvian model in his emphasis on language as the carrier of separation and of negativity.

Heidegger tells us that "in thinking Being comes to language."[228] Language does not separate and recombine the existence of things as the sovereign right of man. It allows Being to appear. "[Human beings's] guardianship accomplishes the manifestation of Being insofar as they bring the manifestation to language."[229] Thinking brings Being to language and maintains it there, protecting it from danger. To think is to say the truth of Being, but also to be seized by it.[230] Heidegger's thinking serves Being, it does not master it as Kojève's does. Kojève's Hegelian subject is capable of recombining and representing objects with impunity. It is man as agent of the realization of things, and it is both existentially unique and historically universal. In contrast, Heidegger will advocate a different mode of revealing Being through language, which will not subordinate Being to the absolute power of thinking man.

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[226] p. 221.
[227] ibid.
[228] p. 218.
[229] ibid.
[230] ibid.

Heidegger refuses to define thinking as the role of the collective subject, a goal and actor Heidegger considers merely the public and the "they." Heidegger sees the instrumentalization of language of behalf of history that Kojève endorses as inadequate for the revelation of Being and a "threat to the essence of humanity."[231] The essence of humanity is to bring Being to thought. This threat, instrumentalized language, "undermines aesthetic and moral responsibility."[232] Technology conquers language and subjugates it to "mere willing and trafficking as an instrument of domination over beings."[233] Technical language speaks to hubris on the part of man, a metaphysical exaltation of the subject, and abandonment of the duty to Being. This use of language, linked to the emphasis on craft, contributes to the "homelessness of modern man."[234]

Heidegger endorses a partial allegiance to the young Marx's notion of alienation in this consideration of homelessness. For Marx, man, the producer, bows down before his products. Heidegger is not interested in restoring the central place of man, and would not endorse an understanding of things in terms of use-value. He is, however, in agreement with regard to this understanding of man as losing his humanity in service to commodities. To Heidegger, exploitation is one egregious manifestation of the homelessness produced by submission to technological understanding. This homelessness, man's forgetting of himself in favor of a preoccupation with rationality, science, and production, leads metaphysics to be "entrenched and covered up as such."[235] Technical thinking, which necessarily follows from humanist presuppositions, finds the truth of Being in causes and explanations.[236]

The problem with humanism is that it situates man as a being among beings, and

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[231] p. 221.
[232] ibid.
[233] p. 223.
[234] p. 243.
[235] ibid.
[236] p. 223.

pretends it already knows what those beings might be. Humanism has decided that Being is expressed in causes and in explanations. Those forgotten presuppositions carry with them a technical and teleological interest in defining objects by their reference to an essence other than their existence. Heidegger calls this technicity, teleology, and essentialism "metaphysics." Rather than being the master of things, naming them and determining their causes, purposes, and explanations, Heidegger opens the question of ontological difference between objects and the raw appearance of their existence. Instead of providing subjective meaning to the world, man is "'thrown' from Being itself."[237] He is himself a being separate from Being, but uniquely capable of thinking the question of Being. This awareness of the ontological difference, the famous difference between Being and beings, allows man to "guard the truth of Being, in order that beings might appear in the light of Being as the beings they are."[238]

While Bataille's *moi* is also separate from Being, he would repudiate the essential role of revealing beings through language and Being. Even this duty, from Bataille's perspective, remains subordination. Bataille's language does not illuminate beings. The "taste of garlic" that Bataille evokes in the apprehension of death is not revealed by his language. It is instead presented as enigmatic, untruthful, and dirty. Bataille's language is a being that is obscured by death. It is material.

Heidegger criticizes Marxism for a metaphysical commitment to materialism, which posits all beings as "the material of labor."[239] The tendency to see all objects as congealed labor-time leads Marxism to complicity with technical thinking. Marxism remains as much a threat to man and Being as capitalism. Bataille might share distaste at

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[237] p. 234.
[238] ibid.
[239] p. 243. According to Derrida, "a reciprocal fascination-repulsion between Marxism and Heideggerianism is one of the most significant phenomena of this century. And we have not finished meditating on it, assuming that we have seriously begun to do so." "Politics and Friendship," *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001*, Ed. Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002, p. 154.

measuring things according to labor. However, Heidegger's revulsion is also directed at a material definition of things. Materialism, for Heidegger, must carry with it the desire to seek out an essence distinct from existence, and for this reason be metaphysical. Bataille, in contrast, finds matter to be something else entirely than an adjunct to labor or to metaphysics.

Bataille speaks of *le moi*, the ego or the self, rather than of Dasein. *Le moi* is distinct from Dasein because it is undetermined and absent from the world.[240] While Heidegger would set himself against the determinations of rationalism, his *Dasein* is a being among beings. Heidegger sees Dasein (or "Man," in the "Letter on Humanism") as discerning beings through action and language, tending to their appearance. Bataille sees this as belonging to a "system of intentions" against which he is in revolt.[241] Bataille, unlike Heidegger, and closer to Kojève, insists on the necessity of value (as against Heidegger's "pride" of the eagle):

> If a man has a sense of his value, which he relates to another, established value, if he relates to the place he occupies on one of the miserable ladders of power, then by so doing he rejects himself *outside of being* and rejects his existence in the mass of squandered existence, existence that has been produced in fact but has not attained the form where it ceases producing itself in relation to other things.[242]

In other words, for Bataille, man is not a being among beings, but a being capable of rejecting his place among beings. The essential capacity is not to let beings Be through language, but to tear yourself from them. As Geroulanos puts it, "without a proclamation of insufficiency as a central factor in all existence, Being is nothing but immanence

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[240] p. 33.
[241] Ibid. Bataille's association of Heidegger with intentionality may come from the early French readings of Heidegger, which associate him closely with Husserl. Heidegger also uses the language of intentionality in "On the Essence of Ground." See Geroulanos, p. 17.
[242] p. 34.

reducing the individual to shared uniform sociality."[243] Bataille returns to the Kojèvian theme of desire as a destructive capacity, carrying with it a force separate from the world as given. Desire proceeds from and aims itself at an unsatisfiable lack.

From Bataille's perspective, Heidegger's Dasein, thrown into the world and with the duty of tending to the Being of the objects surrounding him, falls short of the freedom of a human individual. *Le moi*, capable of slipping out of this world, carries with it the potential for radical freedom. From Bataille's perspective, Heidegger's reduction of existence to the maintenance of beings mirrors the political accomplishment of fascism, which only upholds the profane world under the pretense of transcending it. Heidegger's attachment to authenticity covers up the pain, lack, and horror attendant to existence. This attempt culminates in the project of authentic *Mit-sein*: "Our fates have already been guided in advance, in our Being with one another in the same world and in our resoluteness for definite possibilities."[244] It is this world and these definite possibilities that Bataille's *moi* escapes.

[243] "The Anthropology of Exit: Bataille on Heidegger and Fascism," p. 14.
[244] *Being and Time*, division II, section 5, p. 384.

Chapter Two: Politics and the Dead God: Freud, Bataille, and the Execution of the King

Bataille inscribes a spur to self-discipline in the margin of the "Critique of Heidegger": "don't talk about Freud."[245] Bataille's interest in Freud is pervasive; Freud is not only a theoretical influence, but a personal fascination. It is apparent that Bataille is a good candidate for psychoanalysis; this was clear to André Breton, who dismissed Bataille as an "obsédé," just as it was to Bataille himself, who decided to become one of the first French analysands.[246] Rather than normalizing him, Bataille's analysis liberated him to pursue his characteristic fixations. It is my contention that rather than Freud explaining Bataille, it is Bataille's considerations of literature and matter that can explain elements of Freud's speculative work. From this perspective, Freud does not provide the key to decipher Bataille's prevailing themes – incest, necrophilia, the sacred, transgression. Instead, Freud provides a narrative intertwining these tropes that Bataille radicalizes and upsets. The essential difference is in the site of identity; while Freud insists on the necessity of fatherhood in order to structure both personal identity and societal cohesion, Bataille's writing continually disrupts the possibility of any such master figure. For this reason, Bataille's sovereignty, which transgresses and surpasses any notion of mastery, is of great ethical and political consequence.

The most evident intertext with Bataille is Freud's account of the origin of human community, *Totem and Taboo*.[247] Psychoanalytic thought presents a rigorous investigation into the desire for transgression and appears to render it explicable and

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[245] "Critique of Heidegger" by Georges Bataille, trans. Stefanos Geroulanos. *October* 117, Summer 2006, p. 25. The original remains in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.
[246] See Surya, Michel, *Georges Bataille, La mort à l'œuvre*, II, "Champ magnétique," p. 91 and "Le curé de torcy," p. 107.
[247] Written 1912-1913. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XIII (1913-1914): Totem and Taboo and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1958.

sublimated. However, reading Freud reveals that this explanation relies on idealism and a corresponding closure to alterity. This tendency to reinforce the self-same is embodied by the notion of a necessary ego-ideal that is socially and politically enacted by a leader. Further, while *Totem and Taboo* is exemplary in its portrayal of the ambivalence of this figure – both idealized and obscene – Freud's subsequent group psychological work tends to minimize this insight. For this reason, we must consider Bataille's intervention as one that is indebted to Freud's account of the father as necessarily vulnerable to sacrifice, but also one that extends the more troubling ramifications of this outlook, to such a degree that some of Freud's later claims are subverted.

The Murder of the Father and the Creation of God

In Part IV of *Totem and Taboo*, Freud concludes that human society must have originated in the sociality of a primal horde, ruled over by a despotic father.[248] This fearsome patriarch "keeps all the females for himself and drives away his sons as they grow up."[249] Each of the brothers nurses feelings of revenge and desire for the women who have been taken from him, until each realizes that in cooperation they can accomplish what none could do alone. "One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde."[250] Cannibalism is a way of absorbing substance, giving each of the brothers an equal element of the once-unitary authority, as well as consummating identification with omnipotent paternity.[251]

Freud argues that in this moment, the democratic seizure and redistribution of power, social organization, moral restrictions, and religion became necessary.[252] This is because the singular despot is replaced by a self-governing society, in which each

[248] *SE XIII*, p. 125. The impetus for this idea is taken from a hypothesis of Charles Darwin's.
[249] p. 141.
[250] Ibid.
[251] p. 142.
[252] ibid.

member is aware of his desire to take the place now vacated by the dead super-father. It is for this reason that exogamy is instituted. Each of the brothers would like to possess all of the women, so they are compelled to each renounce the women of their own group.[253] Freud also speculates that matriarchy may have been instituted at this point, as an interim regime between the father-king and the subsequent rule of law.[254] In the new society, two crimes are avoided above all: murder and incest.[255]

In this new society, the brothers are tormented by conflicting desires. Their elimination of the father-despot has liberated them, but they find themselves enthralled by his ghost:

> Each single one of the brothers who had banded together for the purpose of killing their father was inspired by a wish to become like him. […] in consequence of the pressure exercised upon each participant by the fraternal clan as a whole, that wish could not be fulfilled. For the future no one could or might ever again attain the father's supreme power, even though that was what all of them had striven for.[256]

Subsequently, they idealize the dead father in the form of a totem animal.[257] Realizing that they have not been freed to commit the transgressive acts they fantasized under the old absolute father, they symbolically repeat the crime in the form of periodic sacrifices of this privileged beast.[258] For this reason, man's relation to the father corresponds to a change in his relation to the world of animals.[259] The totem animal is a figure of

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[253] p. 144.
[254] ibid. This schema essentially evacuates the role of women in the birth of society, with the exception of this brief speculation on Freud's part. I will further investigate the role of feminine alterity in psychoanalysis in the fourth chapter of this study. For a fascinating re-inscription of maternity and femininity in *Totem and Taboo*, see Elissa Marder, "The Sex of Death and the Maternal Crypt," *Parallax*, volume 15, number 1, New York: Routledge, February 2009, p. 10-17.
[255] p. 143.
[256] p. 148.
[257] ibid.
[258] p. 145.
[259] p. 147.

identification while, at the same time, it is expelled from the human community. For this reason, this sacrifice is a necessary ground for the establishing of a human community, governed by laws, distinct from the animal world of instinct.

Freud argues that Christianity is a logical revision of the basic desire to worship a displaced father while ritually devouring him on special occasions. God is naturally a refined version of a father-displacement: "at bottom God is nothing other than an exalted father."[260] The sacrifice of the son brings salvation because it achieves vengeance for the initial murder of the father: "In the Christian doctrine, therefore, men were acknowledging in the most undisguised manner the guilty primaeval deed, since they found the fullest atonement for it in the sacrifice of this one son."[261] Further, the initial requirement of celibacy and the strict sexual morality associated with Christianity accomplishes atonement, in that the initial rebellion was fought with the aim of access to women.[262] Communion plays the role of sacrifice; it "is essentially a fresh elimination of the father, a repetition of the guilty deed."[263] Freud, then, argues that the Christian religion is a collective neurosis, in which mental processes occur *en masse*, practicing compromise formations in order to quell the anxieties experienced by its constituent members.[264]

From a certain perspective, then, Freud appears to have anticipated Bataille's perspective and explained it utterly.[265] After all, Freud suggests, "the two driving factors, the son's sense of guilt and the son's rebelliousness, never became extinct."[266] The psychoanalytic ear can hear Bataille's fixation on transgression, and specifically sexual

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[260] ibid.
[261] p. 154.
[262] ibid.
[263] p. 155.
[264] p. 158.
[265] Susan Robin Suleiman sees Bataille's essential concern as Oedipal, "a confrontation between an all-powerful father and a traumatized son, a confrontation staged across and over the body of the mother." "Transgression and the Avant-garde: Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil*," *On Bataille: Critical Essays*, ed. Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, Albany: SUNY Press, p. 329.
[266] p. 152.

aberration, as simply remnants of the ancient desire to take the place of the dead, all-powerful father who has been fantasized as God. Freud even identifies the dead father as Nietzsche's *Übermensch*; the desire to overcome human limits is an obscure wish to become the primordial father.[267] From this outlook, Bataille's desire to become Nietzsche, who had himself identified himself as Zarathustra and as a bridge to the Overman, could only be read as a drive to become the fantasized primal father.[268] More than this, Bataille's moral universe is often described as strongly Catholic, and it is this denomination more than any other that Freud's diagnosis in *Totem and Taboo* seems to treat – its strongly ritualistic character, its emphasis on a collective body, its meditation on the sufferings and death of Jesus.

Freud tells us that "The notion of a man becoming a god or of a god dying strikes us to-day as shockingly presumptuous; but even in classical antiquity there was nothing revolting in it."[269] This pre-existing classical fascination with deicide reaches its historical apotheosis in Christianity, and specifically Paul's *kenosis*.[270] So Bataille's insistence that transgression is bound up with the confrontation with death is an acute individual experience of the tensions already expressed in Catholicism, the collective neurosis.[271] From a Freudian perspective, Bataille's problems must have their origin in his envy and rage towards his father, both idealized and condemned, in that psychoanalysis treats all psychic unrest as "soluble on the basis of one single concrete point – man's relation to his

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[267] *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey, New York: W.W. Norton, 1989, p. 71.
[268] See "Why I Am a Destiny," *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage, 1989, p. 333, and *OC* V, *L'expérience intérieure*, III. Principes d'une méthode et d'une communauté, p. 27-28.
[269] *SE XIII*, p. 149. Freud argues that the festivals of Dionysus were transformed into the Passion plays, with a corresponding transvaluation of affect, with the same aim.
[270] See Jean-Luc Nancy's "L'insacrifiable" in *Une pensée finie*, Paris: Editions Galilée, 1990.
[271] "L'agonie de Dieu en la personne de l'homme est fatale […] L'agonie d'un Dieu n'a que faire de l'explication du péché." *L'expérience l'intérieure*, deuxième partie, p. 61. For consideration of Bataille's debts to a specific Christian mystical tradition on this point, see Connor, Peter Tracey, "A rage against life as it is," *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000, chapter 1, p. 46.

father."[272] Bataille would then be merely one of those most familiar neurotics: the man who is obsessed with the desire to kill his father and to commit incest, ultimately a wish to make love to his mother.

Taboo

The consequence of a society of brothers is that each brother is secretly obsessed with the desire to take the place of the father he has helped to murder. The spoils of this kind of fatherhood include ownership of all the women, so incestuous desire is the wish attendant to strivings for paternal authority. For this reason, just as sacrifices are practiced in which the tribe devours the ordinarily forbidden totem animal, savages who ordinarily have strict rules against incest "practice sacred orgies, in which precisely these forbidden degrees of kinship seek sexual intercourse […]."[273] This contrast is a symptom of the essential ambivalence of the sacred, which concerns both the forbidden and the exalted.

"Each man is conscious that he is performing an act forbidden to the individual and justifiable only through the participation of the whole clan; nor may anyone absent himself from the killing and the meal."[274] A collective mourning, necessary to disclaim responsibility for the action, follows this transgression. The sacrifice of the totem, which stands in for the father and for God, and the performance of incest, are characteristic of festivity: "A festival is a permitted, or rather an obligatory, excess, a solemn breach of a prohibition. […] the festive feeling is produced by the liberty to do what is as a rule prohibited." [275] This excess is the place of the Dionysian and the sacred, a paramount concern for Bataille.[276]

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[272] *SE XIII*, p. 157.
[273] p. 11.
[274] P. 140.
[275] ibid.
[276] Similar considerations of the necessary excess of festivity are famously included in Friedrich Nietzsche, "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage, 1967,

Freud locates the sacred in the word *sacer*, which means "on the one hand, 'sacred', 'consecrated', and on the other 'uncanny', 'dangerous', 'forbidden', 'unclean'."[277] The sacred is generally found in the realm of the prohibited, and is separated from the ordinary by the law of taboo. Taboos protect the important and the weak, they cordon off corpses, the birth process, sexual intercourse, the realm of the gods and spirits, food, and property.[278] Taboo can also be applied to persons; "anyone who has transgressed one of these prohibitions himself acquires the characteristic of being prohibited – as though the whole of the dangerous charge had been transferred over to him."[279] The only antidote to becoming taboo is the practice of atonement or purification. Taboo applies "to all *special* individuals, such as kings, priests or newborn babies, to all *exceptional* states, such as the physical states of menstruation, puberty or birth, and to all *uncanny* things, such as sickness and death and what is associated with them through their power of infection or contagion."[280] The category of the taboo unites a variety of disparate states, from political authority to physical abjection, and lays the groundwork for what Bataille calls heterology.[281]

The primary consideration of taboo is physical contact; one may not touch persons, animals or things that are sacred, but further, there can be a prohibition of intellectual contact.[282] So thinking or speaking about things that are taboo can make one taboo. Freud declares that taboos carry with them great attraction; "He is constantly wishing to perform this act (the touching), [and looks on it as his supreme enjoyment, but

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and Antonin Artaud, "Le théâtre et la peste," *Le théâtre et son double*, in *Œuvres*, Paris: Gallimard, 2004, p. 510-520.

[277] p. 18. See also "The Antithetical Sense of Primal Words' (1910)," *SE* XI.

[278] Ibid.

[279] p. 20.

[280] P. 22.

[281] "Principes d'hétérologie pratique," "La valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade (I)", *OC* II, Dossier de la polémique avec André Breton, as well as "La structure psychologique du fascisme." *OC* I, discussed later in this chapter.

[282] *SE XIII*, p. 27.

he must not perform it] and detests it as well."[283] This desire, and guilt for desire, leads to the necessity of obsessive acts, which fulfill the roles of demonstrating remorse while simultaneously substituting themselves for the forbidden action.[284] For this reason, "psychoanalysis is no more than confirming the habitual pronouncement of the pious: we are all miserable sinners."[285]

The attraction to transgression, the drive to be in contact with everything the community considers dangerous and to associate this danger with the province of the fantasized father, can lead Oedipal strivings in the direction of morbid fascination. To the primitive world, death always appears unnatural.[286] For this reason, corpses are taboo just as women of blood relation are.[287] From this perspective, the apparent necrophilia present in Bataille's work becomes easily explicable.[288] Psychoanalysis itself makes distinct assertions about the role of death in desire. Freud famously asserts that death does not exist in the unconscious.[289] This statement is drastically revised in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.[290] There is an essential question that can be leveled at Freud, which is whether he himself has presupposed an orientation towards death and whether his consideration can be said to be authentic.[291] Does Freud himself have a proper understanding of what

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[283] p. 29. Brackets in original. First edition content, subsequently deleted.
[284] p. 30.
[285] p. 72. Compare book II of St. Augustine's *Confessions* and Romans 7:7.
[286] p. 76.
[287] p. 51.
[288] See especially *Le bleu du ciel*, deuxième partie, "Le mauvais presage," *OC* III, p. 406.
[289] This is directly stated in the 1915 "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death", II. Our Attitude towards Death, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey, p. 296.
[290] Written in 1920. There are "two kinds of instincts: those which seek to lead what is living to death, and others, the sexual instincts, which are perpetually attempting and achieving a renewal of life," *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, chapter VI, in *Selected Writings*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1997, p. 287. However, Freud eventually concludes that "The pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts," ibid., chapter VII, p. 309. This is one basis for Lacan's claim that "toute pulsion est virtuellement pulsion de mort." "Position de l'inconscient," *Écrits 2*, nouvelle édition, Paris: Êditions du Seuil, 1999, p. 329. I discuss the death drive and its varying definitions more fully in chapter four.
[291] Heidegger affirms that ethnographic information on death rituals are relevant, but demands that this material be considered from an ontological viewpoint. *Zollikon Seminars*, chapter III, "From the Letters to Medard Boss," Evanston: Northwestern UP, p. 247. Heidegger also sees the unconscious itself as posited

Bataille calls moi=qui=meurt, or what Heidegger called Being-towards-death?[292] It is my contention in the previous chapter, following a reading of Bataille, that the apprehension of death requires a non-instrumental understanding of language. What can Freud's statements on language and its potential effects tell us about his understanding of existence?

Words and Deeds

Freud includes a number of statements on the origin of literary creativity in regressive neurosis in *Totem and Taboo*.[293] He reminds us of the "evidence to show the extent to which the interest of creative writers centres round the theme of incest and how the same theme, in countless variation and distortions, proves the subject-matter of poetry."[294] So for Freud, the essence of poetry is its subject, and its subject is a transformed relic of incestuous desire. For this reason, a poet is a particular type of neurotic, who "has either failed to get free from the psycho-sexual conditions that prevailed in his childhood or he has returned to them – two possibilities which may be summed up as developmental inhibition and regression."[295] For this unfortunate person, "incestuous fixations of libido continue to play (or begin once more to play) the principal part in his unconscious mental life."[296]

Freud indicates that poetry is a creative response to neurotic conflict. It is a substitute for an unacceptable, criminal action. Rather then commit incest, the poet

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only in order to maintain a rationalist unbroken chain of causal connection, and as a postulate of science rather than a true phenomenon. ibid., p. 208.

[292] Bataille, *OC* V, p. 85-86. The "equals" signs are a stylistic idiosyncrasy. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1962, division II, section 1, p. 266 (German pagination).

[293] For further psychoanalytic discussion of literary creativity, see "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming (1908)," *Collected Papers: Volume IV*, trans. Joan Riviere, London: Hogarth Press, 1953. For the classic study on Freud and writing, see Jacques Derrida's "Freud et la scène de l'écriture," in *L'Écriture et la différence*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967. Shoshana Felman indicates an innovative approach to the the interaction between psychoanalysis and literature that does not pathologize the latter in her "To Open the Question," *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Shoshana Felman, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982, p. 5-10.

[294] p. 17.

[295] ibid.

[296] ibid.

transfigures the desire into aesthetic pleasure. This repeats, for an individual, the accomplishment of civilization, which is the repudiation of criminal desires and their replacement with thought and fantasy. The poet and the neurotic both absent themselves from a world that cannot accommodate their unacceptable desires. For this reason, they are removed from human society: "To turn away from reality is at the same time to withdraw from the community of man."[297] Bataille also affirms an intimate link between poetry and sacrifice: poetry is "le sacrifice où les mots sont victimes."[298] Bataille's inner experience, being the renunciation of project, is for him the essence of poetry, and the core of the sacrificial act.

For this reason, for both Bataille and Freud, poets and savages have a trait in common. Savages, unlike civilized people, "treat words in every sense as things."[299] Their taboos extend to names as well as people and animals, and they can be terrified by a word just as by a beast. Freud argues that the sublimating accomplishment of civilization is its capacity to replace unacceptable deeds with their outlet in displaced, supplementary activities (such as poetry). Modern man replaces a fulfillment of his anti-social desires with immaterial representations in thought. For primitives "it is rather the deed that is substituted for the thought."[300] Freud relies on an essential distinction between scientific inquiry and poetic or sacrificial language.

Freud ends his treatment with an epigraph from Goethe's *Faust,* part I: "in the beginning was the Deed."[301] One thing that strikes the reader of *Totem and Taboo* is its conspicuous intertextuality. Indeed, Freud even performs and radicalizes the killing of the father by the alliance of brothers in his own work. In addition to James George Frazer,

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[297] p. 74.
[298] "Digression sur la poésie et Marcel Proust," *L'expérience intérieure*, quatrième partie, VI. Nietzsche, *OC* V, p. 156.
[299] *SE XIII*, p. 56.
[300] p. 161.
[301] ibid.

the main source for his inquiry, Freud enlists an array of fellow scholars in his attempt to reveal God as illusory – Charles Darwin, Northcote W. Thomas, Franz Boas, Émile Durkheim, Havelock Ellis, L.H. Morgan, Herbert Spencer, W. Wundt …[302] Such is the power of writing that Freud is capable of enlisting allies whom he has never met and who in many cases participate posthumously.

Freud is aware that his insight is one that can only be conjectured and cannot be located empirically. The primal horde "has never been an object of observation."[303] Frazer, Freud's main source of information, is himself the prototype of the anthropologist who never has contact with the cultures he studies.[304] So the deed that Freud performs in *Totem and Taboo* – the rationalist explanation and consequent elimination of the God delusion – is one that takes place entirely through written thoughts, enacted by a community of scholar-writers. For this reason, Freud's materialism is a peculiar one. In one footnote, Freud writes of Pikler and Somló, two comrades-in-arms in his struggle, as authors who "justly describe their attempted explanation of the origin of totemism as 'a contribution to the materialist theory of history'."[305] Freud here seems to include himself in a methodology of historical materialism. Freud's historical materialism, however, is one that does not rely on sense data or on experiments. It is an accumulation of conjectures produced by the need to explain superstition and neurotic symptoms. *Totem and Taboo*, as a speculative work, can then be read as itself carrying the implications suggested by Freud's interpretation, as well as Bataille's definition, of poetry. For Bataille, poetry is not a genre term but a capacity of language. For this reason, the deicidal intent of *Totem and Taboo* and its reliance on imagination rather than

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[302] See "Bibliography and Author Index," p. 245-247.
[303] p. 141.
[304] Frazer declared "Heaven forbid!" when asked if he had ever done fieldwork. Levi-Strauss, Claude, *Structural Anthropology*, part five, chapter XVII, "The Place of Anthropology in the Social Sciences and Problems Raised in Teaching It," New York: Basic Books, 1963, p. 372.
[305] *SE XIII*, p. 110.

observation makes it something like an epic poem that performs its own object of study.[306]

For this reason, while Freud superficially appears to conclude that civilization has replaced the transgressive deed (sacrifice, incestuous festival) with sublimating thoughts (poetry, science, psychoanalysis), the performative force of his writing announces something different. His thoughts, like those of the taboo-fearing savages, are deeds insofar as they are written down and inasmuch as they communicate with other written thoughts, comprising a militant community of scientific atheists. Psychoanalysis is, of course, the talking cure; a treatment that relies on language rather than on medicines or surgery. In this sense, Freud remains in complicity with savage thought.

In one footnote, Freud discusses the birth of art at Lascaux, where it had an initially magical purpose, helping to hunt and kill animals for meat.[307] At one point, Freud appeals to simulacra: hysteria caricatures art, obsessive neurosis caricatures religion, and paranoia caricatures philosophy.[308] This is logic of equivalence and substitution, in which we might say that Freud's explanation functions as either the copy or the obscured original of the murder of God. This basic notion – paranoia mirrors and distorts the truths of philosophy, and likewise for pathological forms of other social practices – is worth a second look, because Freud inverts the truth/caricature relation when he makes obsessive neurosis the truth, rather than the distortion, of religion. This essential inversion is a complete one, so art becomes a special form of hysteria and philosophy a refined paranoia. Bataille himself speaks of the ubiquity of parody:

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[306] Derrida indicates that *Totem and Taboo* "resembles a fiction, a myth, or a fable," and itself provides "the origin of literature at the same time as the origin of law," in "Before the Law," trans. Avital Ronell and Christine Roulston, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 199.
[307] *SE XIII*, p. 90. Bataille also interprets the Lascaux paintings as performing a venatic function. See "Le dépassement des interdits : le jeu, l'art et la religion," *Lascaux*, *OC* IX.
[308] p. 73.

> Tout le monde a conscience que la vie est parodique et qu'il manque une interprétation.
>
> Ainsi le plomb est la parodie de l'or.
>
> L'air est la parodie de l'eau.
>
> Le cerveau est la parodie de l'équateur.
>
> Le coït est la parodie du crime.
>
> L'or, l'eau, l'équateur ou le crime peuvent indifféremment être énoncés comme le principe des choses.[309]

In this early writing, Bataille engages with the theory of caricature but repudiates the capacity to assert the primacy of one term over another. A consequence of this idea, applied to Freud's reasoning, is that Bataille is neither valorizing poetry as superior in its sublimation of incestuous drives nor revealing the sordid roots of apparently spiritual behavior, though he is on the side of psychoanalysis by affirming the relation. For example, Freud argues that a child who observes hens laying eggs is gratifying his sexual curiosity about humans.[310] Bataille's *L'histoire de l'œil* undoes this decoding, constructing its narrative from a chain of resemblances that refuses to settle on a decisive index.[311]

Freud also writes that decency in maturity is preceded by viciousness in childhood: "Each of these excessively virtuous individuals passed through an evil period in his infancy – a phase of perversion which was the forerunner and precondition of the later period of excessive morality."[312] Bataille also asserts proximity between evil and childhood. However, this proximity carries with it difference and distortion. Bataille

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[309] "L'anus solaire", *OC* I, p. 80.
[310] *SE XIII*, p. 131.
[311] For egg imagery, see chapter 2 of the first part, "L'armoire normande," *OC* I, p. 18. For a formalist reading of the story as based on the play of resemblances, see Roland Barthes, "La métaphore de œil," *Critique*, 195-196, 1963.
[312] *SE XIII*, p. 161.

insists that the horrific murderer Gilles de Rais is a child; but while childishness is necessarily limited, Gilles's power leads him to the potential of the tragic.[313]

> Il ne s'agit plus […] de ce que nous désignons, parlant d'enfantillage. C'est en effet de *monstruosité* qu'il s'agit. Essentiellement, cette monstruosité est enfantine. Mais il s'agit de l'enfantillage auquel appartiennent les possibilités de l'âge adulte, et plutôt qu'enfantines ces possibilités sont archaïques. Si Gilles de Rais est un enfant, c'est à la manière des sauvages.[314]

Bataille here indicates an essentially childlike quality to the monstrous. Unlike Freud, who appears to posit a biographical and locatable stage of perversion occurring in development, Bataille indicates that monstrosity is characterized by prehistorical urges that are only apprehended from the perspective of their mature expression. This is to say that the cruelty of a child or a savage, even if this is the origin of subsequent sadistic acts, falls short of the monstrous because it does not carry with it the powers of adulthood and the contrast with the entry to society that accompanies this maturation. This means that "evil," here identified with the tragic and the savage, is characterized by the paradoxical coexistence of maturation into the civilized realm along with the ancient desires that could not be expressed in the limited and weakened world that birthed them.

Psychoanalysis paradigmatically concerns itself with the necessary renunciation of anti-social instincts in order to accomplish the advances of civilization. A crucial hypothesis of psychoanalysis is that the sex drive as such is on the side of the anti-social, selfish unconscious, or as Freud puts it: "Sexual needs are not capable of uniting men in the same way as are the demands of self-preservation. Sexual satisfaction is essentially the private affair of each individual."[315] Social feelings are always estranged from the

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[313] *Le Procès de Gilles de Rais*, chapitre I, La tragédie de Gilles de Rais, 9. Enfantillage et archaïsme, *OC* X.
[314] ibid., p. 301-302.
[315] p. 74.

erotic: "We may describe as 'social' the emotions which are determined by showing consideration for another person without taking him as a [direct] sexual object."[316] It is ironic that psychoanalysis, which is a discourse that is associated with locating sex everywhere, would also rely on a definition of civil society that excludes sexual desire entirely. Freud even defines neurosis as essentially the result of "the preponderance of the sexual over the social instinctual elements."[317]

At the same time, Freud argues that the social instincts are themselves combinations of egoism and eroticism.[318] Freud also defines love as the truth of psychosis: "The state of being in love, which is psychologically so remarkable and is the normal prototype of the psychoses, shows these [libidinal] emanations at their maximum compared to the level of self-love."[319] This indicates that eroticism as we experience it (sexual lust) is for Freud essentially a narcissistic drive.[320] This desire to possess the object sexually, which is selfish and (in the final analysis) aggressive, is sublimated into social drives, which are the grounds for civilization. This society is predicated on the renunciation of the desire to be the sovereign father, and with it, the disavowal of the transgressive sexual desires that are incestuous at their core. From this perspective, physical eroticism necessarily carries with it an authoritarian impulse. Freud's insight echoes the Marquis de Sade's claim that "Il n'est point d'homme qui ne veuille être despote quand il bande […]."[321] It is then necessary for us to investigate whether Bataille's fascination with physical arousal translates into desire for or sympathy with tyranny.

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[316] p. 72. Brackets in original.
[317] p. 73.
[318] P. 74. Brackets in original.
[319] p. 89. Brackets in original.
[320] See also "On Narcissism: An Introduction," *SE* XIV.
[321] *La Philosophie dans le boudoir ou Les Instituteurs immoraux*, édition présentée, établie et annotée par Yvon Belaval, Paris: Gallimard, 1976, p. 259.

Bataille's fascination with evil and sacrifice would appear to render him politically dubious. We find Bataille advocating a sadistic revolutionary Marxism, and later abandoning politics in favor of a ferocious religious movement.[322] He lets slip, in 1937, that "je n'attribue pas grande importance à la différence entre le fascisme et le communisme," and later speaks of the strictly conservative effects and paralysis of thought induced by the unified category of totalitarianism.[323] A worst-case perspective is that of his acquaintance Boris Souvarine, who declared that Bataille was not only a fascist sympathizer, but had only cowardice to thank for his lack of outright collaboration with the Nazis.[324] In contrast, Michel Leiris declared that Bataille was only impressed by the fascist skill at propaganda, and wished for the left to be equally equipped.[325] In contrast, some commentators have sought to find in Bataille a political thought that transcends his historical context. Jean-Joseph Goux argues that Bataille anticipates Reaganomics, while Allan Stoekl discerns the groundwork for the "eroticized recycling" necessary to protect the environment.[326]

Precisely because of the multifarious application of Bataille's ideas, it is necessary to delve into his early political writings in order to sort out the nature of his insight, which has shown itself to be appealing to so many different perspectives. Bataille begins with a sociological problematic inherited from Freud, specifically his *Group*

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[322] "La valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade," III. Dossier de la polémique avec André Breton, p. 54-72, *Œuvres complètes II: Écrits posthumes 1922-1940*, Paris: Gallimard, 1970.
[323] The sentence minimizing the distinction between fascism and communism was excised from Bataille's final draft. *OC V*, p. 562. He criticizes the concept of totalitarianism in *La part maudite*, 5. Les données présentes, *OC* VII, Paris: Gallimard, 1949, p. 142.
[324] Souvarine, Boris, Préface, *La Critique sociale*, Paris: La Différence, 1983. Souvarine appears to have had a personal axe to grind with Bataille, insofar as Bataille stole his lover, Colette (Laure) Peignot. See Michel Surya, III, *Georges Bataille, la mort à l'œuvre*, Paris: Éditions Garamont, 1987. « Le premier désaveuglé », p. 174.
[325] Surya, "I love ignorance touching on the future," p. 293. Taken from an interview with Michel Leiris in Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Les aventures de la liberté*, p. 186.
[326] See Goux, "General Economics and Postmodern Capitalism," trans. Kathryn Ascheim and Rhonda Garelick, *Yale French Studies* no. 78, New Haven: Yale UP, 1990, and Stoekl, *Bataille's Peak: Energy, Religion, and Postsustainability*. II. Expenditure and Depletion. Chapter 5, "Orgiastic Recycling," p. 115-149. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2007.

Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego.[327] Freud is himself reliant on Gustav Le Bon, who posits a racial unconscious in which, in Freud's gloss, "what is heterogeneous is submerged in what is homogeneous."[328] As a result, "the mental superstructure, the development of which in individuals shows such dissimilarities, is removed, and the unconscious foundations, which are similar in everyone, stand exposed to view."[329] In Le Bon's schema, then, group psychology reveals cultural templates for behavior that govern a mass mind; the individual differences between individuals diminish. Freud takes some distance from this view, preferring to say that in a group the individual is brought under conditions that allow him to throw off the repressions of his unconscious instinctual impulses. The apparently new characteristics which he then displays are in fact the manifestations of the unconscious in which all that is evil in the human mind is contained as a predisposition."[330] So in the Freudian response to Le Bon's initial thesis, an individual is not so much immersed in the racial group mind as his unconscious drives, his tendencies towards evil, find an opportunity to express themselves in their newly anonymous surroundings. Further, Freud analyzes feelings of racial community as a secondary effect of narcissistic fantasy, rather than the natural starting point indicated by Le Bon.[331]

Le Bon's group psychology is profoundly right-wing, rising from contempt for the revolutionary masses and their refusal to be ruled. His belief in a racial unconscious was directly proto-fascist and an inspiration for Benito Mussolini, whom he admired.[332] Freud's relationship to Le Bon is ambivalent. He departs from Le Bon in refusing his racial position and in viewing the unconscious as an accumulation of evil drives liberated

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[327] *SE* XVIII.
[328] *SE* XVIII, p. 74. Bataille adopts the language of heterogeneity and homogeneity from Freud, who borrows it from Le Bon.
[329] Ibid.
[330] ibid.
[331] *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, p. 75.
[332] See Michèle H. Richman, *Sacred Revolutions: Durkheim and the Collège de Sociologie*, chapter 3: "Politics and the Sacred in the Collège de Sociologie," Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2002, p. 140-141.

by anonymity rather than an underlying cultural predisposition. However, Freud perpetuates Le Bon's basic insistence that groups without a fixed leader are typically violent, dangerous, and yearn for domination. This element of psychoanalytic thought is potentially hostile to democracy, in that it sees any refusal of an embodied singular authority as masking a deep desire to submit to the incarnation of that displaced father representation. This is presumably one reason why Heidegger appreciated Freud's work on group psychology, vastly preferring it to his developmental work and mind topography.[333]

Both Le Bon and Freud aim to account for group behavior they find to be generally threatening, irrational, and violent. Both thinkers take the revolutionary masses of 1789-1793 France as their experimental object.[334] Freud accepts Le Bon's work as an authority and takes from it the notion that the individual immersed in a group believes that he can do the impossible, and that groups are stimulated by and seek out all extremes.[335] Further, while the individuals comprising a group lose their ordinary inhibitions and experience themselves as all-powerful, this co-exists with a contrary desire to be "oppressed and to fear its masters."[336] Moreover, groups are in love with words and lose their grasp on tangible reality.[337] "The most remarkable and also the most important result of the formation of a group is the 'exaltation or intensification of emotion' produced in every member of it."[338] These ecstatic group experiences are in a sense a variation on the experience of erotic love: "love relationships […] also constitute the essence of the group mind."[339]

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[333] See Richard Askay, "Heidegger's Philosophy and Its Implications for Psychology, Freud, and Existential Psychoanalysis," *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 310.
[334] *SE* XVIII, p. 83.
[335] ibid., p. 78.
[336] Ibid, p. 79.
[337] Ibid., p. 80.
[338] Ibid., p. 84.
[339] Ibid., p. 91.

Contrary to the dangerous erotic attachments of mobs, Freud posits an alternative manifestation of group psychology ignored by Le Bon. These are groups that, rather than craving a leader, already have one.[340] The paradigmatic instances of these groups, for Freud, are the Church (most saliently the Catholic Church), and the army. Each of these rely on "a head […] who loves all the individuals in the group with an equal love" – "he is their substitute father."[341] These stable groups rely on mass identification obeying Oedipal logic.[342] Under this organization, the army or church accepts a unanimous ego ideal, "*and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego*."[343] This mechanism of identification is analogous to the occurrence of love between individuals: "*The object has been put in the place of the ego ideal*."[344] It is for this reason that love can be deeply morally ambivalent.

The mass with a stable father to love have a concrete agent acting as collective superego; in the case of more turbulent and less dependable love affairs, "remorselessness is carried to the pitch of crime."[345] This is because in the case of mad love, the desired object replaces the ordinary ego ideal, thereby liberating all manner of urges. The festival Freud discusses in which excess becomes obligatory, then, is profoundly related to the liberation that takes place in the loss of the old punitive superego: "the abrogation of the ideal would necessarily be a magnificent festival for the ego, which might then once again feel satisfied with itself."[346] The stable groups with substitute father-leaders, as a result, must forbid the possibility of any such interruption of their hold as concrete enforcers of the law: "there is no room for woman as a sexual

[340] Ibid., p. 81.
[341] Ibid, p. 94.
[342] ibid., p. 105
[343] Ibid., P. 116.
[344] Ibid., P. 113.
[345] Ibid.
[346] ibid., p. 131.

object."[347] Freud's work suggests, then, that a stable and nonviolent group must be characterized by a uniform Oedipal attachment that cannot be abrogated by heterosexual eroticism. Bataille's work, while learning from Freud, enacts a revaluation of Freud's social preferences.

In the 1930s, Bataille and a number of collaborators devoted themselves to studying the means of group formation.[348] Bataille describes *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* as "une introduction essentielle à la compréhension du fascisme," but he reverses its thesis, condemning groups with leaders and aiming to tap into the emancipatory and revolutionary power of headless groups.[349] "La structure psychologique du fascisme," a theoretical product of this attempt, begins by reversing the schema adopted from Le Bon that identifies conscious individual distinctions with heterogeneity and unconscious (racial or cultural) similarities with homogeneity.[350] Contrariwise, Bataille writes of society as superficially comprised of an essential homogeneity that evacuates the potential of conflict and violence in favor of purely utilitarian principles.[351] This is identified with the bourgeois dominance of equivalence and money.[352] In this schema, it is the proletariat as practical revolutionary agent, divorced from his labor, who occupies the place of heterogeneity.[353] Bataille identifies the drives of the unconscious with heterogeneity, reversing Le Bon's principle, because they refuse to subordinate

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[347] Ibid., P. 141.
[348] Richman describes Bataille's methodology as a synthesis of German phenomenology, Freudian psychoanalysis, and French sociology. *Sacred Revolutions: Durkheim and the Collège de Sociologie*, p. 129.
[349] *OC* I, p. 356. Both Freud and Bataille share a debt to Émile Durkheim's *Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. See ibid., p. 345, and Michèle H. Richman, *Sacred Revolutions*, chapters 1 and 3.
[350] *OC* I.
[351] ibid., p. 340.
[352] Ibid.
[353] ibid., p. 341.

themselves to the market.[354] He also describes the sacred that Freud discusses in *Totem and Taboo* as heterogeneous to the reign of commodities and capital.[355]

Because homogeneity stands at risk from internal conflict, its protection "doit être trouvée dans le recours à des éléments impératifs capables d'anéantir ou de réduire à une règle les différentes forces désordonnées."[356] Bataille's modifications to the Freudian schema include, first, the treatment of society as a whole as obeying the principles indicated for groups by Freud. Second, Bataille introduces the theme of revolutionary class politics as taking on the disruptive role, and in fact a role similar to that Freud had ascribed to the instabilities of romantic love. Third, Bataille identifies homogeneity with conscious lived existence and heterogeneity with the unruliness of unconscious drives; this reverses Le Bon's definitions. Last, Bataille gives the name "imperative elements" to the active capacities of the stable ego ideals Freud identifies as ruling over the church and army.

Bataille identifies imperative forces as themselves occupying the place of heterogeneity, just like the subversive proletariat, unconscious drives, and sacred abject states of excess and delirium.[357] This is a notable departure from Freud's portrayal in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, but entirely in keeping with the insights of *Totem and Taboo*. While the group ego ideal appears expunged of the troubling ambivalence of the sacred, *Totem and Taboo* reveals the head of the church and of the army as stand-ins for the monstrous primal father. For this reason, Bataille argues that Mussolini and Hitler occupy the place of the heterogeneous – distinctly outside the democratic reign of equivalence that upholds the market – but "*supérieur, noble, élevé*,"

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[354] Ibid., p. 345. This also contrasts with the position of his friend and collaborator Michel Leiris, who dismissed the unconscious as incapable of grappling with the problematic of death and hence all too scientific. See *Manhood*, trans. Richard Howard, London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1968, p. 141.
[355] Ibid, p. 345.
[356] Ibid., p. 342.
[357] Ibid., p. 348.

masters, defenders of the order from the filthy subversive elements.[358] Similarly, the entire idea of race stands as a mystical goal separate from and higher than the everyday transactions of the state.[359] In this outlook, Le Bon's starting point necessary to the constitution of homogeneity is here revealed as itself a heterogeneous and sacred object of desire.

Sade and the Execution of the King

From the psychoanalytic perspective, political sovereignty is marked with the inheritance of the murdered primal father. Frazer claims that primitive tribes have temporary, foreign kings: "Worshipped as a god one day, he is killed as a criminal the next."[360] Kings could be, and at times needed to be, sacrificed as representatives of the divine. Affirming complicity with this notion, Bataille's group Acéphale performed a ceremony in commemoration of the anniversary of Louis XVI's execution.[361] Pierre Klossowski, Bataille's interlocutor and a participant in Acéphale, writes of the execution of the king from Sade's perspective:

> A l'instant où le couperet tranche la tête de Louis XVI, ce n'est pas aux yeux de Sade le citoyen Capet, ce n'est pas même le traître qui meurt, c'est, aux *yeux de Sade comme aux yeux de Joseph de Maistre* et de tous les ultramontains, le représentant de Dieu qui meurt; et c'est le sang du représentant temporel de Dieu, et, dans un sens plus intime, le sang de Dieu qui retombe sur les têtes du peuple insurgé.[362]

For Sade and the later counterrevolutionaries, and for Klossowski and for Bataille, and for the savages that Frazer and Freud study, the political sovereign is a proxy for God,

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[358] Ibid., p. 350-352.
[359] Ibid., p. 365.
[360] p. 56, 65.
[361] See Surya, III, « Tout exige en nous que la mort nous ravage », p. 255.
[362] *Sade mon prochain, précedé de Le philosophe scélérat*, "Sade et la révolution," III. Le régicide simulacre de la mise à mort de dieu, Paris: Seuil, 1967, p. 72.

whose sacrifice carries with it a profound break in the order of the world.[363] This counterrevolutionary tradition is, moreover, one that extends from de Maistre to Le Bon, Freud's source for group psychology. In addition to this lineage, however, even Immanuel Kant, not normally suspected of extreme piety or reactionary sympathies, identifies the execution of the king as "*the complete subversion of every concept of justice*," "a crime that remains eternally and cannot be expiated (*crimen immortale, inexpiabile*)," resembling "the kind of sin that, according to theologians, can never be forgiven in this world or the next."[364] Kant compares this occurrence to "being swallowed up in an abyss from which there is no return, like the state's committing suicide."[365] He argues that it is in the nature of the supreme legislation to make regicide absolutely illegitimate and effectively impossible.

Following from Kant's claim, Geoffrey Bennington argues that the contingent occurrence of the formal execution of Louis XVI enacted by Saint-Just demonstrates the possibility that the law can condemn its own guarantor.[366] This possibility was always there, outside and opposed to the law; it could have been enacted prior to 1793 and it could be enacted again. This means that the sovereignty of the king, the mastery of the master, was and is always something vulnerable and fragile, and the absoluteness of absolute monarchy was never anything more than an appearance. From this viewpoint, it is the merit of Kant's description (closely linked to the one identified in Sade by Klossowski) to ascertain the radical novelty of revolution and impossibility of accounting for the moment of democratic decision from the perspective of a philosophical tradition that relies on an unbreachable unifying principle.

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[363] See Bataille's continuation of this thesis in "La pensée de Sade," *La littérature et le mal*, "Sade," *OC* IX, p. 245.
[364] *Metaphysics of Morals*, *Kant's Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977, p. 145.
[365] Ibid.
[366] See Geoffrey Bennington, "Forget to Remember, Remember to Forget: *Sade avec Kant*," paper read to the "Sade and his Legacy" conference, University of North London, November 1997, *Open Book/Livre ouvert*, Scotts Valley: CreateSpace, 2008, p. 114.

Klossowski's claim is that the execution of the King represents nothing less than the death of God, making the absolute priority for crime indicated in the writings of Marquis de Sade possible.[367] Thomas Keenan also reads Sade in order to make a claim about the nature of freedom and responsibility. The historical event of the Revolution and its regicide, and Sade's existence as literary counterpart to this overthrow, tell us that the products of this revolution (liberty, equality, fraternity) as ideals and as concrete manifestations are lacking in guarantees, radically free, without prior justification. Rather, the notion of a past legitimacy annihilated by subsequent insurrectionary developments cannot be taken seriously, as that apparent legitimacy must always have been vulnerable. Neither can the notion of a historically warranted rebellion be credited, as revolution comes out of nowhere, rather than being authorized by past knowledge.

The unprecedented nature of this decision haunts every future democratic decision. In Keenan's view, "there is no experience of freedom and responsibility except on the basis of the encounter with the undecidable or the unreadable."[368] In other words, the execution of the king cannot be justified by a prior natural order, as the king is himself, as Kant and Klossowski would have it, the representative of the coherence and universality of that order. The occurrence of the elimination of the highest term, necessary for the implementation of a new society in which the people are sovereign rather than the king, requires extreme and unmitigated novelty.[369] From there, we can say that because democratic decisions rely on a break from guaranteed coherence, every future occurrence of democracy is itself is necessarily characterized by the implication of the possibility of such a unforeseen event.

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[367] Sade's most famous and programmatic statement of society ruled by crime is the revolutionary pamphlet declaimed by Dolmancé in *La philosophie dans le boudoir*, cinquième dialogue, "Français, encore un effort si vous voulez être républicains," Paris: Gallimard, 1976.
[368] Keenan, Thomas, "Freedom, the Law of Another Fable: Sade's Insurrection," *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997, p. 70.
[369] For a Lacanian reading of these concerns, see Alenka Zupancic, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, chapter 5, Good and Evil, "The Logic of Suicide," London: Verso, 2000, p. 84-86.

As Bennington puts it, in contrast to the novelty of the undecidable, traditional political thinking "projects freedom as a state at the end of a progress ideally oriented by calculable and programmable laws," with freedom itself "ejected from now except in the negative form of unforeseen obstacles."[370] Keenan argues that contrary to this traditional political thought, which rejects the freedom it sometimes claims as its telos, deconstructive ethico-political thought avoids the regulation of decision-making according to an accepted principle that cannot be violated. Another form of ethics would begin with interruption by "language – the relation to others as another kind of inter-subjectivity – as what opens it to the necessity of reading, to the political."[371] By inter-subjectivity, what is here meant is that the rejection of a monarchical political system and its replacement with democracy involves the removal of an essential guarantor and a new consideration based on the presumption of inconsistency. Rather than societal submission to a primary and transcendent governing agent, democratic decisions carry with them the co-existence of mutually opposed principles and actors.

The Freudian analysis of society in *Totem and Taboo* and *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* relies on a metonymy of the developmental account provided for an individual. Freud's individual developmental theory is that we emerge from a scattered and amoral state to constitute an identity that includes awareness of social norms through love for, identification with, and fear of our fathers. His social thought indicates that immersion in a multitudinous grouping can partially undo this effect, returning us to the lawless chaos of a variety of insatiable and inconsistent desires. For this reason, social groups go through a process comparable to that of individuals, also being tamed by their identification with a transcendent figure. The narrative of social progress mirrors the route to maturity. As we have previously discussed, Freud argues that altruistic and compassionate behavior in adulthood is often the reversal of repressed childhood aggression. Bataille's writing on Gilles de Rais indicates that the

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[370] "Deconstruction and the Philosophers (The Very Idea)," *Legislations*, London: Verso, 1994, p. 45.
[371] Ibid., p. 70-71.

essence of monstrosity is the survival of these childhood urges in excess of the awareness of their supposed restraint in adulthood; monstrosity is the coexistence of the drives of childhood and the capacities of adulthood, which ought to be mutually exclusive.

The Marquis de Sade also considers the formation of society to mirror the development of an individual. From this perspective, Sade's *La philosophie dans le boudoir* can be read as a social theory for a lawless society and a pedagogical book intended to produce monsters, men and women who will retain the drives of their childhood while attaining the *savoir-faire* of adulthood. Keenan reads *La philosophie dans le boudoir* as just such a demonstrative fable, focusing in particular on the libertines' concern with the importance of naming. Saint-Ange and Dolmancé patiently explain to Eugénie all the obscene or descriptive names necessary to libertine practice.[372] "For Eugénie, here to learn, the learning is (in) naming, the lesson is a lesson in names, not simply about names, in general or in particular, but an event in naming."[373] Keenan follows Bennington in emphasizing Sade's pedagogical intent; the narrative sections exemplify the "truths" of the didactic propositions, which draw philosophical conclusions from the narrative events.[374] However, as Bennington puts it, Sade's narrative scenes aim to produce and describe "excess" itself, while Sade's philosophical moments "attain that status through the claim to exhaustivity and rigour in the formulation of the 'truth.'"[375] This accounts for the interminable nature of Sade's writing. It is impossible to contain the excessive, the exceptional, and the transgressive, in the form of maxims, propositions, and conclusions. Sade's whole encomium to crime, for example, is a self-defeating, self-subverting one, insofar as he denies the legitimacy of law, making "crime" a word with no referent.[376] So the pedagogy practiced by Sade relies on a basic contradiction, that between the description of nature as ruled by crime and the performance

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[372] This takes place throughout, but particularly in the troisième dialogue, p. 55-59.
[373] "Freedom, the Law of Another Fable," p. 76.
[374] See Geoffrey Bennington, *Sententiousness and the Novel*, chapter 5, Sade: the Transgression of Nature, "Scandalizing/Moralizing," p. 176.
[375] ibid., p. 179.
[376] Ibid., p. 197.

of crime as disrupting nature. This very lack of consistency, the failure of narrative self-coincidence, mirrors the monstrosity of the Sadean hero.

Keenan focuses on Saint-Ange's pedagogical fable to Eugènie, a narrative of maturation. Like Kant, Sade locates maturity as the precondition for freedom and autonomy; this maturity depends on "an instant of self-recognition and self-sufficiency."[377] Sade's account is centered on a refusal of debt to one's parents, specifically the mother; and from there, the development into total egoism. So Sade makes the consequence of self-recognition, the emancipatory moment, conclude in a denial of recognition of anyone else. "The narrative tells the story of the movement from a narrative (I authored you, I come from you, I depend on you) to the oddly *a*narrative (I owe you nothing, I do not recognize you, you?)."[378] This absolute declaration of total freedom and the elimination of recognition, authority, and duty, unsettles its apparent preconditions and narrative antecedents. While Kant strives towards an eventual autonomy and self-mastery, he establishes a positive freedom that recognizes the necessity of law. Sade circumvents this moment, establishing instead priority for drives that deny restraint predicated on social existence.[379] Or, Sade's account provides for an entry into society that refuses its limits while appropriating its capacities.

Keenan points out that Sade's claims depend on a demystifying intent.[380] Sade would replace the interdictions and imperatives put in place by Christian ethical instruction with "Nature," the absolute principle of selfish pursuit of desire. Keenan argues that Sade's Nature is characterized by the principle of similarity. Sade relies on similes to declare that in order to be free and republican and natural, the French must behave like their animal analogues, their savage and privileged ancestors.[381] However, at Sade's strangest moments, his heroes turn against nature,

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[377] "Freedom, the Law of Another Fable," p. 80.
[378] Ibid.
[379] For Lacan's classic study on the relationship between Sade and Kant, see "Kant avec Sade," *Ecrits* II, section VI, nouvelle édition, Paris: Seuil, 1999, and *Seminar VII*, chapter VI, "Le la loi morale." I continue these concerns in chapter four.
[380] "Freedom, the Law of Another Fable," p. 84.
[381] ibid., p. 86.

asserting absolute singularity, freedom of comparison, even elimination of causality: "perhaps the causes are useless to the effects," says Juliette.[382] There would be effectively no general ruling the particular; but in order to assert this absolute autonomy of the singular, he must rely on language, narrative, and the fabulous – examples of the non-exemplary.[383] Keenan argues that this narrative of the impossible to narrate, fables that cannot possibly provide morals (even of a scandalous or repugnant sort), demonstrates the aporia of the ethico-political. The political depends on the radical absence of authorization by knowledge, but also an absolute imperative to act.

Bataille's Sovereignty and Ours

Derrida writes of a Bataille whose sovereignty is a mastery that refuses meaning: "On ne peut même pas dire que cette différence a un sens : elle est la *différence du sens*, l'intervalle *unique* qui sépare le sens d'un certain non-sens."[384] The difference of sense is achieved in the willingness to eliminate one's here-and-now particularity and a refusal to re-infuse that generality into future heres and nows. In contrast to mastery, a bound condition that relies on recognition by the laboring slave and the refusal of suicide, sovereignty rushes impetuously into death. This death is also a theatrical death. Just as art or the literary is (in the tradition originated by Plato) mimetic and without intrinsic truth, Bataille's sovereignty is a simulacrum.[385] Derrida makes the claim that "les immenses révolutions de Kant et de Hegel n'ont fait à cet égard que réveiller ou révéler la détermination philosophique la plus permanente de la négativité […]."[386] This is to say that it is the modern German contribution to metaphysics to point out, first in Kant, the limits of human knowledge, the ways that epistemology is bound to the capacities of the knowing subject; then in Hegel, knowledge's accession to the universal by negating the

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[382] Ibid., p. 88.
[383] Ibid., p. 92.
[384] *L'écriture et la différence*, "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale : *Une hegelianisme sans réserve*," "L'époque du sens : maîtrise et souveraineté," Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967, p. 374.
[385] ibid., p. 378.
[386] Ibid, p. 380.

particular. In each of their case, a profound awareness of the negative is made necessary to the practice of philosophy.

For Derrida, Bataille's excessive innovation is to radicalize this negativity to a degree that it can no longer be defined as the moment of a system, even as meaning organizes itself around it.[387] It is the difficulty of sovereignty that if it becomes a foundational requirement, an operative negativity, it loses its quality of absolute risk and refusal of sense. While lordship risks sovereignty in that it runs the risk of actually being annihilated, of failing to survive combat, sovereignty runs the "risk" of victory, the possibility that it might subordinate and give itself a meaning. Sovereignty, lacking definition, exceeds its historical time and place, its authorship, and its own possibility of definition – "Il n'y a d'ailleurs pas de souveraineté *elle-même*."[388] Sovereignty, an absolute difference that never establishes hierarchy, cannot be found in its essence because its essence is a pure lack, a movement towards the universal that destroys the particular without achieving a corresponding idea. This definition of sovereignty is obviously foreign to the homonymous account provided in traditional political philosophy.[389] However, it is possible that Bataille's account of sovereignty – one directly tied to the experience of the execution of the King and to the profound awareness of God's death – is of great import to the political. Derrida attempts to trace exactly this kind of intervention into the tradition of political philosophy, asking it to reconsider its precepts without the conceptual inheritance of monarchical privilege. However, he

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[387] Ibid.
[388] ibid., "L'écriture et l'économie générales," p. 397.
[389] For example, sovereignty as indicated in Jean Bodin's classic account of 1576, *Les Six livres de la République,* according to which it is "la puissance absolue et perpétuelle d'une République." *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967, p. 25.

approaches this from the perspective of Freud rather than from the insight he had himself uncovered in Bataille.[390]

Psychoanalysis against Political Philosophy

Political philosophy imagines that both individuals and states are rational, self-interested actors. This is not to say that politics does not accept the necessity of managing threat and violence. Thomas Hobbes asserts that "*man to man is an arrant wolf*."[391] Kant, who suggests the possibility of perpetual peace, takes for granted that even an ideal society will be "society which has not only the greatest freedom, and therefore a continual antagonism among its members, but also the most precise specification and preservation of the limits of this freedom in order that it can co-exist with the freedom of others."[392] This means that even the most optimistic prospect found in the tradition for the utmost liberty presumes conflict and struggle to be unavoidable. However, both Hobbes and Kant imagine that as dangerous and ruthless as individuals might be, they are driven by concern for their own self-interest, determined with some semblance, however imperfect, of human reason. Psychoanalysis calls this into question.

While psychoanalysis indicates that reasons can be given for human behavior, it offers substantially different explanations than those that seem apparent. The psychology taken for granted by political theorists of both idealist and realist stripes imagines that the primary goal of individuals is physical security. In contrast, it is the contention of psychoanalysis that human beings act in order to gratify desires of which they are not consciously aware and that they disavow. Second, psychoanalysis argues that these desires do not conform to adherence to reality, but are instead governed by unconscious

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[390] For a comparable reconsideration of political sovereignty more explicitly indebted to Bataille, see Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World, or, Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew, New York: SUNY Press, 2007, p. 107.

[391] "To the Right Honourable William Earle of Devonshire, My Most Honoured Lord," *The Citizen: Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society: Man and Citizen (*De Homine *and* De Cive*)*, ed. Bernard Gert, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991, p. 89.

[392] Kant, Immanuel, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," second edition, *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reis, trans. H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991, p. 45.

processes beyond the logic of non-contradiction and causality. Third, Freud suggests the presence of a death drive, indicating that the struggle for the life or basic concern with self-preservation is not a guarantee for human behavior.

For these reasons, psychoanalysis calls into question the generally accepted reasons why individuals submit to governance. Further, while political engagement is unusual for the psychoanalytic community, Freud will at times suggest that these insights also hold macrocosmically. This means that the state, which both Hobbes and Kant imagine to be a check on individual violence, is capable of itself being driven by motives that are hidden, perhaps irrational, and possibly suicidal.

Psychoanalysis and War

Freud was most concerned with social questions late in his career. The event of the First World War left an indelible mark on his thought, the discovery of the death drive itself, through his analysis of war trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.[393] Freud's most comprehensive attempt to apply psychoanalytic insights to society takes place in his famous *Civilization and Its Discontents*.[394] However, prior to both these efforts, Freud attempted to consider political problems in "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," written in the second year of the First World War. Freud writes of the suspicion that sovereign states, rather than acting as curbs on the individual potential for violence, in fact magnify and exteriorize this tendency. As he sarcastically comments, it seems likely that "the state has forbidden to the individual the practice of wrong-doing, not because it desires to abolish it, but because it wants to monopolize it, like salt and tobacco."[395] Freud here considers the state as itself hostile and self-interested, rather than a check on individual conflict and guardian of general safety.

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[393] Written in 1920.
[394] Published in 1930.
[395] Freud, Sigmund. "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XIV (1914-1916). On the History of the Psycho-Analytic*

This outlook discards an assumption of political philosophy, namely, the basic benevolence of the state.[396] Freud suggests here that the European nation-states of the twentieth century fail to establish the common good. His implication is not only that the war suggests a contingent failure, but that this says something about state behavior – its goals, not its execution – that is more troubling than the usual interference of human imperfection. Freud speaks of his own attitude of disillusionment at "the low morality shown externally by states which in their internal relations pose as the guardians of moral standards and the brutality shown by individuals whom, as participants in the highest human civilization, one would not have thought capable of such behavior."[397] This sentence contains two observations that Freud himself finds deeply disturbing: First, the utter lack of restraint on the part of states embroiled in war, and second, the complicity of their citizens in atrocities.

It is notable that Freud's concern with the lack of decency in warfare is somewhat alien to pre-Kantian political philosophy, which takes for granted the occasional outbreak of bloody conflict between different nations. In this sense, psychoanalysis breaks with any presumption of national self-interest by refusing to accept distinctions based on race or geography. Freud will later characterize these explanations as mere "narcissism of minor difference."[398] Political philosophy imagines that war either results from real racial or cultural differences (differences Freud considers to be only significant for neurotic reasons), or because of legitimate self-interest – the demand of one state for security from another, or control over resources. Freud instead feels that such competition or violence can result from the need to establish an identity that is essentially fictive.

Movement, Papers on Metapsychology, and Other Works, trans. James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1957, p. 279.

[396] Plato's ruling class of philosopher-guardians, Aristotle's self-sufficing state that strives for the good life, Hobbes' Leviathan, or Kant's just civil constitution are all conceptions of the state that take for granted that whatever the possibility of corruption, a true state would be aimed at the good of all its members.

[397] Ibid., p. 280.

[398] *SE* XXI, p. 114.

Freud concludes, "there is no such thing as 'eradicating' evil."[399] This is because the primary processes that characterize the unconscious are eternally present, "instinctual impulses which are of an elementary nature," "similar in all men and which aim at the satisfaction of certain primal needs," some of which civilization must consider evil.[400] Freud believes that the only progress can be attained through the "civilizing" process. The apparent maturation of human instincts through history is the result of complex interweavings of reaction-formations and repression. As previously discussed, psychoanalysis argues that while all humans have a tendency toward cruelty, this proclivity can be sublimated into a more compassionate response.[401] In fact, the most gentle and altruistic of us may have sublimated an original tendency toward practices we would judge to be reprehensible.

The process of civilization is one of taming and recombining basic erotic and aggressive drives. Civilization demands that instincts reverse their charge or change their object; erotic instincts mix with the egoistic ones to produce social instincts. However, these later developments always cover up original drives that are utterly selfish, meaning that we require an indispensable "cultural hypocrisy."[402] Freud's argument is that the event of war abrogates the usual societal prohibitions that keep primary instincts in check. For this reason, in a sense, the frequent atrocities of war should not surprise us very much. Freud's assertion is that war produces a "logical bedazzlement", to which even the well-educated are subject.[403] This loss of one's ordinary senses leads to the capacity for primary instincts towards violence and torture to run roughshod. Freud writes that "our fellow-citizens have not sunk so low as we feared, because they had

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[399] "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," p. 281.
[400] Ibid.
[401] This idea is reiterated, ibid. p. 282.
[402] Ibid. p. 284.
[403] Ibid. P. 287. A bedazzlement with which Freud was familiar, having been quite patriotic in the first immediate moments of the war.

never risen so high as we believed."[404] The question remains, "why does the complex fabric of displacement and overdetermination – hypocrisy – collapse in the event of war?" If hostilities must break out, why do they not follow a civil, if not predictable, course of politics by other means? Why does cruelty become so paramount?

Einstein and Freud

Freud reconsidered the issue in 1932, at the request of no less a figure than Albert Einstein. Einstein initially considered it a duty to form an "intellectual elite" to advise the rulers of the world and provide wisdom to the League of Nations.[405] Like Freud, Einstein believes that the state apparatus does not behave with the interests of peace or prosperity in mind, but rather aims at power for its own sake. Further, Einstein recognizes that the state is often propped up and encouraged in its imperialism by economic elites. While conceding that the ideological domination of the ruling class provides for spontaneous support for imperialism by the masses, Einstein believes that unquestionably, "man has within him a lust for hatred and destruction."[406] Like Freud, Einstein also recognized that the intelligentsia is equally "apt to yield to these disastrous collective suggestions" if not more so (the committee advising the League of Nations would presumably have to heal itself before offering any insight).[407]

Freud and Einstein agree on all of these points. Freud goes on to trace an account of the rise of civilization that emphasizes law as simply "the might of a community", still violence, albeit centralized and more or less equally distributed.[408] The Freudian account of the birth of a nation is a combination of the "recognition of a community of interests […] [that] leads to the growth of emotional ties between the members of a united group

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[404] Ibid. P. 285.
[405] Einstein, Albert. "The Einstein-Freud Correspondence (1931-1932)," *Einstein on Peace*, ed. Otto Nathan and Heinz Norden, New York: Schocken Books, 1960, p. 186.
[406] Freud, Sigmund. "Why War? (1933 [1932]) (Einstein and Freud)," *SE* XXII, p. 201.
[407] Ibid.
[408] ibid., p. 205.

of people," along with "violence overcome by the transference of power to a larger unity, which is held together by emotional ties between its members."[409] Freud points out that the state's monopoly on violence is not equally applied to all individuals, but is rather biased in favor of the privileged and against the lower classes. Justice "becomes an expression of the unequal degrees of power obtaining within it [the community]; the laws are made by and for the ruling members and find little room for the rights of those in subjection."[410] Here Freud judges that the apparent concern with the good of the whole conceals self-interested motives on the part of individuals who have access to state power.

In this matter, Freud sides with the tradition associated with Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, who defined justice, against Socrates, as merely the "advantage of the stronger," the "advantage of the established rule," and obedience to the rulers.[411] At this point in the argument, Freud appears to have a relativist ethics, that strength is the only law. But in contrast to Thrasymachus – who feels that the right of the stronger is the only criterion for justice – Freud finds this conclusion to be horrifying. It is partly his tone and stylistic affect that makes clear a distinction between the psychoanalytic vantage point and Thrasymachus's cynicism. We will see that Freud will later escape from this conclusion, discovering the possibility of an ethics that does not rely on the justice of sovereignty or strength.

Psychoanalytic Indirection

Freud recognizes that this alliance of centralized violence with shared culture is a solution, though an imperfect one, to the potential unbridled war of all against all. The foundation of civilization is, however, as we have seen, more concerned with establishing stability than with equality or fairness. He then dedicates himself to determining whether

[409] Ibid.
[410] ibid., p. 206.
[411] *Republic,* p. 338b, 339c.

these factors might be applied globally to prevent hostility between state actors. The first question is whether a global empire could be constituted, a worldwide monopoly on force by one single sovereign. Freud points out that this is practically impossible.[412] He also has little faith in the second possible guardian against war – shared ideals and community based on identity. He points out that shared Christian values did little to prevent destructive and recurrent European conflict.[413] Ideals, rather than serving as a social bond, have instead typically existed as pretext for destructive rampages. Freud also argues that communism cannot lead to the cessation of war, because equality and prosperity will never be enough to overcome basic drives toward violence and power for its own sake.[414]

However, in the face of these obstacles, Freud insists that there is a basic ethical imperative to refuse to accept the eternal outbreak of war. He asserts that as humans, we also have a basic attachment to life, to which war is an abomination.[415] His final laconic suggestion is that mankind might choose to collectively avoid war because of a "justified dread of the consequences of a future war."[416] This last thought deserves further examination. Dread for the future, the converse of hope, relies on a premonition of occurrence of what is not now possible; an unknowable and hence incalculable future. Further, it appears that Freud is alluding to the possibility of what would become known as mutually assured destruction; dread at the thought that future wars will lead to total obliteration.

Derrida and the Economy of Cruelty

Derrida's indebtedness to psychoanalysis is well-known.[417] While deconstruction always bore a certain relation to the political, the question became increasingly prominent

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[412] p. 207-208.
[413] P. 208.
[414] Ibid.
[415] p. 213.
[416] P. 215.
[417] Bennington indicates that Freud is the most indispensable resource for deconstruction, more so than Heidegger. See "Circanalysis (The Thing Itself)," *Interrupting Derrida*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 96.

with *Spectres de Marx* in 1993.[418] In the subsequent decade, Derrida became increasingly preoccupied with deconstruction's place in (or outside) the tradition of political philosophy. In his address to the Estates General of Psychoanalysis in 2000, Derrida chooses to discuss the relationship between psychoanalysis and political thought, and what deconstruction might have to say about that relation. His remarks endorse many of Freud's statements in "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" and the Einstein discussion, and suggest that the profession of psychoanalysis should follow its inceptor's lead in delving into political problems.

Derrida draws attention to a constant Freudian stratagem, that of diversion; human cruelty cannot be abolished, but it can be managed and redirected. Freud suggests to politics that it cannot eliminate violence but can "la domestiquer, la différer, apprendre à négocier, à transiger *indirectement* mais sans illusion avec elle […]".[419] This is to the credit of psychoanalysis, from a deconstructive point of view. Deconstruction charges the tradition of political science with tending to think violence only from a metaphysical perspective. Metaphysics posits originary presence, subsequently disrupted, which can be restored to its original *telos*. Political thought, similarly, tends to imagine that politics can be thought from its conclusion (the establishing of a just civil order, for example) or from its beginning (Rousseau's natural man). In either case, there is a tendency to theorize on the basis of future resolution – even Marxism, a modern thought of social antagonism, bases its outlook from the future classless society.[420] Psychoanalysis, on the other hand,

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The crucial texts on the relationship between psychoanalysis and deconstruction are "Freud et la scène de l'écriture," in *L'Écriture et la difference*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967; and *La carte postale: De Socrate à Freud et au-delà*, Paris: Flammarion, 1980.

[418] As early as 1967, Derrida wrote of political science's reliance on Leibniz's theorem of science as non-phonetic and universal: "Par ce regard silencieux et mortel s'échangent les complicités de la science et de la politique : plus précisément de la science politique moderne." *De la grammatologie*, deuxième partie, chapitre 4, "Le théoreme et le théâtre," p. 429.

[419] Derrida, Jacques, *États d'âme de la psychanalyse*: *L'impossible au-delà d'une souveraine cruauté*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2000, P. 37.

[420] See Bennington: "The metaphysical thought of origin and end entails non-violence, and duly prescribes politics either as the unfortunate and degenerative decline from a peaceful origin (Rousseau), or as the

declares that human violence cannot and will never be avoided, and for this reason, Freud's political speculations do not rely on the possibility of resolution.

For this reason, Derrida suggests that it might be accurate to speak of a psychoanalytic "revolution." Psychoanalysis denies the apparent transcendence of the sovereign. The state is not disinterested, nor aimed at the common good, but rather animated by the same drive to power and violence that produces crime. Psychoanalysis also denies the possibility of an achieved state of peace, whether in the distant past or in the hoped-for future. Psychoanalysis instead imagines antagonism to be irreducible. Derrida ties these insights to the disturbing moment of the execution of Louis XVI at the dawn of the modern era. Derrida calls this a "parégicide," the death of the father and the king, who appeared to exist as guarantor of law and meaning but whose authority was always only an appearance.[421] Derrida also reminds us that contemporary republican governance requires the inheritance of a "monarchical principle," that paregicide has not or cannot be thought through political thought insofar as it continues to rely on a notion of sovereignty. Like the revolution, psychoanalysis is the demonstration of the mortality and fragility of the king, the assertion that apparently legitimate authority is merely a superior form of violence. This revelation of the highest power as lacking its apparent symbolic authority is linked to the insights discussed in this chapter from Kant and Klossowski.[422]

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redemptive drive towards an achieved peace (Kant). Even political philosophies which appear in one way or another to give greater thought to violence (Hobbes, Hegel, Marx) cannot think violence other than in the teleological perspective of non-violence." "Derrida and politics," *Interrupting Derrida*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 28-29.

[421] P. 50.

[422] p. 51. This aspect of Derrida's work bears comparison with Michel Foucault's statement that "Dans la pensée et l'analyse politique, on n'a toujours pas coupé la tête du roi." *Histoire de la sexualité: La volonté de savoir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1976, p. 117. However, Foucault draws from this the conclusion that the dismissal of political sovereignty results in the inquiry into micropolitical considerations of the means that subjects are produced. Foucault is hostile to any consideration of political sovereignty – this is evident in chapter three of *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey, New York: Picador, p. 43. In contrast, Derrida's analysis continues to meditate directly on the ramifications of an absent center, rather than proceeding on to a positive account of practical alternatives.

Derrida points out that the Freudian libido allows for "différences de modalité, de qualité, d'intensité, d'activité, ou de reactivité dans la *même* cruauté."[423] All actions might be said to be manifestations of a single libido; a libido we might call cruel in that it is self-interested, aggressive, and does not, in its essence, choose to conform to reality or necessity. This means that any progress, any apparent "humanization," generosity or decency is necessarily only "une voie indirecte, toujours indirecte, de combattre la pulsion de cruauté."[424] Cruelty cannot be simply countered with generosity or goodness; rather, it is transformed on its own terms. It is mediated rather than fought.

In this schema, evil cannot be said to be independent of good, or even its privation. Evil is only another name for basic drives towards the perseverance of life. When Freud discovers the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* he opposes it to the erotic libido previously uncovered. However, it is impossible to declare the death drive evil and Eros good; the two rely on one another, as Eros requires aggression in order to survive, and the death drive requires perseverance in order to repeat. In Derrida's reading, the erotic drive toward life would not in itself be sufficient. Rather, "il n'y a pas de vie sans la concurrence des deux forces pulsionnelles antagonistes."[425] So any Manicheaen privilege for Eros is impossible, because life itself would require the simultaneous presence of death.

For this reason, the only possible goal, it would seem, would be a politics of diversion. At this point in the argument, it would appear that the psychic processes of deferring the cruel drives, alloying erotic instincts with identification and directing aggression outwards, is the only hope for preventing utter barbarism. Replacing an unjust society with another one, or remaking human nature, is out of the question – we can only find ways to acknowledge our basic cruelty and to direct collective aggression into

[423] P. 73.
[424] P. 72.
[425] P. 76.

relatively harmless avenues. Derrida reminds us that Freud has suggested cultivating emotional ties, the mixture of erotic and egoistic drives, and the identification with others, the "type de ligature ou d'obligation venant limiter le déchaînement, la déliaison."[426] Freud and Derrida here seem to endorse social institutions that limit competition and aggression, including patriotism and family ties. These responsibilities and commitments establish group identifications that stabilize social roles.

Derrida also praises Freud for recognizing "l'inégalité indéracinable et innée des hommes," including the perseverance of class conflict.[427] In this sense as well, Freud seems to go against the grain of modern political thought. From Hobbes to Marx, there is a political instinct towards leveling differences between members of the political body. Even the sovereign could be anyone at all; all citizens are effectively equal in their desire for security and prosperity. If individuals are not assumed to be equally rational and equivalent in their desires, as psychoanalysis does not, this pre-given equality disappears.

For these insights, Derrida suggests that "la politique devrait *prendre en compte* le savoir psychanalytique (*ce qui ne veut pas dire y chercher un programme*), et que, réciproquement, la communauté analytique devrait prendre en compte l'histoire […]."[428] We should be aware of the warning Derrida includes in his endorsement – he is concerned that while psychoanalytic insights should be consulted, in a manner of speaking, they could not provide a new political project. This might be because of the apparent conservatism of some of the insights previously discussed – psychoanalysis, in calling into question the possibilities of reason, denying equality, and endorsing projects of collective identification, seems at times quite close to the right-wing discourse associated with de Maistre. It is, after all, the conclusion of a certain French tradition that emerges from the Ultramontanists, mentioned by Klossowski, to Le Bon, that social

[426] P. 74.
[427] P. 75.
[428] P. 78.

cohesion and traditional values must be prized above all else in the absence of centralized rule, in that they are the only barriers against man's basic drive towards sin and evil. Derrida, however, argues for a different link between Freudian insights and the nature of political decision, one intrinsic to deconstruction.

Psychoanalysis, the Aneconomic, and Deconstruction

Derrida famously argued, in "Freud et la scène de l'écriture," that Freud remains metaphysical. Psychoanalysis aims to assign a stable and certain meaning to every action, gesture, word or utterance, and to contain every symptom or parapraxis in a knowable libidinal economy. However, Derrida argues that a close reading of the insights of psychoanalysis can acknowledge the inherent instability of this economy, and the possibility of an event that takes place outside it. From this perspective, psychoanalysis becomes a privileged, perhaps even essential, ally for the deconstructive project. Along these lines, Derrida will oppose the possibilities of psychoanalytic thinking about cruelty to the similar argument about the irreducibility of power struggle associated with Nietzsche.

Nietzsche argued that "All events that result from intention are reducible to the intention to increase power."[429] It follows that for Nietzsche, all human actions are in a sense intentional. It is Nietzsche's goal as psychologist to discover this basic drive toward power as the hidden explanation for all behavior. Nietzsche's cruelty is then, like Freud's, a basic drive for power that might be sublimated or reversed, but never extinguished; "sans terme et sans terme opposable."[430] Nietzsche is content with power as his transcendental explanatory term. A constant struggle of distinct wills-to-power – a differential economy without positive terms – is still an economy. It offers explanations and a basic common term for all beings and behaviors: the will to power. Derrida

[429] *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, New York: Vintage, 1968, aphorism 663.
[430] Derrida, *États d'âmes de la psychanalyse*, p. 10.

suggests that this is not the final conclusion of psychoanalysis. Derrida at this point wonders if Freud might lead the way to a contrary to cruelty, a possible outside to power and violence, "un au-delà de la pulsion de mort ou de maîtrise souveraine, donc l'au-delà d'une cruauté, un au-delà qui n'aurait rien à voir ni avec les pulsions ni avec les principes?"[431] Derrida's argument up until now, regarding an irreducible economy of cruelty, is homologous with the one he assigns to Nietzsche. However, for Nietzsche, all actions, including apparently senseless cruelty, have a meaning – the essential and unquestioned will to power.[432] In contrast, Derrida will argue that a close reading of Freud indicates the presence of something outside this apparently universal drive.

Derrida chooses to pursue Freud's insight that the strength of the rulers and the law – political sovereignty – is reducible to the same drive that results in individual cruelty. Derrida argues that both cruelty and the drive for power resist even psychoanalytic explanation. This is because psychoanalysis strives to recuperate, understand or interpret everything as an expression of a monistic libidinal economy. It will be the argument of deconstruction that cruelty is by definition excessive. Derrida speaks of cruelty as "le souffrir *pour* souffrir, le faire-souffrir, le se-faire ou laisser souffrir *pour*, si un peut encore dire, le plaisir de la souffrance."[433] The problem with *cruelty* in particular, rather than merely aggression, is that it has no apparent purpose. It is not the danger of the Hobbesian war of all against all, in which different individuals compete for resources and goods. Rather, true cruelty would have no *telos*; it would be the inflicting of suffering purely for the sake of itself, and thereby meaningless.[434]

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[431] P. 14.
[432] This reading of Nietzsche as the last metaphysician is indebted to Heidegger, especially *Nietzsche: Volume III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, David Farrell Krell, and Frank A. Capuzzi, San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991. Bataille's reading in *Sur Nietzsche*, OC VI, contrasts with this perspective.
[433] P. 111.
[434] Freud wrestles with a similar problem in "The Economic Problem in Masochism," *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology*, ed. Philip Rieff, New York: Touchstone, 1991.

Derrida suggests that this aneconomic nature of *true* cruelty – that is, totally senseless and unmotivated suffering – would effectively escape the bounds of psychoanalytic knowledge. Cruelty as Nietzsche envisions it, and as Freud appears to want to imagine it, ultimately requires a knowing subject. The aggressive drive that Hobbes discusses imagines that men, arrant wolves as they are, are rational and self-interested and desire security. Nietzsche's drive for power, in contrast, exceeds security, and it is capable of deception. The Nietzschean will to power can even cloak itself in its opposite and appear to be an altruism or a generosity or a desire for weakness (this last possibility is nihilism).

However, even in this subtle case, it can be seen in Nietzsche's discourse that however deluded or self-deluded one might be, a presence-to-self is required. If a political agent acts for power or for cruelty, this power or cruelty is still in the service of a kind of self-interest – discharging of energy, as Nietzsche would put it. Freud's libidinal economy also imagines an unconscious other scene dictating our actions. Freud will also posit that our motives can be far more troubling or less acceptable than we can admit. However, Derrida will argue that the death drive as such, the death drive itself, would seem to exceed this minimal self-knowledge on which Nietzsche still relies. That is to say, the Nietzschean will to power, however suicidal it might become, maintains a certain relation to a subject desiring to exercise power. The Freudian death drive, in contrast, understood properly, would resist knowledge or thought or possession entirely.

A true death drive, a drive toward cruelty, would need to be utterly senseless and without purpose. It would be effectively the mirror image of the problem of generosity or altruism. In this sense, psychoanalysis seems to acknowledge "une discontinuité radicale, une hétérogénéité, un saut dans l'éthique (donc aussi dans le juridique et le politique)

qu'aucun savoir psychanalytique en tant que tel ne saurait propulser ou autoriser."[435] Derrida sees this problem – the problem of cruelty, aggression in excess of any economy, the nature of the death drive itself – as indicating the impossible. The nature of excess, death, and the aneconomic resists thought and cannot be understood or appropriated by knowledge. Further, Derrida argues that this event mirrors the problem of the decision. A true decision, as Derrida argues, could not be one whose conclusion is dictated in an advance. Rather, it must take place without determinacy. This decision, as such, is for Derrida at the core of politics insofar as it is political and ethics insofar as it is ethical.[436]

Taking into account the possibility of action that had no *telos*, no goal or origin, is itself a consideration of a suspension or a hiatus like the one necessary in any true political or ethical decision. Derrida argues that "cette anéconomie, Freud travaille sans cesse à la réintégrer, donc à la prendre en compte, à en rendre raison, de façon calculable, dans une économie du possible."[437] Derrida believes that the metaphysical commitments of psychoanalysis lead it to frequently fall short of its own insight. While Freud is on the verge of a death drive that is beyond the capacities of a subject, and is on the cusp of recognizing the aneconomic or the unaccountable, he constantly tries to appropriate it into a body of scientific knowledge. Likewise, psychoanalytic indirection is still an appropriation by a subject, "le pouvoir ou la possibilité du « je peux » […]."[438] A deconstructive radicalization of psychoanalytic insight, on the other hand, would suspend this economy of cruelty and its recognition or re-appropriation. Instead, deconstructive ethics suggests recognition of the limit of such managerial project.

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[435] P. 76.
[436] For reading and ethics, see *Limited Inc*., trans. Samuel Weber, Evanston: Northwestern UP, "Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion," p. 144-145. For politics and decision, see Derrida's critique of Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction *The Politics of Friendship*, chapter 5, "On Absolute Hostility: The Cause of Philosophy and the Spectre of the Political," trans. George Collins, London: Verso, 1997.
[437] P. 81.
[438] P. 84.

I would argue that it is Freud's last, vague allusion, his hope for the "well-founded dread of the form that future wars will take" that is closest to this deconstructive messianicity.[439] First, because it is a deep pessimism that Freud takes to be a source of optimism. Second, because it is a politics of anticipation, and last, because it appears to allude to the potential for total annihilation. An irreducible human death drive would seem to override any such concern. However, we might suggest that Freud's *Todestrieb* remains the property of a single subject, an urge to own and possess one's own death. The form of future wars, on the other hand, portends something else entirely – an extinction, one that would eliminate the recognition of any such heroic suicide.

Derrida and Freud regard this collective and de-individuated death, one that would supersede the subject, as a source for the ethical, rather than its annihilation. This consideration of death carries with it an intimate link to obscure community, a possibility of relation with others that is not based on a political head who takes the form of a father substitute. Moreover, this collective death, radically irrecuperable by subjectivity and in excess of what is conventionally understood to be named by Freud's death drive, opens an alterity essential to a primary ethics. Bataille's sovereignty might indeed be a name for this notion of death and this grounds for ethical relationship.

[439] P. 215.

Chapter Three: Eroticism, Ethics, and Literature: Bataille's Fiction and the Opening to Alerity

Introduction: Doubts

From a certain perspective, Bataille's "literary" works might appear almost dispensable. After all, it has been pointed out that any strict demarcation between the theoretical and the literary is untenable in Bataille's *œuvre*.[440] For this reason, one cannot claim that his philosophical or critical works are in any way secondary to the less intertextual, more fictive stories. The reader can even be tempted to conclude that Bataille's *récits* comprise a kind of dulling of his insights for popular consumption, a dressing-up of his concerns in the more immediately shocking and scandalous apparel of pornographic narrative.[441] While *Histoire de l'œil* is easily his most famous and best-selling work, it is possible that this early work expresses few of Bataille's innovations, and makes only a modest stylistic contribution to literature.

Bataille's fiction is complicated by several factors: First, the matter of genre. Can Bataille's fiction be called pornography? And if we accept this designation, what does this say about his gender politics and his ethics? Further, if these works are his most popular and well-known, what can this popularity tell us? To complicate Bataille's sexual politics still further, we must admit that his fiction gives the impression of occupying a suspiciously retrograde position. The transgressive scenarios he suggests often include a preoccupation with blasphemy and a persistent atmosphere of guilt and shame. It is in these fictional works more than any other that we are confronted with a strongly Christian, indeed Catholic, view of the pleasures of the flesh as horrifying and

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[440] See Roland Barthes, "From work to text," *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, Fontana, London, 1977, p. 157.

[441] His choice to publish them pseudonymously does nothing to dispel this impression. Bataille attributed *Histoire de l'œil* to "Lord Auch" and *Madame Edwarda* to "Pierre Angelique," while he hoped to win the Nobel Prize for his work on *La parte maudite*.

repulsive.[442] In addition to this inverse puritanism, the *récits* also appear to be heteronormative, if not patriarchal or misogynist. While women are portrayed as active initiators and ecstatic participants in sex, the clitoris never appears in any of Bataille's works. For these reasons, it is peculiar that Bataille's fiction is so enormously popular; one would think that this guilt-ridden and androcentric approach would be past its sell-by date.

It is this very counter-intuitive popularity that demands an account. If it is unlikely that Bataille is merely a typical pornographer, it remains true that his fictional work has carried with an enormous influence on artists, musicians, and filmmakers. A short list of figures who have made direct reference to Bataille would include Hans Bellmer, André Masson, Marguerite Duras, Jean-Luc Godard, Bernardo Bertolucci, Björk, Yukio Mishima, Shinya Tsukamoto, Milan Kundera, and Dinos and Jake Chapman. It is important to note that this list includes both men and women, and figures emerging from a variety of cultures, including non-Christian countries. Moreover, it is the discomfort that a reading of Bataille retains today, its untimely quality of a peculiar nostalgic or reactionary atmosphere, while at the same time striking so many readers as unsurpassed in the literature of eroticism, which needs inquiry.

Previous readings

There is no shortage of secondary literature on Bataille's fiction. These commentaries accumulate disproportionately on *Histoire de l'œil*, his short "pornographic" narrative of 1928. As with the differing approaches to his political position, the readings that have been advanced are diverse and often mutually exclusive. Most impressive is Roland Barthes's reading, which is relentlessly formalist and views

[442] In the years 1918-19, Bataille's main readings were from Rémy de Gourmont's *Le Latin mystique*, a collection of Catholic texts intended to inspire revulsion and disgust for flesh and sexuality. He also intended to enter seminary and become a priest during this period. See Michel Surya, "The school of the flesh," *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, p. 27.

Bataille's accomplishment as having nothing to do with the shock value of the acts represented and everything to do with its performance of a chain of resemblances that inexorably drives the narrative, without regard to character, psychology, or conventional plotting.[443]

Contrary to Barthes, Susan Sontag reads the story as a particularly meritorious and aesthetically successful example of pornography, furthering the genre while remaining confined by it, through its superior affective charge and imaginative force.[444] Andrea Dworkin agrees with Sontag that the narrative is pornographic, but applies this designation in order to condemn the narrative as propaganda for the violence of the male sexual outlook.[445] Dworkin's reading is wildly reductive and expresses a misguided moralism. However, I would argue that Dworkin contributes two worthwhile elements of inquiry that other commentators often ignore: First, her focus on Bataille's reception as a pornographer, as a writer who speaks to the sexual desires of his readers, and second, the ethical stakes of that position.

Neither Barthes nor Sontag would ever argue that it is Bataille's goal to demonstrate something about ethics. Barthes posits an entirely self-contained economy of reference with no imaginable outside, in which characters function as automatons who serve the alterations in substance that provide the real subject of the narrative, whereas Sontag's aestheticizing viewpoint sees the story as a well-constructed object that expands the realm of experience. The very idea of introducing ethics into a reading of the story with a straight face seems clearly inappropriate, given that Bataille gives us nothing but death, murder, orgies, and mutilation, all of which are related in a seemingly flat and untroubled tone. While Dworkin applies a ready-made conception of feminist ethics in

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[443] "La métaphore de l'œil," *Essais critiques*, Paris: Seuil, 1966. This reading is indebted to a Freudian account of condensation and displacement, but eschews the psychoanalytic claim to explanatory power on sexual grounds.
[444] "The Pornographic Imagination," *Styles of Radical Will*, New York: Picador, 1966, p. 35-73.
[445] *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, chapter 5, New York: Perigree, p. 167.

order to judge Bataille, I will read Bataille closely in order to determine precisely what Bataille is saying about the relationship between ethics and sexual difference. It is, however, to Dworkin's credit that she raises the ethical question, however naïvely and self-righteously she conceives of it.[446]

The ethics of Bataille's narratives

My reading will advance the claim that Bataille's fiction performs a communication between ethics, eroticism, and literature. I will not claim that the acts or characters presented are themselves ethical or commendable; I take for granted that these are not mimetic texts, they do not relate or condone actual behaviors or events. At the same time, my reading will not be purely formal; the scandalous and taboo acts that provide the core of Bataille's diegesis, the focus on the sexual and the criminal and the intertwining of these two, are integral to the strategy he enacts. This strategy is, in my view, a systematic disruption of the identity of the reader, an experience through reading that consists of exposure to radical difference and maintains this difference in excess of understanding, satisfaction, or conclusion.

Further, this disurbance has a specifically feminine status, which is non-phallic. From this perspective, I read those aspects of Bataille's narrative that appear regressive – his heteronormativity, his emphasis on fear and shame – as following from an ethical consideration of an encounter with sexual difference. More than this, the threatening, irrational, and carnal qualities ascribed to the diegetic feminine of Bataille's text eroticize the ethical and to ethicize the erotic. This process of intrication between ethical imperatives and sexual drives is vital to Bataille's materialist intervention in ethics, because it introduces ethical priorities to the apparently amoral world of primary

[446] Dworkin's challenge is similar to Sartre's concern, expressed in "Un nouveau mystique," *Situations I*, Paris: Gallimard, 1947, p. 143-188, that Bataille's advocacy of transgression implies an endorsement of rape.

processes, and at the same time redresses the anti-somatic idealism of the ethical tradition.

Virility

In Bataille's theoretical text "L'apprenti sorcier," he aligns what he calls elsewhere sovereignty or heterology with the term "virilité." Virility is, in this text, the name for an integral and excessive being in the world: "La vie est l'unité virile des éléments qui la composent. Il y a en elle la simplicité d'un coupe de hache."[447] The word obviously expresses a gendered quality; virile existence is apparently a masculine existence. However, while "virilité" is masculine, "vie" is feminine. Already in these two terse sentences, Bataille indicates a masculine vital unity, an axe blow, which apparently defines a feminine quality, "la vie." Bataille intricates vitalism, simplicity, unity, and violence, and ties these together under the name for masculinity. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Bataille seems to be describing a fascination with the phallus. However, Bataille links this phallic jouissance to communication with apprehension of an obscure second party: "desirable nudity," or "THE LOVED ONE."

> [Q]uand un homme n'a plus la force de répondre à l'image de la nudité désirable, il reconnaît la perte de son intégrité virile. Et de même que la virilité se lie à toute image qui suscite de l'espoir et de l'effroi. L'ÊTRE AIMÉ dans ce monde dissous est devenu la seule puissance qui ait gardé la vertu de rendre à la chaleur de la vie.[448]

First, Bataille indicates that virility is properly perceived when it has been lost, in an experience of a profound impotence. This lack of capacity is conveyed by an indication of nudity (the absence of covering), which should be capable of arousing lust. Second, Bataille claims an analogous insight, that the awareness of the integral being of virility is

[447] *OC* I, "L'apprenti sorcier," VIII, "L'existence dissociée," p. 529.
[448] Ibid., IX. "L'existence pleine et l'image de l'être aimé," p. 530.

brought by all desired objects, the paradigmatic instance of which is this attractive nakedness (which is implicitly feminine). While "nudité" is feminine, "être aimé" is a masculine noun. In context, Bataille's specification of a man's response to desirable nudity seems to strongly indicate a heterosexual response. However, the gender of the desirable nudity or loved one is made partially ambiguous. Further, he indicates that the image that entices is also frightening. The last sentence is crucial: The object of love is the only being in the world that can convey a true experience of existence.

Bataille goes on to relate the attributes of this loved one: "Le malheur ravagerait l'esprit de celui qui se laisserait posséder par le besoin de la réduire. Sa réalité est aussi douteuse qu'une lueur qui vacille, mais que la nuit rend violente."[449] In these passages, Bataille specifies that the temptation to understand or domesticate this obscure loved one will itself reify and imprison the self that desires. The feminine object is here characterized as ephemeral, barely real, and ultimately threatening. This account of femininity was criticized by Simone de Beauvoir, who cites Bataille as a representative purveyer of the myth of an apparent loss of self in the mystery of carnality. In de Beauvoir's view, Bataille's romanticism masks a refusal to consider a woman as an independent and free intellect.[450] Against this critique, it is necessary to read Bataille's most fleshed-out narrative of the desire for a bare feminine Other in order to determine precisely what experience he is championing. A reading of *Madame Edwarda* reveals that Bataille's "virility" does not name a potency, a capacity to dominate, or an ability to objectify. Virility is an example of Bataille's penchant for naming by antiphrasis; it is actually a name for a failure to understand, a lapse in control, and a relationship with alterity. Bataille's choice of words invites misunderstanding, and could lead the reader to

[449] Ibid., X. "Le caractère illusoire de l'être aimé," p. 531.
[450] *The Second Sex*, part III, IX. "Dreams, Fears, Idols," trans. H. M. Parshley, New York: Vintage, 1974, p. 171.

a perception of a fetishization of masculine arousal, where his narrative indicates exactly the opposite.

Madame Edwarda

Madame Edwarda is, after *Histoire de l'œil*, Bataille's most commented-upon fictional narrative. These comments typically come in the form of brief, laudatory allusions rather than systematic readings. Lacan mentions the tale as an illustration of an encounter with extreme female *jouissance*; Blanchot called it "le plus beau récit de notre temps;" and Lyotard appeals to the title character as a figure for the raw core of affirmative desire.[451]

The work is both a fictional narrative and a continuation of Bataille's conceptual inquiries. It is comprised of two parts; a long preface and a subsequent *récit*. There are two direct intertexts. Hegel provides the epigraph for the preface, and is mentioned in the concluding parenthetical remarks; Sade is also discussed in the preface. In addition, Bataille wrote later that he considered the work to be intimately related to what I have called the "pseudophenomenology" contained in the *Summa atheologica*.[452]

I will argue that while the preface is indispensable to an understanding of the *récit*, the fictive narrative nonetheless conveys certain insights that exceed the reach of Bataille's own explication. While Bataille resorts to echoes of Heideggerian language in the "Preface," this creates the misleading impression that eroticism discloses a relationship to one's own death. This partly obscures the real question revealed by the narrative: that is, the nature of the ethical relationship. For this reason, I will read the

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[451] This is one of Lacan's few direct references to Bataille's work. "D'une question préliminaire à tout traitement possible de la psychose," footnote 36, *Écrits 2*, p. 61. I read this extensively in the fourth chapter of this study. Blanchot, Maurice, *L'entretien infini*, chapitre II, IX. L'expérience-limite, 1. "L'affirmation et la passion de la pensée negative," Paris: Gallimard, 1969, p. 300. Lyotard, Jean-François, *Libidinal Economy*, chapter 3, "Edwarda and Little Girl Marx," trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, London: Continuum, 1993, p. 135.

[452] *OC* I, *Histoire de l'œil*, chapitre IX, p. 48.

narrative first, before returning to the preface and explaining its account of eroticism and its implicit ethical claim.[453]

On the level of plot, *Madame Edwarda* is entirely unremarkable. It is virtually plotless, in fact, and has no characters of any substance. In summary: A troubled, restless narrator wanders into a brothel, where he encounters a prostitute, Madame Edwarda. He performs cunnilingus on her in view of the other patrons. They leave the brothel and wander off together; while walking, Edwarda verbally chastens the narrator, shouting various profanities at him. They encounter a taxi-driver, with whom Edwarda has intercourse and orgasms. The narrative abruptly ends. Unlike *Histoire de l'œil*, which is one of the most imaginative and provocative remnants of the surrealist era, *Madame Edwarda* contains nothing fantastic on the level of diegesis. A reading of Barthes's type would find *Madame Edwarda* unworthy of attention; in encapsulation, nothing distinguishes it from a million rote fantasies.

In spite of this impression, *Madame Edwarda* is crucial to Bataille's contribution, in his fashion, to what Levinas called ethics as first philosophy. Further, I will argue that it positions his perspective with regard to Hegel, Heidegger, and Levinas with a brevity and precision not matched in his fragmentary and unfinished "Critique of Heidegger" or in the prolix notebooks that make up the *Summa atheologica*. As well, the story establishes a demonstrable break with the Freudian account of transgression.

First, we should note that the narrator is made sharply irreducible to the biographical Bataille. The story is published under the name "Pierre Angelique;" the author of the preface refers to the "auteur de *Madame Edwarda*," thereby dissociating the

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[453] Allan Stoekl reads the narrative as essentially turning on a ritual substitution of the elements of the Catholic mass, with the goal of establishing an altered form of Hegelian recognition, in "Recognition in *Madame Edwarda*," *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill, London: Routledge, 1995, 78. In my view, this emphasis on religion and on recognition falls short of the extremity of the experience described in the narrative.

two.[454] For this reason, the first-person narrator of the story must be taken as empty and anonymous, and we cannot fill in his character with what we know of Bataille's life or other works. Madame Edwarda is also minimally characterized and is mainly described affectively; we are told almost nothing of what she looks like, and our attention is mainly brought to her raspy voice as her most distinctive trait. The cabdriver, the third character, is given essentially no substance at all. We must make note that in this story that has hardly any plot and depthless characters, the main force driving the action is affect: Bataille's language constantly refers to boredom, confusion, terror, and madness.

Madame Edwarda first appears accompanied by many other women: "Au milieu d'un essaim de filles, Mme Edwarda, nue, tirait la langue."[455] Here we are told that Madame Edwarda is surrounded by a "swarm;" she is implicitly compared to an insect. Further, the other people around her with whom she is linked are described as girls; this indicates their profession as well as associating them with youth and femininity.[456] She is named as the Madame and so given a title of hierarchical respect, and she is described as already naked. So she is "clothed" in her honorific, which under the circumstances appears inappropriate, and is otherwise utterly exposed.

The narrator relates his encounter with the Madame in a chain of linked clauses: "Un instant sa main glissa, je me brisai soudainement comme une vitre, et je tremblai dans ma culotte; je sentis Mme Edwarda, dont mes mains contenaient les fesses, elle-même en même temps déchirée : et dans ses yeux plus grands, renversés, la terreur, dans sa gorge un long étranglement."[457] The narrator appears to be describing a spontaneous and premature orgasm, which he experiences as a moment of rupture and explosion that is provoked by Edwarda and that is out of his control. She is simultaneously torn or

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[454] *OC* III, p. 9.
[455] Ibid., P. 19.
[456] "Fille" is of course a standard euphemism for a prostitute.
[457] *OC* III, p. 20.

ripped along with the narrator. This laceration appears to describe a physical orgasm, though not necessarily. Our attention is drawn to Edwarda's eyes, which lack focus and are filled with fear (the object of her terror is not specified), and her voice, which the narrator specifies as "dans sa gorge," that is, an expression of the body. The narrative characterizes this voice as the product of an "étranglement," a strangled outcry. She does not express comprehensible words.

Following this instant, the narrator begins his invocation of theological experience: "je devins malheureux et me sentis abandonné comme on l'est en présence de DIEU."[458] Paradoxically, the narrator locates the feeling of being forsaken by the presence of God, rather than by his absence. "[J]e sentis une tristesse à l'idée que cette grandeur, qui tombait sur moi, me dérobait les plaisirs que je comptais goûter avec Edwarda."[459] Here the experience is explicitly characterized as unpleasant; he describes an initial awareness of the divine that separates him from the enjoyment he previously associated with Edwarda the prostitute. This feeling of sadness is succeeded by the most famous moment in the narrative, in which the appearance of God, initially diffuse, becomes localized into a single point, and rather than being separate from Edwarda and her pleasures, is revealed as interior to her being:

> De mon hébétude, une voix, trop humaine, me tira. La voix de Mme Edwarda, comme son corps gracile, était obscène:
>
> – Tu veux voir mes guenilles? disait-elle.
>
> Les deux mains agrippées à la table, je me tournai vers elle. Assise, elle maintenait haute une jambe écartée : pour mieux ouvrir la fente, elle achevait de

[458] Ibid.
[459] Ibid.

> tirer la peau des deux mains. Ainsi les « guenilles » d'Edwarda me regardaient, velues et roses, pleines de vie comme une pieuvre répugnante.[460]

This passage begins with the separation between the human and the divine. The narrator is distracted from his initial apprehension of God by the human voice of Edwarda, which is linked to her body and which is characterized as "obscene." This establishes, first, that Bataille considers this voice to be physical, to be an extension of the carnal body. Second, the narrative dictates that both the body and the voice should be considered obscene, that is, both offensive and exciting prurient interest. Edwarda's statement is her weary acknowledgment that the object of the narrator's scopophilia must be the "guenilles" (rags), which is a way of referring to her genitals that indicates dirt, multiplicity, and tearing. The narrator indicates that he has been hanging on to the tabletop, which suggests that he is in need of external support in order to prevent being pulled to the floor. He is required to contort his body in order to observe Edwarda.

She exposes her "fente" (crack), which indicates her separating her labia. "Crack" indicates a break or induced gap. At this point, the narrator describes Edwarda's crack as looking back at him, as hairy and pink, as filled with excessive life, and he likens it to an octopus, specified as repulsive and horrible. This first indicates a proximity to the animal world, but, unlike *Histoire de l'œil*, which associates female genitalia with the feline,[461] a mollusc is invoked. The association of women with animals is of course standard; for example, Levinas cites Mallarmé's *L'Après-midi d'une faune* and indicates that, in eroticism, "on joue avec autrui comme avec un jeune animal."[462] Bataille, however, in contrast to the standard invocation of a faun or a Baudelairean cat, refers to the octopus

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[460] *OC* III, p. 20-21.
[461] *OC* I, chapitre 1, "L'œil de chat," p. 13. This naming is of course typical in slang, and also has a Baudelairean heritage.
[462] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité*, "Phénoménologie de l'Eros," p. 286, 295.

as the figure for femininity – that is, a cephalopod with myriad legs, invertebrate, with three hearts, without hair, and whose skin is slimy and inky.

Bataille's anatomical diction is worthy of comment. Bataille never writes "vagin," in part because its medicalizing connotations interfere with the erotic effect he aims to produce. It is also significant that the etymological root of the word "vagina" is the Latin for "scabbard," which makes it secondary to and complementary with the phallus.[463] Bataille's avoidance of this term prevents the tendency to consider feminine sexuality as filled by the masculine organ. In *Histoire de l'œil*, the narrator applies the term "cul" (ass), which he declares is "pour moi le plus joli des noms du sexe." [464] This means that, in *Histoire de l'œil*, Bataille chooses a word that avoids mention of sexual difference; he specifies that prettiest name for the vagina is "cul," a name that elides gender distinction. The English translation, *The Story of the Eye*, conceals this by applying the word "cunt," which would intensify sexual difference where the actual narrative diminishes it.

In contrast to *Histoire de l'œil*'s "cul," *Madame Edwarda* dictates the names "fente" and "guenilles," words that intensify the female genitalia as alien to masculine identity. From this perspective, *Histoire de l'œil* remains within a more comforting sexual economy in which female sexual difference is of little significance.[465] From a certain, perhaps too charitable, perspective, Bataille's failure to make note of the clitoris is actually a testament to his willingness to consider the feminine as utterly different, as a locus of alterity, rather than an object to be inscribed into an essentially masculine sexual economy.[466]

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[463] *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language: Unabridged*, ed. Philip Babcock Gove, Springfield: G & C Merriam, 1969, 2528.
[464] *OC* I, p. 13.
[465] It shares this quality with Sade's fiction, which similarly focuses on the anus and presents female characters with enlarged clitorises.
[466] The clitoris is of course often seen as phallus substitute, however inaccurate this characterization might be. See Freud, Sigmund, "Female Sexuality (1931)," *SE* XXI, 228.

Bataille is often said to impart a morbidized account of the erotic. For example, Sontag has it that "One reason that *Histoire de l'œil* and *Madame Edwarda* make such a strong and upsetting impression is that Bataille understood more clearly than any other writer I know that what pornography is really about, ultimately, isn't sex but death."[467] This conclusion is so prevalent that it is necessary to pay close attention to this sentence: "Ainsi les « guenilles » d'Edwarda me regardaient, velues et roses, pleines de vie comme une pieuvre répugnante."[468] Unlike James Joyce, who writes of death as "the grey sunken cunt of the world,"[469] Bataille writes of intense, frightening life. Readers who see Bataille's women as signs for nothingness, lack, or death, then, can only be confounded by this passage.[470] Madame Edwarda, the eroticized feminine, does not reveal the terrifying emptiness of the grave; rather, her crack reveals an abundance of ongoing and alien vitality. I will go on to link this vitality to the excessive existence that Levinas called the *il y a*.

After the description of Edwarda's genitals, the narrator asks for an explanation of what has just transpired:

> Je balbutiai doucement :
>
> - Pourquoi fais-tu cela?
>
> - Tu vois, dit-elle, je suis DIEU ...[471]

The narrator stammers, losing control over his ability to communicate through ordinary language. He is subdued, experiencing an awe or respect. Edwarda answers that she is demonstrating herself as God. At this point, the separation earlier indicated between the

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[467] "The Pornographic Imagination," p. 106.
[468] *OC* III, p. 20-21.
[469] *Ulysses*, London: Penguin, 1992, p. 73.
[470] See Cathy MacGregor, "The Eye of the Storm – Female Representation in Bataille's *Madame Edwarda* and *Histoire de l'œil*," *The Beast at Heaven's Gate: Georges Bataille and the Art of Transgression*, ed. Andrew Hussey, New York: Rodopi, 2006, p. 107. Luce Irigaray indicates for men, a woman's "sexual organ represents *the horror of nothing to see*. [...] A 'hole' [...]." *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Ithaca, Cornell UP, 1985, p. 26. This is not the experience of Bataille's narrator.
[471] *OC* III, p. 21.

pleasure of the narrator's orgasm at Edwarda's hand, and the subsequent guilt, dread, and awareness of God, vanishes. Edwarda is herself revealed as the cause, not of pleasure, but of the apprehension of the divine. It is necessary to pay close attention to this scene, because it is often said of narratives of transgression that they rely on their interdiction; the law is revealed by its violation.[472]

Of this experience, Bataille does not write at all of an ephemeral fleshly enjoyment that is followed by spiritual torment. Rather, the (masculine) spiritual, "DIEU," is forcefully described as emanating from the (feminine) flesh, Edwarda. The essence of pleasure is revealed to be not at all pleasurable. More importantly, the carnal *is not indicated as the site of death*. This is, then, not the penitent Christian narrative in which sexual pleasure only discloses mortality and finitude. Instead, the apparent object of desire reveals itself as excessively alive, and itself the origin of the interdiction against its enjoyment. From this perspective, this narrative extends the claims made in "L'apprenti sorcier," in which the integral life of virility is inspired by the presence of the desirable nudity of life. From the perspective of Edwarda as God, that is, the guarantor of the law and the origin of ethical demands, it becomes possible that virile life, which disregards the bourgeois demands of everyday law, is itself brought into existence by a relationship to alterity, and not through autonomy.

> – Je suis fou ...
>
> – Mais non, tu dois regarder : regarde!
>
> Sa voix rauque s'adoucit, elle se fit presque enfantine pour me dire avec lassitude, avec le sourire infini de l'abandon : « Comme j'ai joui! »[473]

In this passage, both the narrator and Edwarda speak, and their words are directly juxtaposed to one another. The narrator states that he is losing his sanity, and Edwarda,

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[472] See, for example, Romans 7:7 or book II of Augustine's *Confessions*.
[473] *OC* III, p. 21.

who has declared herself divine, demands that he continue in his observation. At this point, her voice is described as childlike. This suggests two things. First, because Edwarda has just named herself as an incarnation of God, this childlike quality recalls images of the Christ-child. Second, it recalls the psychological claim that the true aim of female desire is to produce a child.[474] At this point, Edwarda speaks as herself a child, as already the aim of her own desire. This is to say that, unlike in the Freudian schema according to which woman is essentially lacking and constantly wishing for the phallus, or for a child who stands in for this phallus, Edwarda speaks as herself a child; she is herself in a state of desire for herself. Edwarda, untroubled, asks the narrator to observe and listen to her communication of her enjoyment, which is "infinite," absent from the world, and indicates "abandon."

Lyotard's Reading and the Evacuation of the Ethical

At this point, it may prove instructive to pause in order to examine a previous reading of Madame Edwarda and what she might have to teach us. Lyotard reads this passage in order to turn Edwarda against Marx, or specifically Marx's ethico-critical position. According to Lyotard, Marx sees capitalism as a generalized whoredom. While intrigued by this, Marx also reacts against it; he posits a refusal of this prostitution. In contrast, Lyotard sees Edwarda as a whore who enjoys her whoredom, excessively. This possibility is unaccountable by a Marxist account of prostitution. He exhorts the reader to adopt Edwarda's position, to abandon the moralistic perspective of critique in favor of a

[474] "Everything about woman is a riddle, and everything about woman has one solution: it is called pregnancy," Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Penguin Books, Zarathustra's Discourses, "Of Old and Young Women," p. 91. "The girl passes over—by way of a symbolic analogy, one may say—from the penis to a child; her Oedipus-complex culminates in the desire, which is long cherished, to be given a child by her father as a present, to bear him a child." Freud, Sigmund, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex," *SE* 178-179.

mad enjoyment of the perverse pleasures engendered by capital. Subsequent to this book, Lyotard rejected his own thesis as "evil," for somewhat self-evident reasons.[475]

It is my contention that Lyotard completely misunderstood the scene of erotic communication presented in *Madame Edwarda*. First, it is absolutely essential that Edwarda's enjoyment slips out of the world; it does not occur alongside the economics of prostitution.[476] She is never, at any point in the story, paid. Edwarda's enjoyment has nothing to do with her place in the capitalist economy, libidinal or otherwise. For this reason, it it is necessary to insist that Edwarda's enjoyment, and the horror that attends it, is not reducible to the homogeneous world that it inhabits. The narrative needs to be read along with Bataille's "Critique of Heidegger;" it is not a story of affirmation of the world of homogeneity and equivalence.

Indeed, even more than in the "Critique of Heidegger," *Madame Edwarda* makes clear that is the relationship with alterity that opens up the possibility of escape. If *Madame Edwarda* were the narrative of affirmation and acceptance Lyotard reads, it would be much closer to an ontology Bataille explicitly calls fascist. Lyotard elides the perspective of the narrator in favor of a direct opposition between Edwarda the figure of mad enjoyment and Marx the puritanical scientist-revolutionary. In the story itself, Edwarda requires the narrator to witness her pleasure, they break in half simultaneously, and her situation is mediated by the perceptions of this anonymous narrator. There is an obscure, vital, communicative space that pervades the narrative, and one that Lyotard

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[475] In 1988, Lyotard described *Libidinal Economy*, written fourteen years earlier, as his "evil book, the book of evilness that everyone writing and thinking is tempted to do." *Peregrinations*, New York: Columbia UP, 1988, p. 13.

[476] Cathy MacGregor also overemphasizes economic aspects by relating Madame Edwarda to Walter Benjamin's dialectical view of prostitutes, in "The Eye of the Storm – Female Representation in Bataille's *Madame Edwarda* and *Histoire de l'œil*," *The Beast at Heaven's Gate: Georges Bataille and the Art of Transgression*, ed. Andrew Hussey, New York: Rodopi, 2006, p. 110. Edwarda does not function as a dialectical unity of commodity and seller, but rather as an excessive vitality located beyond both these deficient considerations of otherness.

ignores. This relationship with alterity makes for better comparison with Levinas's ethical outlook than Marx's more politico-economic concerns.[477]

Eroticism and the *il y a*

Bataille's story frequently conveys an impression of intense dissonance, of experience that cannot be assimilated to understanding. The narrative makes mention of the rasp and roughness of Edwarda's voice, which exceeds, and sometimes takes the place of, any expression on the level of words. Especially relevant to the concerns of this study, the narrator writes of approaching Edwarda's crack in order to kiss it, and recounts an unusual auditory phenomenon: "Sa cuisse nue caressa mon oreille : il me sembla ententre un bruit de houle, on entend le même bruit en appliquant l'oreille à de grandes coquilles."[478] This sound-image is exactly the one later mentioned by Levinas as indicative of the *il y a* in *Ethics and Infinity*, though the story was written in 1941.[479] This is six years before Levinas's book *De l'existence à l'existant*, which first formulated the concept of the *il y a*, was published and read by Bataille, and forty years before Levinas appealed to the experience of the seashell. Similarly, Levinas appears to have himself recognized a similar link between the erotic encounter and the *il y a*, when he writes that "A côté de la nuit comme bruissement anonyme de l'*il y a*, s'étend la nuit de l'érotique."[480] Likewise, Edwarda does not reveal finitude; she appears as excessive

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[477] Alphonso Lingis faults Lyotard's conception for the absence, in *Libidinal Economy*, of "any sense of contact with an alien passion." *Libido: The French Existential Theories*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985, "Libido and Alterity," p. 119. John Philips's Deleuzian reading of Bataille in "'The Law of the Mother': Masochism, Fetishism and Subjectivity in Georges Bataille's *Histoire de l'œil*," also misses the dimension of alterity in Bataille's work, reinscribing eroticism into an economy under the law of the Mother. *The Beast at Heaven's Gate: Georges Bataille and the Art of Transgression*, ed. Andrew Hussey, New York: Rodopi, 2006, p. 111-112.

[478] *OC* III, p. 21.

[479] "It is something resembling what one hears when one puts an empty shell close to the ear, as if the emptiness were full, as if the silence were a noise. […] in the absolute emptiness that one can imagine before creation — there is." *Ethics and Infinity*: *Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. by Richard A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1985, "The 'There Is,'" p. 48.

[480] *Totalité et infini*, "Phénoménologie de l'Éros," p. 289. Levinas goes on to link this encounter with an intrinsic virginity, a claim with which I will take issue, and to restore the encounter with erotic alterity to a pre-ethical recuperation by the self-same, by a maneuver he calls pornography.

existence, as wildly alive, and as incomprehensible. This experience is irreconcilable with the world.

Along these lines, the narrator tells us that "la mort elle-même était de la fête, en ceci que la nudité du bordel appelle le couteau du boucher," after which twelve and four fifths lines are filled with ellipses.[481] We must not be fooled by the invocation of death as a guest; what is important is that death is only a guest, not the host, of the feast. The appearance of death is immediately followed by the delirious language of the "butcher's knife" and the obscure, unreadable, long pause of dots. Edwarda does not indicate death; she conveys experience beyond death and beyond authenticity. The narrator associates this with a specific type of aesthetic appreciation: "Mme Edwarda me fascinait, je n'avais jamais vu de fille plus jolie – ni plus nue."[482] It is necessary to account for this "prettiness," and link it to Blanchot's vocabulary when he crowned the narrative "le plus beau récit de notre temps."[483]

Beauty, Death, and Hegel

The first thing we should note about Blanchot's praise is its intentional inappropriateness. Few readers would consider the events that Bataille describes to be "beautiful." While some might find it arousing, the narrative is intentionally tawdry. More than this, the temporal marker "of our times" is equally odd and jarring; there is little about *Madame Edwarda* that indicates historical significance. The narrative does borrow from surrealism and anticipate the *nouveau roman* in important respects, but its stylistic innovations do not appear to be on par with *Ulysses*, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, or even Blanchot's own *L'Arrête de mort*.

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[481] ibid., p. 22.
[482] ibid.
[483] *L'entretien infini*, chapitre II, IX. L'expérience-limite, 1. "L'affirmation et la passion de la pensée négative," Paris: Gallimard, 1969, p. 300.

The thirty-second paragraph of Hegel's preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* includes the famous passage: "Death [...] is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast to what is dead requires the greatest strength. Lacking strength, Beauty hates the Understanding for asking of her what it cannot do."[484] Hegel describes the dialectical passage of Spirit through history, which negates given particularities in order to sublate them into higher forms, which eventually provide the truth of an entire coherent system of meaning. Blanchot's description of *Madame Edwarda* as "the most beautiful narrative of our time" invites a connection to Hegel's enigmatic passage about Beauty's hatred of the Understanding. From Hegel's perspective, the movement of history necessarily exceeds aesthetics; history is understandable, but not pretty, though reason attempts to enlist aesthetics into its cause. For *Madame Edwarda* to be the most beautiful narrative in history, it must occupy an extreme point of proximity to the movement of death that nonetheless falls short of understanding or knowledge.

Bataille's own preface to *Madame Edwarda* is itself prefaced by a translation from Hegel's preface: "La mort est ce qu'il y a de plus terrible et maintenir l'œuvre de la mort est ce qui demande la plus grande force."[485] This is the sentence immediately preceding the discussion of Beauty's weakness, incapacity, and hatred for Understanding. Bataille's intervention is quite direct: He arrests the passage of intellect at an aesthetic moment preceding comprehension, and thereby remains in proximity to death, refusing to pass through it.

This conception of death as a radical end, as incapable of being sublated, tempts the reader to think of Heidegger. Bataille's preface flirts with this possibility. In this theoretical text preceding his narrative, he describes the extremity of eroticism: "l'identité

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[484] Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 19.
[485] *OC* III, p. 9.

du plaisir extrême et de l'extrême douleur : l'identité de l'être et de la mort [...]"[486] This statement seems to indicate that eroticism discloses death. If this were true, Bataille could be seen as practicing a kind of sexualization of Heidegger. While Being-towards-death is disclosed by the call of conscience in Heidegger's work, a call that has no immediate ontic cue, it could be argued that Bataille's writing conveys a similar profound awareness of mortality through the means of sexual fantasy. Bataille's famous formulation in *L'Érotisme*, "De l'érotisme, il est possible de dire qu'il est l'approbation de la vie jusque dans la mort," reinforces this interpretation.[487]

We have already read the passage in which Madame Edwarda's genitals, the focus of sexual desire, are described as teeming with life. More than this, we must direct our attention to a long and difficult footnote appended to Bataille's preface. In this footnote, he expands upon a distinction indicate previously between being and excess. A close reading of the preface makes clear that rather than the emphasis on an identity between being and nothingness or life and death, Bataille insists on the priority of a third term, excess. Further, he indicates that this excess can never be expressed through the language of philosophy, because excess surpasses foundations.[488] This means that a foundational ontology of finitude necessarily falls short of the erotic relation that Bataille aims to express, and that his eroticism conveys something in addition to the mere awareness of one's own status as potentially dead or the proximity of one's being to nothingness. Bataille indicates a complex relationship between his own being, disclosed as finite, and the literary endeavor to which he commits himself, which is *limitless*:

> Ces phrases méthodiquement rangées sont possibles (elles le sont dans une large mesure, puisque l'excès est l'exception, c'est le merveilleux, le miracle...; et

[486] P. 10.
[487] *OC* X, p. 17.
[488] *OC* III, p. 12.

> l'excès designe l'attrait – l'attrait, sinon l'horreur, *tout ce qui est plus que ce qui est*), mais leur impossibilité est d'abord donnée.

In this footnote, Bataille indicates that the place of his literary work is not bound by the disclosure of his own mortality as a man, even as his ability to produce such writing depends on his finite existence in the world. His literary output, which will survive him and be read long after the internment of his body in the earth, is then an excessive product not subject to finitude in the way that his existence is. Literary writing is excessive; it is not limited by finitude, and for this reason it inspires a horrible attraction.

For this reason, the literary object has a status very close to that of Edwarda herself, in that it is characterized by an abundance of alien life and is both attractive and repulsive (this connection is of course emphasized by the narrative's title). So, neither literature nor eroticism convey or mean death, or at least they do more than that. Sontag's claim that Bataille's pornography is about death rather than sex is not the whole story.[489] Sontag is right, of course, that Bataille's work is not really "about sex" in the way we would ordinarily understand it; it goes beyond the topic of sexual activity, if the word "sexual" refers to the aim of genital pleasure. But it exceeds death as well.

However, eroticism and literature certainly do not exceed death in the way that Hegel's understanding does, accumulating and comprehending knowledge through history towards the absolute. Rather, eroticism is, in Bataille's view, as we have seen, not autoerotic, but rather reliant on a singular other. This singular other goes by the name of desirable nudity or a loved one, in "L'apprenti sorcier," and is embodied by the titular character, in *Madame Edwarda*. Similarly, the impossible moment of literary creation exceeds finitude towards the possibility of an obscure survival, a reception by unborn readers who are capable of reading Bataille's work in his absence.

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[489] "The Pornographic Imagination," p. 106.

This relationship to singularity rather than to the absolute, to obscure apprehension rather than knowledge, and emerging from radical finitude but exceeding it, bears comparison with Levinas's notion of ethics. When Blanchot writes that *Madame Edwarda* is "le plus beau récit de notre temps," this ironic designation first draws out the narrative's link to Hegel's Beauty, which reaches for death but cannot grasp it. To say that a story is the most beautiful of our times is, from this perspective, to say that it is not of our times at all, that its beauty renders it impotent to affect or inform the passage of history and knowledge. This sort of beauty, excepted from history, bears comparison to Levinas's relationship to alterity: "Quand l'homme aborde vraiment Autrui, il est arraché à l'histoire."[490] Levinas's gendered language here is probably not intentional. However, read with Bataille, the nature of sexual difference is rendered significant in the true encounter with the Other, torn from history. And it is the *il y a* to which we have related Bataille's thought on literature and eroticism that precedes the subject, just as the Beauty of Hegel's preface precedes the rational and negating subject.

Moreover, Bataille's preface makes implicit ethical claims at two moments. The first of which is his criticism of any hasty sexual liberation; the second is a brief interpretation of Sade's work. Bataille sharply distances himself from a progressivist opinion that sexual restrictions are merely the remnants of outdated puritanism.[491] He declares that "Autant dire que nous devrions faire enfin table rase et revenir au temps de l'animalité, de la libre dévoration et de l'indifférence aux immondices."[492] On one level, this is Bataille asserting that the erotic moment can only be an ephemeral link to the immediacy of the animal world, and that any attempt to remain beyond this frontier

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[490] *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité*, Métaphysique et transcendance, 5. La transcendance comme idée de l'infini," Kluwer Academic, 1971, p. 45.
[491] In this, he anticipates Lacan's rebuke to the partisans of "l'affranchissement naturaliste du désir." *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan: Livre VII: L'Éthique de la psychanalyse 1959-1960*, texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Seuil, 1986, "Notre programme," p. 12.
[492] *OC* III, p. 10.

would lead to annihilation. It is, however, necessary to notice that Bataille's claim here is not only an attempt to preserve the transgressive madness of the erotic moment. He speaks of total sexual freedom as leading to indiscriminate cannibalism. This means that to eliminate sexual restriction entirely is to remove the interdiction against murder and anthopophagy. To inquire into erotic experience, then, is named as carrying with it the highest ethical stakes. Eroticism involves a relationship with another person that can threaten their life and being, in which at least one of the parties runs the risk of being devoured.

Bataille follows on this idea in his subsequent mention of Sade. Bataille indicates that eroticism involves a surpassing of the self and a close proximity to nothingness. For this reason, he indicates that it is common for the literature of the erotic to deflect the possibility of death onto another: "Même dans la perspective de Sade, la mort est détournée sur l'*autre*, et l'*autre* est tout d'abord une expression délicieuse de la vie."[493] So Sade's work is characterized as retaining a comforting illusion; the appearance of death is made something that threatens an exterior object (a person), and this person is made consummately healthy, so as to ward off a full awareness of mortality for the reader.

It must be made evident that this is a criticism of Sade. Sade misunderstands eroticism and conceals it by externalizing its hazardous effects. Does this mean that Bataille's correction is to illustrate eroticism as bringing death to the person who experiences it, rather than the person who excites desire? Bataille's preface ends with a description of someone who is open erotic experience. Indeed, this experience involves a proximity to death: "l'*être ouvert* – à la mort, au supplice, à la joie – sans réserve, l'être ouvert et mourant, douloureux et heureux, paraît déjà dans sa lumière voilée : cette

[493] p. 13.

lumière est divine."[494] Being open to erotic experience is to be open to death, to pain, to join, but not only this. More importantly, eroticism opens beyond death, to "divine light." The divine light of which Bataille speaks is clearly displayed in the narrative by Edwarda's naming of herself as God. This means that the aim of erotic experience is not one's own death; it is the unimaginable alterity of divine light, of abundant life, and of the feminine other. From this perspective, Sade's error is in deflecting death onto a deficient consideration of the other as sexual object, rather than a true understanding of eroticism as a hazardous encounter that brings the possibility of otherness, and indeed ethics, into view.

Klossowski and Sade

Klossowski had previously attempted an ethical reading of Sade.[495] His *Sade mon prochain* initially compiled a number of essays written between 1933 and 1947; I have discussed his political reading of Sade's work in the previous chapter. In 1967, he revised some of his ideas, contributing a new preface and an additional essay on the topic of sodomy. Klossowski's revision forcefully repudiates a hypothesis he had previously suggested in an essay titled "Esquisse du système de Sade." In that piece, Klossowski advances a somewhat Christianized reading in which he argues that Sade's thought revolves around the idea of purity, embodied by the literary figure of the virgin.

According to this early essay, *Justine* "se présente encore comme l'illustration du dogme fondamental du christianisme : celui de la *réversibilité des mérites du sacrifice de l'innocent en faveur du coupable*."[496] In other words, Justine's torments are essentially a repetition of Christian sacrifice; the suffering of the most innocent redeems the most guilty. At the conclusion of one version of *Justine*, Juliette, her vicious sister, repents after witnessing Justine's death, concluding that

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[494] P. 14.
[495] *Sade mon prochain précedé de Le philosophe scélérat*, Paris: Seuil, 1967.
[496] P. 98.

> *la prospérité du crime n'est qu'une épreuve où la providence veut mettre la vertu; elle est comme la foudre dont les feux trompeurs n'embellissent un instant l'atmosphère que pour précipiter dans les abîmes de la mort le malheureux qu'ils ont ébloui*.[497]

This ending is often thought to be insincere, a mere mockery of the usual repentant ending of pornographic narratives. Klossowski takes the risk of taking Sade's moment of salvation seriously. Klossowski's argument is that while Sade's philosopher-libertines often seem to advocate solipsism, they find themselves relying on the presence of other people to be witnesses or victims.

> [N]'est-ce pas le problème de la réalité d'autrui qui se posait à la conscience sadiste; ainsi que la Nature se créant des obstacles par sa volonté de création, la conscience sadiste ne créait-elle pas le prochain dans san volonté de se créer ell-même? Cela même par la nécessité; mais par cette aspiration à l'innocence elle admettait autrui, elle donnait de la réalité à autrui; pourtant elle restait dans la nécessité de détruire : et comme elle voulait maintenir autrui, elle devenait coupable dès l'instant qu'elle ne maintenait autrui que pour le détruire.[498]

In other words, in order for the Sadean libertine to create the sense of himself as sovereign, lawless, and free, he requires a second party to recognize his supremacy, but his supremacy necessitates that he destroy this second party. This implies an economy of guilt, which is exactly the name for the simultaneous maintenance and annihilation of otherness that defines the Sadean immoralist. In order to abolish duty to the other, Sade's heroes and heroines must perform acts "qui pour être violents requièrent autrui et du même coup rétablissent la réalité de l'autre et de moi-même."[499] This oscillation between

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[497] Italics in original. Marquis de Sade, *Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu*, Paris: Gallimard, p. 412-413.
[498] P. 128.
[499] P. 134-135.

affirmation and denial of the existence of alterity leads to a fixation on purity, symbolized by virginity.

Virginity, in Klossowski's reading of Sade, is divine purity "soustraite à la possession de l'homme."[500] It is the nature of virginity to be inviolate, but also desired. The virgin excites desire, but cannot be captured by it without immediately ceasing to be a virgin. This is then the best example of the other that Sade requires; an otherness that is untouchable, which cannot be possessed, but which at the same time is defined by its being potentially besmirched. In Klossowski's formulation, the Sadean self-definition is: "*Je suis exclu de la pureté, parce que je veux posséder celle qui est pure. Je ne puis ne pas désirer la pureté, mais du même coup je suis impur parce que je veux jouir de l'injouissable pureté*."[501] The Sadean libertine relies on a pure otherness in order to define his or her role as desiring transgressive enjoyment, but at the same time is continually losing the target of lust at the very moment of its capture.[502]

Klossowski goes on to argue that this figure of inviolate female purity in fact implies God's presence.[503] This is why Sade's atheism becomes something very different from that inspired by his materialist contemporaries. Where the atheists practicing in the wake of Voltaire replace their belief in God with a belief in Nature, Sade's heroes eventually insult Nature as well as God.[504] Sade's system remains reliant on moral categories of good and evil even as he aims to transgress their boundaries. While Sade tries to speak as a rationalist, inscribing all human behavior, no matter how perverse, into a self-contained economic system, he continually finds himself needing to overcome his own system in the direction of the ineradicable alterity symbolized by the virgin.

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[500] Klossowski, "Sous le masque de l'athéisme," P. 146.
[501] P. 148.
[502] A comparable paradoxical understanding of virginity is advanced in Derrida's account of the hymen in "The Double Session," *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981, p. 209.
[503] "Esquisse du système de Sade," P. 99.
[504] P. 113.

Klossowski subsequently rejected his own thesis, stating two decades later that he had neglected Sade's insistence on sodomy.[505] Sodomy is for Sade a mechanism to suppress sexual difference.[506] By this means, Sade manages to eliminate the boundary between self and other that Klossowski had previously asserted as central. Through sodomite behavior, an entirely economic system is restored, and otherness loses its necessity and preeminence. From this outlook, virginity becomes only an ironic remnant of a previous and untenable perspective, abrogated by the universal prostitution of the Sadean fantasy.

This revised hypothesis is doubtless in greater fidelity to the rigor of Sade's thought. Regardless, Klossowski's earlier reading, while arrested at a moment in Sade's discourse that is subsequently superseded, makes for instructive comparison with Bataille's consideration of alterity. As in the initial Klossowkian-Sadian instance, Bataille asserts a sovereignty that breaks with obedience to social norms, only to rely on the postulate of a desirable alterity that is nonetheless incapable of being overcome. Sade's libertines (in Klossowski's original hypothesis) attempt to reject all exterior authority, but only find themselves relying on a sign of divinity which they ritualistically transgress. Similarly, the narrator of *Madame Edwarda* goes to a brothel with the apparent aim of achieving enjoyment from prostitutes that are his social and financial subordinates, but instead the very possibility of such a relationship is shown to be reliant on an unbreachable alterity in which the feminine party is supreme.

At the same time, Bataille cannot be straightforwardly identified with the Sade of Klossowski's 1947 conjecture, because while Sade relies on purity and virginity in order to achieve ephemeral access to divinity, Bataille's narrative forcefully locates the incarnation of God not in a virgin, but in a whore, and specifically in the awareness of her

[505] "Avertissement," p. 14.
[506] "Le philosophe scélérat," p. 32.

carnal existence and alien enjoyment. In Klossowski's reading, Juliette, the figure of female sexual agency, is only a figure for the apathy of the rational pursuit of perverse desire.[507] Juliette is eventually shamed by her virginal sister, Justine, who is revealed as the primary figure that the libertine requires so as to assert and reassert transgressive existence. Conversely, Bataille's thought does not at all place erotic pursuit under the perspective of rationalized behavior, nor does it place the ideal virgin in the unbreachable realm of alterity. Rather, these outlooks are inverted; Bataille appears to be the overturning of the Sadean psychology as explained by the early Klossowski.

Levinas, Klossowski, and Sade: The Erotic and the Ethical

In order to further explain the consequences of and reasons for this overturning, I will first invoke an unlikely comparison: between the Sade of Klossowski's interpretation and the erotic and ethical perspective of Levinas. For Levinas, ethics depends on the experience of an alterity that interrupts a rationalized system of nature. This is why the last sentence of the "Séparation et absolu" section of *Totalité et infini*, is "La pensée et la liberté nous viennent de la séparation et de la considération d'Autrui – cette thèse est aux antipodes du spinozisme."[508] While a Spinozist system makes God entirely equal to nature, with no outside term, Levinas's theology depends on God's arrival through an unintegratable and infinite otherness that cannot be inscribed into a system of knowledge. Similarly, Klossowski argues that while Sade begins by locating and praising the presence of perversion and evil in a natural system that cannot be judged by exterior values, consciously emulating Spinoza, he is eventually compelled to aim his efforts at a divine otherness irreducible to the laws of existence in the world.[509]

From this perspective, Sade is in part the exception that proves the validity Levinas's ethical phenomenology. An attempt to embrace absolute evil can only better

[507] P. 48.
[508] P. 108.
[509] "Esquisse du système de Sade," p. 95.

indicate the presence of the omnipresent Other who is persecuted by such behavior. Evil for Levinas is a name for something that can never be justified or rationalized, in fact the essence of what cannot be reconciled with a totality: "Evil is not only the non-integratable; it is also the non-integratability of the non-integratable."[510] Furthermore, this evil is what makes me a self separate from an otherwise holistic and self-contained system: "God does evil to me to tear me out of the world, as unique and ex-ceptional – as a soul."[511] Just as for Sade it is necessary to transgress in order to assert an integral existence, Levinas indicates that it is evil that makes me an individual rather than an indistinct creature of nature.

Sade makes this occurence a willed act, while Levinas makes me the passive product of God's evil, but the distinction is not so great; Sade must himself locate the ability to do evil in the preexistent Nature that he attempts to continually overcome. Also, for Levinas, the "God that does evil" is "God as a you."[512] So the existence of evil, and my existence as such (that is, distinct from the raw totality of the existence of the universe) is something that emerges from God, and a God who appears in the second person, separate from me, an alterity. Furthermore, while I am initially brought into being by an act of evil attributable to God, my existence is led in the shadow of an original sin for which I am responsible.

Levinas quotes Dostoyevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*: "Each of us is guilty before everyone, for everyone and for each one, and I more than others."[513] My very existence is for Levinas as for (Klossowski's) Sade, the product of evil and the occasion for guilt in the face of the ideal otherness I cannot help but transgress. While, for Klossowski-Sade, divine alterity is incarnated in a virgin whose violation only

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[510] Levinas, Emmanuel, "Transcendence and Evil," 3. The Excess of Evil, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, p. 180.
[511] Ibid., 4. The You, p. 182.
[512] Ibid., P. 181.
[513] Ibid. chapter 10, God and Philosophy, 5. Phenomenology and Transcendence, p. 168.

underscores its purity, Levinas's other appears in the form of the face. The face, similarly, is characterized by the impossibility of its being overcome, understood, or destroyed: "Le visage se refuse à la possession, à mes pouvoirs."[514] Murder then, symptomatically, is my desire to overcome something which is inherently beyond my power: "Je ne peux vouloir tuer qu'un étant absolument indépendant, celui que dépasse infiniment mes pouvoirs et qui par là ne s'y oppose pas, mais paralyse le pouvoir même de pouvoir."[515] So murder, like rape or seduction in the Klossowskian-Sadean universe, relies on and confirms the existence of alterity as separate, inviolable, and primary, and this is confirmed by my presence as guilty.

Now, after having demonstrated proximity between Klossowski-Sade and Levinas, it is necessary to return to my initial point of contrast with respect to Bataille, that in his case alterity appears but not as pure or virginal but rather as the opposite. We must first note that Levinas had already made a distinction between love with and without eros. For Levinas, eroticism is something that carries with it an interestedness that makes sexual love something that falls short of the truly ethical. Indeed, Levinas even goes so far as to say that there is something in the erotic that already implies the pornographic. He defines pornography as the representation of otherness which is enjoyed, in the place of the true other who makes ethical demands, and stipulates that this pornography appears "in all eroticism, as eroticism arises in all love."[516] For this reason, and here the echo of Sade may even be deliberate, "The celestial and the vulgar Venus are sisters."[517]

To summarize: For Klossowski-Sade, Juliette discovers her existence as lawless and sovereign to be dependent on the witness and torment of Justine her virginal sister who is the true embodiment of the divine purity without which the existence of an

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[514] *Totalité et infini*, "Visage et éthique," p. 215.
[515] P. 198.
[516] *Collected Philosophical Papers,* "God and Philosophy," 3. The Idea of the Infinite, P. 164.
[517] Ibid.

immoralist and separate from and capable of overcoming the natural world would not be possible, and is made ashamed before this inviolate appearance of God. For Levinas, I am myself dependent as a self on the existence of God, whose primacy is revealed to me by the inviolate face which I desire to kill, but which I essentially cannot, because the face is an alterity such that its trangession reveals the ethical stricture against such an attempt. For Levinas, the sexualized instance of this relationship to the other, unlike for Klossowski-Sade, is not the best instance of encounter with alterity. This is because erotic love is always contaminated by the pornographic fantasy of an otherness that I can enjoy, so my sexual enjoyment falls short of an otherness as such. Unlike for Klossowski-Sade, the possibility of my sexual enjoyment does not bring its impossibility into view, it only separates me from a truly ethical apprehension of my neighbor's difference from me.

Like Klossowski-Sade, Levinas speaks of the object of erotic desire as essentially and forever virginal: "L'Aimée, à la fois saisissable, mais intacte dans sa nudité, au-delà de l'étant, se tient dans la virginité."[518] Levinas insists on erotic experience as "du clandestin, du mystérieux, patrie du vierge, simultanément découvert par l'*Éros* et se refusant à l'Éros – ce qui est une autre façon de dire la profanation."[519] So erotic experience implies an other as alterity which continually recedes beyond my reach, but at the same time this otherness remains in the thrall of a pornographied otherness that remains under the control of my enjoyment and fantasy, thereby putting the virginity of erotic experience at one step of remove from me, in the realm of alterity, but still one step short of ethical alterity, which would make demands on me, rather than supporting my erotic enjoyment.

Bataille's Repudiation of the Cult of the Virgin

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[518] *Totalité et infini*, IV. Au-delà du visage, B. Phénoménologie de l'Éros, p. 289.
[519] P. 289.

I have discussed at some length the way that Bataille's reading of eroticism does not at all include this cult of virginity that Klossowski-Sade and Levinas concur in advancing. In *Madame Edwarda*, the narrator confronts a "fente" teeming with life and multitudinous horror, identified with God, rather than a pristine hymen that he is incapable of tearing. Indeed, Madame Edwarda is already torn, and it is this tear, and not any inviolate integrity, that hurls Bataille's narrator into erotic and religious experience. Further, this is true through Bataille's *œuvre*. We find essentially no erotic virgins in Bataille's work. The one character who seems to embody something like this role, Lazare in *Le Bleu du Ciel* (apparently modelled on Simone Weill), is intriguing to the narrator for her purity, but in an entirely desexualized way.[520]

Rather, the incarnations of the erotic in Bataille's work are anything but pure – the name of Lazare's erotic foil in this narrative, Dirty (in English in the original), makes this obvious.[521] Simone, a protagonist of *L'Histoire de l'œil*, which is an early work closer to the rationalist Sade for its emphasis on sodomy, is a counterpart to Juliette and not at all virginal. Even the mother, a figure in psychic economy who is generally desexualized and sublimated, is rendered carnal in Bataille's narrative *Ma mère*.[522] It must be noted that Bataille shows much more interest in the tragedy of Orestes, whose eroticized mother, Clytemnestra, is violent and adulterous, than in Sophocles's Jocasta, who is comparatively domesticated.[523] His sexualization of maternity is hence not an Oedipal one. This is a maneuver which Julia Kristeva understood:

> [C]e que ce thème fictionnel représente n'est pas indifférent; il médite des « états limites » de dépense, d'érotisme à perte, de sacrifice; des états qui passent par la mère et le désir pour elle mais, loin de s'y fixer et encore moins de la sublimer, la

[520] *OC* III, p. 402.
[521] p. 385.
[522] In *Divinus Deus*, deuxième partie, *OC* IV.
[523] For example, "L'Orestie," in *L'Impossible*, *OC* III.

> traversent et la salissent, c'est-à dire y découvrent le corps de la femme qui – enfin – n'est pas celui de la génétrice rassurante et identificatrice.[524]

This is excellent reading of Bataille's contribution.[525] Klossowski-Sade and Levinas are essentially in agreement on eroticism; there is only a minor distinction in that virginity is made the locus of the divine ideal and of ethics in the former, while it remains a step short of ethics in the latter. The reason why Levinas makes feminine virginity not quite equivalent to ethics is because it remains vulnerable to being pornographied and reduced to the "vulgar Venus," unlike the face, which can never be overcome.

Bataille is distinct from these two positions, as Kristeva points out. His eroticism is aimed at complete expenditure, which is to say that it does not reaffirm a selfhood dependent on a witness victim. It does not postulate the other as virginal, and hence a support for the enjoyment of violation and ownership, as it does for Klossowski-Sade, or for romantic love, as it does for Levinas. Instead, erotic experience carries with it the horror that alterity, rather than possessing an eternal virginity, is already torn and never carried with it the purity I may have fantasized. Further, the recognition that the other is violated from the outset leads to the conclusion that I am myself incapable of vicariously existing on the fantasy that someone somewhere is pure who can be the target of enjoyment. Instead, I will never gain this purity, and more than that, this purity does not exist as an object to be desired in frustration, it does not exist. What was conjectured as purity only concealed a crack, rags, a life incomprehensible from the perspective of

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[524] 'Bataille, l'expérience et la pratique," *Bataille*, direction Philippe Sollers, Paris: U.G.E., 1973, p. 285.
[525] As I will discuss in the subsequent chapter, Kristeva's claims later in the essay, in which she re-inscribes Bataille's innovations into a Marxist notion of subjective praxis, are much less successful, because his account of materialism is not easily reconcilable with a historical materialism that depends on a positive notion of what matter is (p. 293-294). Her later work unfortunately continues to reify Bataille's innovations, such as in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection*, Paris: Seuil, 1980. Rosalind Krauss has definitively criticized this in *Formless: A User's Guide*, "The Destiny of the *Informe*," New York: Zone Books, 1997, p. 236-238.

subjectivity. This is not even an instance of fear of castration brought on by the sight of female lack, because the alterity in question is not lacking, it is an excess.[526]

From this perspective, Bataille's work is not at all pornography in Levinas's sense, because pornography is for Levinas the capacity to overlay alterity with a fantasized image that can be enjoyed. Furthermore, Levinas is only capable of imagining woman as essentially a virgin, or as the "vulgar Venus," which is relegated to being the pornographic representation of her chaste sister. Contrarily, Bataille's literature is not a pornographic support for fantasy, because it engages with a much stronger conception of alterity than the idealized version of woman advanced by both Levinas and Klossowski's initial reading of Sade. It is, then, the horrifying aspects of sexuality that Dworkin and Sontag perceive, for good or for ill, to be essentially pornographic, that are the elements that prevent the pornographic fantasy that Levinas describes. This has the benefit of breaking up the deficient notions of otherness, supported by a self-contained subject who reinforces his self-sameness through the image of inviolate femininity, that prevent the experience of alterity and reinforce a psychology that is literally sadistic. A maneuver of Bataille's type, then, is necessary in order to reconceive of alterity so that anything like ethics can begin to be considered seriously.

[526] See Freud, Sigmund, "Female Sexuality (1931)," *SE* XXI, p. 232, for contrast. For this reason, Carolyn J. Dean's reading of Bataille's view of sexual difference, which revolves around castration, is untenable. See *The Self and Its Pleasures: Bataille, Lacan, and the History of the Decentered Subject*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, "Returning to the Scene of the Crime," p. 243.

Chapter Four: Bataille's Experience Outside the Subject: An Intervention in Lacanian Theories of Subjectivity

Lacan and *Madame Edwarda*

Despite his personal proximity to Bataille, Jacques Lacan makes very few direct references to his work. Indeed, the only mention of Bataille's name in the 878 pages of the *Écrits* is in a footnote to "D'une question préliminaire à tout traitement possible de la psychose."[527] This article declares that Daniel Schreber, the prototypical psychotic, was exposed to inner experience by his insight that "Dieu est une p[utain]."[528] Lacan affirms that his mention of inner experience is an allusion to Bataille, and refers the reader to *L'expérience intérieure*, which he calls "l'ouvrage centrale de l'œuvre de Georges Bataille;" and to Madame *Edwarda*, and in which "il décrit de cette expérience l'extrémité singulière."[529] Lacan here identifies the experience of *Madame Edwarda* with Bataille's inner experience, and stipulates that both are identical to Schreber's psychotic break.

"D'une question préliminaire à tout traitement possible de la psychose" was written in 1958 and generated by a seminar Lacan gave in 1955-1956.[530] He had known Bataille for twenty years, having been a participant in Bataille's *Acéphale* group.[531] Lacan was also the companion of Sylvia Bataille (née Maklès), Bataille's first wife, following their separation in 1934; Lacan married her in 1953.[532] Sylvia remained close to Bataille for the rest of her life following their separation and divorce. Moreover, Lacan raised Laurence, Bataille's daughter, because her birth parents separated when she was four

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[527] *Ecrits 2*, nouvelle édition, Paris: Seuil, 1999.
[528] P. 61.
[529] Ibid.
[530] Published as *Le séminaire, livre III: Les psychoses*, texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Seuil, 1981.
[531] Surya, en., p. 252. See also Roudinesco, Elisabeth, *Jacques Lacan*, chapter 12, "Georges Bataille and Co.," trans. Barbara Bray, New York: Columbia UP, 1997, p. 121-139.
[532] Surya, en., p. 534.

years old.[533] The 1950s was a period of close contact between the two men; Lacan contributed some of the research for *L'Érotisme*, published in 1957.[534]

Aside from this close anecdotal link and Lacan's explicit invocation of Bataille in his consideration of psychosis, Slavoj Zizek has argued for another point of proximity between their thought, a link that he finds dangerous and aims to overcome. In Zizek's view, it is in *Seminar VII*, given in 1959-1960, that Lacan is closest to Bataille in his formulation of transgressive jouissance.[535] This is an influence that Zizek believes that Lacan subsequently escapes. I will argue that whatever Lacan's personal friendship with Bataille, his statement in "D'une question préliminaire à tout traitement possible de la psychose" betrays a misunderstanding of *Madame Edwarda*. That is, while Lacan had commitments to the reconstitution of subjectivity that render Bataille's work illustrative of psychotic experience, close reading of Bataille's text reveals a distinct position on self and other.[536]

In consideration of these two points of contact between Lacan and Bataille (on psychotic experience and transgression), we must note that the neurotic who is led to undertake an act corresponding to the essence of his or her desire is not said to be a psychotic.[537] To reconcile this apparent contradiction, it is necessary to realize that for Lacan, all subjects are potentially psychotic, and avoid this only by the fragile construction of an ego ideal.[538] Psychosis, then, is the result of a foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father and a denial of the Other of the Other, leading to direct contact with the

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[533] Roudinesco, p. 125, 187.
[534] *OC* X, p. 13.
[535] Zizek, Slavoj, *The Parallax View*, chapter 2: Building Blocks for a Materialist Theology, "The Difficulty of Being a Kantian," p. 94-95. Lacan brought the transcript of this seminar to his stepdaughter Laurence, Bataille's biological daughter, when she was held in the Prison de la Roquette for her activities on behalf of the Algerian Front de libération nationale. See Roudinesco, chapter 16, "Double Life," p. 187.
[536] On this point I am in broad agreement with Jean Dragon's thesis in "The Work of Alterity: Bataille and Lacan," *Diacritics*, volume 26, number 2, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, 31-48.
[537] See for example *Seminar VII*, 99, 303, 243, 313.
[538] See Chiesa, Lorenzo, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007, 7.

real.[539] From this perspective, Bataille's refusal of the Name-of-the-Father and of subjectivity (writing under a pseudonym) and emphasizing an immediate contact with otherness that identifies a specific alterity (the title character) with its ultimate guarantor can only be read as a psychotic experience.[540]

From there, I will inquire into Lacan's theories of subjectivity and examine the impetus they receive from Bataille's ideas on ipseity, as well as their departure from his thought. This will follow into an investigation of a Kantian ethical problem, as read by Adrian Johnston, with the end of comparing this to Bataille's own imbrication of eroticism and ethics. A close reading of Bataille will show an alternative position on alterity that escapes subjectivity, while remaining distinct from the psychosis diagnosed by Lacan and the irresponsible nihilism suspected by Zizek. Lacan and Bataille attended Kojève's lectures together; as a result, both of their reconsiderations of selfhood bear the mark of his revisitation of Hegel.[541] Regardless of the substantial imprint on Lacan's thought of Bataille's reception of and intervention into these Kojèvian ideas, Bataille does not himself seem to have borrowed any particular insight from Lacan's work, nor did he ever endorse the direction Lacan had taken with ideas that are in some cases derived from his own writings.[542]

Lacan's reformulation of subjectivity is not only an application of the findings of German phenomenology to Freud's discovery of the unconscious, but a reception of Bataille's experience of selfhood as disrupted by alterity. I read Bataille's disruption as essentially an ethical one, which Lacan partially undoes by his re-inscription of the philosophical precedence of a subject (however finite and decentered) over Bataille's

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[539] Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness*, chapter 4, 108.
[540] This can of course also be linked to Bataille's discomfort with playing the role of husband and father, and his willingness to allow Lacan to occupy this position on his behalf.
[541] See Roudinesco, chapter 7, "The Papin Sisters."
[542] Roudinesco writes of "The constant though implicit presence of Bataille in Lacan's evolving work and the total absence of Lacan's writings in the work of Bataille, together with the long, subterranean friendship between the two men themselves." Chapter 12, "Georges Bataille and Co.," p. 136.

sensitivity to the singular and the irreducibly other. Lacan's increasing systematization at the hands of Zizek and those who share the project of recasting Lacan as a sophisticated interpreter of German idealism (notably, Bruce Fink, Joan Copjec, Alenka Zupancic, Lorenzo Chiesa, and Adrian Johnston) has had the effect of formulating an ingenious and robust return to the ethics of a committed subject.[543] This development has, however, been at the price of other aspects of Lacan's thought more intimately linked to Bataille's experiences, elements that are, in my view, much more adequate to ethics as such, that is, ethics that allows for the possibility of a genuine encounter with another.

Schreber

Lacan alludes to Bataille on the question of psychosis. Unlike many psychoanalysts, Lacan was particularly fascinated by psychotic experience.[544] For this reason, his interpretation of Sigmund Freud's inquiry into the Schreber case is crucial to an understanding of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Dr. Daniel Paul Schreber was a judge in Dresden who intermittently became overcome by wild delusions. He recorded his thoughts and feelings in a book called *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, published in 1903, to which Sigmund Freud devoted an analysis in 1911.[545] Freud's reading remains the classic case of a psychoanalytic attempt to grapple with psychosis. This was a rare venture on Freud's part, who generally confined his efforts to the more manageable disorders of neurosis. Schreber's disturbances initially took the form of hypochondria,

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[543] See Fink, Bruce, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995; Copjec, Joan, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002; Zupancic, Alenka, *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, London: Verso, 2000; Chiesa, Lorenzo, *Subjectivity and Otherness*; Johnston, Adrian, *Zizek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity*, Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2008.

[544] Dylan Evans points out that "Lacan's interest in psychosis predates his interest in psychoanalysis;" his doctoral research on "Aimée," a psychotic woman, was the impetus for his initial readings of Freud. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, New York: Routledge, 1996, 154.

[545] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911-1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique, and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1971, "Psycho-analytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides) (1911)," 10.

and advanced to visual and auditory hallucinations.[546] He eventually began to believe that he had died, that he could communicate with God or with devils, and that he lived in another world. He also became paranoid and convinced that his former physician was trying to kill him.[547] At the core of Schreber's delusions was a messianic belief that he had been chosen as a redeemer for the world, and that this redemption involved his transformation into a woman as a result of a miracle.[548] At times, he became convinced that God had impregnated him while he remained a virgin woman; that he had become Mary.[549]

Freud discerns a strong element of homosexuality in Schreber's disorder; his paranoid delusions cover up amorous feelings towards his doctor.[550] Many of Schreber's beliefs revolve around solar rays and the sun; he declared, "The sun is a whore."[551] Freud writes that the sun is a sublimation of the father; he extrapolates that Nietzsche's song "Before Sunrise," from part III of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, speaks to an erotic longing for an absent father. Bataille's identification with Nietzsche, then, suggests that from a Freudian perspective, he might himself share an eroticized fascination with the father that is comparable to Schreber's.[552] As I have previously mentioned, among Freud's very few direct references to Nietzsche is his claim that the *Übermensch* is the primal father; Freud appears to have conceived of Nietzsche as an enthusiast of unbreachable paternal authority, a reading that is reductive at best.[553] Leaving Nietzsche aside, a close reading of Bataille's texts shows a decidedly less central concern with fatherhood than Freud and

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[546] P. 14
[547] ibid.
[548] p. 16
[549] P. 32.
[550] P. 43.
[551] P. 53.
[552] I am alluding to Bataille's statement of intense and intimate relation to Nietzsche's thought in *OC* V, *L'expérience intérieure*, III. Principes d'une méthode et d'une communauté, p. 27-28.
[553] *SE* XVIII, 123.

Lacan emphasize, and a corresponding fascination with feminine alterity that differs from the psychoanalysts here discussed.[554]

Bataille and the Sun

Bataille's work does at one point seem to converge with this homosexual fascination with the father, and with identity between the sun and the paternal figure. In a very early fragment, written sometime between 1927 and 1930, which he later titled "Rêve," Bataille writes of being spanked by his father. He writes, "J'ai comme trois ans les jambes nues sur les genoux de mon père et le sexe en sang comme du soleil;" he dreams, "Mon père me gifle et je vois le soleil."[555] Psychoanalysis would see this as a fear of being castrated by the father as punishment for masturbation, and a simultaneous masochistic longing for punishment by the father. This is as close as Bataille gets to Schreber's symptoms.

These early surrealist writings also include "L'anus solaire," which also features imagery that seems consonant with Schreber's delusion. However, reading this short piece introduces elements closer to the concern with female alterity I have elucidated in chapter 3, and which are absent from Schreber's recollections. At the end of the piece, Bataile writes that "C'est ainsi que l'amour s'écrie dans ma propre gorge : je suis le *Jésuve*, immonde parodie du soleil torride et aveuglant."[556] In keeping with the previous text, "Rêve," this seems to reinforce the identity between the father and the sun; the narrator affirms himself as a dirty simulacrum of the sun.[557] A son can see himself as the distorted copy of his father. However, this is secondary and subordinate to the narrative's

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[554] For an account of the development of psychoanalytic approaches to sexual difference, see Verhaeghe, Paul, *Does the Woman Exist?: From Freud's Hysteric to Lacan's Feminine*, trans. Marc du Ry, New York: Other Press, 1999. In this study, I am bracketing Lacan's famous speculations on female *jouissance* in *Seminar XX: Encore 1972-1973: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink, New York: W.W. Norton, 1998, though much of Lacan's reading here might be more relevant to *Madame Edwarda* than his explicit reference with regard to the psychoses.
[555] *OC* II, p. 10.
[556] *OC* I, p. 86.
[557] His father went blind before his death. See Surya, en., p. 8-9.

affirmation of love screaming in his throat; this love does not scream at the father/sun. Bataille continues: "Je désire être égorgé en violant la fille à qui j'aurai pu dire : tu es la nuit."[558] So his desire is for death, a death that occurs simultaneously with performing transgressive contact with a feminine other, who he identifies not with the sun but with its absence, the night.

> Le Soleil aime exclusivement la Nuit et dirige vers la terre sa violence lumineuse, verge ignoble, mais il se trouve dans l'incapacité d'atteindre le regard ou la nuit bien que les étendues terrestres nocturnes se dirigent continuellement vers l'immondice du rayon solaire.[559]

In this passage, Bataille writes that the masculinized authority, the sun, of which he is a copy, is in fact not self-satisfied or sovereign but aimed at the night, a night with which it cannot be in contact without at the same time losing it. The piece concludes: "*L'anneau solaire* est l'anus intacte de son corps à dix-huit ans auquel rien d'aussi aveuglant ne peut être comparé à l'exception du soleil, bien que l'*anus* soit la *nuit*."[560] This final statement indicates that female alterity towards which his sodomistic desires are directed may appear as the sun for purposes of representation, but is in fact nocturnal and dark. The punchline of the narrative shows that the title is misleading; the disclosure of eroticism reveals that it is a crepuscular anus, not a solar anus, that is the focus of Bataille's obsession.[561]

The other discrepancies with Schreber follow from this. Bataille's erotic concern is always with the otherness of night, while psychosis of Schreber's type eliminates the possibility of singular otherness in favor of identification with the universe. Lacan writes

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[558] *OC* I, p. 86.
[559] Ibid.
[560] ibid.
[561] Derrida writes of a classical ambivalence with regard to the metaphor of the sun, according to which it functions as both a master signifier and its lack simultaneously, in "White Mythology," *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, 243, 251.

that for Schreber, "il n'est à peu près rien de tout ce qui l'entoure que d'une certaine façon, il ne soit."[562] While otherness does exist for Schreber, it is an empty and superficial understanding of otherness as an abstract container with no singular content.[563] This identification leads Schreber to a partial denial of death.[564] While Schreber fantasizes himself as a redeemer, as Christ or Christ's mother, Bataille's invocations of Christ always emphasize a death of God from which there is no salvation or resurrection.[565] Schreber also forcefully denies sexual difference by his desire to become a woman.[566] He wants to become not just any woman, but an impregnated virgin. I have already discussed the ways in which Bataille breaks with a cult of virginity and the Sadian dismissal of sexual difference through the means of sodomy.[567] Bataille's invocation of anal sex in "L'anus solaire," like his naming of the vagina as a "cul" in *L'histoire de l'œil*, belongs to an early stage in his writing, which is superseded by the encounter with God through sexual difference that takes place in *Madame Edwarda*.

So the difference between Schreber and Bataille is quite great. Schreber's statement that "the sun is a whore" is at the antipodes of Madame Edwarda's declaration that she is God, because it is the feminine alterity of night that is the God-whore, not the masculine solarity of Schreber's imagination. It is the aim of Schreber's entire megalomaniacal fantasy to eliminate alterity by the means of union with totality, where Bataille aims for precisely the reverse. Schreber's psychosis began with an initial

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[562] *Le séminaire, livre III: Les psychoses, 1955-1956*, texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Seuil, 1981, p. 91.
[563] "Le psychotique ne peut saisir l'Autre que dans la relation au signifiant, il ne s'attarde qu'à une coque, à une enveloppe, une ombre, la forme de la parole." Ibid., p. 288-289.
[564] Ibid., p. 36, 330.
[565] See especially the discussion of the crucifixion in *Sur Nietzsche*, deuxième partie, "Le sommet et le déclin," *OC* VI, p. 42-45.
[566] "Il [God] est atteint d'une dégradation imaginaire de l'alterité, qui fait qu'il est comme Schreber frappé d'une espèce de féminisation." *Séminaire III*, p. 116.
[567] Schreber's fantasy is in some ways the inverse of Sade's in that he dreams of a pregnant man, while Sade aims to interrupt the possibility of procreation. Nonetheless, they are united in their desire to refuse sexual difference, and in their positing of an essential and eternal virginity, at least according to Klossowski's initial reading in "Outline of Sade's System," *Sade My Neighbor*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1991, p. 72.

experience of a twilight of the world which he subsequently filled in with his delusions.[568] Bataille's thought, in contrast, emerges from a continual approach towards this twilight, this disuption of selfhood by an obscure other, rather than its denial by means of hallucination.

Lacan insists that Schreber's relationship to the world and to language is not that of a poet. He defines poetry as "création d'un sujet assumant un nouvel ordre de relation symbolique au monde."[569] Bataille's notion of poetry does not coincide with this, but what Lacan and Bataille have in common is that they inherit a Kojèvian view of language in which a certain use of language has the capacity to negate.[570] The psychotic, as incapable of a true negation (being himself identical in a sense to everything), cannot construct a subjective use of language. It is in Lacan's view essential to poetry to be able to construct metaphors, while psychotics, children, and animals rely on metonymy.[571] This alone should suffice to show that Bataille's inner experience has nothing in common with psychosis, because Lacan indicates that it is surrealist poetry and "certaines étapes de la peinture de Picasso" that best exemplify the preeminence of metaphor over metonymy in artistic creation.[572] It is metaphor that relies on awareness of death, for Lacan, as naming does for Kojève.[573]

However, Lacan is a much more orthodox Kojèvian than Bataille, in that he ascribes the privilege of this type of creative language to a subject and decisively separates this subject from the world of animals. He says explicitly that animals do not understand metaphors and hence can never be poetic, while Bataille, as we have

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[568] *Séminaire III*, p. 73.
[569] Ibid., p. 91.
[570] See *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel. Leçons sur la* Phénoménologie de l'Esprit. Professées de 1933 à 1939 à l'École des Hautes Études. Réunies et publiées par Raymond Queneau. Appendix II. "L'idée de la mort dans la philosophie de Hegel," p. 575. Paris: Gallimard, 1947, p. 542, and "Digression sur la poésie et Marcel Proust," *L'expérience intérieure*, quatrième partie, VI. Nietzsche, *OC* V, p. 156.
[571] *Séminaire III*, p. 248, 260.
[572] P. 260. The Picasso paintings to which Lacan alludes might include his rendering of the skull, which Bataille notes includes a "dislocation des formes" in "Le « Jeu lugubre »," *OC* I, p. 212.
[573] *Séminaire III*, p. 311.

discussed, writes that true poetry approaches the immediacy of "l'aboiement impénétrable d'un chien."[574] These citations suggest that Bataille's consideration of poetry and indeed existence is something that departs from Lacan's consideration of subjectivity, to such a degree that Lacan at one point believed that Bataille's thought occupied a space contiguous to the pre-subjective world of the psychoses. It is my reading, however, that Bataille's writing is neither psychotic nor the product of a subject recreating symbolic relations to the world through metaphor.

It is necessary to recall Bataille's difficult meditation on the notion of ipseity in *L'expérience intérieure*, particularly because Lacan gambled on uniting its insights with *Madame Edwarda* and with Schreber's memoirs. At the close of part III, Bataille begins to discuss ipseity, which etymologically indicates selfhood and identity (from Latin, *ipse*, self). Bataille begins by noting that human ipseity is irreducibly complex and constantly dynamic; he compares it to a knife of which one first replaces the handle, then the blade.[575] In other words, self-sameness is continually interrupted by successive difference.[576] He explicitly links this condition to man's existence in the world through language.[577] It is then the unusual status of language as a system of differences that leads to human status as essentially non-self-identical.

But not only this, Bataille proceeds from this to question the status of the erotic relationship: "La connaissance qu'a le voisin de sa voisine n'est pas moins éloignée d'une rencontre d'inconnus que ne l'est la vie de la mort."[578] This passage indicates that the erotic encounter is both the same as and different from the meeting of strangers, just as life is essentially different from but relies on death. This is to say that the erotic

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[574] Ibid., p. 248, "De l'existentialisme au primat de l'économie," *OC* XI, p. 291.
[575] *OC* V, p. 98. See also p. 111: "Ainsi nous ne sommes rien, ni toi ni moi, auprès des paroles brûlantes qui pourraient aller de moi vers toi, imprimées sur un feuillet."
[576] "C'est à cette différence irréductible – que tu es – que tu dois rapporter le sens de chaque objet." P. 111.
[577] Ibid., p. 99.
[578] Ibid., p. 100.

encounter is on one hand intimate and hence a meeting of neighbors and not of strangers, but insofar as it is erotic, necessarily includes a glimmer of the strange and the alienated even at the moment of the utmost familiarity. This insight is magnified in the section "La « Communication »" that concludes part III, in which Bataille writes, "Nous ne pouvons découvrir qu'*en autrui* comment dispose de nous l'exubérance légère des choses."[579] Following from this reading, it is my suggestion, first, contra Lacan, that Bataille has little in common with Schreber, because Schreber's consideration of otherness is a hollow one that relies on an identification of himself with a sun that sheds light on everything and cannot contemplate darkness; his use of language is an eternal linking of self with other.

Conversely, Bataille's understanding of language insists on the reliance of life on death, knowledge on non-knowledge, identity on difference, and not through a monistic uniting of these opposites but rather an awareness of the gap between them and an openess to the outside. Second, Bataille's poetry and experience are also distinct from Lacan's subject who adopts symbolic relations to the world around him, because the Lacanian subject effectively understands metaphor in order to comprehend his finitude, a model which is all too Kojèvian in its belief that the subject can master language and thereby establish autonomy from determination from without. Bataille has continually insisted on the irreduciblity of alterity, one that is inherent in language and that underlies the differences and communications between humans and animals, and men and women. It is Lacan and Schreber both who have found ways to ward off the possibility of a twilight of the world that would admit difference, Schreber through his delusions and

[579] Ibid., p. 114.

Lacan through his subject; Bataille is distinct from each of them in his refusal to close his eyes to night.[580]

Lacan's Subject

In order to examine the way that Lacan avoids psychosis, we must devote ourselves to a patient and attentive reading of his understanding of the emergence of subjectivity. Lacan induces communication between psychopathology and philosophy, indicating a comparison between the psychotic point of view and Spinoza, on the one hand, and between the development of subjectivity and Kant, on the other. I have already discussed Lacan's association between Bataille and psychosis; it is now necessary to read the links between Lacan's reading of Kant and his debt to Bataille. The differences between Bataille and Spinoza will help to indicate the distinction between Bataille's experience and psychotic phenomena. First, a consideration of Lacan's reading of Spinoza's *Ethics* as a kind of paranoid fantasy.

There is a point of similarity between Schreber's delusions and Spinoza's philosophy. Lacan says this directly, identifying Spinoza's co-existence of thought and extension and his definition of divine intelligence as the sum of human intelligences with Schreber's own experience of equivalence between his intellect and God's.[581] Lacan has partly inherited this reading from Kojève, who had written, "l' « Éthique » n'a pu être écrite, si elle est vraie, que par Dieu lui-même ; et notons-le bien, – par un Dieu non incarné." Kojève thinks that the *Ethics* becomes God; for this reason, "prendre Spinoza au sérieux, c'est effectivement être – ou devenir – fou."[582] Kojève declares that knowledge works according to a God's-eye-view in Spinoza, and is therefore a kind of

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[580] Freud of course acknowledges proximity between psychotic perception and psychoanalytic insight at the conclusion of his Schreber study; *SE* XII, 79.
[581] Ibid., p. 66, 210. Deleuze and Guattari also link Schreber to Spinoza. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983, p. 309, 327. Spinoza would certainly not admit any proximity to madness; he writes of a complete perplexity at madmen, children, animals, and suicides, in part II, proposition XLIX of *Ethics*.
[582] "Note sur l'éternité, le temps et le concept," Cours de l'année 1938-39, p. 354.

madness, because it makes omniscience the condition of possibility for knowledge. Lacan makes a similar claim when he explains Spinoza's *Amor intellectualis Dei* as "la réduction du champ de Dieu à l'universalité du signifiant, d'où se produit un détachement serien, exceptionnel, à l'égard du désir humain."[583] The Spinozist identification with God and the world eliminates the necessity of negativity and death. I have discussed a certain identification between Sade and Spinoza, and Levinas's ethical repudiation of Spinoza as a rational dismissal of alterity, in the previous chapter.[584]

Lacan also dismisses Spinoza, partly in the direction of alterity. His argument is that "L'expérience nous montre que Kant est plus vrai," and by Kant, he refers to a very specific account that emerges from a reading of his *Critique of Practical Reason*.[585] It is Lacan's claim that Kant has properly understood the desire for a singular other and its ethical consequences in a way that Spinoza denied by his abstract universality. Unlike Spinoza's universality of the signifier, Lacan argues, like Kojève, that a subject is produced through negativity and death. This insight leads him to a concern with ethics, transgression and evil. Unlike in Spinozist ethics, where personal desire becomes identified with the eternal totality of God's intellect, Lacanian ethics depend on the possibility of transgressing the law at the price of death. Lacan believes he can find the best instance of this type of transgression in Kant's work. I will strive to elucidate the psychoanalytic background for this claim.

The Law of *Jouissance,* or, the *Jouissance* of the Law

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[583] *Le séminaire: livre XI*, texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Seuil, 1973, p. 306.
[584] These readings of Spinoza are arguably reductive. For a much more sympathetic account with some relevance to Bataille's ideas, see Louis Althusser's comments in "The Errors of Classical Economics: An Outline for a Concept of Historical Time," *Reading* Capital, trans. Ben Brewster, New York: Pantheon, 1970, p. 102. See also Levinas's much more measured and sympathetic view in "The Spinoza Case" and "Have You Reread Baruch?" in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1990, p. 106-118. Bataille also emphasizes that Spinoza was a revolutionary and the "first of the democratic thinkers" in his review of Sartre's *Réflexions sur la question juive*, *OC* XI, p. 227.
[585] Ibid.

Lacan asserts that ethics is no less than the origin of psychoanalysis.[586] To demonstrate this, Lacan embarks on a two-pronged criticism of the notion of happiness. The first type Lacan regards with dismissive contempt, this being "*la voie américaine*," which he associates with ego psychology.[587] Lacan considers the dominant practice of Anna Freudian heritage, and International Psychoanalytic Institute approval, to be non-Freudian, a product of conformist European emigrés striving to give American culture what it wants. Lacan perceives utilitarianism behind American psychoanalysis, which he believes is grounded on "la perspective d'un accès aux biens de la terre," with "biens" holding the double meaning of both consequentialist desirable outcomes and commodities.[588]

The second mode of "the pursuit of happiness" he considers a more worthy adversary, and that is the transgressive pursuit of desires repressed by society. Lacan calls this the "l'affranchissement naturaliste du désir," and associates it with the eighteenth century libertine project.[589] Lacan considers at great length the various pornographic endeavors contemporaneous with both Kant and the French Revolution. This naturalist liberation rejects divine authority and its earthly monarchic proxy in favor of a broadly Rousseauian attempt to restore human beings their natural pleasures without societal restrictions.[590] This is also an attempt to discover an unproblematic enjoyment, in this case, an elimination of superego interdictions and the neuroses they produce in favor of an untrammeled right to desire. Lacan considers this goal to be equally chimerous and unreachable. Against both a liberal, linear notion of progress and a revolutionary one, Lacan insists that man is not more liberated than before, and that he could not become so

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[586] *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan : Livre VII : L'Éthique de la psychanalyse 1959-1960*, texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris : Seuil, 1986, p. 48
[587] ibid., p. 258.
[588] Ibid.
[589] Ibid., p. 12.
[590] This bears comparison to Klossowski's statements on the relationship between Rousseau's natural man and Sade's integral man. See "Sade and the Revolution," *Sade My Neighbor*, Evanston: Northwestern UP, p. 47-48.

regardless of any future political developments or insurrections.[591] For Lacan, however, psychoanalysis offers its own deontological ethics of desire that takes a certain inspiration from this libertine project while also taking its distance from it. One instructive comparison is with Bataille.

Bataille and *Felix Culpa*

Bataille argues that the notion of excess, sin, or transgression has a necessary and integral relationship to the law and the order of things. If we were to schematize and to treat Bataille as occupying a discernible philosophical position distinct from the express language of his texts, we might find in his work two related insights. The first concerns a necessary excess or waste product produced by any system, "la parte maudite" that must be spent or expended. A non-productive expenditure is required to eliminate this sacred waste, which accounts for what Bataille considers to be an identical attitude toward the taboo objects of shit, God, and cadavers.[592] This excremental, excessive point, produced by any inorganic or organic system, which Bataille considered the blind spot of the dialectic, bears a certain comparison to what Lacan called the *petit objet a*, the obscure object of desire which is un-symbolizable, irrecoverable, troubling, and unreachable.[593] This will be discussed in greater depth in our examination of the gaze.

However, there is a shift in Bataille's work, attested to by his provocative equation of "God" with shit, in which Bataille begins to consider this waste product to be primary. This symptom or waste becomes the basis of the system, if not its origin. The paradigmatic example for Bataille is the crucifixion of Christ, the *felix culpa*: The ultimate sin of the torturing to death of God himself is the greatest violation and the

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[591] *Seminaire VII*, p. 13.
[592] "Principes d'hétérologie pratique," "La valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade (I)", *OC* II, Dossier de la polémique avec André Breton.
[593] Jacques-Alain Miller admits that "something Georges Bataille contributed in 'Heterology' is at work" in *petit objet a* in "Microscopia: An Introduction to the Reading of Television," in Lacan, Jacques, *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, ed. Joan Copjec, New York: W. W. Norton, 1990, xxxi.

bedrock on which the entire religion of love and forgiveness rests.[594] Lacan compares this crime to the murder of the monstrous Father, on which Freud speculates in *Totem and Taboo*.[595] As discussed in chapter 2 of this study, Bataille himself aims to adhere to the consequences of the death of the father, rather than attempting to reincarnate him. In Zizek's view, Bataille's work falls into enrapturement with the moment of excess and crime, what some Lacanians would call a "passion for the Real": the obsession with chance, subjective annihilation, death, violation, and the unspeakable.[596]

Bataille's insight, that the norm relies on its exception, is close to Zizek's characteristic move: that is, the claim that apparent prohibitions and societal interdictions conceal an obscene underbelly, disavowed transgressions, and cynical distance which appears illegal but is in fact coded into the very law itself. However, Zizek risks a third move subsequent to Bataille's. Bataille suggests, first, that the law generates its transgression, that work produces festivals, the most liberal societies build prisons, and biological organisms excrete waste matter. Second, that this transgression is primary to the law or essential to it; that religions of love and kindness generate their authority from sacrifice, that capitalist economies depend on leisure and military industries, and that socialist economies depend on black markets.[597] Zizek takes this one step further by declaring that the violation of the law is not primary or originary to the law, but is *identical* to the law in some radical sense.

What does this mean? Zizek characterizes Bataille's transgression as relying on its system or its limit as pre-modern, a failure to fully think the consequences of Kant, which

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[594] See *Sur Nietzsche*, deuxième partie, *OC* VI, p. 42.
[595] *Séminaire VII*, p. 14.
[596]Zizek, Slavoj, "The Difficulty of Being a Kantian," *The Parallax View*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006, p. 94. The phrase comes from Alain Badiou.
[597] This is partly comparable to Michel Foucault's claims about "useful delinquencies." "Dans cette société panoptique dont l'incarcération est l'armature omniprésente, le délinquant n'est pas hors la loi ; il est, et même dès le départ, dans la loi, au cœur même de la loi." *Surveiller et punir : Naissance de la prison*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975, chapitre IV, III. "Le carcéral," p. 352.

tell us that "*absolute excess is that of the Law itself*."[598] The Law is for Zizek illegal; it "intervenes in the 'homogeneous' stability of our pleasure-oriented life as the shattering force of the absolute destabilizing 'heterogeneity.'"[599] This claim has two possible valences: First, a literal adherence to the law would be its own fulfillment and transgression. Second, Zizek also speaks of the interruption of a higher Law or desire that would shatter and violate the ordinary laws and goals of everyday life. Zizek locates this move in Lacan, declaring that Lacan wavers between Bataille's regression and Zizek's subsequent innovation, progressing in chapter IV of *Seminar VII* from the former to the latter.[600]

Zizek emphasizes that Lacan only fully accepts his own fusion with Kant in the very late and unpublished *Seminar XXIII*, when he concedes that there is "no substantial Thing – *jouissance* beyond the Symbolic," but that *jouissance* is "of/in the lack of itself, a *jouissance* that arises when its movement repeatedly misses its goal, a pleasure that is generated by the repeated failure itself."[601] We must first note that this reading of Lacan is forceful and even tendentious, relying on an extreme emphasis on a few very late Lacanian formulations and a simultaneous critique of many of Lacan's own claims.[602] What Zizek does here is to emphasize that jouissance is not found in transgression as such but is rather a name for the attempt to obey the law while at the same time trying (and failing) to achieve some enjoyment beyond it. Jouissance in this Zizekian reading is

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[598] *The Parallax View*, p. 95.
[599] Ibid.
[600] For this reason, Zizek argues that Bataille misunderstands the nature of sacrifice in modernity (the modern subject sacrifices itself, rendering transgression irrelevant), in *The Indivisible Remainder*, London: Verso, 1996, 125. See Matthew Sharpe's reading in *Slavoj Zizek: A Little Piece of the Real*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, 139. Zizek's self-sacrificial subject occludes the dimension of alterity maintained and examined by Bataille.
[601] ibid., p. 96.
[602] Zizek is drawing on a criticism of a tragic and transcendent Lacan made by Bruno Bosteels and Lorenzo Chiesa, and articulating a criticism of his own early work, which constructed Lacan this way. For this reason, Zizek's attempt to extricate Bataille from Lacan is a necessary aspect of his own self-criticism; Bataille is made out to be a nihilist so that he can be identified with a straw-man Lacan, as against the apparently more ethical Lacan delineated by Zizek and Chiesa. See Chiesa, Lorenzo, "Tragic Transgression and Symbolic Re-inscription: Lacan with Lars von Trier," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, New York: Routledge, volume II, number 2, August 2006, 49-61.

neither the product of fanatical adherence to the laws undergirding the symbolic order nor the transgressive refusal of it, but the space created by the vacillation between both these (ultimately futile) efforts. While noting this conclusion on Zizek's part, we should return to the claims made by Lacan about Kant in *Seminar VII*, the point of his apparent sympathy with Bataille, so that we might strive to articulate alternative ethical consequences.

The Question of Authority

Lacan was unenthused by the student revolt of May 1968, retorting: "As hysterics, you want a master. You will get one."[603] It is Lacan's reply to any attempt to transgress prohibition and shatter taboo that such a transgression relies on the rule it claims to reject, crying out for recognition of its courageous blasphemy. Sade is notorious for this black mass logic, declaring his atheism to anyone who will listen, but especially to the very God he denies. Lacan characterizes the libertine project of which Sade is the exemplar as "une sorte d'ordalie proposée à ce qui reste le terme, réduit sans doute, mais certainement fixe," God.[604]

Lacan's own authority has an ambiguous status, in that he was notorious in demanding absolute loyalty and maintained an appearance of absolute mastery, while simultaneously behaving in a manner that was absurd, undignified, unjust, selfish, and arbitrary. Lacan appears as an incarnation of the Real father, the castrating father, who has a monopoly on *jouissance*, which Lacan indelicately named "Grand Fouteur."[605] At the level of his writing or oral seminars, there is a similar gap between his obvious erudition and brilliance on one hand, and his frequent jokes, conversational asides, petty errors, and puns. The very difficulty of his style appears to be ultra-magisterial, but also warrants a variety of disparate interpretations. This act of performing an authoritative

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[603] Ibid., p. 91. Quoted from *Seminar XVII*.
[604] *Séminaire VII,* p. 12.
[605] ibid., p. 355.

figure of enjoyment establishes its own complicated mixture of enjoyment and punishment for his readers and listeners; on one hand, the attempt to appreciate Lacan is often frustrated by his refusal to make his assertions according to any particular rationality, while at the same time there is an enjoyment to be found in submitting to the demands of such an eccentric thinker.

In a sense, Lacan incarnates an authority who is able to appear as an object for desire; desire that exceeds the more stable satisfactions of happiness. Lacan argues that this desire for happiness has always been an element of human existence, depreciating the originality of Saint-Just's claim that happiness had become a political factor for the first time with the destruction of the monarchy. Contrariwise, Lacan says that "le bonheur" "a toujours été et ramènera le sceptre et l'encensoir qui s'en accommodent fort bien."[606] In other words, the desire for happiness had already existed and been consequent in the time of the monarchy, and had been able to thrive on its limitation by church and crown. Lacan argues that it is the novelty of the revolution to aim for "la liberté du désir," and that it is Sade who understands this.[607]

Sade

Lacan paraphrases Sade's maxim as "le droit de jouir d'autrui quel qu'il soit, comme instrument de notre plaisir."[608] The question for Lacan is whether this maxim passes Kant's test of universality. If our repugnance towards such a possible maxim, the notion that it would be nasty, unstable, cruel, abusive, etc., is only a sentimental revulsion, an expression of fear or disgust on the level of affect, this should be of no consequence to Kant's true deontological ethics – consequences and emotional and sensual considerations are simply irrelevant. The only question is whether the Sadeian desire for the common property of bodies can be rationally willed to be universal.

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[606] *Écrits 2*, "Kant avec Sade," p. 264.
[607] Ibid.
[608] *Séminaire VII,* p. 98.

It is one of Sade's contributions to the understanding of desire that his libertinage is so unpleasant. Lacan asks, "pour atteindre absolument *das Ding*, [the object of desire] pour ouvrir toutes les vannes du désir, qu'est-ce que Sade nous montre à l'horizon?"[609] The answer is pain, "La douleur d'autrui, et aussi bien la douleur proper du sujet, car ce ne sont à l'occasion qu'une seule et même chose."[610] Kant's ethical subject undergoes only one pathological emotion, the pain of humiliation, when he chooses (as he must) to obey the law. The law is then sadistic, a counterpart to "de Sade's notion of pain (torturing and humiliating the other, being tortured and humiliated by him) as the privileged way of access to sexual *jouissance*," the form of sensation which can far exceed mere pleasure in its duration.[611]

The relentless pursuit of desire by the Sadian libertine mirrors the intractable ethical subject, who cannot be dissuaded by physical sensation or emotional disinclination. Sade's technical goal is, among other things, a radically de-sublimated sexual enjoyment.[612] As Zizek clarifies it, we find in Sade a rigorous instrumentalization of the sexual, not a raw burst of animal lust.[613] To this end, Sade offers an endorsement of the relationship with partial objects; as Lacan paraphrases it, "*Prêtez-moi la partie de votre corps qui peut me satisfaire un instant, et jouissez, si cela vous plait, de celle du mien qui peut vous être agréable*."[614] This can be read as isomorphous with Kant's definition of marriage as "the binding together of two persons of different sexes for the life-long reciprocal possession of their sexual attributes;" Sade merely eliminates the requirements of sexual difference and permanence.[615]

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[609] Ibid., p. 97.
[610] Ibid.
[611] Zizek, Slavoj. "Kant with (or against) Sade," *The Zizek Reader*, ed. Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright, Oxford: Blackwell, 1999, p. 291.
[612] *Séminaire VII*, p. 234.
[613] "Kant with (or against) Sade," p. 287.
[614] *Séminaire VII*, p. 237.
[615] *Metaphysical Elements of Justice: Part I of* The Metaphysics of Morals, trans. John Ladd, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1999, 88.

As Zizek argues, Lacan recognizes that Sade lays bare the sadism of the superego. Rather than a neutral enforcer of societal norms, the superego is in fact a displacement of id-level aggression, tormenting the ego in the name of legitimacy and right.[616] This is, however, not the true innovation of Lacan's reading of Sade or of Kant. According to Zizek, Lacan is actually concerned with "the ultimate consequences and disavowed premisses of the Kantian ethical revolution."[617] For (Zizek's) Lacan, what is so fascinating is not that the apparently universal and disinterested ethical law is actually polluted by personal pathological desires at every level. What is more interesting is that this tainting with personal wants is necessary as a barrier against the self-destroying and negating force of duty, which is far more "sadistic" than any Sadeian perversion – duty and desire become equivalent for Zizek's Lacan.[618]

Lacan and Kantian Deontology

Bataille and Lacan are often considered as readers of Hegel; Derrida's "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale : *Un hégélianisme sans réserve*" marks the beginning of a deconstructive engagement with Hegel, while Zizek has strived to articulate Lacan as the re-activator of an authentic Hegel as against subsequent misreadings.[619] In Derrida's reading, Bataille radicalizes Hegel's negative to a degree that it can no longer be defined as the moment of a system, even as meaning organizes itself around it.[620] Bataille's sovereignty, unlike Hegelian mastery, is an absolute difference that never establishes hierarchy, cannot be found in its essence because its essence is a pure lack, a movement towards the universal that destroys the particular without achieving a corresponding idea. In contrast, Lacan's mirror stage traces the

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[616] "Kant with (or against) Sade," p. 288.
[617] Ibid.
[618] ibid.
[619] Derrida, Jacques, *L'écriture et la différence*, Paris: Seuil, 1967, p. 369-408; Slavoj Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology*, New York: Verso, 1999, chapter 2, p. 70-124.
[620] "De l'économie restreinte à l'économie générale : *Un hégélianisme sans réserve*," p. 371.

possibility of the foundation of subjectivity as mediated by negativity in his famous *écrit* "Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je," in a manner that owes a great deal to the Hegelian account of subjectivity.[621] Bataillean "sovereignty," however, is not merely self-destructive; he writes of ""un lien avec ce *lui* obscur" as paramount.[622] I would like to suggest that the alternative consideration of otherness suggested by Bataille, which escapes from the precedence of subjectivity re-established by Lacan, can best be exemplified not through the traditional Hegelian master-slave model, which depends on masculine combat, but through a scenario present in the work of Immanuel Kant, dealing with the relation to femininity.

Kant's example is that a sensualist is given the option of making love to the woman he desires, but at the price of immediate execution.[623] Kant argues that no one would make such a bargain, no desire could possibly be worth life; everyone can control his or her passions in extreme situations. Contrary to this, it is possible to imagine an ethical subject who might undergo execution rather than violate the moral adherence to truth and the commandment not to bear false witness against a neighbor. Therefore, while the moral law is immortal, the passions are fleeting and weak. The desire for self-preservation even at the loss of the sexual object is not ethical, in that it remains tied to future empirical consequences, but it demonstrates the ability of a human subject to transcend his sensuous nature.[624]

However, Lacan takes the risk of arguing for the possibility of at least one libertine so perverse he would in fact trade his life for such a desire.[625] Desire possesses a

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[621] *Écrits*, 93-101.
[622] Bataille, *OC V*, *L'expérience intérieure*, deuxième partie : "Le supplice."
[623] *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 30, read by Lacan in *Seminar VII*, p. 108 and p. 189.
[624] Johnston, Adrian. "The Barred *Trieb*," *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive*, Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2005, p. 234-235.
[625] The association between erotic desire and the disclosure of death was already made by Freud: "The fairest and the best, she who has stepped in to the place of the Death-goddess, has kept certain characteristics that border on the uncanny, so that from them we might guess at what lay beneath." "The Theme of the Three Caskets," *SE* XII, 300.

capacity of sublimation, the practice of raising an object "à la dignité de la Chose."[626] The Thing, *das Ding*, is for Lacan an object related to the traumatic Real; we desire it without regard for ordinary consequences. Should the desired woman attain the quality of the Thing, she would be worth death. Lacan takes a position directly opposing Kant's; the sensualist's fear of death is what is tied to the pleasure principle, his utilitarian wish to live longer rather than to fornicate. A Don Juan who would willingly be dragged to hell would be the true example of an ethical subject. This hypothetical, suicidally lustful figure, the Lacano-Kantian libertine, produces certain consequences: As Zizek puts it, "if gratifying sexual passion involves the suspension of even the most elementary 'egoistic' interests, if this gratification is clearly located 'beyond the pleasure principle,' then in spite of all appearances to the contrary, *we are dealing with an ethical act*, then his 'passion' is *strictu sensu* ethical."[627] Desire and the law are formally equivalent, outside the horizon of the pleasure principle, non-sensual, overriding the fear of death.

Lacan argues for a strict delineation between *jouissance* (desire) and pleasure. Pleasure is a "diluted discharge of libidinal tension" mitigated by the reality principle.[628] Any pleasure or enjoyment in the ordinary sense is not so much repressed but rather *depends* on the intervention of the ego's domesticating abilities, reducing intensity, accommodating experience to external reality, holding back the self-obliterating force of *jouissance* – which is excessive, suicidal, and apparently irrational and impossible. It is in this sense that Lacan commented that "toute pulsion est virtuellement pulsion de mort;" in its pure form, all jouissance would be negating and destructive.[629] Desire is made up of the elements of the demand that exceed needs; it has no final object and is insatiable.

The drive, which includes the death drive (*Todestrieb*) as its constant latent

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[626] *Séminaire VII*, p. 134.
[627] "Kant with (or against) Sade," p. 289.
[628] "The Barred *Trieb*," p. 236.
[629] *Écrits 2*, "Position de l'inconscient," p. 329.

tendency, demands total intensity and immediate connection to the Real, while simultaneously taking on the qualites Freud named the "nirvana principle" – the desire for rest, stasis, silence, and peace. The drive essentially demands everything as a tactic to get to nothing. Adrian Johnston takes the position that the drive (*Trieb*) in general is self-contradictory and split, like the subject.

> One, the *Todestrieb* is a general, metapsychological description of all drives; two, the *Todestrieb* aims at achieving a complete elimination of tension; three, all drives are generators of internal tension – therefore, *Trieb* is inherently self-defeating, since it aims at eliminating tension while [...] being itself responsible for generating tension.[630]

Jouissance is then, for Johnston, not so much the terrifying possible realization of all our unacceptable hopes and desires, in all their soul-destroying transgressive intensity, as essentially non-existent. That is to say, it is impossible in the mundane sense of "cannot be achieved," rather than impossible in the Bataillean sense of unmitigated self-erasing sovereignty. Rather than a subversive potential to be kept at bay by society and ego-psychology, raw jouissance simply could not be reached under any circumstances, for Johnston.

To illustrate this thesis, Johnston also appeals to Kant's example of the woman and the gallows, and suggests that first, following Lacan, maybe someone would choose to purchase the woman of his dreams at the price of his life, and this would be an elevation of an ordinary woman to the sublime and morbid heights of the Thing, but that the actual sex might be greatly disappointing – rather than a self-destroying burst of orgasmic fulfillment, the unfortunate libertine might find himself "crushed by a mixture of revulsion and horror," confronted with "a mere pound of flesh not worth dying for in

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[630] "The Barred *Trieb*," p. 237.

the end."[631] Johnston's subject would effectively not be able to maintain the obsessive valuation of *das Ding*; upon looking too close, the woman would become an ordinary mammal and not the romantic ultimate desideratum of his libido. If the man is given the choice of either the gallows or the comely young woman, he has basically no real choice at all, because if he chooses the woman, he will lose the possibility of *jouissance* (after finally arriving at it) and his life as well.[632] Social reality, repression, the basic obstacles to the realization of one's dreams turn out to be the necessary precondition for the apparent (but non-existent) possibility of jouissance, like hard, dry sand reflecting a mirage. "This *jouissance* is an illusory lure, a *trompe-l'oeil* that is convincing only insofar as social reality remains in place as the seemingly contingent scapegoat blamed for barring access to enjoyment."[633]

In discussing Johnston's argument, it is important to emphasize that *jouissance* is strictly asensual – so Johnston is not arguing merely that no woman could look as good naked as we imagine her or that the sex promised to Kant's ethical/lustful subject might turn out to be too brief or too ordinary or otherwise not to his taste. Johnston's argument for the impossibility of *jouissance* is then not reliant on a claim for the inadequacy of lived sensation in comparison to fantasy. Instead, Johnston argues that the promised *jouissance* at the end of the drive is formally impossible. When Zizek associates Lacan with Bataille, he is thinking of Lacan's claim that the desire to enjoy the woman even at the price of death is essentially ethical; this drive towards transgession seems to Zizek to be particularly Bataillean. Johnston's account of jouissance as illusory and the death drive as inherently self-defeating serves the purpose of criticizing that which appears Bataillean in Lacan, and in this sense Johnston's thesis is in line with Zizek's desire to put Lacan on a more orthodox Kantian-Hegelian path. It is to Johnston's credit that he

[631] Ibid., p. 239.
[632] Ibid., p. 241.
[633] Ibid., p. 243.

draws out the consequences of Kant's and scenario and Lacan's acceptance of the wager, to the end that the promised enjoyment of the female would doubtless be found wanting and the courageous libertine would, from a certain perspective, find himself cheated. Therefore, a kind of transgressive heroism to which Lacan appears to subscribe is thwarted.[634]

However, a reading of the type I have suggested of *Madame Edwarda* indicates that if Lacan had meant to prescribe an ethics of sexual adventurism, this was never, whatever Zizek's reading, something in line with Bataille. After all, it is essential to Bataille's writing – in *Madame Edwarda*, in *Inner Experience*, in "L'apprenti sorcier," "Critique of Heidegger," all of the texts to which we have devoted our attention, that eroticism is not a path to libertine enjoyment anyway. While Lacan goes part of the way in dissociating desire from sexual pleasure, his account of sexual desire in *Seminar VII* still seems to indicate a drive towards possession and consumption of the female other. For example, Lacan suggests that the libertine might act "pour le plaisir de couper la dame en morceaux."[635] His point is that desire is essentially destructive and not sensual, but this is exactly the problem; Lacanian erotic transgression is based on destroying the other. Bataille's account of transgression, on the other hand, only brings an Other to light who cannot be destroyed, Edwarda as incarnation of God being the most salient example. From this perspective, the horrified realization on the part of Johnston's libertine, who has been cheated and finds himself with an abject creature of bones, flesh, and blood, is a consequence Bataille has already understood and accepted. It is at this point that ethics are actually reached, because this is the only moment in the sequence Kant-Lacan-

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[634] In Chiesa's reading, Lacan learns to avoid this ethics of transgression by *Seminar XVII* (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychosis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg, New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), instead "asking us to *compromise* our desire precisely in order to keep on desiring." Chiesa, Lorenzo, "Lacan with Artaud: *j'ouïs-sens, jouis-sens, jouis-sans*," *Lacan: The Silent Partners*, ed. Slavoj Zizek, London: Verso, 2006, 346.
[635] *Séminaire VII*, p. 131.

Johnston in which alterity appears.

Guilt and the Act

Lacan suggests that if psychoanalysis has a therapeutic value, this curative effect is essentially a by-product rather than an essential medical *telos*. Further, he famously argues that psychoanalysis does not tell the patient what is healthy and what is not, does not suggest a course of action, does not provide advice, does not heal or reconstruct the ego – effectively, psychoanalysis does not in itself revaluate any values. The analysand is totally free to live a life of morbid transgression or bourgeois conformity, acquiescence or rebellion. Psychoanalysis does, however, seem to have a certain goal, as is made clear at the conclusion of Lacan's famous *écrit* on the mirror stage: "la psychanalyse peut accompagner le patient jusqu'à la limite extatique du « *Tu es cela* », où se révèle à lui le chiffre de sa destinée mortelle."[636] This sets the production of subjectivity as the final goal of the analytic endeavor.

So, how can we elaborate the ways that psychoanalysis accomplishes this ecstatic limit of identity? Lacan suggests that "La psychanalyse semblerait n'avoir pour but que d'apaiser la culpabilité."[637] This consideration of guilt leads Lacan to a redefinition of the self, based on desire, the excessive, non-pragmatic, disavowed source of subjectivity. Lacan discusses guilt, descriptively, as of course a superego enforcement of id-level sadism. Guilt, however, also differentiates itself from normal ethico-legal codes in that it punishes the ego for crimes he or she might *like* to commit, rather than only those crimes actually enacted in the real world.

Guilt is then a punishment not for what we have done, but for what we have failed to do – our failure to continue to pursue our unacceptable desires, our failure to transgress the law (or to fulfill it, in Zizek's reading) is what we punish ourselves for, in the absence

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[636] "Le stade de miroir," p. 99.
[637] *Séminaire VII*, p. 13.

of the exterior punishment we deserve. This leads to Lacan's apparent maxim: "La seule chose don't ou puisse être coupable, c'est d'avoir cédé sur son désir."[638] Zizek finds this to be the kernel of Lacan's psychoanalytic ethics. Lacan states the directive more forcefully earlier in the seminar:

> [C]'est parce que nous savons mieux que ceux qui nous ont precédés, reconnaître la nature du désir qui est au cœur de cette expérience, qu'une révision éthique est possible, qu'un jugement éthique est possible, qui représente cette question avec sa valeur de Jugement dernier – Avez-vous agi conformément au désir qui vous habite?[639]

However, Zizek has recently distanced himself from a sloganizing of this "Last Judgment," clarifying that Lacan never spoke this way before or after *Seminar VII*, and equivocating that this is effectively a formula of "passion for the Real" (that is, all too Bataillean.)[640] The passion of the Real, an ethical danger of psychoanalysis, is the urge to be done with mediation and the symbolic entirely in favor of an undifferentiated holistic intensity of experience; something like André Breton's "certain point de l'esprit d'où la vie et la mort, le réel et l'imaginaire, le passé et le futur, le communicable et l'incommunicable, le haut et le bas cessent d'être perçus contradictoirement."[641] If we accept Zizek's thesis, at this point in Lacan's work there is a surrealist fetishization of being done with the judgment of God and guilt, an ecstatic, timeless embrace of transgression, which swallows up the subject entirely.[642]

If a pure fetishization of the omnipotence and immortality of desire is too idealistic, too enthralled with the madness of the here and now, and the romance of evil

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[638] ibid., p. 370.
[639] Ibid., p. 362.
[640] "The Difficulty of Being a Kantian," p. 94
[641] "Second manifeste du surréalisme," *Manifestes du surréalisme*, Paris: Gallimard, 1979, p. 72-73. Bataille cites this passage favorably, in "Henri Pastoureau: *La blessure de l'homme*," *The Absence of Myth*, p. 127, although much of Breton's manifesto is devoted to an attack on Bataille.
[642] This is similar to what Badiou calls a "disaster" for a truth-process. *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward, New York: Verso, 2001, p. 81.

jouissance, where else might Lacan's maxim lead? In *Seminar XV*, Lacan elaborates an account of *act* and differentiates it from a mere action. In Alenka Zupancic's account, "The act differs from an 'action' in that it radically transforms its bearer;" "the subject is annihilated and subsequently reborn (or not); the act involves a kind of temporary eclipse of the subject."[643] Lacan defines the act as essentially evil and suicidal. Zupancic clarifies this by a comparison to Kant's famous reactionary account of the Jacobin regicide, which I have previously discussed in the context of Klossowksi, Sade, and the politics of deconstruction. Zupancic describes the Jacobin formal execution as an overthrowing of the monarch's "symbolic body."[644] Such an event smashes the state and radically abrogates all previous laws; it is always formally radically evil. However, the observer of such an event, a participant in revolutionary enthusiasm, is not necessarily consumed and annihilated by the event, though this is always a danger. Rather, it is possible to remain faithful to this event and pursue its outcome.[645] Ethical consistency and perseverance requires a certain sobriety that a Bataillean Lacan might seem to lack.

The Lacanian theory of the act represents a philosophical formulation of the encounter with alterity considered as essential to the foundation of a subject who is able to draw consequences from the disruption of the self-same order of things. From the perspective of the radical ethics to which this study adheres, this theory of subjectivity can be read as having important commonalities with the Bataillean theory of ipseity earlier outlined. Bataille and the Lacanians both trace a certain lineage to the execution of the king and a fidelity to the consequences of this enactment of the death of the God and radical finitude of the eternal father. Bataille and the contemporary Lacanians part ways (bracketing Lacan himself for a moment) in that Zizek and Zupancic enthusiastically

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[643] Zupancic, Alenka. *Ethics of the Real: Kant, Lacan*, "Good and Evil," London: Verso, 2000, p. 83.
[644] Ibid.
[645] Zupancic is drawing on Badiou's notion of ethical fidelity to a truth-process, which he links to Lacan, but systematizes and elaborates: "Persevere in the interruption. Seize in your being that which has seized and broken you." *Ethics*, p. 47.

assert a renewed fidelity to the law of a new symbolic order, and see an abandonment of this project as suicidal, terroristic, or irresponsible. In my view, this stems from a misunderstanding of Bataille's outlook as essentially necrophilic or psychotic, whereas in fact Bataille's work outlines a constant sensitivity to the coming of alterity, without preexisting guarantees or schematics. Inasmuch as the Lacanians insist on an ethics that continues to rely on the re-formation of a subject, they inevitably fall short of the possibility of ethics in the strong sense.

The Mirror Stage

If we are to conceive the subject as in some sense a closure to the possibility of alterity, we must read the texts that formulate Lacan's subject in order to determine if this is indeed the case. The primary document on Lacanian subject formation is of course "Le stade du miroir," which describes the production of selfhood out of the network of imaginary relations.[646] While Lacan asserts that the nucleus of the *I* pre-exists, subjectivity does not truly take place until the point when one begins to recognize oneself in the mirror. At this moment, the subject is "s'objective dans la dialectique de l'identification à l'autre et que le langage ne lui restitue dans l'universel sa fonction de sujet."[647] Subjectivity is being propelled into the universal; it is mediated by language; it is characterized by identification with another. This occurence splits the subject between the untotalized, unconscious chaos of lived experience, already present in infancy and remaining in the imaginary, and the "ideal-I," ego, or imago.[648] The imaginary is pre-verbal and pre-Oedipal, and is characterized by aggression and narcissism. It allows for fantastic relations with oneself and with objects; it is the object of analysis. The

[646] Lacan, Jacques, *Écrits* 1, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999, "Le stade du miroir," p. 93.
[647] Ibid.
[648] ibid.

imaginary is the "fantasmes dans la technique de l'expérience [psychanalytique] et dans la constitution de l'objet aux différents stades du développement psychique."[649]

The ego is produced by an identification with others who have reached maturity and who appear to have egos of their own. The subject mistakenly believes that the self-contained images of mastery presented to him by mature adults are the actual and complete representatives of those people. This is "la *fonction de méconnaissance*," which the subject then applies in forgetting the role of his own imaginary and its constitutive drives, in favor of an aspiration to be completely assimilated to the imago.[650] The creation of an identity proceeds from "une image morcelée du corps à une forme que nous appellerons orthopédique de sa totalité, – et à l'armure enfin assumée d'une identité aliénante, qui va marquer de sa structure rigide tout sout developpement mental."[651] That is to say, one begins with a body in pieces, and constructs for oneself, with the help of language, the incest taboo, and the example set by others, a hard and constricting personal identity. The ego is the site of the conscious mind. However, true subjectivity can never be reduced to the ego, which "ne rejoindera qu'asymptotiquement le devenir du sujet." [652] The ego, then, always presents itself with a more or less obvious lack; this lack is what remains unconscious, and what, when symbolized, we perceive as the phallus. The production of an imago is not the production of a subject. The subject, rather, is produced by the conscious mind's attempt to grasp its unconscious obverse.

Aggression

What is troubling in Lacan is that that there is always "une certaine déhiscence de l'organisme en son sein."[653] Dehiscence, which is a botanical term for the bursting of fruit at maturity and a medical term for the bursting open of a surgically closed wound, is the

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[649] *Écrits* 1, "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage," p. 240-241
[650] "Le stade du miroir," p. 98.
[651] Ibid., p. 96.
[652] Ibid.
[653] ibid., p. 95.

term for the tendency of the social imago to be overcome by its repressed unconscious counterpart. The *I* is "cet appareil pour lequel toute poussée des instincts sera un danger, répondît-elle à une maturation naturelle."[654] The ego must constantly protect itself from its own other, its unconscious, which threatens to destroy the imago completely, eliminating subjectivity in favor of psychosis. One only enters into the symbolic through imaginary, narcissistic, aggressive desires: "*L'agressivité est la tendance corrélative d'un mode d'identification que nous appelons narcissique et qui détermine la structure formelle du moi de l'homme et du registre d'entités caractéristique de son monde*."[655] Paradoxically, these aggressive urges drive the subject towards a repression of these very drives.[656] This has the consequence of giving some autonomy to human knowledge from the "champ de forces du désir;" that is to say, human knowledge can attain a quality of disinterestedness and separation from the appetites.[657] The symbolic, governed by identification with the father, stabilizes the *I* and pacifies destructive urges.[658]

However, underlying this identification is the Oedipal conflict, characterized by an urge to destroy the father and possess the mother. This underlying aggressivity, which is self-destructive insofar as it would destroy the foundations of a self, accounts for "l'agressivité qui s'en dégage dans toute relation à l'autre, fût-ce celle de l'aide la plus samaritaine."[659] Lacan criticizes existentialism for grasping negativity only within the limits of self-sufficiency of consciousness.[660] It is necessary to acknowledge the profoundly *social* nature of subjectivity, because prior to accepting the societal prohibition of incest and mastering language, there is only a pre-subjective nucleus. If we fail to understand these social conditions, subjectivity will remain in the narcissistic and

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[654] Ibid., p. 97.
[655] ibid., p. 109.
[656] Ibid. ,p. 95.
[657] Ibid.
[658] ibid., p. 116.
[659] Ibid., p. 98.
[660] Ibid.

aggressive realm of the imaginary. This critique of existentialism coincides with a measured re-interpretation or alteration of the Hegelian dialectic of lordship and bondage. Lacan's mirror stage differentiates itself from the master-slave dialectic in emphasizing the artificiality of the master's sovereignty (even the master is only identifying with the imago of mastery) and in intertwining more radically the opposing terms.

The repression of the aggressive drive to kill the father, coinciding with the identification with the father, allows for the possibility of death.

> C'est en effet par la béance qu'ouvre cette prématuration dans l'imaginaire et où foisonnent les effets du stade du miroir, que l'animal humain est *capable* de s'imaginer mortel, non qu'on puisse dire qu'il le pourrait sans sa symbiose avec le symbolique, mais plutôt que sans cette béance qui l'aliène à sa propre image, cette symbiose avec le symbolique n'aurait pu se produire, où il se constitue comme sujet à la mort.[661]

"Death" is only fully possible in the symbolic sense after the completion of the mirror stage. However, for death to exist at all, for us not to be immortal beings fully identified with our indestructible imago, we must also be aware of our ineradicable gap. The space between lived experience and symbolic identity is the gap where death maintains itself.

Only the mirror stage can project the individual into historical time.[662] Within the imaginary, there is only a sort of eternal present. Time is a function that relies on the symbolic; the ability to experience one's passage from one moment to the next. However, time is also radically other and irreducible to its lived experience; it contains death, as it propels us away from our momentary identification. But time relies on the troubling, traumatic real; the moment "où le symbolique et le réel se conjoignent, [...] dans la

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[661] *Ecrits 2*, "Du traitement possible de la psychose," III. Avec Freud, p. 30.
[662] Ibid.

fonction du temps."[663] The passage of history allows for the production of truth. Lacan speaks of this annihilating and productive power as an entrance into history: "La suite de la méditation philosophique fait basculer effectivement le sujet vers l'action historique transformante, et, autour de ce point, ordonne les modes configurés de la conscience de soi active à travers ses métamorphoses dans l'histoire."[664]

We must be aware of the ways that this account of subjectivity borrows from Hegel, and especially from Kojève's reading of Hegel, in its insistence on aggression, the assumption of history, and the subject's reliance on language. Lacan departs from Kojève in his more sophisticated account of imaginary relations and the way that they structure the combative relations with others; he owes this sophistication to his close reading of Freud, and possibly to the more subtle understanding of Heidegger we have found previously.[665] Further understanding of his doctrine of subjectivity can be derived from attention to his account of the gaze, which demonstrates many of the difficulties and paradoxes of self-knowledge.

The Gaze

For Lacan, the gaze indicates something essential about the process of achieving subjectivity. Maurice Merleau-Ponty criticized the illusion of an omniscient perspective, the God's eye view I have previously discussed in relation to Spinoza and paranoia, and replaced it with an inherently limited notion of subjectivity thrown into the outside world.[666] Lacan draws on and modifies this innovation, arguing that the individual gaze, the conditions for seeing at all, are provided for by "la préexistence d'un regard."[667] This pre-existing gaze is dual-natured; both a specific, limited viewpoint, and an imaginary

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[663] "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage," p. 308.
[664] Ibid., p. 77.
[665] With regard to subject formation, Lacan is most indebted to "On Narcissism: An Introduction."
[666] In *Le visible et l'invisible*. Lacan, Jacques, *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre XI: Les quatres concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973, "La schize de l'œil et du regard," p. 71.
[667] "La schize de l'œil et du regard," p. 69.

position within the all – "je ne vois que d'un point, mais dans mon existence je suis regardé de partout."[668] Seeing anything in particular depends on the illusion of being oneself seen absolutely. This imaginary illumination is a pre-condition for subjectivity. This fantasy essential to the subject, of being integrated through an all-seeing gaze, participates in a forgetting of one's particularity, one's gaze as a function of the drive.

"L'oeil et le regard, telle est pour nous la schize dans laquelle se manifeste la pulsion au niveau du champ scopique."[669] The subject is on one hand the acknowledged, conscious vision, a function of the eye. On the other hand, subjectivity carries with it unconscious desire, expressed by the gaze. This gaze, associated with *ça*, is primary but also necessarily forgotten. There is "quelque chose [qui] glisse, passe, se transmet, d'étage en étage, pour y être toujours à quelque degré éludé – c'est ça qui s'appelle le regard."[670] The gaze is always present and absent; it is always there, but only perceived in uncanny moments.

When the gaze is perceived as an object, when one sees the preconditions for one's own act of looking, it takes the form of *objet petit a*. Lacan speaks of the distinction between dream and waking as the differing awareness of the gaze as present and productive: "dans l'état dit de veille, il y a élision du regard, élision de ceci que, non seulement ça regarde, mais *ça montre*. Dans le champ du rêve, au contraire, ce qui caractérise les images, c'est que *ça montre*."[671] In this rich passage, Lacan argues that the gaze, which is also the *ça*, the *Es*, the id, shows as well as looks. This is apparent in the dream, while forgotten in waking life. When he says that "*ça montre*," this is of course grammatically ambiguous; the *regard* performs a function of illumination, showing objects, but also shows itself. This gaze as *objet petit a* symbolizes the cut primary to

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[668] Ibid.
[669] ibid., p. 70.
[670] ibid.
[671] ibid., p. 72.

subjectivity; that is, the lack expressed by castration.[672]

Subjectivity in fact begins with the traumatic primal scene which carries with it the statement "*je me vois me voir*."[673] This visible gaze is not apparent as a gaze turned back on itself. Rather, "Ce regard que je rencontre [...] est, non point un regard vu, mais un regard par moi imaginé au champ de l'Autre."[674] This is because perceiving one's presence in the world always carries with it the truth of one's own impossibility. The "*je me vois me voir,*" the awareness of the presence of the gaze, always contains the seeds of self-annihilation within itself. "A la limite, le procès de cette méditation, de cette réflexion réfléchissante, va jusqu'à réduire le sujet que saisit la méditation cartésienne à un pouvoir de néantisation."[675] For Lacan, there is profound self-mutilation in the notion of the gaze, the presence of the *objet petit a*. That is why seeing the gaze must posit the big Other, which would be capable of containing the image of the gaze. The impossibility of seeing oneself see is apparent to a moment's reflection. Clearly, there would be an infinite regress (what power of perception allows me to perceive my own power of perception?). However, it is this very impossible occurrence, the appearance of self-consciousness, that provides the transcendental grounds for individual existence.

When *objet petit a* is a property of the subject itself and its own image, it performs the function of mimicry. When I see myself, I am always a stain, a bit of ineradicable dirt. "Et moi, si je suis quelque chose dans le tableau, c'est aussi sous cette forme de l'écran, que j'ai nommée tout à l'heure la tache."[676] Mimicry is becoming this stain.[677] Drawing on the phenomena of mimicry in the animal world, Lacan relies on

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[672] Ibid., p. 73.
[673] *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre XI: Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, "L'Anamorphose," p. 76
[674] ibid., p. 79.
[675] Ibid., p. 77.
[676] *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre XI: Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, "La ligne et la lumière," p. 90.
[677] Ibid., p. 92.

Roger Caillois' *Méduse et compagnie*.[678] Callois distinguishes between mimicry and adaptation – adaptation defends from light and performs a utilitarian function.[679] Mimicry is the demonstration of a certain capacity to perceive both the environment in which one is immersed, and one's relationship of immersion in or distinction from that environment, "en position de maîtriser, non seulement la forme même du corps mimétisé, mais sa relation au milieu, dans lequel il s'agit soit qu'il se distingue, soit au contraire qu'il s'y confonde."[680] A schizophrenic will find himself saying "I know where I am, but I don't feel that I am where I am."[681] The schizophrenic, or anyone else deprived of subjectivity, will be incapable of obtaining this sense of being situated. There is then, for Lacan, a necessity to establish distinction. This distinction relies on a mode of access to death; the castration to which the *petit objet a* bears witness is itself an intimation of mortality.[682] This emphasis on the gaze as the witness to castration and the bearer of death intimates that it is the presence of the phallus that defends the ego from the idea of death.[683] It will be Lacan's contention that the phallus is a limit figure that wards off death as well as courting it.

Desire against the Dialectic

Assurément il y a là ce qu'on appelle un os.[684]

Lacan declared that the erotic and death drives are not truly opposed, but are instead merely two aspects of human desire.[685] It follows from this that passion is not composed of pure vitalism, but rather conceals, in its very effervescence, a persistent

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[678] Caillois was a close friend and collaborator of Bataille's, who participated in the Acéphale group along with Bataille and Lacan. See Roudinesco, "Georges Bataille and Co.," p. 131.
[679] Ibid., p. 91.
[680] Ibid.
[681] Ibid., p. 100.
[682] The link between castration and morality is established in *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*, trans. Alix Strachey, New York: W.W. Norton, 1989, p. 58.
[683] Lacan's emphasis on the uncanniness of the eye naturally reminds us of *L'histoire de l'œil*.
[684] "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir," *Écrits 2*, p. 301.
[685] Drive is the entirely non-biological, and impossible to satisfy, correlate to instinct. Sexual drives are "toujours susceptibles de présentifier la présence de la mort." "De l'interprétation au transfert," *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan*: *Livre XI: Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, p. 286.

morbidity. In its essence, love thrives on death; it seeks it and persists within it. Jean Wahl invited Lacan to a conference on dialectics at Roumont, in 1960.[686] It was here that Lacan delivered "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir," which is in part a commentary on Hegel, or a Freudian revision of Hegel. Lacan argues that, for Hegel, death "shows what is elided by a preliminary rule as well as by the final settlement."[687] This means that Hegel's dialectic relies on ruling out death as a possible consequence. While it is the life-or-death struggle that is absolutely crucial to the attainment of recognition and subjectivity, "death" is quickly bypassed in the transition from paragraph 188 to paragraph 189 in chapter IV of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel's route to freedom is through the work of the slave, which amounts to forfeiting enjoyment because of fear of death.[688] So it is work that Hegel will come to affirm, and not desire.

What of desire itself in this schema? That is, what can we say about the struggle for prestige, if we do not choose to casually move on to the framework of alienated labor that sets history in motion? What if the combatant prefers death, upright, to survival, kneeling? It is not a great leap to suggest that this very possibility, the choice of death, is identical to what Freud calls the death drive.[689] Lacan's assertion will be that the death drive Freud discovers tells us something about all drives (drives being the components of the desire that contends for recognition).

Freud himself sometimes speaks of this drive as a desire for rest; a will to no longer feel. He at times sees this in a biological sense, or even expressed as inertial, in terms of physics.[690] Lacan, in contrast, views this way of seeing the death drive as purely

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[686] Wahl was one of the earliest French exponents of Hegel. See his *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1951.
[687] P. 810.
[688] "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir," p. 291.
[689] First formulated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *SE* XVIII, chapter V, 34-43.
[690] "*It seems, then, that an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put in another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life." *SE* XVIII, p. 36.

metaphorical.[691] The death drive, for Lacan, has little to do with biology and much to do with language. Lacan implores us to see in the death drive "cette marge au-delà de la vie que le langage assure à l'être du fait qu'il parle."[692] So, for Lacan, it is man as speaking creature that separates him from immediate life. Further, Lacan speaks of language as the unifying force that brings together all the parts of the body.[693] The parts of the body are mediated by language, and this integrates them into an entire body, at the price of alienation in the form of linguistic representation.[694] It is this mediation, for Lacan, that distinguishes the drive, which is human desire, insatiable, from instinct, the animal desire for a concrete object.[695] This is why Lacan speaks of "l'affinité essentielle de toute pulsion avec la zone de la mort."[696]

The accession into language is what allows for the creation of desire over instinct.[697] This mediation of instinct into desire takes place in relation to another.[698] The struggle between two self-consciousnesses logically takes place for a third. In order for them to have any grounds for competition, any prize to be won, there must be a third party witnessing their contest from without. According to Lacan, Freud places the struggle for desire in the eyes of the Father; specifically, a dead Father.[699]

Lacan endorses a certain measure of human freedom when he affirms that the social dialectic is "la raison qui la rend plus autonome que celle de l'animal du champ de forces du désir."[700] Lacan will declare that this mediation brought by entry into language provides the birth of a whole body as represented by a name, rather than the myriad

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[691] "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir," p. 283.
[692] ibid.
[693] ibid.
[694] This is discussed in "Le stade du miroir".
[695] "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir," p. 283.
[696] *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, XV, "De l'amour à la libido," p. 223.
[697] "Le désir s'ébauche dans la marge où la demande se déchire du besoin," "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir," p. 294.
[698] "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir," p. 287.
[699] Ibid., p. 293. See *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, *SE* XIII.
[700] "Le stade du miroir," p. 95.

sensations he describes as the "corps morcelé," as well as the transformation of instinct into desire. However, this very entry into language also brings with it a reference to a Law prohibiting satisfaction, governed by the Other.[701] Following the Hegelian contest, Lacan will assert that desire, as such, is effectively the desire to control another's desire. For this reason, the question "que veux-tu?" will inevitably become "Que me veut-il?"[702]

This distinguishes desire from instinct. It is necessary to further differentiate "drive" from "desire" – briefly, desire is unified by the phallus (this will be described later), whereas drive is partial and fragmented. "Demand" is a third term requiring definition. Demand, for Lacan, is the spoken correlate to instinct that produces desire or drive. Lacan states that drive "est ce qui advient de la demande quand le sujet s'y évanouit."[703] This means that a subject, an apparent full consciousness-of-self, issues a demand. Demand is what a human being in full self-control utters in order to make his animal instincts into human desires. Demand effectively takes place on Hegelian terrain. Drive, in contrast, loses subjectivity; drive is not an animal instinct coercing activity in order to maintain survival. Drive is instead a specifically human trait that remains uncontrollable by any seemingly free subject.

The Phallus

In Lacan's work, there are not only distinctions among instinct, demand, and desire, but also a difference between desire and drive. Desire takes place on a symbolic level while drive addresses itself to the real; desire is unified, drive is split and fragmented. Drive has primacy; it comes from fragments of the body, which are only later brought together into a single body. Lacan speaks of the "les intégrations plus ou moins parcellaires qui paraissent en faire l'ordonnance, y fonctionnement avant tout

[701] "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir," p. 294.
[702] ibid., p. 295.
[703] ibid., p. 298.

comme les éléments d'une héraldique, d'un blason du corps."[704] This means that the apparently developmental stages discussed by Freud – the oral, anal and genital stages – take place as subsequent integrations of parts of the body.[705] This process of unification is not one that corresponds to biological maturation. Rather, we have here relationships like those in the pseudo-science of heraldry. Each part of the body is mediated by symbolic representations in order to construct a language that will articulate all body parts into a whole. The aristocratic connotations of "heraldry" in this metaphor should not be ignored, as they remind us of Lacan's inheritance from the Hegelian understanding of identity as initially historically constructed by feudal relations.

In order to construct this unified body by means of this heraldry, and in order to transform the myriad drives into unified desire, human consciousness requires a "trait unaire."[706] That is to say, a single signifier or mark that stands in supremacy over the others. This unary trait is the phallus, which enjoys a "paradoxical" privilege.[707] It is paradoxical because the phallus is most essential as guarantor of the coherence of the ego-ideal, but it is at the same time accompanied by the castration complex. It is the fact of the vulnerability of the phallus – the possibility of its destruction (by the Father, in fantasy) or its failure to respond to conscious thought (impotence) that makes the subject incapable of its projected self-control and autonomy.[708] It is a castration of sorts that happens to the bondsman in Hegel's dialectic. The phallus is "structural du sujet;" it "constitue essentiellement cette marge que toute pensée a évitée."[709] Lacan speaks of this

[704] ibid., p. 284.
[705] See especially *Three Essays on Sexuality*, *SE* VII.
[706] "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir," p. 288. This unary trait constructs the ego-ideal; the symbolic representation of the body.
[707] ibid.
[708] p. 301.
[709] ibid.

phallus as a "bone," indicating both a "bone of contention" and a play on slang for an erection.[710] We shall speak further on the relation between the phallus and bone.

The Lamella and the Skull

Four years after his address at the Roumont conference, Lacan gave his eleventh seminar, known for its formulations on the gaze. The seventh chapter, "L'anamorphose," discusses Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* and its relevance to the Lacanian understanding of vision and desire. Lacan speaks of a historical coincidence of Holbein's time (the 16th century): the development of effects of perspective in painting and the formulation of the modern subject.[711] Holbein's painting makes use of not only perspective but anamorphosis – anamorphosis being a distorted image that can only be viewed correctly from some skewed vantage point.

Holbein's oblique anamorphosis depicts an unusual shape in the lower center of his canvas that can only be discerned correctly from the right hand side and very close up. However, even in its distorted form, examination reveals the figure to be a skull. Lacan refers to this as a "fantôme phallique."[712] Lacan declares that "au coeur même de l'époque où se dessine le sujet et où se cherche l'optique géométrale, Holbein nous rend ici visible quelque chose qui n'est rien d'autre que le sujet comme néantisé."[713] This skull – not depicted straight-on, but rather, distorted almost out of recognition by spatial manipulation, is for Lacan "l'incarnation imagée" of castration, which he reminds us is the center of the desires as they frame the drives.[714] But he insists that this skull is not merely a phallic symbol (though in its distorted form the skull does appear as elongated or even erect); it is rather the "le regard comme tel."[715] The anamorphosis of this skull

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[710] ibid.
[711] Descartes' subject is born in his *Discourse on Method* in 1637, over one hundred years after Holbein's painting. It appears to be Lacan's contention that these two events belong to the same era.
[712] *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de psychanalyse*, VII, "L'anamorphose," p. 101.
[713] ibid.
[714] ibid.
[715] ibid.

means that it presents its image to a viewer, but the viewer must take an unusual position in relation to the image in order to see its true form.

As *Seminar XI* proceeds, Lacan begins to argue that the libido – in this writing, effectively synonymous with drive – is itself an organ.[716] However, it is an "organe insaisissable," an "objet que nous ne pouvons que contourner," a "faux organe."[717] It is this false organ that Lacan gives the name the "lamella." "Lamella" etymologically signifies a "thin layer." It is used in biology and geology, to describe a plate-like structure. In zoology it can describe a gill; it can also refer to a layered material such as mica or graphite. Lastly, it can denote a portion of cortical bone, which is the hard, stacked osseous tissue that makes up the surface of the skeleton.

Lacan describes this lamella as immortal, "Puisque ça survit à toute division, puisque ça subsiste à toute intervention scissipare."[718] This pure libido is "de vie immortel, de vie irrépressible, de vie qui n'a besoin, elle, d'aucun organe, de vie simplifiée et indestructible."[719] The lamella is "non pas la polarité sexuée, le rapport du masculin au féminin, mais le rapport du sujet vivant à ce qu'il perd de devoir passer, pour sa reproduction, par le cycle sexuel."[720] So at this point, Lacan wishes to argue that this eroticism is about death rather than sex. Lacan's lamella, pure libido, is not so concerned with sexual difference, but with our status as finite beings.[721] Further research, however, might call into question whether this desire towards death is truly indifferent to sex.

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[716] "Libido" has different meanings at different times in the work of Freud and Lacan. Both Lacan and Freud seem to conceive of it as masculine sexual energy; see Lacan, "La signification du phallus," *Écrits*, p. 695. Prior to *Séminaire XI*, Lacan tends to identify libido with the imaginary wants proceeding from the ego. In this text, the libido refers to libido as such, which is to say the desire that entails death, which I have previously discussed. See Dylan Evans, "Libido," *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 101.
[717] "De l'amour à la libido", p. 220.
[718] Ibid., p. 221.
[719] Ibid.
[720] p. 223.
[721] This is partly inherited from Bataille: "De l'érotisme, il est possible de dire qu'il est l'approbation de la vie jusque dans la mort." Introduction, *L'érotisme*, *OC* X, p. 17.

Zizek describes the lamella as the image of the discordance between reality (the consensus generally shared of the world in which we all live) and the real (the inherently traumatic experience of the world utterly outside, which cannot be understood or represented).[722] This latter term, the real, is the final object of enjoyment, but is at the same time necessarily obscene, disgusting and repulsive. So for Zizek, the lamella is the "disgusting substance of enjoyment."[723] His cinematic examples of lamella include insects, beetles, "raw flesh," worms, and the "body stripped of its skin."[724] However, the denotative meaning of the word "lamella" does not indicate the soft or multitudinous abjection implied by Zizek's examples. We might ask, why does Lacan choose to call the image of desire, the representation of the castrated phallus, the lamella? The lamella, is among other things, cortical bone. Cortical bone is hard, compressed, layered tissue. It is solid, opaque, unbending. Lacan could, after all, have called his image of libinal energy "trabecular" or "cancellous" instead, these being the names for the spongy, inner bone substance. This would be closer to Zizek's example of raw flesh.[725] The lamella is hard and unyielding, and this is also the image from Holbein's painting that Lacan chooses to represent the castrated phallus. So, the lamella's terrifying presence is not necessarily the sticky texture we generally associate with disgust, but rather a hard, solid, resistant mass like bone lamellae.[726]

Hegel's Skull

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[722] "The Lamella of David Lynch," *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan's* Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, Maire Jaanus, Part IV: The Gaze and Object *a*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1995.
[723] 206.
[724] 206, 209, 208.
[725] In Zizek's favor, Lacan also compares the lamella to an omelette-homunculus and an amoeba, both of which would be soft ("From Love to the Libido," *Seminar XI*, en., p. 197).
[726] In his "Le stade du miroir," Lacan also speaks of "fantasmes qui se succèdent d'une image morcelée du corps à une forme que nous appelons orthopédique de sa totalité, – et à l'armure enfin assumée d'une identité aliénante, qui va marquer de sa structure rigide tout son développement mental." P. 96. This suggests the formation of the ego-ideal – a whole body – through the phallus, and the formation of desire out of drives, is orthopedic. That is to say; the ego ideal corrects and prevents disorders of the bones. This again associates bone with the fragmented body and the partial drives.

At this point, we should consider what Hegel himself had to say about the skull and bone in consideration of mind. In section A of chapter V of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel devotes himself to a consideration of the role of the skull in thought. His comments are immediately concerned with a refutation of phrenology, the nineteenth-century pseudo-science that we today only find amusing. However, his comments are significant in delineating his position against the reductive materialism that sees mind as merely an epiphenomenal product of brain tissue.

Hegel describes the skull-bone as the "immediate actuality" of mind, that is, the raw material encasing the mind.[727] However, the skull does not act, nor does it speak.[728] "We neither commit theft, murder, etc. with the skull bone, not does it in the least betray such deeds by a change of countenance, so that the skull-bone would become a speaking gesture."[729] The inert matter of bone is not even a sign; it can tell us nothing about the thoughts housed within.[730] We might contemplate a skull, but the skull bone is itself only self-identical – any meaning it possesses we bring, voluntarily, to it. We cannot read it.[731] The skull (the implicit contrast is to the face) is not mediated, without desire or recognition, and hence utterly inhuman. For this reason, Hegel suggests that it is absurd to maintain, as phrenology does, that the "bump" of a murderer could be discerned in his skull. He might have any number of bumps and contours, and none would have the real determinate force necessary to affect his character.[732] A bone merely *is*, lying in wait to be examined, perhaps after death, or by a phrenologist during life, whereas the mind is free.[733] Lacan appears to allude to this passage in his Roumont address when he says that cognitive psychology talks as if "s'il fallait que le psychique se fît valoir comme doublant

[727] Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, paragraph 332.
[728] ibid., paragraph 333.
[729] ibid.
[730] ibid.
[731] ibid.
[732] Paragraph 335.
[733] Paragraph 339.

l'organisme."[734] Like phrenology, a certain reductive materialism aims to locate all psychic mechanisms in the anatomical brain, failing to account for the consciousness that is irreducible to neurology.

Hegel makes another, quite different, allusion to the skull in his uncanny and horrific passage on the night of the world. This is one of Hegel's meditations on the pure negating power of human consciousness. In his view, human beings are capable of positing an empty negativity, merely annihilating the existence around them. As Kojève quotes and translates it, from the *Lectures* of 1805-1806:

> Dans des représentations fantasmogoriques, il fait nuit tout autour : ici surgit alors brusquement une tête ensanglantée, là – un autre apparition (Gestalt) blanche ; et elles disparaissent tout aussi brusquement. C'est cette nuit qu'on aperçoit lorsqu'on regarde un homme dans les yeux : [on plonge alors ses regards] en une nuit qui devient *terrible* (furchtbar) ; c'est la nuit du monde qui se présente (hängt antgegen) [alors] à nous.[735]

Hegel's skull is the self-identical, immediate aspect of mind. It can be studied or analyzed by a phrenologist, it is present and measurable, but it has no capacity to limit or to determine human freedom. Hegel's second "skull" of sorts, the one appearing in the night of the world, is quite different. This "bloody head" is also immediate; it is pure self, pure negativity. The skull that phrenology possesses is the non-determining shell of human consciousness. The bloody head, on the other hand, is the extreme point of the negating power of mind. Whereas the skull-bone is an empty nothing waiting to be determined by human consciousness, the bloody head is the nothing of human consciousness as such, the negative without limit. This bloody head is what appears when we look another in the

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[734] "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir," *Écrits 2*, p. 275.
[735] Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 575. Translated from G.W.F. Hegel, "Jenaer Realphilosophie," in *Fruehe politische Systeme*, Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1974, p. 204.

eye, when we recognize their absolute freedom and our incapacity to tame or subordinate that freedom.

As we recall, Lacan charges Hegel with eliding the possibility of death in his life-and-death struggle. Rather than exploring his true insight, the identity of desire and death, he proceeds teleologically, to the historical pursuit of human freedom through work. This insight leads Lacan to isolate desire itself, desire in its proper form as carrier of death drive, and to begin to theorize the lamella. This lamella is the figure of the partial drive, the drive that contains death, the drive that is not unified into a whole identity. This is because, as Hegel also shows us, whole identity is also only shaped through the dialectic of lordship and bondage, through an economy of recognition, subsequently to the settling of accounts with desire and death. Desire *qua* desire has not yet allowed for recognition or for identity, in that it is arrested at the moment of suicidal and homicidal negation. This means that desire itself, the lamella, is outside of time and indestructible – it concerns pure negation, not the dialectic that occurs in history.

Lacan's term, lamella, can refer to layers of flesh and layers of bone, both. We can oppose a type of desire, in complicity with death, that is hard and contoured (like the lamella Lacan uncovers in Holbein's painting), and another desire that is instead wet, fleshy and indeterminate. It is my contention here that this first desire, the resistant and analyzable surface of bone, corresponds to Hegel's consideration of the skull bone. Of course, there is a distinct paradox here – Hegel's skull-bone is only the inert space of the human body without power over mind, whereas Lacan's lamella is desire itself. We might argue, following Lacan and Bataille, that it is Hegel's mistake to allocate to human beings a freedom that they do not have.[736] For Hegel, the skull-bone is indeterminate. For Freud and Lacan, our desires are constantly refracted and derailed by an interior

[736] Bataille points out Hegel's and Kojève's ignorance of the unconscious and consequent overoptimistic assessment of individual autonomy in "Attraction and Repulsion II," p. 115.

resistance that cannot be thought. This is not the physiological reductionism Hegel rails against, but it is a consideration of matter as unthought and unthinkable even in the core of our desires – the "os" of which Lacan spoke.[737]

In "Attraction and Repulsion II," Bataille writes of the duality of the sacred as exemplified by the distinction between the gory objects of taboo that have not been consecrated – "corpses, blood, especially menstrual blood, menstruating women themselves" – and what remains after putrefaction; "bleached bones" are auspicious.[738] We might note that the hard and phallic nature of the lamella corresponds to the Heglian skull from which consciousness emerges. The shattered, bloody and wet skull, on the other hand, corresponds to Hegel's bloody head – the raw force of negating desire. The skull-bone is hard and unyielding, and, for Lacan, the emblem of an exclusively male libido. The specifically bloody head, however, spoken of by Hegel, reminds us of the menstruation of women.[739] Hegel's discussion of the night that becomes awful when we look another human in the eye recalls the implicitly male struggle of two self-consciousnesses for death or for prestige, but it also suggests something not as visible. The well-known historical fear of women cannot be theatrically presented in the way that Hegel dramatizes the struggle for recognition. I might, however, submit that the relationship with a woman is at least as significant for identity, at least as problematic, as the belligerence between warriors to which Hegel allocates such pride of place. Kojève reminds us that, for Hegel, love is only a return to the immediacy of nature; death and combat are responsible for the birth of humanity.[740]

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[737] "Subversion du sujet et dialectique du désir," p. 301.
[738] "Attraction and Repulsion II," *The College of Sociology (1937-39)*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988.p. 121. *OC XII*.
[739] Bataille associates this "*tête ensanglantée*" with poetry in "Hegel, la mort, et le sacrifice," *OC* XII, p. 328.
[740] "La dialectique du réel et la méthode phénoménologique," p. 521. This passage appears in translation in *Hegel and the Human Spirit: A translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of the Spirit (1805-6) with commentary*, trans. Leo Raugh, Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1983.

After all, it is impossible to imagine the life-and-death struggle of the *Phenomenology* as anything other than a historically masculine one. It is Bataille's innovation to turn his attention to another possibility for the examination of the bloody head, in contrast to the comparatively ossified study of war and resentment. We can easily imagine the terror of looking another in the eye as taking place between two women, or between a man and a woman. The fear here, after all, is the inscrutability and uncontrollable nature of another human consciousness, the essentially free and negating force of another's desire. This night that becomes awful could be, in fact, the fear of where one's wife has been at night – the terror of cuckoldry, rather than the fear of death in battle. So if the skull-bone belongs to a defeated adversary who no longer has the capacity to mediate or sublate the limits of the substance of his brain, the bloody head could belong to a woman who we cannot understand or possess. It is this possibility that represents Bataille's most significant and worthwhile departure from the orthodox Hegelian schema; the glimpse at a possibility of alterity not understood as a rival for prestige, as something other than subject to death or conquest.

Conclusion

This dissertation began with an examination of Alexandre Kojève's existentialist Marxist reformulation of the modern subject. Kojève's subject found itself radically exposed to death, and capable of risking and overcoming that negativity. From the perspective of social ontology, this subject was revealed to be incapable of establishing self-consciousness outside of history and collective political experience; as a result, a revolutionary Terror was judged necessary in order to produce a fully self-present subject. We delved into Kojève's appropriation of Martin Heidegger in order to discover how the former borrowed and distorted the latter's conception of finitude, with an aim to uncovering an understanding of negativity as alterity, unsurpassable by a subject. Then, we saw how Heidegger himself failed to attend properly to an encounter with this alterity, as revealed by the critiques rendered by Emmanuel Levinas and especially by Georges Bataille.

The second chapter showed how Sigmund Freud's discovery of the unconscious unsettles the kind of metapolitical history advanced by Kojève. After discussing concerns about Bataille's political leanings, I argued that a Bataillean conception of materiality as unbreachable difference could be brought into communication with a psychoanalytic revision of political philosophy. For this reason, an engagement with deconstructive readings of both psychoanalysis and political philosophy, centered on the French Revolutionary Terror crucial for Kojève, became crucial to the analysis. This demonstrated a new conception of desire as non-teleological, and tied to this to the alterity of matter studied by Bataille.

Subsequently, the dissertation gave way to a robust reading of radical alterity, demonstrated by Bataille's story *Madame Edwarda*, which evinces an encounter with

sexual difference alongside the inutility of the literary and an eroticism understood as more radical than death. This moment was the experience whose extremity Kojève, Heidegger, and even Freud were charged with being incapable of fully appreciating. Bataille's intervention was read as presenting a meta-ethical opportunity, clearing space for an encounter with difference that refused to be closed off by traditional idealistic means.

Last, we studied Jacques Lacan's postmodern decentering of the same subject initially advanced by Kojève. Lacan reformulates this subject in order to overcome the Heideggerian, Freudian, and literary challenges discussed in the first three chapters. However, this new subjectivity remains idealist, insofar as it refuses the radical disruption presented by literary language, sexual difference, and a radical disruption to which Bataille gives voice.

In retrospect, it may be clear that this study was structured according to a parody of the inherited understanding of Hegelian dialectic. The first chapter presented the triumph of a self-conscious subject, which was then undone by Heidegger, Levinas, and Bataille. The second chapter displayed a partial negation of the self-knowledge of this subject through the unconscious, which gave way to an eclipse of understanding by the literary encounter with sexual difference read in chapter three. The final chapter posited a newly born subject capable of overcoming these negations under the aegis of Lacan, while respectfully submitting that this project did not fully succeed. In keeping with this, this conclusion must be read as named antiphrastically. The thesis of this dissertation is that knowledge understood as the appropriation of experience by a subject must falter, and that this lack of endurance is necessary to the entrance of something different, from the outside. As a result, it is impossible for this study to end other than elliptically.

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