Architectural Contestation

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Technische Universiteit Delft,
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus prof. ir. K.C.A.M. Luyben,
voorzitter van het College voor Promoties,
in het openbaar te verdedigen
op vrijdag 12 oktober 2012 om 10.00 uur

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geboren te Le Puy En Velay, Frankrijk.

II

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Acknowledgements

Writing a doctoral dissertation may seem a relatively easy task on paper. However, the amount of drawbacks, challenges, troubles, hindrances and obstacles that one encounters during the process, quickly dissipates such a preconception. Feeling most of the time completely blind in the mists of the research process, I received the generous help of a few. It is time, with those very ineffective and inadequate words, to attempt to thank them.

I am grateful to Professor Umberto Barbieri for accepting my candidature as a PhD student in the summer of 2007. During the last five years, I benefitted from the support, expertise, encouragement and, simply said, the generosity of my co-supervisor Dr. Tom Avermaete. This dissertation would simply not exist without his patience and intelligence.

I am also grateful to the doctoral committee members for kindly agreeing to take part in the assessment process of my dissertation.

For the Dutch translation all the credit and my profound gratitude go to Riet Schennink and Dries Van Eijk.

I owe the most to those persons who patiently supported me with their love. This manuscript is dedicated to my family.

INTRODUCTION

The Use Value of G.A.M.V. Bataille

(Georges Albert Maurice Victor Bataille)

Introduction. The Use Value of G.A.M.V. Bataille

'We can frequently use words only for ours own loss, forced to choose between the destiny of a reprobate, who is as profoundly separated from society as excrement is from apparent life, and a renunciation the price of which is a mediocre activity, subordinated to vulgar and superficial needs'.[1]

Theory and criticism within architectural culture[2]

Whether written or in its oral forms, verbal language, long before the rise of the so-called 'modern movement',[3] has been used by architects and commentators, not only as a means to explain and publicize, but also as a way to underline goals, to assess impacts and to unveil the ideologies or processes which motivate, materialise and support architectural works.[4] As the principal means of conscious exchange between individuals in general, and a fortiori between architecture's professionals, verbal language not only highlights issues and problems pertaining to built or projected objects, but – and most importantly – permits their intelligible articulation in the form of architectural theories and criticisms, with social, politic, economic and even ecological concerns. The written and spoken works – either radical evaluations, manifestoes, or scripted practices – of Vitruvius, Leon Battista Alberti, Palladio, Etienne Louis Boullee, Claude Nicolas Ledoux, or, closer to us, Manfredo Tafuri, Colin Rowe, Peter Eisenman, Kenneth Frampton, Anthony Vidler, Robin Evans, Mark Wigley, Rem Koolhaas – to name a few and disparate actors – are irreducible proofs of the indispensability to the discipline, of architectural (and urban) theory and criticism.

The theoretical debate at the turn of the millennium: The 'Critical' vs the 'Projective'
This dissertation is driven by a profound interest in those indispensable components of architecture – theory and criticism – and in the different confrontations between ideas and perspectives that both activities have engendered until recently. More specifically it stems from an attempt to comprehend the most contemporary development of confrontational debates, launched within the precinct of architectural theory and criticism, as a way to assess its relevance to our present condition.

The last decades of the twentieth century have seen the emergence – within the humanities as a whole – of an awkward uncertainty concerning the status and function of criticism and theory. This attitude originally derived from the works of individuals expressly opposed to theory and criticism, as for example E.P. Thompson's 1978 *The Poverty of Theory*. But this 'feeling' of uncertainty concerning the abilities of theory and criticism, soon contaminated even their most prominent defenders, and here one might dare to name Terry Eagleton and his *After Theory* from 2003. Perhaps the rise of such a crisis of theory and criticism could be explained as a direct result of the self-reflective process constitutive of both. This would fairly point to their 'true' function. However consideration must also be given to the consequences of a general impression of failure concerning the left when confronted with the ever increasing hegemony of right wing ideologies and forces over culture and, of course, society as a whole. This would clearly render intelligible the return of the reductive (socially speaking) topic of 'craft' as a post-critical and post-theoretical agenda.[5]

At the turn of the new millennium, this resulted in an intense debate within the architectural discipline on how criticism and theory were then to be understood, or in more aggressive terms, on how to get rid of those historical components and activities so essential to architecture, but seen by many as defects, or relics of the past.[6] Other scholars and architects believed this debate to be

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[1]. Georges Bataille, 'La notion de depense', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 307-8

[2]. By 'Architectural Culture' I refer to the sum of discursive thoughts and practices which address and constitute architecture as a discipline.

[3]. Indeed, one could recall Vitruvius' *Ten Books on Architecture*.

[4]. For an introduction to the importance of 'verbal language' in architecture – either considered as a practice or a discipline – see, for example, Forty Adrian, *Words and Buildings*, Thames and Hudson, New York, 2000.

[5]. As the major influence, willingly or not, of the return of the 'craft' as the central topic of conservative agendas, see, for example, Sennett Richard, *The Craftsman*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2008

[6]. One must also acknowledge that this debate's origin and unfolding is geographically grounded – if not limited – to, principally, the American, British and Dutch academic spheres.

nothing more than simple 'hype', something to be discarded as little more than an ephemeral fashion and not noble enough to engage with academically. Although it is true that this debate was short lived, its 'genealogy' can be easily traced.[7] Hence, I must confess that it is difficult for me to explain its dismissal by some scholars in any way, other than as 'psychological frustration', bound to the observation that other research interests are more topical than one's own. However, on both sides of the Atlantic, several architects, critics and theoreticians took up a subtle variety of stances within this debate. These diverse stances have nevertheless been gathered under two, perhaps moderately useful, banners: the 'Critical' (the 'pros' theory, criticism and the subsequent 'critical' architecture) and the 'Projective' (the 'contras' theory and criticism, who consequently defended a 'Projective' architecture).[8]

Reflecting on the arguments, thesis and agendas of both the 'Critical' and the 'Projective' camps, I was struck not so much by their divergences and their unwillingness to comprehend each other's positions – attitudes which bespoke a rather restrictive understanding of architecture and more generally of the environment in which it is built – rather I was struck by the similarity of their understanding and reliance upon the notion of 'project', its course, its status as a means, and consequently upon its unquestioned prominence. But beyond revealing their incapacity to acknowledge this 'shared territory', and the obvious weakness of their opposing stances, this observation led me to admit the hypothesis – perhaps insane – of the existence of virgin territory open to some *other* kind of architectural theory and criticism, in which the notion of 'project' as a means to other ends would be simply absent, or at least present *in appearance only*. But before returning to this hypothesis, I'd like to propose a short overview of the two 'camps' and their stances with regard to 'criticality' in order to clarify my observations.

To start with, the 'Critical' stance (chronologically speaking, the first 'camp' which emerged) seems to stem from (or at least to have received an early definitive formulation in) an essay by the Harvard Professor K. Michael Hays: 'Critical architecture: Between Culture and Form,' published in *Perspecta* 21 in 1984. In this seminal text for the 'Critical' camp, Hays considered that architecture – i.e. all architectural productions – as 'activity and knowledge' was taken per force in a dialectical set up between the two poles of 'Culture' and 'Form'. He claimed that architecture is conventionally grasped (at least until 1984) either through the lens of a purely formal, conceptual and a-circumstantial interpretation discussing its object according to self-referential criteria – a take on architecture that renders it 'autonomous' from society at large; or from the perspective of a cultural, historical and retrospective interpretation assessing its object in terms of its formal correspondence to the value of the culture it is embedded in – an angle of analysis affirming architecture as an instrument of culture. Against this background, Hays contended that architectural theory and criticism should focus on what he named a 'critical architecture, one resistant to the self-confirming, conciliatory operations of a dominant culture and yet irreducible to a purely formal structure disengaged from the contingencies of place and time'.[9] Hence, an architecture having a form in which could be read its reflective distancing from its surrounding and hegemonic culture, a sort of synthetic architecture that is at the same time 'in the world', yet forcefully presenting – through its form but not only – its 'critique' of this world. As an attempt to bring to the fore this superseding (my formulation) 'critical architecture', Hays focused on a few projects by Mies van der Rohe – the Friedrichstrasse Skyscrapers projects of 1919 and 1922, the Alexanderplatz project from 1928, and the Barcelona German pavilion from 1929 – which could also be considered, according to Hays, 'resistant and oppositional', as they 'cannot be reduced either to a conciliatory representation of external forces or to a dogmatic, reproducible formal system'.[10]
Concluding his essay, Hays argued for an architectural critique which would match his concept of 'critical architecture'; a sort of 'critical criticism' (my formulation): an architectural criticism conflated

[7]. For a brief genealogic mapping of the struggle around 'criticism' its aim, function and its eruption within the discipline, see Kaminer Tahl, 'Undermining the Critical project: The post-critical "third way" and the legitimating of architectural practices', in *The Architecture Annual 2004-5, Delft University of Technology*, 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, 2006, pp. 70-73

[8]. For a succinct, yet quite telling, account of this debate, the different perspective it gathers, but also its causes and paradoxes, see Baird Georges, '"Criticality" and its Discontents', Harvard Design Magazine, Autumn 2004/Winter 2005, n. 21.

[9]. K. Michael Hays, 'Critical architecture: Between Culture and Form,' in *Perspecta* n. 21, Yale School of architecture, New Haven, 1984, p. 15.

[10]. Ibid. p.17.

(Hays considered it to be 'continuous with architectural design') with a 'critical architecture'. Such 'criticism' should share the 'space' of the 'critical architecture' as the 'interpretative inquiry […] lies in an irreducibly architectural realm between those conditions that seem to generate or enable the architect's intention to make architecture and those forms in which the intention is transcribed',[11] its main features, as it should be 'openly contentious and oppositional', and finally – perhaps most importantly – its goal or aim as, according to Hays, 'both criticism and design are forms of knowledge' permitting the unveiling of the 'cultural meaning' of objects which was thought to be 'undecidable' (Hays terms). Consequently, Hays ended his text with a final claim that summarized fairly well the whole direction and function of his endeavour: 'It is precisely the responsibility of criticism that this cultural meaning be continually decided'.[12] Hays' plea for a 'critical architecture' and its correlative 'critical criticism' is thus, in my view, a 'project' or a 'means' toward other ends: more specifically it is an attempt to productively define 'meaning' for the sake of an urge to 'know'. This, in my view, constitutes the Achilles heel of Hays' essay and his contentions. Although the development of Hays' thought was deeply indebted to the work of Manfredo Tafuri – one of the most prominent figures of architectural theory and criticism who warned critics of all sorts against a partisan or *operative* criticism – it seems that Hays couldn't conceive of his own 'critical' engagement being determined by 'cultural' factors. In other words, while Tafuri contended that 'The very same questions that criticism puts to architecture it must also put to itself: that is, in what way does criticism enter into the process of production? How does it conceive its own role within that process?'[13] it seems that Hays considered reflection on the underlying structure of his own intention as hardly necessary. In his adherence to a 'critical architecture' and its correlative 'criticism' as projects or means whose aims or goals are beyond themselves – as productive for other ends – he seemed to forget or simply to neglect the necessary questioning of the ideology that lies beneath his 'project' and its aims: the belief in rational knowledge and (its) production – which are both deeply embedded within our contemporary 'culture' – as, if not some means towards an always deferred emancipation, at least, ways of resisting and opposing the present course of things.

More than fifteen years after the publication of Hays' essay, the 'Projective' camp launched the debate on the necessity of a 'critical architecture' and its adjunct 'criticism', by releasing several more or less theoretical contributions which aimed to tackle, or at least, to question the position of Hays and also of the architect whose productions came to embody – within the minds of the defenders of the 'Projective' – the idea of a 'critical architecture', Peter Eisenman. Although the 'anti-critical' stance was composed of many different actors and their various contributions – such as Michael Speaks (who spoke first against the 'critical'), Stan Allen or Sylvia Lavin – the first to directly engage with Hays' essay were Bob Somol and Sarah Whiting in their 2002 text, published in *Perspecta* 33: 'Notes around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism'. The interpretative perspective based on cultural values and its subsequent assessment of architecture as 'an instrument of culture' that Hays discarded earlier, became their alternative to the 'critical project' of the Harvard professor. Somol and Whiting contended that 'disciplinarity has been absorbed and exhausted by the project of criticality'.[14] They argued for their claim by stating that for both Eisenman and Hays 'disciplinarity is understood as autonomy (enabling critique, representation and signification), but not as instrumentality (projection, performativity, and pragmatics). One could say that their definition of disciplinarity is directed against reification, rather than towards the possibility of emergence'.[15] According to them, 'criticality' within the discipline became more of a hindrance than an asset. Consequently they did not simply plead for an adjustment of the 'Critical's' assessment but rather proposed a complete 'alternative to the critical project – here linked to the indexical, the dialectical and hot representation' which they 'genealogically' traced back to Koolhaas and coined as 'the projective – linked to the diagrammatic, the atmospheric and cool performances'.[16] They underlined the necessity, in view of global

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[11]. Ibid. p.27.

[12]. Ibid.

[13]. Manfredo Tafuri, 'L'Architecture dans le Boudoir : The Language of Criticism and the Criticism of language', in K. Michael Hays (ed.), *Architectural Theory Since 1968*, MIT Press, London, 2000, p.167.

[14]. Rober Somol and Sarah Whiting, 'Notes Around the Doppler Effect and other Moods of Modernism,' *Perspecta 33: The Yale Architectural Journal*, 2002, p. 73.

[15]. Ibid.p. 74.

[16]. Ibid.

changes – political as well as social – which occurred with the advent of the new millennium, of an architecture that would accept its share of 'instrumentality'; and thus of a 'criticism' that wouldn't reject it on this simple basis. Somol and Whiting focussed on demonstrating the necessity of a 'post-critical' or 'projective', committed to results, non-oppositional, non-resistant, and therefore a non-utopian form of architectural production, thus dismissing Hays' 'critical' stance, but nevertheless bypassing the essential question of the criteria through which the 'projective' could be judged, beyond its obvious acceptance and accommodation of existing social, economic, or cultural norms. Somehow they epitomized Terry Eagleton's general comment that 'The point for the anti-theorists then, is just to get on with what we do, without all this distracting fuss about theory'.[17] Project über alles.

In retrospect, it is not so much the divergences between the two stances of the 'Critical' and the 'Projective' or their internal paradoxes – which have all been well discussed by several commentators of this debate, such as Georges Baird[18] or Reinhold Martin[19] – that stand out. But, rather, the concomitant belief in the ideology of 'project' (and by extension of 'production', if not also of 'knowledge') displayed by the 'Critical' camp as well as by the 'Projective' effort which in my view is striking.[20] Each stance seems to unfold along the lines of a disturbing belief in a 'productive apparatus', which is either considered as permitting a form of 'resistance' to 'culture' – without questioning the culturally fuelled idea of 'project' (and production) as such – or affirmed as a means to a performance – without obviously questioning the outcome of this performativity or even proposing a frame for its assessment and thus, intuiting that it might be better qualified as a 'producer of the status quo'. However, I do not intend to say that it is surprising that this so called 'Critical' strain, nor the 'Projective' one are in themselves constructed around the idea of 'project',[21] rather it is the fact that both camps are relying on the idea of 'project' while they pretend to oppose each other, and thus to propose two different understandings of the discipline, architecture and the environment in which it is built, that I found troubling. From this perspective this debate does not seem to be characterized by opposite sides – with regard to their function – but rather by a certain form of homogeneity. Two stances appear as opposing each other while actually they run on the same 'fuel'. What seemed to be a confrontational debate between heterogeneous stances, focusing on the aspects, aims and thus – most importantly – function of architectural criticism and theory, ends up being a very flat or even homogeneous 'tea room' chat. In what might be perceived as a very 'modern' fashion the questions concerning the structures or ideologies effectively supporting the different stances are simply absent from that relatively recent debate.

Bataille's 'writing': a project as way to escape the realm of project
Before the rather partial and concomitant approach regarding the notion of 'project' (or by extension the imperative of 'production') – and therefore the function of the architectural assessment – that the aforementioned pseudo-confrontational stances assumed, this dissertation returns to the oeuvre of a writer who attempted to elaborate a radical 'criticism' of culture and society, of their basic tenets (production, accumulation, knowledge, form and meaning) as well as

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[17]. Terry Eagleton, *After theory*, Penguin Books, London, 2003, p.62.

[18]. See, Baird, Georges, '"Criticality" and its Discontents', *Harvard Design Magazine*, Autumn/Winter 2004-5, n. 21.

[19]. See, Martin Reinhold, 'Critical of What? Toward a Utopian Realism', *Harvard Design Magazine*, Spring/Summer 2005, n. 22.

[20]. That architecture leads to the production of objects (buildings or at least drawings) may hardly seem a contentious proposition. But, that its assessment, here 'defined' as 'Criticism', is or must be 'productive' is definitely arguable.

[21]. Indeed, a brief lineage of the 'Critical' effort and the 'Projective' stance might elucidate their indulgence in the idea of 'project'. The two major figure of the 'Critical' – at least according to the 'Projective' defenders – Peter Eisenman and K. Michael Hays share, as Georges Baird pointed it, at least, one major influence within the discipline: the work of Manfredo Tafuri. Then, Hays' position derives also in a more direct way from one of the influence – external to the discipline – of Tafuri himself: the works of the members of – or at least of individuals affiliated with – the 'Frankfurt School' – more specifically the writings of Theodor Adorno and Georg Lukacs. Hence, it is easy to perceive from where the 'Critical' took its underlying 'idea' of 'project' from: it owes a great debt to the proper 'project' of the 'Critical theory' of Max Horkheimer (the director of the Frankfurt School from 1930 on). Then, regarding the 'Projective', their visible insistence on the 'real' actually hide a sub-text of pragmatism which can be traced back to the work of the early 20th century philosophers William James and John Dewey and more recently to the writings of Richard Rorty. That is, their endeavours and claims actually originates from the so-called Pragmatist Philosophy which rejects philosophical inquiry on such abstract notion as 'truth' in favour of an ethic based on practice.

of their 'servile' tools (science, philosophy and reason). The subject of this dissertation is Georges Bataille and his 'paradoxical philosophy'. Georges Bataille (1897-1962) is among the most influential and radical thinkers of the twentieth century. Born at the dawn of the latter, in Auvergne and attracted at the end of his teens by religious vocations, he violently distanced himself from those aspirations in the early 1920s, graduated from the Ecole des Chartes with honours and became a librarian at the Bibliotheque National in Paris. Meanwhile he also indulged in a dissolute life, roaming among the Parisian artistic and intellectual avant-gardes – such as the Surrealist group of Andre Breton – without becoming a servile member of any of them, for reasons pertaining to the very 'nature' of his written oeuvre which he, himself, referred to as a 'paradoxical philosophy'. This 'reflection' on 'paradoxes' – which interestingly unfolded as a paradox itself – lead him to a substantial bibliography. Composed of about twenty books and several dozen of articles (all of them nowadays compiled in the twelve volumes of his *Oeuvres Complétes,* about 6000 pages), it covers a large variety of subjects spanning philosophy to art and architectural criticism, and espouses a great diversity of 'forms' from the novel to the political and economic essay. Furthermore, it is relevant to note that this 'corpus' has been acknowledged as a major influence on their work by a wide range of important poststructuralist and post-modern philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard, to name but a few.

However important this author's oeuvre – acknowledged or not as it might be –   there appears at first sight an obvious anachronism, in the need to return to a writer whose period of activity dates from the late 1920s to the late 1950s, in order to tackle issues surfacing in an early twenty-first century architectural debate. Nevertheless, the claim of anachronism can be dismissed, if one recalls the major influences of the protagonists of the debate that I discussed above. It is not very contentious to affirm that both stances – the 'Critical' and the 'Projective' – construct themselves on their singular understanding of some influences – belonging to the field of the 'humanities' – which are also 'dated'. More accurately, it is clear (and acknowledged) that Hays owes a great debt to the 'Critical theory' of the Frankfurt School, to be found in the writings of Adorno, Horkheimer or Marcuse from the early 1930s on, while it is also obvious that the 'Projective' effort is deeply indebted (although it remains perhaps unaware of it) to the work, among others, of the 'pragmatist' philosopher John Dewey – also a thinker from the first part of the twentieth century. It thus makes sense to return to the oeuvre of an author who, at the time that the influences of the 'Critical' and 'Projective' stances were produced, revealed a quite different path: a path radically *other*.

The return to this author's oeuvre was mainly inspired by the assumption that the concomitant belief in the ideology of 'project' and 'production', as the groundwork from which at the dawn of the millennium the 'Critical' camp as well as of the 'Projective' effort attempted to propose an assessment of the architectural, was previously undermined within the radical 'writing' practice of Georges Bataille. That is, Bataille's 'project' seems not to be based on the chimeric belief in the necessity of production, meaning or efficiency, but rather on an attempt to escape the very notion of 'project' and its productive aim: its function is not a means towards the accumulation (of knowledge and performances) but rather an unproductive end – an expenditure in and for itself (of meaning and goals). This endeavour is most clearly epitomized in a complex book that Bataille published during Second World War, in 1943: *The Inner Experience*. This 'inner experience', the notion at the heart of the book, is neither an experience as an 'event' through which the subject went, a past 'experience' which can be charted, nor is it an experience as an 'experiment' towards certain aims. Bataille contended that the 'inner experience' is its own authority as 'contestation',[22] that is, it has no productive goal or end outside of itself.[23] This 'experience' is also not concerned with giving an account of the 'interior' condition of the self, (the subject or being) going through an experience (as the term 'inner' might lead one to think). According to Bataille, if this experience has an 'interior' or is 'inner', it is because having no other end than itself, it consequently has no reference or object 'outside' itself (neither discursive knowledge nor a transcendental God) but also because those terms ('inner' and 'interior') indicate the coordinates from where this peculiar 'experience' is unleashed:

> *'Inner experience responds to the necessity in which I find myself – human existence with me*

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[22]. Georges Bataille, *L'experience interieure*, in OC V, Gallimard, Paris, 1973. p.24.
[23]. Ibid. p.18.

– of challenging everything (to put it into question) without permissible rest. […] I say at once that it leads to no harbour (but to a place of bewilderment, of nonsense). I wanted non-knowledge to be its principle […]. But this experience born of non-knowledge remains there decidedly. It is not beyond expression, one does not betray it if one speaks of it, but it steals from the mind the answers it still had to the questions of knowledge. Experience reveals nothing and cannot found belief nor set out from it. Experience is, in fever and anguish, the putting into question (to the test) of that which a man knows of being'.[24]

In *The Inner Experience*, Bataille attempted to introduce an activity that would challenge the given of knowledge. This activity could be likened to an intellectual 'brawl' which would contest not only the rules and dogma (ethical poles, unquestionable concepts and moral values) but also the structures (discursive thought, the unfolding of 'project', and the primacy of reason) which support them. Bataille's aim was not to replace those with 'new' transcendental values, and these with a new hegemonic framework but to simply undermine all of them without further purposes. In many ways Bataille's 'inner experience' appears thus as a 'sacrifice' in pure loss, a squandering, of reason, moral, knowledge, discourse and 'project':

'The plan of the moral is the plan of the project. The contrary to project is sacrifice. Sacrifice takes on the forms of project but in appearance only'.[25]

Hence, this 'inner experience' might look like a 'project' but it actually undermines the very function of 'project'. 'Project' is seen as a servile attempt to fulfil 'planed' ends. Individuals and activities taken within a 'project' are thus per se servile. 'Project' is in no way an act of 'resistance' or 'emancipation'. Rather, because it remains oriented towards exterior aims or simply pragmatic, it is, according to Bataille, a 'prison'. Bataille thus took the 'nature' of project *a la lettre* in order to free from it, the beings who were practicing it. If project is servile it will remain so, yet through the 'project' of the 'inner experience' – a project that does not go beyond itself – the practicing individual escapes 'the realm of project' – i.e. its productive and pragmatic function – and its servile status:

'The principle of inner experience: to escape with a project from the realm of project'.[26]

While the 'Critical' and 'Projective stances could not think of an activity (either criticism or design) beyond the predicament of 'project', Bataille's oeuvre, as a practice being its own authority as 'contestation' – as a peculiar 'experience' with no productive goal or end beyond itself, a 'sacrifice' in pure loss of all transcendental values but also of reason, moral, knowledge, discourse and finally 'project' – seems to open a new uncharted territory for architectural criticism and theory, a theory and a criticism of the architectural realm as a 'contestation' in and of itself. Not a simple recoil in the ivory tower of autonomous writing, far from the contingencies of architectural practice and of its assessment, but a radical disruption – as an after effect – of the pillars (meaning and production) on which their economy rests.

My assumption about the radical undermining of 'project' (as a 'production') – as what forms the core of theory and criticism – that Bataille had proposed, propelled this doctoral research on his oeuvre. It presented obvious questions concerning the 'nature' of this oeuvre and the notions it indulges in; but also about their function, their effects and – most importantly – about their relevance to the architectural discipline in our contemporaneity. Hence, I have attempted to investigate in what way Bataille's 'paradoxical philosophy' proposes an alternative to operative, ideologically fuelled and projective architectural forms of criticism. Furthermore, I have tried to demonstrate how this 'thought' sheds some interesting light on the function of the architectural. Finally, in this dissertation I aimed to elucidate the 'role', 'task' or, better said, 'function' of the architectural critic and theoretician this oeuvre consequently intuits.

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[24]. Ibid. pp. 15-6.
[25]. Ibid. p. 158.
[26]. Ibid. p. 60.

Releasing Bataille's use value

Departing from my initial assumption, in order to penetrate the depths of Bataille's books, texts, essays and articles, my investigation has been guided by the belief that this author's work or, better said, his practise, offers (as a gift) a paradoxically useful – because sovereign an unproductive – form of architectural assessment particularly relevant to the present state of architecture, as a discipline entangled within our contemporary globalized era and its functioning modes.

As of today, within the field of architectural criticism and theory Bataille's work – if it is not simply silenced – is predominantly discussed and understood through the very specific lens, one might say through the extraction from his oeuvre, of two articles from the late 1920s published in the review *Documents*: 'Architecture' and 'Formless' [or '*Informe*']. For example, one would just need to open Neil Leach's architectural theory reader *Rethinking Architecture*,[27] to be confronted with the rather reductive way this author's contributions are introduced. This reductive attitude obviously ignores the rest of Bataille's research or 'paradoxical philosophy' on the excess and the modes of expenditure relative to it. It passes over the broad frame of investigation this work encompasses from individual experience to collective economy. And, needless to say, it simply forgets the ambiguous but radical form of his 'writing', which oscillates between the practice of the excess and its more scientific study. While, as I already mentioned, Bataille's bibliography contains entries for about twenty books and several dozens of articles (his *Oeuvres Complétes* compile, at least, 6000 pages), few scholars – to say the least – belonging to the architectural discipline, have made a genuine attempt to treat the whole of Bataille's oeuvre in order to assess the relevance of its contribution to the architectural discipline.

This dissertation addresses, the basically reductive reading of Bataille's work, which is done within the field of architectural criticism and theory (at least in an English speaking context). A reading that tends on the one hand to set aside the fundamental (although disrupted) totality of its oeuvre (by restricting itself to the study of the articles 'Architecture' and 'formless' alone), and on the other hand to narrowly interpret it as a mere critique of architectural form, consequently presenting it either as the negation of all form of architecture, or as the attempt to naïvely transgress a 'classical' architectural form.

Beyond the rather reductive understanding of Bataille's work, displayed in architectural theory readers but also in different academically published essays and texts[28] – a reading which is hovering above this oeuvre without daring to penetrate within its deeper and arcane prose and to indulge in its confidently affirmed paradoxes – a few actors from the architectural discipline have attempted to render 'operative' Bataille's themes and notions within the framework of agendas completely foreign to Bataille's endeavour. Indeed, it seems that there has been a reception of Bataille's oeuvre within the architectural realm. Furthermore, this reception seems to have happened at two different moments: first in the 1970s, as Bernard Tschumi's texts 'Architecture and Transgression',[29] and 'Questions of Space: The Pyramid and the Labyrinth or the Architectural Paradox',[30] are visible attempts to build on Bataille's radical aura by referencing his work without, it seems, having carefully read it.[31] Then, a few decades later, in the year 2000, the philosopher Andrew Benjamin in his *Architectural Philosophy* attempted to put Bataille's notion of 'formless' at work in order to operatively criticise or, better said, to praise the work of Peter Eisenman and more specifically his vague conceptualisation of the interstitial.[32]

However, those discursive attempts, as they do not focus on Bataille's oeuvre, but rather try to use the aura of the radical thinker for their own benefit, cannot be, academically speaking, considered as unbiased understandings of Bataille's 'paradoxical philosophy' and thus as addressing the function and relevance of this oeuvre to the discipline. Hence, my research appears as having a double aim. On the one hand it is an attempt at uncovering a quantity of

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[27]. Neil Leach (ed.), *Rethiniking Architecture, a reader in cultural theory*, Routledge, London, 1997.

[28]. See for example, Renata Hejduk, 'Death becomes Her: transgression, decay, and eROTicism in Bernard Tschumi's early writings and projects' in*The Journal of Architecture*, vol.12 n. 4*, Routledge,* 2007, pp. 393-404..

[29]. Bernard Tschumi, 'Architecture and Transgression' in *Oppositions 7*, Winter, 1976, pp. 55-63.

[30]. Bernard Tschumi, 'Questions of Space: The Pyramid and the labyrinth or the Architectural Paradox' in *Studio International*, Sept-Oct, 1975

[31]. I will demonstrate my contention in the first chapter of this dissertation.

[32]. See, Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, Athlone Press, London and New Brunswick, 2000.

barely discussed materials – in an architectural setting – in order to point at the relevance of Bataille's work to the discipline. Then, on the other hand this dissertation also confronts radically – as a contestation – the appropriation of Bataille's thought, by a few actors within the architectural scene in order to fulfil their personal agendas. In other words, in this doctoral research, I attempt to release – with the sense of issuing it into the 'open', as well as 'freeing' it from the aforementioned misconstructions or misrepresentations – Bataille's *use value*.

However, this 'releasing' does not pretend – logically – to be purely neutral. Indeed, as the reader will notice, it consciously borrows its function of 'contestation' from the corpus of Bataille. That is, this dissertation does not try to homogenize or sterilise Bataille's reflections through the conventionally acknowledged distance of scholarly endeavours. Instead, this doctoral research paradoxically unveils the radically ungraspable (and thus non-sterilisable) 'writing' of Bataille as a paradoxical theorisation *and* practice of the excess, while at the same time, it attempts to proceed along the same 'path' as its subject matter – that is, to be 'operative in itself'. Hence, this dissertation is pretty much taken within the 'movement' of Bataille's corpus – it is as much a survey presenting its 'results' as an operation without any further goals (expounding the double folded nature of my endeavour that I characterised as a release: a bringing forth as much as a liberation).

Finally, this 'release', in terms of methodology or with reference to its 'scholarly angle', can be characterized as first a 'parody' and, then, as having been guided by the belief in the necessary putting to death of 'The Death of the author'. A methodological approach which thus leads – as an aftereffect – to the assumed, yet paradoxical, reversal of the consequences of this 'Death'. Thus, this research's methodology epitomizes a plea for a radical positioning of the scholar, his work, and its methodology as means to confront and contest and not as means of homogenization and flattening of the academia.

Parody

> *'It is clear that the world is purely parodic, in other words, that each thing seen is the parody of another, or is the same thing in a deceptive form. […] Everyone is aware that life is parodic and that it lacks an interpretation. Thus lead is the parody of gold. Air is the parody of water. The brain is the parody of the equator. The copulation is the parody of crime'.[33]*

A parody is often perceived as the degradation of an original with mocking mimicry. It assaults the absent or abandoned authority of this model. It can be seen as a sort of transgression: it upholds certain limits in order to undermine them. It often opens the way to laughter: due to the differences it unveils or articulates between the model and its mocking. But it is nevertheless a form –perhaps peculiar – of homage or at least a way to pay respect to some aspects of the original. Bataille often used parody as a literary strategy within his novels and non-fictional opus. His 'paradoxical philosophy' itself can be seen as a parody of his influences: Nietzsche, Hegel, Mauss, all of them have been rewritten, their positions reversed, their conclusions laughed at, and/or paradoxically praised – all of these sometimes within the same text – by Bataille. Nevertheless, it can be said that parody was not just another 'method' or literary trope for Bataille. Precisely due to its radical impact – as a means to betray, to induce laughter, to reduce one's contribution, to squander one's elevation – parody was in many ways essential to Bataille's textual aims.

For example, in an unpublished text (during his lifetime) on the Marquis De Sade, 'The Use Value of D.A.F. De Sade (An open letter to my current comrades)', Bataille employed, as a characterising framework, a parody of the pattern he had perceived within De Sade's prose, for unveiling the opposition of attitudes regarding the reception of De Sade's oeuvres – hence for undermining those dual stances.[34]

'The Use-Value of D.A.F. De Sade (An open letter to my current comrades)' discusses what is according to Bataille De Sade's 'true' use-value. That is, he has none. Or better said, it has no 'conventional' (Marxist) use-value: its use value resides accurately in it having no usefulness (no purpose) and also no value (as being below value). Faced with what he estimates to be De Sade's 'use value', Bataille denounces, of course, with this essay, all the attempts to see in De Sade some kind of useful, spiritual, exchange or conceptual value but also the attitude of those who reject De

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[33]. Georges Bataille, *L'anus solaire*, , in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p.80.
[34]. See, Georges Bataille, 'La valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970.

Sade for his lack, precisely, of value. According to Bataille, the two gestures of rejection and appropriation, despite the fact that they appear as opposites, are actually similar in their effects. Whether de Sade is rejected or admired, he is finally treated in the same way: himself and his 'true' use-value are expelled. When one rejects De Sade, he is immediately expelled, while when he is appropriated, he is first assimilated and then expelled. The surrealists for example, who acknowledged him as a precursor, did not think that De Sade's work had a place anywhere other than in 'fiction' – it was, for them, 'above the real'; they thus amputated De Sade's radicalism from his social, 'real', fold. They finally expelled the 'true' De Sade). Hence, the result is the same in both cases. Both processes treat De Sade as a 'foreign Body' that must be expelled in order to maintain a certain purity.[35]

But, Bataille contends, the visible dualism inherent in the reception of De Sade's oeuvre, is actually parodied by the dualism at the heart of his text. Indeed, for Bataille, De Sade's text unfolds according to a dual mode: first an 'eruption of excremental forces' and then 'a corresponding limitation'.[36] These two modes are obviously in conflict: the excremental forces are challenging the limitations that arise from their eruptions. However, in Bataille's view, it is the 'eruption' that prevails, as the transgression of all the limitations (but also as what paradoxically engenders them). Hence, Bataille's point is rather clear: as the dual mode visible within De Sade's text is a kind of parody of the dualist reception of it, and, as this dual reception leads nevertheless to its sterilisation, one must release the excess of De Sade's thought, to make it erupt again, against any limitative reading or reception of it.

Before the radical perspective, this essay, 'The Use Value of D.A.F. De Sade', opens, this dissertation can be, methodologically speaking, first of all qualified as being a parody. Indeed, perceiving the way Bataille's oeuvre is limited and reduced within an architectural setting, I have simply attempted to propose a parody of Bataille's parody of De Sade oeuvre's parody of its own reception. Against the reductive reading – done from within the discipline – which violently limits the pertinence of Bataille's works to architectural theory and criticism (and which similarly proposes a very narrow understanding of the architectural as principally occupied with the generation of form), I first parodically argue, in this dissertation, that Bataille's oeuvre forms a 'whole' or 'totality' which should – although this ensemble is disruptive and disrupted – nevertheless, be considered – if not embraced – in its entirety in order to address its relevance to architectural contemporary matters. In other words, not simply the relevance to the discipline of the different critical and theoretical appropriations of Bataille's terms and notions by contemporary architectural commentators, but the very manner in which Bataille's oeuvre and its assessment of the architectural proposes a radical 'contestation' extremely pertinent to our present has been investigated here. In consequence, I propose to bring to the fore Bataille's 'assessment' of architecture from within his 'paradoxical philosophy' or dualist thought. From this perspective Bataille's texts on architecture are released not as a mere critique of the architectural 'form' but as a discussion of the political, social and economic function of architecture. I wish to illustrate that for Bataille, architecture is a means of 'exchange' or 'communication' between what he sketches as the heterogeneous and homogeneous realms. To put it differently, I argue that in Bataille's view, architecture allows a leaking of the sacred back into the profane: architecture is, for Bataille, an expenditure either real or symbolic, and either productive or in pure loss, whose 'function' is revealed through two different modes. One is imperative, it serves the hegemony of the 'high' heterogeneous elements while it structures and preserves the homogeneous realm and its order. The other mode is 'impure', it allows a leaking of the 'low' impure heterogeneous elements back into the profane (homogeneous realm), disturbing as such its order.

The death of 'The Death of the Author'
The methodological approach of this dissertation has also been guided by my belief in the necessity of putting to death 'The Death of the author'. In other words, my attempt to read from within his oeuvre, Bataille's assessment of architecture – after having biographically contextualised his work – in order to release Bataille from the abovementioned reductive readings of his texts, although it could be perceived as a rather 'conservative' approach, should instead be read as a radical contestation of the consequences of the end of the hegemony of the 'author', regarding the

[35]. Ibid. p.56.
[36]. Ibid. p.56.

interpretation of his work. That is, the belief that nowadays, a reading of Bataille's take on architecture from within its oeuvre as a pertinent methodology, has, indeed, been guiding this dissertation. Yet, this belief was not sustained by the naïve aim of attempting to reach an absolute truth about Bataille, to the detriment of the other reductive misconstructions of his work. Rather, I adopted such an approach, as it appeared to be a radical means of undermining the principle which pervades the field of academic research: the law of what I call the 'equivalent validity of plural readings'. A principle or law, which in my view renders, what could be a field of lively and impassioned debates, into a homogeneous, flat and suffocating realm in which radical differences are truncated for mere diversities.

'The Death of the Author' is the title of an essay by the French literary critic and theorist Roland Barthes.[37] In this essay, Barthes dismisses a method of reading an author's text based on aspects of the author's personality and context (his political views, his historical settings and all other biographical attributes) as this protocol leads to define with authority the meaning and thus the sole valid interpretation of that text. In Barthes own words – such a method 'imposes a limit on that text […] it is closing the writing'[38] So Barthes believes that to interpret an oeuvre according to its author's biography is a totalitarian act. Conversely, Barthes contends that the meaning of a text depends much more on the reader than on his author:

> *'Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is gathered and that place is not the author, as was hitherto said, but the reader: the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination,[…]'[39]*

Confronted with this quote, and more essentially with this essay of Barthes as a whole, the present dissertation which proposes a reading – as a release – of Bataille's assessment of the architectural from within his oeuvre (itself framed by this author's life, polemics, influences, groupings and legacy) might appear – in contradiction with its stated aims – as a very reactionary, or at least conservative attempt to define with authority the scope and function of Bataille's 'writing'. However, I contend that it is not. Reading further Barthes' text will help to elucidate my contention. Barthes's claim that 'the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost' provokes – ironically enough – within the average reader's mind a need for clarification: who is precisely Barthes's 'reader'? In the passage from his essay following on from the one quoted above, Barthes gives an answer, perhaps naively yet directly, to this question:

> *'[…] yet this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted. Which is why it is derisory to condemn the new writing in the name of humanism hypocritically turned champion of the reader's rights. Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, there is no other person in literature than the one who writes'.[40]*

The 'reader' for Barthes, is without doubt a metaphorical one, yet 'he' is a 'neutral' receptacle, able to gather the plurality of readings, the many different layers of 'fabric', from which a text as a metaphorical piece of 'tissue' might be made. Then, the 'new writing' that Barthes mentions would consist precisely of texts whose authors would have 'erased' themselves leaving the sole authority of understanding to the readers. And, the humanist-classic criticism that Barthes himself criticizes for, if not humanist's, at least reader friendly's reasons, would be the conventional critique of literary texts based on a biographic-contextual reading of an author's text, as a way to define the legal meaning and the authorised understanding of it.

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[37]. Roland Barthes, 'La mort de l'auteur' in *Œuvres completes* vol. III, Seuil, Paris, 2002, pp.40-5.
First published in English, in the journal *Aspen* n.5-6, 1967, and in French in the magazine *Manteia*, n.5, 1968.
[38]. Ibid. p. 44.
[39]. Ibid. p.45.
[40]. Ibid.

Although I totally agree with Barthes' aim to free a text, an oeuvre or any kind of creation from the hegemony of the established and authoritarian criticism on which rests what he also names a 'good' society. His belief in the existence of a 'reader', a free individual, totally independent from cultural and societal agency, and thus free from any bias, sounds to me quite idealistic. The first question to ask would be, 'Is not the classic-humanist 'critic' (although I do not wish to defend its aim and function) also a reader?'

In my view, a 'neutral' reader does not exist. But, this is not to say that I reject Barthes's text and attempt at 'killing' the author for taking on any kind of literary authority. In his endeavour to 'release' the lector's reading from the prison of the authoritarian understanding of the critic, Barthe's text has been a great source of inspiration to my own investigation. Rather, I would like to point to the consequences or outcome relative to what 'The Death of the Author' stated. The last bits of Barthes's text summarize those quite well:

> *'We are now no longer allowing ourselves to be fooled by those sort of antiphrasis, through which the good society superbly recriminates in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that to give writing a future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author'.[41]*

Apart of the last sentence, I wish that I would have been able, myself, to phrase in such a concise and yet illuminating way, my understanding of the present situation concerning the reception of Bataille's oeuvre within architectural culture and, consequently, of the necessary actions to be taken for facing it. The 'Death of the Author' is just the symptom of the birth of the 'reader' as Barthes claims. But, what Barthes does not say, or envisage, is that the reader who is unable to remain this ideal 'neutral' space, will end up representing a new form of authoritarian understanding. This is not to say that the main problem induced by the 'Death of the Author' is that one 'reading' became an authority in itself (although this might happen or might have happened) but rather that the 'Death of the Author' marks paradoxically the end of the possibility for all heterogeneous 'readings' to be released. As there is no more 'authority' there is no more 'transgression'. What is left over is only a flat and homogeneous realm of multiple readings which are all equivalent, commensurate one might say, as they do not tend to be confrontational anymore, but simply 'homogeneous'. The problem that the 'Death of the Author' presents, is not so much that no 'reading' positions itself like the sole – although 'impossible' – authority, (however, from one fashion to another, indeed, a reading might be perceived as the 'final' one) but rather the fact that the affirmed equivalence of multiple readings – a form of homogeneity – has become the authority. Hence, paraphrasing Barthes or rather 'reading' him – as being unable to have been myself the original author of his lines – I would say that indeed it is time to stop being fooled by all kind of 'antiphrasis' – such as the 'equivalent validity of plural readings' (my formulation)– through which a homogeneous society and its correlative flat criticism 'superbly recriminates in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys'. In other words, one should not anymore accept the authoritarian relativism concerning the plurality of reading of an author's text, as it is through this form of dogma that a homogeneous, flat and 'good' society stabilizes itself and criticizes – pretending it does so for the sake of a right to 'difference' of which it actually rejects the most radical aspects – all attempts at radically positioning one's authorship or reading as heterogeneous.

Hence, reversing and/or parodying Barthes final words, the methodology of this dissertation can be characterized as having been guided by the claim that: *we must be aware that to give the heterogeneous its present share, it is necessary to overthrow the myth that came to replace the myth: the re-birth of a reading as a contestation must be at the cost of the death of 'The Death of the Author'.[42]*

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[41]. Ibid.

[42]. My critic of 'The Death of the Author' is very close to Michel Foucault's reflection on the matter of authorship, a matter on which he gave a well-known lecture untitled: 'What is an author?' In short, in this lecture, Foucault, although he does not refer to Barthes' text expressively, seems to challenge his view. Indeed, while Barthes foresaw the unfolding of a sort of historical progression which could free the 'reader' from the authority of the author, Foucault contended the existence of what he calls an 'author-function', an ideological figure, 'by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning', that is the author is a sort of 'classifying principle' inherent to all discursive formations. Foucault thus intuits that, as the embodiment of that 'function' might change

This claim concerning the necessary putting to death of 'The Death of the Author' allowed the paradoxical 'authorship' of Georges Bataille to be revealed. Indeed, I have attempted to show in this dissertation that Bataille's 'writing' [or in French 'ecriture'] is not simply professing a certain number of concepts or dogma but rather constantly squandering what might appear – at first sight – to be its discursive statements and thus its 'meaning'. In other words, I tried to reveal how Bataille's 'writing' *on* the excess and the means of expenditure, is also a 'writing' *of* the excess (a 'writing' not controlling and limiting what exceeds 'meaning', but rather releasing this excess), hence a 'writing' as an expenditure in pure loss. Said differently, within this dissertation, I contend (and show the pertinence of such a contention), that it was necessary to return to a biographical, contextual and somewhat historical 'reading' of Bataille's oeuvre, in order to, not elect him as the 'author', but, rather, to uncover how his 'authorship' is a radically heterogeneous 'suicide (or sacrifice) of the author'.

To conclude on those 'methodological reflections', I wish to intuit (for the time being) in what way this double folded methodology is –paradoxically – useful. Retrieving Bataille's peculiar 'use-value' through a careful reframing of his 'take' on architecture by the unveiling of certain biographical aspects and the re-releasing of indispensable notions from his oeuvre, and then pointing at the paradoxical function of his 'writing', not as a means of producing and accumulating 'meanings', but as the bringing forth of a discursive 'content' instantaneously succeeded by its squandering in pure loss, allowed Bataille's relevance and pertinence to the architectural discipline – or more accurately to architectural theory and criticism – to surface.

In other words, the methodology which sustained this dissertation lead to the disturbing yet seminal conclusion that Bataille's 'take' on architecture does not simply reveal architecture as a form of excess or as an expenditure, but is also disseminated within an oeuvre which itself espouses the material it addresses (i.e. Bataille's oeuvre is in itself an excessive expenditure), this architectural assessment, thus, is also an expenditure in pure loss of itself and of architecture as a discipline.

Hence, the methodology, that this dissertation embraces, demonstrates that Bataille's architectural 'assessment' obviously offers no conceptual and operative arsenal to architects yearning for some 'intellectual backing' and even less some sort of structural method of analysis to architectural critics, historians and theoreticians from where they could complete their hidden agenda, but that rather, the only agenda it could permit –without having it betray its radicalism – would be not its re-enactment but precisely its parody: a parodic re-affirmation of architecture as an expenditure, through a parodic 'writing' (itself a radical self-expenditure in pure loss): a 'writing' inducing the fall of all other agendas – the radical and non-hypocritical squandering of architectural criticism and theory.[43]

Reflection on the materials

The methodological approach of this research, outlined in what preceded, is reflected in the different material that I have come across during the course of this investigation.

First of all, this investigation is based on the published and unpublished texts, essay, notes, articles and books which comprise the writings of Georges Bataille, all of which having been compiled in twelve volumes over a period spanning from 1970 until 1988.

Although the secondary literature on Bataille is quite limited within the architectural field, within the realm of philosophy and French comparative literature studies, it is quite substantial. Important critical assessment of Bataille's writings such as Denis Hollier's *La Prise de la Concorde*, from 1973, or Michel Surya's biography of Bataille untitled *Bataille, la Mort a l'Oeuvre*, from 1992,

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with the passage from a discursive formation to another, with the succession of 'Epistémés', (i.e. the 'author' as we understand it might lose this 'function' or it might be given to another agent), to kill the 'author' nowadays is not a way to insure the end of all form of authority and power concerning 'readership'. In other words, and as I contend it, the tackled authority of the author concerning 'meaning' might found a refuge in a reader or a commentator, or – disturbingly – a home within the very fundament of a discursive formation: nowadays, the politically correct affirmation of what I call the 'equivalent validity of plural readings'. See, Michel Foucault, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?' in *Dits et Écrits*, vol.I, Gallimard, Paris, 1994.

[43]. Here, I guess it is 'useful' to mention that I do not think that the architectural critic, historian or theoretician could – or should be granted the right to be able to – escape the squandering he must consciously unleash.

or more recently Allan Stoekl's (the first American scholar to translate some of Bataille's *Documents* articles in English) illuminating attempt to address Bataille's interest in the excess and the means of expenditure in view of the current shortage of energy resources, all have been, to say the least – and without irony – radically useful within the course of my research.

Finally, I also have been able to profit from a large body of mainly philosophical but also sociological scholarship. Both the work of Bataille's influences such as Nietzsche, Hegel, De Sade and Mauss as well as the oeuvres of more contemporary scholars, writers and thinkers such as Maurice Blanchot, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Jean Luc Nancy to name a few, have guided me in my understanding of the content but also of the 'form' (or erasure of it) of Bataille's difficult prose.[44]

Structure

The confrontation of my early assumptions relating to the work of Georges Bataille with the depth of his oeuvre and the secondary literature dedicated to it (in an architectural setting or in the realm of the human sciences) resulted in this doctoral dissertation being structured around two parts and five chapters.

Part I, following the methodological approach of this dissertation that I referred to above as a parody, is untitled 'Appropriation'. This heading refers to the endeavor of the Surrealists with regard to De Sade's oeuvre that Bataille identified, named and disqualified as a fraud. In this first part I identify more accurately the problem I perceived in the different studies which have tried to put Bataille's writing at work in their respective realms (art and architecture criticism and theory) or which have discussed his critique of architecture in relation to his writing (literature studies). In other words, I make clear how those contributions, actually, misrepresent, misconstrue or even betray, consciously or not, Bataille's thought due to their improper bias, agendas and fields of investigations. Finally, I clarify why those contributions cannot be seriously considered as providing a framework for grasping the relevance of Bataille's thought to the architectural discipline.

Thus, in the first chapter I discuss the study of Denis Hollier, *La prise de La Concorde.* I focus first on how Denis Hollier's study, albeit a brilliant and erudite investigation of Bataille's writings, might, nevertheless, induce within a purely architectural perspective, a reductive understanding of Bataille's thought as simply 'against architecture'. I then show how Bernard Tschumi's earliest writings, attempting to be radical by referring to Bataille, are actually based on a reading or even a misreading (and paraphrasing) of Hollier and not on a direct attempt to grasp the function of Bataille's 'take' on architecture.

In chapter two, I show how the art's scholars Georges Didi-Huberman, Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois in their attempt to put either 'at work' or 'into form' Bataille's 'formless', subsequently betray Bataille's thought and his notions. Then, I reveal how Andrew Benjamin's will to put the 'formless' in 'movement' through his peculiar approach defined as 'process philosophy', while not foreign to the endeavour of the aforementioned art's scholars, simply allows him to re-define the architectural as autonomous. A statement that can't be, actually, further removed from Bataille's thought.

'Excretion' is the heading of Part II of this dissertation, a parodic rehearsal of Bataille's definition of his 'releasing' of the Marquis De Sade's 'use value '. In this second part I undertake the bringing forth of Bataille's assessment of architecture from within the frame of his 'paradoxical philosophy'. I there retrieve Bataille's intellectual context and influence, the content, aim and function of his 'paradoxical philosophy' and finally I expound in what consists his assessment of the architectural: his take on architecture.

In the third chapter, I articulate Bataille's oeuvre and experience with the wider context of the twentieth century's intellectual history. I consider, the manner in which Bataille discovers and relates to the thought of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Mauss, as well as, the importance of the experience of the limit and the excess to the development of his 'writing'. I illustrate the way he posits himself outside of his contemporary 'Avant-garde' groups, such as Surrealism and later Existentialism, by launching intense debates with two of the most notorious figures of his time: Sartre and Breton. Finally, I discuss the importance of his 'text' to a whole generation of post-structuralist and post-modern thinkers: Foucault, Derrida, Baudrillard, Lacan and the Tel Quel's

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[44]. For a more complete bibliography, see the end of this dissertation.

group.

While the third chapter attempts to contextualize Bataille's oeuvre by recovering its relationship with those figures, experiences, and groups, the fourth chapter looks to his writings as a whole, in order to grasp the core of his 'paradoxical philosophy' and to elucidate the function the notion of excess occupies in it. I reveal how Bataille's work is dual in its form: on the one hand it consists of a theorizing of the excess and its modes of expenditure and on the other hand it appears to be a playful practice of this excess in literary and philosophical discourses. Furthermore, I discuss there the dualism on which, in term of content, Bataille's thought rests: the dyad homogeneity/heterogeneity. Finally, I demonstrate that for Bataille the heterogeneous or sacred realm also splits into two: there is in his view a 'low impure' form of heterogeneity and a 'high imperative' one.

Through the interpretative framework elaborated in chapter four, I propose a reading of Bataille's critique of architecture in chapter five – the final chapter of this dissertation. I undertake the analysis of the whole of Bataille's articles and short essays which have architecture as the central topic or which refer to architectural objects. I there argue that Bataille's reflection on architecture is not a simple critique of architecture's aesthetic or formal features but a critique of architecture's political, social and economic function. I shed some light on how Bataille reveals architecture as a 'means' of 'exchange' or 'communication', which permits a 'leaking' of the heterogeneous back into the homogeneous. I point out that, due to the particular nature of the heterogeneous, which is – in Bataille's view – in itself a dualism, architecture might function according to two different modes. One mode is 'imperative', it preserves and controls the homogeneous order, oppresses the 'low' and serves the hegemony of the 'high' heterogeneous. The other mode can be qualified of being 'impure', it disturbs the order and stability of the profane, threatens the hegemonic position of the 'high' heterogeneous, and allows the 'low' heterogeneous elements to be present and visible within the homogeneous realm.

In the conclusion, *The practice of Architectural Contestation Before Death*, I return to what Bataille suggests concerning the function that architecture shares with the architectural assessment if both are not hypocritically operated. I contend that the relevance and pertinence (in the sense of its applicability, and with reference to its importance) of Bataille's oeuvre to the architectural discipline are to be found at an operative or, better said, 'functional' level. That is, this oeuvre and its specific 'take' on architecture emerge not simply as a peculiar 'way' or 'style' to write about architecture nor as just another hermeneutic approach to the architectural environment, but as an attempt to release a 'writing' which 'proceeds' according to the 'function' its unveils for the architectural. The relevance and pertinence of Bataille's 'text' to the discipline resides in the erotic conjoining of a discourse on architecture as an expenditure (an hermeneutic approach) with a transgression (as a pushing to its very limit) of discourse's meaning (an expenditure in itself). I propose to refer to this conjoining as an *Architectural Contestation*.

PART I
APPROPRIATION

(Bataille's reception in architectural culture)

Part I. Appropriation (Bataille's reception in architectural culture)

Georges Bataille's 'assessment' of architecture, although almost totally unknown among most of the professionals of the architectural discipline[1] (either scholars or practicing architects) is nevertheless present within the pages of some architectural theory's readers, such as, K. Michael Hays' *Architecture Theory since 1968*, or Neil Leach's *Rethinking Architecture*. This lack of interest is perhaps due to the self-acknowledged complexity of Bataille's work, but it is also the consequence of the rather disturbing challenge it presents to the architectural field. However, there appears to be evidence that Bataille's work has been investigated within some architectural circles. The aim of the first part of this dissertation is, first of all to reveal when, how and also why, Bataille's thinking and its articulation of architectural matters has been appropriated within the discipline. Subsequently I will attempt, with this particular 'beginning', to show what I consider to be the major problem intrinsic to this reception, and my reasons for thinking this dissertation relevant to the architectural discipline.

The following discussion has three aims. It attempts, first, to map the different contributions which have permitted the introduction of Bataille's work within the world of architectural scholarship. I will here discuss the theoretical contributions of several scholars and one architect in order to identify how those contributions represent Bataille's thought and its assessment of the architectural. Those protagonists and their contributions are: Denis Hollier's *La Prise de la Concorde*, Bernard Tschumi's 'Architectural Paradox' & 'Architecture and Transgression', Georges Didi-Huberman's *La ressemblance informe ou Le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille*, Rosalind E. Krauss & Yves-Alain Bois' *Formless a User's Guide*, and finally, Andrew Benjamin's *Architectural Philosophy*.

Furthermore, I propose to expose how those contributions actually misrepresent, misconstrue or even betray, consciously or not, Bataille's thought due to their proper biases, agendas and fields of investigations. And consequently, I will clarify why those contributions cannot be seriously considered as providing a framework for grasping Bataille thought and its relevance to the architectural discipline. I will show how Denis Hollier's study, albeit a brilliant and erudite investigation of Bataille's oeuvre, is nevertheless producing within an architectural perspective, a reductive understanding of Bataille's thought as simply 'against architecture'. I will demonstrate how Bernard Tschumi's earliest writings, attempting to be radical by referring to Bataille, are actually based on a reading or even a misreading (and paraphrasing) of Hollier and not on a direct reading of Bataille's texts on architecture. I will discuss how the art's scholars Georges Didi-Huberman, Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois, in their attempt to put either 'in form' or 'at work' Bataille's 'formless,' subsequently betray Bataille's thought and its notion. Finally, I will show that Andrew Benjamin's will to put the 'formless' in 'movement' through his peculiar approach defined as 'process philosophy', simply allows him to define the architectural as autonomous, a statement that could not be further removed from Bataille's thought.

Finally, I hope to make clear, the necessity of providing a reading of Bataille's grasp of architecture (the primary object of this dissertation) from within its own 'context' (that is, the seminal experience of the 'author' and the system of knowledge — or non-knowledge — that produced this take on the subject). In other words, the following dissertation's overall relevance to the discipline consists in investigating Bataille's critique of architecture directly and as a part of a coherent, although non-unified whole, deeply influenced by its author's life.

If I may briefly summarize: 'Part I' exposes how Bataille's work is primarily received within architectural circles through the interpretative framework of Denis Hollier's work (Tschumi) or through the extraction from Bataille's writings of two articles, 'formless' and 'architecture' (Benjamin). I contend that such a reception leads to a significant misrepresentation or even betrayal of Bataille's thought, a predicament within which Bataille's critique of architecture is not grasped through the contextualisation and analysis of what he wrote about it — with the aim of comprehending its contemporary relevance — but rather through what others, (with their unavoidable bias) have written about it and him — in order to fulfil personal or disciplinary agendas. Hence the necessity of reading Bataille directly and within the 'context' of his oeuvre, in order to understand his 'critique' of architecture (if one can call it such) and to be aware of the possibilities it opens for architectural theory and criticism.

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[1]. I'd like to thank Bernard Colenbrander for showing me this fact in his rather peculiar way.

CHAPTER I

From *Against Architecture* to its paradox and transgression

Chapter I. From *Against Architecture* to its paradox and transgression

The reception of Bataille's writings into architectural culture occurred quite late on, in the 1970s. This is not surprising if one considers the equally late acknowledgement of his work as a major contributor to twentieth century thought. This last was achieved by Bataille's peers, working in the field of literary studies, a kind of post-mortem recognition, occurring in the mid-1960s with the help of members of the *Tel Quel* group. Henceforth, it is not astonishing to see that one of the members of that group, Denis Hollier, author of *La prise de la Concorde*,[2] proves to be the origin of some architectural circle's interest in Bataille's oeuvre. Indeed, although Hollier's book pertains to the discipline of literary studies rather than 'architectural theory' and even though its form encompasses everything but a scientific discourse, it has been considered since its publication a piece of 'architectural thinking', to the extent that excerpts from it are included in architectural theory's readers,[3] and that it has had a visible influence on architects' disciplinary reflections – as we shall see in the case of Bernard Tschumi's earliest writings.

I.1. Denis Hollier's *La prise de la Concorde* (*Against Architecture*)

At the time of its publication by Gallimard in 1974, Hollier's book, *La prise de la Concorde* (translated in 1989 as *Against Architecture*) was considered the first serious interpretation of Bataille's challenging writings. Nowadays it is still regarded, at least in France, as the standard critical work on Bataille's 'text'. Before discussing Hollier's hypothesis and argumentation, I should state that, by no means whatsoever, do I wish to dismiss his brilliant and erudite contribution to the field of literary studies.[4] Rather, I would like to illustrate how his construction of Bataille's writings as working against the 'jobs' of architecture or the architectural metaphor present within 'discourse', while extremely convenient to some specific agendas – within the frame of literary, linguistics and semiotics studies – is actually limiting the importance as well as restricting the relevance of Bataille's oeuvre to the discipline of architectural criticism and theory, by orienting through its own bias, the reception of Bataille's work in this field.

I.1.1. Against architecture

La prise de la Concorde is structured – as far as one can use this word in describing such a book – around four interlocking essays: 'The Hegelian Edifice', 'The Architectural Metaphor', 'The Labyrinth, the Pyramid, and the Labyrinth' and 'The Caesarean'. The two first essays are actually each different beginnings, through which Hollier sets up his problematic and thesis.

The Hegelian Edifice. The initial beginning, as the author acknowledges, is a bit of a 'forced' one, in both senses of the word: 'forced' because on the one hand it is not about Bataille, and also 'forced' because, according to Hollier, Bataille did start with architecture.[5] This 'beginning' consists of a theoretical excursus on Hegel's *Aesthetics*, showing how the commanding position architecture is given in Hegel's philosophical edifice underlies a deeper and more fundamental aspect of his philosophical thought: architecture is a metaphor for Hegel's discourse and system. And through this metaphor, philosophy, the 'supreme' discourse (but also all sort of discourses), seems to be ruled by architecture.[6]

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[2] . Denis Hollier, *La prise de la Concorde*, Paris: Gallimard, 1974, translated as *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989.

[3] . see for instance the anthology of texts compiled by K. Michael Hays which reproduce excerpts from the second chapter, 'Architectural Metaphors' of *Against Architecture*, K. Michael Hays (ed), *Architecture Theory since 1968*, New York: MIT press, 1998, pp. 192-96.

[4] . In my view, when one looks to the whole scholarship published on Bataille, Denis Hollier is without a doubt the solely representative, who, besides providing an interesting interpretation of Bataille's work, has been able to write on Bataille in way that does not betray its subject; a way that is literally as well as 'literary' impressive.

[5] . See, Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, p. 14.

[6] . It is important to notice that here Denis Hollier discusses Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*. That is, a course Hegel didn't published or even finalise during his lifetime. Indeed, the *Aesthetics* is a compilation of Hegel's students notes and of his own hand-written notes, published posthumously in 1835 by Hegel's editor Heinrich Hotho. Hence,

Hollier thus begins by observing, that Hegel's *Aesthetics* attributes the beginning of art to architecture. Indeed for Hegel, the arts should be sequenced according to their order of appearance as follows: architecture, sculpture, painting, music and poetry, and each of these five particular arts pass through each of the three aesthetic 'moments': symbolic, classical and romantic before being superseded by its follower in the sequence. Consequently for Hegel, the beginning of art should be *symbolic architecture*, which is architecture in its purest form and in its original state. But Hollier also notes that Hegel's discourse on the origin of art, which defines architecture as the first of the arts, is rather awkward and insecure. Hegel seems to have a few difficulties in reconciling his theoretical will and the facts: his pure and symbolic architecture, which he, arguably, finds in the 'Tower of Babel', is actually missing the simplicity that should confer on it the status of origin; an original simplicity which is, for Hegel, the chief attribute of any beginning. In Hollier's view, the primary aim of Hegel's *Aesthetics* is to unsubtly hide this lack — for this 'originality' at stake is seminal to the 'Hegelian Edifice':

> *'In fact, as a result of the logic of Aufhebung (in which each moment supersedes, that is, simultaneously does away and preserves, its antecedents), [Hegel's] entire construction, the entire edifice of his Aesthetics, depends on it. This logic rules in particular the succession of the arts, each one confirming in turn a victory over the materiality of the preceding art. From sculpture to the last, poetry, which will in turn also be superseded, supersession permits an exit from the realm of art and will constitute aesthetics itself (discourse on art) as a moment of philosophical reflection'.[7]*

Thus, according to Hegel, and as Hollier demonstrates, poetry and art are superseded by 'the prose of thought' (philosophy), in which the 'spirit' as Hegel calls it, is immediately in touch with itself without the help of any external materiality: the concept doesn't need words to make itself known. The best example of this Hegelian 'prose of thought' is the Hegelian discourse itself, and the system on which it rests: the logic of *aufhebung*. The *Aesthetics* as part of the Hegelian discourse, as the discourse on art, is also governed by this system and constitutes a supersession of the arts. Hollier states that through this 'last' supersession, the *Aesthetics* sets up art as 'something from the past'. 'Art is dead'.[8] Somehow Hegel's *Aesthetics* is a sort of tomb, 'Art which began with the construction of tombs [architecture] also ends up with a tomb [Hegel's Aesthetics]. In both cases a certain relationship to death is translated into constructive practices'.[9] Hollier through this formula equates architecture with the Hegelian discourse on art and its system: the *Aesthetics* and the logic of *aufhebung*. Hence for Hollier, the pages dedicated to architecture in Hegel's treaty are a sort of redoubling of the *Aesthetics* (the book), and by extension, a redoubling of the Hegelian discourse as a whole, as well as of the entire system on which it rests: the *Aufhebung*. Architecture seems to rule over philosophical discourse.

> *'Architecture is something appearing in the place of death, to point out its presence and to cover it up: the victory of death and the victory over death. This allows it to be the first of the arts, in its empirical, limited form as a stone edifice, and their tomb, in this major and sublimated form: the Hegelian Edifice. The Aufhebung ensures the return of the arche and its liberation in the telos'.[10]*

But, and it is here that Hollier makes his point, this 'final' *Aufhebung* in order to be something other than a view of the mind, necessitates that the *arche* has indeed enough simplicity to allow it to reappear completely in each succession of its supersessions. Which means that if architecture was to be the beginning of art, it should possess the simplicity of an origin; Hollier:

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anyone willing to draw conclusions from the *Aesthetics*, regarding Hegel's thought on art, should act with extreme prudence, as it is as much Hegel's work as it is the one of his students and editor. And, consequently, Hollier's charge against Hegel, should also be nuanced.

[7] . Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, p. 5.
[8] . Ibid. p. 6.
[9] . Ibid.
[10] . Ibid.

> *To accomplish this [return of the* arche *and liberation in the* telos*] there must be something to support the identity that Hegel's discourse requires between origin and beginnings, law and fact. But, to say the least, one must admit that this identity is not immediately apparent'.*[11]

For Hollier, the whole Hegelian discourse on art is grounded on some very weak foundations: architecture does not hold its position as the first of the arts, and as a consequence of this, the whole logic of *Aufhebung*, which sustains the entire Hegelian philosophy, is, in the *Aesthetics*, threatened with collapse. Hollier, in this first beginning deconstructs the Hegelian discourse by showing how the key position within it is assigned to architecture (a position that architecture can't serenely occupy) a position that is more than necessary in order for this discourse to achieve its monumental aspirations: a total conceptualisation of art, thought, and the world. Furthermore, for Hollier, Hegel's Architecture is more than simply the first of the arts; it is perhaps the 'forced' foundation of the Hegelian system (*Aufhebung*), but also metaphorically the summit of this system: architecture is a metaphor for the Hegelian discourse on art (the *Aesthetics*, that is the best example of the Hegelian 'prose of thought', that is the supersession of the arts, that is the summit of the process it inscribes), and by extension it is also a metaphor for the whole Hegelian discourse and system (*Aufhebung*): the core of its edifice.

The Architectural Metaphor. Having stressed in his first beginning, the importance for Hegel's edifice of the identity of the beginnings with the simple origin, Hollier, in his 'second beginning' discusses what he considers to be the beginning and origin of Bataille's oeuvre: a text which is, interestingly enough, about architecture, *Notre Dame de Rheims*.[12]

Notre Dame de Rheims is a rather short essay more conventionally 'literary' than anything Bataille would later write. Bataille never mentioned it during his lifetime, and it became known through an allusion made by an old classmate of Bataille in an obituary. Its subject matter is the Gothic cathedral of the city of Reims, a town Bataille and his mother left on the verge of The First World War, abandoning his syphilitic and paralysed father, leaving him to the mercy of the advancing German army and consequently to certain death. This short text evokes first the Cathedral in all its splendour, then its devastation during the Great War, and finally in its imaginary, one can say illuminated, transfiguration as the emblem of the most sublime aspirations of a nationalist France finally resurrected. With its thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, the essay is almost academically Hegelian, and Hollier's intelligent move is to have it discussed just after Hegel's *Aesthetics*.[13] Hollier indicates that between the writing of this very first text, and the publishing of Bataille's better known prose, ten years of silence elapsed. Interestingly, he reads in this silence the rupture through which Bataille's *writing* (ecriture) had been produced.[14] He also notes that this silenced (forgotten) text is itself silencing certain events that took place at the same time as the events it discusses: there is no mention of the abandonment and death of Bataille's father. This silence (on the death of his father), is seen by Hollier as the consequence of the will to continuity displayed within the text and imposed by its stylistic effects. Hollier reads the sense of this short text as solely the denial of any 'breaks',[15] the erasing of wounds (the ones of the Cathedral as well as of Bataille), the elimination of all disturbing elements, of all forms of discontinuities. Furthermore, Hollier states that this continuity is symbolised by the Cathedral, by Notre-Dame: thus architecture is, here again, metaphorically seen as the fundamental element on which the core of the message is built. Hollier then states what is undoubtedly the thesis of *La prise de la Concorde*:

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[11] . Ibid.

[12] . Georges Bataille, Notre Dame de Rheims, first published by The imprimerie du Courrier d'Auvergne, Saint Flour, 1919, reprinted in Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, pp. 15-19.

[13] . However, one should note (as Hollier briefly does) that Bataille, only knew of Hegel: 'those texts of his that Kojève discussed, essentially two or three passages from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, but he never seems to have spent any time on *Aesthetics*'. Furthermore, at the time of the redaction of *N-D de Rheims*, Bataille's knowledge of Hegelian philosophy was more than limited, it was nil. See *Against Architecture*, p. 14.

[14] . Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, p. 15.

[15] . Ibid. p. 19.

'All of Bataille's writing would be aimed at the destruction of this cathedral; to reduce it to silence he would write against this text. Not, in a fetishistic fixation with some sort of original sin, against this text alone, against these six pages that in retrospect are so incongruous, but against the veiled ideological necessity controlling it, against a far vaster and more secret cathedral in which it is thoroughly trapped and which somehow prevents it having been written, which makes writing only possible afterwards and against this text, against the oppressive architecture of constructive value'.[16]

Thus, Hollier perceives Bataille's *writing* (ecriture) as an attempt to undo the certainty, continuity, closure and self-assurance of *discourse*,[17] a discourse of which, for Hollier, architecture metaphorically constitutes itself as a symbol, underlies its structure and defines its form.[18] A bit further on, while concluding his excursus on *Notre Dame de Rheims*, he shows how this *writing* should perform:

'In some ways all of Bataille's work will be a rewriting of this initial text, a reworking intended to dismantle such a beginning and draw out its silences. But once again, not because of a paralysed guilt; rather because this text itself is the almost anonymous (and for this reason negligible) result, of the vast ideological system symbolized and maintained by architecture. In order to loosen the structure that is hierarchical and at the same time creates hierarchy, Bataille will introduce the play of writing. Writing in this sense would be a profoundly anti-architectural gesture, a non-constructive gesture, one that, on the contrary, undermines and destroys everything whose existence depends on edifying pretensions'.[19]

Against Architecture, the translated title of *La Prise de la Concorde*, here takes on some significance as, Bataille's *writing* would thus be against architecture, not directly architecture in its physical dimension, but the architecture of the discourse. In other words, for Hollier, Bataille's *writing* operates against the architectural metaphor or the metaphorical workings of architecture within discourse.

Having announced his thesis, Hollier then refines his problematic in a sub-part to this chapter; a segment entitling itself 'The Architectural Metaphor', in which he wishes to show that architecture is the hyper-structure, the system of systems, which imposes the concord of languages and guarantees their universal legibility. However it is important to note, that in this precise segment, where Hollier redefines properly his problem statement, he never refers to Bataille's 'critique' of architecture nor does he quote Bataille. Thus, the brief critique of architecture presented in these pages, a critique that is essential to Hollier's argument, is not Bataille's critique, but rather Hollier's.

Hollier notes that when architecture is discussed, more often than not, it is never simply a question of architecture. He states that although architectural metaphors, which are spread and effective within common language, always refer to the proper meaning of the word architecture, paradoxically this proper meaning remains indeterminate. He contends that architecture refers to whatever there is in an edifice that can't be reduced to the mere building, to whatever escapes, in

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[16] . Ibid.

[17] . Hollier defines the term *Discourse* as such: ' [...] the discourse 'on' is the epitome of a discourse in control, calmly assured of its position. It is deployed with complete assurance in a realm over which it has taken possession, one it has inventoried after first closing it off, to make sure it is absolutely safe. This discourse runs no risk at all, it is not uneasy about the future, it steadily expands. One chooses an object and relies on it. [...] the discourse 'on' is almost overseeing one's property, going around as the master who controls 'his' subject, simultaneously sealing it off and deliberately skirting around it'. In *Against Architecture*, p. 23.

[18] . The form of the discourse is for Hollier, the main characteristic through which the discourse defines itself as a completed, fixed and acknowledged discourse. In his view Bataille's *writing* always refused to adopt the discourse's form. Hollier wishes to read Bataille through this refusal. Bataille's *writing* (ecriture), is thus defined as "[...] that which maintains lack, or rather as that which produces a hole where totality becomes incomplete". Consequently, the term *writing* marks: "the appearance in discourse form of that incompletion that form used to reject". See *Against Architecture*, p. 24.

[19] . Ibid. pp. 22-23.

all construction, from purely utilitarian concerns, to whatever is aesthetic about it.[20] This artistic supplement, what is exterior and added to the simple building, defines for Hollier, architecture. But, due to its status of exteriority this supplement is also paradoxically condemned to represent something other than architecture itself. This constrains architecture to remain only the general framework of representation. Hence, for Hollier:

> *'Architecture represents a religion that it brings alive, a political power that it manifests, an event that it commemorates, etc. Architecture, before any other qualification, is identical to the space of representation; it always represents something other than itself from the moment that it becomes distinguished from mere building'.*[21]

Hollier, then states that this metaphor for architecture, extends to language where architectural metaphors are very common. He gives as examples the 'facades' that conceal a sordid reality, the 'hidden architecture' of the freest work of art, the 'keystones' of every system, etc... Although those metaphors can be seen as simple literary figures and effects, Hollier contends that in their very anonymity, these clichés indicate that they are not innocent: they accomplish an ideological task for which they are the instruments.

> *'Never mind if the proper meaning of architecture remains subject to discussion. What is essential is that it always do [sic] its job. No metaphor is innocent; and the less it is contrived the less it is innocent. Its self-evidence is the ground floor where thought can safely walk in sleep'.*[22]

This 'job' consists, for Hollier, in unifying the various fields of 'ideological production'. That is to say, the architectural metaphor and the vocabulary borrowed from architecture provide the system's form in every area where they appear. This results in a kind of repression of anything exterior and ungraspable by its order: all forms of alterity are rejected.

In order to support his claim, that is in order to demonstrate the central, hegemonic, position of architecture and the imperative achievements of its metaphors, Hollier relies on a few examples taken from philosophy and architectural theory. He recalls that architecture, under the form of the dome, is also the model according to which, in the theories of Johannes Kepler, the world is conceived. A reference to Quatremere de Quincy's *Dictionnaire d'architecture*, allows him to state that this model, that is architecture, does not have a model for itself, it has to produce it, thus as seen from this perspective, architecture re-produces itself as model. Strangely, now, for Hollier, architecture does not represent something exterior to itself anymore, it does not imitate an order but constitutes it: whether the order of the world, of the cosmos, or of society. Architecture is thus seen as the archetype, an archetype having a unifying function, as Hollier stresses it, in one of his digressions on Vitrivius's definition of architecture.[23]

But beyond, Kepler, Vitrivius and Quatremere, the most important argument that Hollier uses in his critique of architecture, is to be found in his short discussion on the importance of architecture, its vocabulary and its metaphors for the 'structuralist' discourse. This argument does not make so much sense to the reader i.e. it does not lead the reader to accept Hollier's problematic, thesis and argumentation, rather, this argument is important for understanding Hollier's true aim and target: a critique of what he names 'structuralism'. Hollier writes:

> *'Hubert Damisch has shown that Viollet-le-Duc's* Dictionnaire de l'architecture française *followed a structuralist analytical method (one since developed by Saussure and the linguists,) before the term was invented. This homology is not purely coincidental. Instead of seeing the architect's discourse as a pre-formation of the linguist's, the homology requires in fact that linguistic analysis be thought of as dominated by the importation of an architectural vocabulary. An importation of which the term "structure" itself is not the least of evidence. That it is used today to describe practically all organizations and all systems, that*

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[20] . Ibid. p. 31.
[21] . Ibid. pp. 31-32.
[22] . Ibid. p. 32.
[23] . See Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, p. 33-36.

structuralism is today the major form of thought, shows just how far the domination extends'.[24]

As the institutionalised discourse at the time of the publication of *La prise de la Concorde*, or at least as the institutionalised discourse that started to be questioned in the late 1960s, structuralism is, in my view, the true target of Hollier. Thus, it appears that Hollier wishes to construct a certain Bataille, a post-structuralist *avant la lettre* (indeed Bataille died in 1962, much before anyone spoke of overtaking structuralism), as a critic through its own *writing* (ecriture), of structuralism and of the architectural metaphors which 'dominate' it. Hollier's Bataille being against architecture's metaphorical agency on discourse, his oeuvre is seen as indirectly working against this attempt to understand the 'structuration' behind mere appearances and consequently to discover the hyper-structure of the real and its objects that was structuralism. Somehow while playing *his* Bataille against architecture, Hollier actually plays him against structuralism.[25]

Hollier reinforces his critique of structuralism in the next segment of this chapter, a segment entitled: 'Summa Theologica'. There, Hollier discusses Erwin Panofsky's *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*, a book which unveils a structural homology between the construction principles of Gothic cathedrals and the structure of the *Summae* that were the required rhetorical forms for books in which, from the twelfth century on, the Church summarized and spread its knowledge and dogmas; a formal organisation of wisdom and laws whose most famous example is without any doubt the *Summa Theologica* by Saint Thomas Aquinas. Following Panofsky, Hollier argues that the revealed homology between these two ideological productions can be found in the details of their respective structures, focusing on three essential points. First, both the Gothic cathedral and the scholastic *Summa* are bound to an identical systematic endeavour: to sum up the totality of human knowledge. Second, both have their internal structure governed by an homology: the Summa is organised in such a way that all of its parts are placed in a constant relationship with each other, while the Gothic cathedral is also structured around the single principle of the ribbed vault. Finally both are organized hierarchically: they are perhaps composed of distinctive elements, but an articulation between those prevails. Hollier then observes the particular method, through which, Panofsky makes this homology between the structure of Gothic cathedrals and that of the *Summae* stand out. He quotes Panosky:

'It is necessary to put the notional content of doctrine in parentheses and to concentrate our attention on its modus operandi, *to borrow a term from the scholastics themselves'.*[26]

Hollier notes that Panofsky retains from the architectural practice only the formal features of its method, without bringing in the material and ideological content (construction means, ornaments, religious intent) that it conveys. Furthermore, Hollier states that Panofsky also reads the *Summa* as a form of didactic exposition, independently of the 'material' on which it is focused. But Hollier contends that this way of seeing the architect's work, entirely from the formal point of view, as the intuition of a plan, as a form of conception, as opposed to the material realization; this way of *conceiving* architecture is not different from that of Saint Thomas himself. For as Hollier quotes him: the architect is the man "who conceived the form of the edifice without himself manipulating the material". Hence, as for Hollier this distinction, which is essential to Saint Thomas' argument, between the formal conception and the material realization is in no way ideologically neutral, Panofsky's structuralist method, which merely repeats the scholastic's endeavour, cannot be considered to be as neutral as it pretends. Panofsky's structuralist method is somehow imbued

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[24] . Ibid. p.32.

[25] . As the term 'structuralism' is used to qualify a rather great number of intellectual inquiries present in many differents scholarly fields (from linguistic to anthropology, passing by sociology), I must here defines 'which' structuralism, in my view, Hollier is targeting. Genuinely, I think Hollier targets a rather early and basic version of structuralism. An early structuralism that Roland Barthes himself (while he was taking his distance from it) characterized as the 'dream of scientificity'. That is a structuralism that defines itself as the objective discovery and study of the structures hiding behind the mere appearance of the real and its object, in order to unveil a scientific 'truth', i.e. a method of inquiry that does not acknowledges its own bias, does not perceive itself as a means of the dominant ideologies and believes it leads to the discovery of a rational truth.

[26] . Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*, p.89. Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, p.42.

with the conceptualization of scholastic architecture which it desired, with the necessary scholarly distance, to study. For Hollier, structuralism is, thus, a compromised form of thought, as it appears under the influence of architectural concepts, vocabulary and metaphors.

After these foregoing remarks, Hollier finally closes his 'second beginning', i.e. this essay 'The Architectural Metaphor' with a last segment discussing Bataille's article: 'Architecture'. Having thus shown the hegemonic position of architecture within culture, the totalitarian agency of its metaphors within language, and finally the compromise of the 'structuralist' endeavour with architecture, Hollier is here at ease with interpreting Bataille's 'critique' of 'Architecture,' as similar to his own. But, it is important to note that here Hollier limits the demonstration of the homology between Bataille's 'critique' of architecture and his own, to the discussion of this particular example: the article 'architecture'. This limitation is not benign; it is rather seminal, for it allows Hollier to reaffirm his thesis. Thus, Bataille's statements are only discussed from this particular perspective, i.e. as a critique of architecture's hegemonic position and of the agency of its metaphors in different cultural fields (among them language). This can be seen, for example, in the proposed interpretation of these two excerpts:

> 'Architecture is the expression of the very soul of societies, just as human physiognomy is the expression of the individuals' souls. It is, however, particularly to the physiognomies of official personages (prelates, magistrates, admirals) that this comparison pertains. In fact it is only the ideal soul of society, that which has the authority to command and prohibit, that which is expressed in architectural compositions properly speaking'.[27]

> 'Moreover, each time that architectural composition turns up somewhere other than in monuments, whether it is in physiognomy, costume, music, or painting, one may infer a prevailing taste for the divine or human authority. The great compositions of certain painters express the desire to force the spirit into an official ideal'.[28]

While the first of those Bataille's statements, could be interpreted as a critique of society's power structures and their agency on architecture, Hollier demands that the reader understands those lines as the critique of architecture's self-agency, as a denunciation of architecture's active intervention in the very field it should represent. Hollier:

> 'Architecture, formerly the image of social order, now guarantees and even imposes this order. From being a simple symbol it has now become master. Architecture captures society in the trap of the image it offers, fixing it in the specular image it reflects back'.[29]

As for the second excerpt, while one could understand this statement as the critique of how some dominant segments of society impose a certain 'architectural' form or order in different cultural fields, Hollier contends that those lines should be read as the contestation of architecture's expansions, of its own and proper metaphors. As he proposes it:

> 'Perhaps, apart from [its] expansion, architecture itself is nothing. It exists only to control and shape the entire social arena. It is constituted by this impulse propelling it to erect itself as the centre and to organize all activities around itself'.[30]

Thus, Hollier constructs a rather peculiar Bataille; a Bataille who should agree with his critique of architecture's hegemony, with his denunciation of the architectural metaphors operating within language and probably with his attacks on the 'structuralist' analogy: a Bataille, who, in consequence, proposes within his own text, through his *writing* (ecriture), a radical critique of architecture. Hollier finally concludes this essay by stating how this critique should operate:

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[27] . Georges Bataille, "architecture" in *Document* n.2, may 1929, reprinted in Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, p. 46-47.

[28] . Ibid. p. 51.

[29] . Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, p. 47.

[30] . Ibid. p. 51.

'The critique of architecture will be accomplished through a polyphonic deconstruction, the result of an inter-textual play of a dialogue of multiple writings and signifying practices [...]'.[31]

What seems to me extremely interesting in this final statement of Hollier, besides the definition of Bataille's critique of architecture as an *'inter-textual play'* which grounds (and perhaps also limits) this process into the frame of literature, is, actually, Hollier's subsequent definition of this *'intertextual play'* as an exchange between Bataille's *writing* (ecriture), and his more theoretical and signifying texts (discourse): between the form, or in this particular case the absence/erasure of form, and the content/meaning that is still present through his prose. Till this point, Hollier had simply stated that Bataille's *writing* (ecriture) is the simple means through which Bataille unbinds, the closure, continuity and structure of discourse. Now, it seems that his more 'signifying' practice is also joining the anti-architectural movement. This is on the one hand not surprising, and on the other very stimulating. For now that Hollier has quoted, analysed and interpreted one of Bataille's signifying texts (the article 'architecture') as being exemplary of his critique of architecture, it seems logical that he inscribes Bataille's discursive prose within this deconstructive enterprise. On the other hand this inscription is very stimulating because it avoids to recreate: first, the dialectical (Hegelian) scheme of opposition between architecture (discourse) and writing (critique) and then the expectation for the logic of *aufhebung* to proceed, i.e. the supersession or the sublation of both terms. Rather, what Hollier proposes is, instead of a problematic of opposition, suppression and repression, a problematic, precisely of inscription, i.e. the *writing* (critique) is inscribed within the discourse (architecture), not as what supersedes it but as what undermines it from within. But, one may ask, why now? Why did Hollier return to Bataille's signifying discourse after the problematic of *La prise de la Concorde* was set up? Why did he not discuss Bataille's other articles on architecture, such as "Factory Chimney", "Space", "Slaughter House", "Museum", "The Obelisk", while he constructed his critique of architecture and the architectural metaphors? Perhaps the reason is as simple as this: Bataille's 'critique' of architecture does not appear (if read with all its nuances i.e. read in its 'context' and as a 'whole') as a critique of architecture's self-hegemonic position, of the agency of its metaphors and of Structuralism's compromise with it through the analogy's principle. Perhaps Hollier's oppositional critique of architecture does not mirror Bataille's position or 'take' on architecture.

The Labyrinth, the Pyramid and the Labyrinth *and* the Caesarean. In the second half of *La prise de la Concorde*, Denis Hollier, having demonstrated the interdependence of the monumental aspirations of Hegel's discourse/system and the key position within it assigned to architecture, having also denounced how forcefully the impetus behind that complicity continued to motivate the efforts of what was called 'Structuralism', and finally having shown the hegemonic position of architecture within culture and evoked the totalitarian agency of its metaphors within all cultural fields, Denis Hollier thus, goes on to constitute the entirety of Bataille's oeuvre as an elaborate strategy, an *inter-textual play*, for undermining architecture i.e. the architecture of discourse.

Therefore, the two last essays of this book, 'The Labyrinth, the Pyramid and the Labyrinth' and 'The Caesarean' discuss some experience ('Eroticism'), process ('scissiparity'), myths ('The Solar Anus' and 'The Pineal Eye'), and most importantly – in the perspective of this dissertation – some architectural metaphors (the 'Labyrinth' and the 'Pyramid'), through which, according to Hollier, Bataille induces an undoing or un-working of discursive structures – a squandering of the discourse's architecture. I won't discuss here Bataille's theoretical elaboration on 'Eroticism', his necessary failure to organize into a book the fragments that constitute 'The Pineal Eye', or his paradoxical employment of the process of 'Scissiparity'.[32] Rather I would like to briefly focus – for reasons that seem essential to the purpose of this first chapter – on Hollier's understanding of Bataille's use of these architectural metaphors: the 'Labyrinth' and the 'Pyramid'.

In Hollier's view, Bataille uses the architectural metaphor of the 'Labyrinth' with a double aim: First, Bataille refers to a 'Labyrinth' in order to evoke the labyrinthine structure of existence where 'being' gets lost, and then to claim that language itself, follows a certain labyrinthine

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[31] . Ibid. p. 56..

[32] . I will come back to those materials in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

pattern.[33] For Bataille, human existence is bound up with language. No one can ever represent his own total existence outside of its frame. Consequently, individuals or beings are only something mediated by words and, thus, the concept of 'being' understood as an autonomous agent is by definition arbitrary; for 'being' is always mediated or 'related' to/by language. But, according to Hollier, Bataille does not let 'being' in its state of being related, he contends that being is nowhere, is lost. There is no 'being' outside language, and because it is necessarily 'mediated' by language it is reduced to a 'language being': it is the 'being' of language that deprives me of what is revealed through my own perception as to what is my very own being. This 'language being' actually separates me from what Bataille calls *ipseite*.[34] it is where 'my' own 'being' gets lost as in a labyrinth. Human beings have for themselves only an existence whose structure is labyrinthine, the place where 'being' comes to the fore just in order to vanish.

Hollier demonstrates that language is also a labyrinth in itself by showing the 'battle field' that it fairly constitutes. This 'battle field' opposes *copula* and *substance* or the 'definite' meaning of the words and their interminable interactions. Language is made up of vocabulary i.e. a lexical base composed of different words each of which has a proper meaning attached to it: its substance. But, the language, properly speaking, does not produce sentences unless the words are assembled, put together around some verb form, i.e. through a syntactic process: the copula of terms. In Hollier's view, language is thus composed of two functions (lexical or syntactic) whose primary aims are to compete. The lexical function tends to preserve and stabilize meaning, while its syntactic counterpart attempts to enrich it through 'crossing' this 'fixed' sense, and as such seriously wound it. Language is, thus, a labyrinth, it possesses a labyrinthine structure due to its capacity to constantly threat and often to destroy what is most stable, ordered and legitimate within itself: meaning.

Then Hollier contends that the Pyramid is used as a metaphor by Bataille, for expressing the way out of the Labyrinth, or rather the mere intention that one might have to get out of the Labyrinth, to elevate oneself above the Labyrinth, because no one can really be sure if he is outside (and consequently also inside) and thus no one knows if he has succeeded (in getting out or in). Within the Labyrinth which language is, this Pyramid consists of the reading based on the lexical function, i.e. the lexical reading. This reading privileges and defends the meaning of the words. It discards their combinations, and opposes the syntactic reading, which shows the words' interplay. This lexical reading is the reading of reason, of science and philosophy, which attempt to make sense of the world.

Further Hollier affirms that, within the labyrinthine structure of 'being's' existence, the Pyramid also appears to be the 'Icarian' way out. The *ipseite* being denied to the subject, it becomes objectified. As 'being' is nowhere to be found, a certain 'mischievous morbidity' proposes to crown it as Bataille states, under the form of the divine, the leader, the idea or the concept, 'at the summit of the pyramid formed by beings forming themselves from the vastness of the simplest matter'.[35] Hollier claims that this 'mischievous morbidity' is caused by the philosopher, and more generally 'by any practise of theory as the function of knowledge'.[36] Scientific discourse assumes knowledge as its function. Scientists and philosophers look at 'being' from an objectified point of view. They somehow overlook their own participation into 'being'. They put the labyrinthine structure of 'being's' existence at a distance, like Icarus they fly above the Labyrinth and propose an overview of it from the top of the Pyramid they have constructed.

However, Hollier concludes, because of the permanent copula's return within language and its symptomatic effects on 'being', the Pyramid is just a temporary illusion: 'Icarus flies away, but he falls down again'.[37] For Hollier, perhaps the Labyrinth and the Pyramid are opposed, but one cannot choose one or the other. They are mutually exclusive but cannot be separated. The Pyramid implies the Labyrinth, and the labyrinth in its turn implies the Pyramid:

[33]. Georges Bataille, "Le Labyrinthe" in *Recherches Philosophiques* V, 1935-36 ,(O. C., t.1,p.436). A slightly different version is available in Georges Bataille, *L'Experience interieure*,(O. C. t. 5).

[34]. *Ipseite* is for Bataille, any differentiating quality there is in an individual that is irreplaceable and incomparable, that is *itself* (ipse) and not another.

[35]. Georges Bataille, "Le Labyrinthe" in *Recherches Philosophiques* V, 1935-36 ,(O. C., t.1,p.435). A slightly different version is available in Georges Bataille, *L'Experience interieure*,(O. C. t. 5,p.98.).

[36]. Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*,tr. Betsy Wing,London: MIT press, 1989,p.72.

[37]. Ibid. p.73.

'One of the labyrinth's most subtle (treacherous) detours leads one to believe it is possible to get out, even making one desire to do so. Sublimation is a false exit that is an integral part of its economy. The pyramid is only a product of the labyrinth itself, and thoroughly belongs to it'.[38]

Hollier's excursus on Bataille's recourse to the architectural metaphors of the 'Labyrinth' and the 'Pyramid', allows him to demonstrate that, therefore, Bataille's *writing* (ecriture) embraces with ecstasy the labyrinthine structure of language. Bataille does not pretend to represent the Labyrinth nor the pyramid, although sometimes his *writing*, due to the close ties that the Pyramid and the Labyrinth preserve, must pass through a pyramidal moment. Rather, in Hollier's view, Bataille writes through the Labyrinth in order to tear down the architecture of the discourse: the Pyramid.

I.1.2. The limits, bias and restrictions of *Against Architecture*

A squandering of the values which maintain the Hegelian 'edifice' erect, so to speak, an attack on a certain structuralist's strain seen as compromised by the architectural impetus, an onslaught on the hegemonic position occupied by architecture within culture, and an erosion of the totalitarian agency of architectural metaphors within all cultural fields, Hollier's *Bataille*, as the one writing against architecture's discourse, is, in my view, among the most impressive deconstructive efforts ever published.

Once again, I do not wish to undermine Denis Hollier's impressive achievement in the field of literary studies. Nor do I pretend to radically criticize his reading of Bataille's texts. Rather I would just modestly point to a few problems one might encounter while trying to transpose – that is to appropriate – to the field of architectural theory and criticism such an exhilarating thesis without carefully noticing its structure, aim, content and form. Thus, I will, in what follows and under the aspect of three remarks, show what constitutes, in my view, the limits which *Against Architecture* offers to the architectural discipline. In other words I aim at presenting the bias and restrictions that this book may initiate in all direct attempts at using it as a framework for architectural criticism and theory. As my remarks have already been partially expounded upon in the above text, I hope now to present them with greater clarity. These remarks concern, first, *Against Architecture*'s form or 'style' of writing (*ecriture*), then its structure, content and true aim, and in conclusion, its relevance to our field of study.

My first remarks concern the style or 'writing's' form of *Against Architecture*. Writing against the core of discourse, its architecture, thus writing against discourse is a difficult endeavour. Moreover, writing on a *writing*, which undoes discourse, is an even more daring enterprise, and in doing so, one might quickly end up producing a *discourse on* writing. In doing as such one might stabilize, order and structure what was standing outside of the discourse's realm, its transgression: one might betray the *writing* by writing *on* it, by producing a discourse *on*, but Hollier gets away from such a predicament by espousing Bataille's own *writing* pattern. He is not writing *on* Bataille but literally writing *through* him. Indeed, Hollier's writing embodies several times Bataille's labyrinthine structure of *writing*. Within the pages of *Against Architecture*, as within Bataille's prose, the fight between *copula* and *substance* of the words is raging. Meaning is never ensured, it is constantly threatened: sometimes it seems to rise out of the labyrinthine writing, but this moment is purely ephemeral. Soon meaning is lost again: an affirmation is (almost) immediately followed by its negation, as for examples in this passage on Adolf Loos' famous definition of architecture taken from the new introduction Hollier wrote for the American edition of *La Prise de la Concorde* in 1989:

'In this definition architecture is recognized first by the affect it produces (...) you turn serious (...) you perceive an absence, evoking someone not living here, or rather someone here, not living'.[39]

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[38]. Ibid.

[39]. Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, p. xxi. My own (non) italics.

However this display of amazing literary skill, this ability to *write*, this exhilarating squandering of meaning, this fascinating achievement is also paradoxically, the first restriction that the book offers. Indeed, this restriction concerns the inability of the book to communicate a message, to deliver meaning, and thus to demonstrate a thesis. In other words such a book written in such a fashion cannot pretend to offer an 'academic' or 'scientific,' reading of Bataille, for reasons which seem obvious and essential to its commitment, i.e. the undoing of discourse and its architecture. Thus, to propose a 'Pyramidal' reading of the book, i.e. to 'present' its thesis (as I did above) is somehow to betray the book itself. *Against Architecture* is not a book providing a set of tools and concepts ready to be used by some other critical enterprise. On the contrary it should be read as the impossibility to extract stable concepts and a framework out of Bataille's labyrinthine oeuvre. Hence, its relevance and usefulness to 'scientific' and 'academic' architectural criticism/theory is close to being nil. In short *Against Architecture* provides more questions than answers. Is there truly a thesis in *Against Architecture*? Should there be one? Is there consequently a demonstration of a claim, somewhere in the book? Is Bataille's *writing* truly against architecture? Is *Against Architecture* against anything, actually? And, finally, if there were truly a claim, a thesis and its demonstration, wouldn't they be null and void for the very reason they are put into a discourse's form, (re)presented? In other words, what is the validity of a 'Pyramidal' reading of that book? Isn't Hollier holding out this trap, this 'pyramid' in order to allow the reader to fall back into Bataille's labyrinth? Isn't Hollier waiting for someone to come and tear down this pyramidal reading out of which *Against Architecture* is conventionally understood?

My second set of remarks concerns *Against Architecture*'s structure, content and true aim. Hollier brilliantly demonstrates the interdependence of the monumental aspirations of Hegel's discourse/system and the key position which is, out of necessity, assigned within it to architecture, i.e. architecture as the simple origin of art; an original simplicity which is, if we follow Hollier, simply missing. There, it seems obvious that Hollier follows a deconstructive path, and perhaps not any path. Indeed the onslaught on an original simplicity and its deconstruction into an 'an-original' complexity reminds the reader of Jacques Derrida's attack on 'Logocentrism' and on the usual primacy of 'speech' over 'writing': in brief, 'Logocentrism', by claiming that 'speech' is the primal and full form of expression, inevitably ignores or conceals the fact that, if 'writing' is a supplement to 'speech', something must be absent in 'speech' that has to be supplemented. Thus 'speech', for Derrida, does not arise simply from an 'origin', but rather from an 'originary lack' or an 'an-original complexity'.[40] Hence, Hollier follows Derrida's deconstructive pattern in order, first to show Hegel's instrumental theorization of the simplicity of the origin of art, and then to demonstrate the lack of this origin or, at least, the presence, in its place, of an 'an-original complexity'. However, *Against Architecture* is also guilty of such a 'Hegelian' move. Indeed, Hollier's thesis which states that Bataille's entire oeuvre is an attempt at un-working the hidden structure or architecture of his first text, *Notre Dame de Rheims*, (or in other words, Bataille's writing is an attempt at undoing the discourse's architecture which is precisely concealed within his first text), thus, this thesis, in order to be valid needs to possess the 'original simplicity' Hollier refuses to allow to Hegel's *Aesthetics* Bataille must have written against his very first text, *Notre Dame de Rheims*. Hollier wants to read this *silenced* (missing) text as some 'originary lack', claiming that Bataille, by silencing this first text and writing against it, didn't surrender to the desire for an ordered discourse: a discourse that securely develops from its origin (as Hegel did). Somehow Hollier wishes to construct a 'Bataille', who is a 'post-structuralist' *avant la lettre*, or even a 'Bataille' who is a 'Deriddean', forty years before Jacques Derrida ever published anything. But, this interpretation of *Notre Dame de Rheims* *as* an 'originary lack' is exclusively Hollier's. Indeed, although Bataille never referenced this text during his life-time, the silence surrounding his early prose might also (in my view), be simply understood as a pronounced disdain for a text, which did not match his subsequent literary achievements. Furthermore, at the time of the publication of *Notre Dame de Rheims*, Bataille had yet not encountered the thought of Hegel (and even less the *Lectures on Aesthetics*).[41] Nor,

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[40]. For more on Derrida's critique of 'Logocentrism', see for examples, Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatolgy*, tr. G.C. Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1997, or *Writing and Difference*, tr. A. Bass, London: Routledge & Kegal, 1978, or *Speech and Phenomena*, tr. D.B. Allison, Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973.

[41]. Bataille will have been introduced to Hegel's ideas, as were many other French intellectuals of the inter-war period, by Alexandre Kojeve's lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, not before the year 1932.

obviously, had he any knowledge of Derrida's material, which discuss the problem of 'Logocentrism', and the issue of the 'originary lack', given the date of their publication, which occurred a few years after the death of Bataille in 1962. Hence, Hollier's *Against Architecture*, in a way similar to Hegel's Aesthetics that it criticizes, misses its original simplicity. Instead of this original simplicity, *Against Architecture* is constructed on some 'an-original complexity' with two non-simple beginnings ('The Hegelian edifice' and 'The Architectural Metaphor'). But after all, this was, perhaps, the intention? Perhaps Hollier founded his own 'Labyrinth' quite early in the book? Nevertheless, it is seminal to note – with regard to the relevance of Bataille text's to architectural criticism – that due to the discrepancies between its own structure and the structural critiques it pronounces (i.e. the lack of simplicity of the origin), *Against Architecture* does not have a plausible, rational explanation for the cause of its claim (Bataille wrote against the architecture of his very first text). Although, I find this 'lack' seducing rather than disturbing, I must acknowledge that *Against Architecture* barely manages to defend what is, too often by convention, understood as its thesis but also fails to sustain its translated title (Bataille's writing undoes the discourse's architecture, i.e. 'against architecture'). If I may summarize briefly, that Bataille wrote against the agency and order of discourse is certain, but that he, as early as 1918 (*Notre Dame de Rheims*) or even 1926 (when he 'wrote' *The Story of the Eye*, which is considered by Hollier as the first utterance of his 'writing'), perceived the discourse's 'structure' and order as bound to the architectural, could not be more doubtful. Thus, it is extremely risky, from an architectural perspective, to consider Bataille's texts as simply 'against architecture' and consequently to adopt his numerous subversive notions and operations as potential devices which 'solve' the problem inherent in architecture's totalitarian hegemony (as claimed by Hollier).

Hollier's aggressive stubbornness towards architecture is probably linked to what constitutes, in my view, the true aim of *Against Architecture*: a rejection of structuralism. Indeed, as I mentioned above, Hollier's reference to Hubert Damisch's reflections, in his introduction to *L'architecture raisonnée*, on Viollet-le-Duc's *Dictionnaire de l' architecture française* and his radical criticism towards Erwin Panofsky's *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*, betray an obvious contempt for the movement of thought which was institutionalised when *Against Architecture* was first published in French, under the title of *La Prise de La Concorde*: structuralism. Hollier's Bataille being against architecture's metaphorical agency on discourse, against the way architecture 'organizes' discourses, his oeuvre is seen as indirectly working against the attempts of a certain structuralism ordered by architectural patterns (in Hollier's post-structuralist view), and which pretends to understand the 'structuration' behind mere appearances or to discover the hyper-structure of the real and its objects, but which actually organizes its subject matter according to its own ideological bias. With *Against Architecture*, Hollier constructs a peculiar Bataille; a Bataille who should be a post-structralist *avant la lettre*, a critic through his own *writing* (ecriture) of the agencies of architectural concepts, vocabulary and metaphors with which structuralism (in Hollier's view) is compromised. Repeating what I already mentioned: while playing *his* Bataille against architecture, Hollier actually plays him against structuralism. Architecture is rather the sparring partner, and finally perhaps the victim, of *Against Architecture* in its assault on structuralism. Hence, once again, but this time not with regard to its written-form or structure, but from the perspective of its ultimate aim, *Against Architecture* does not appear as simply oriented against architecture.

My last words on this particular aspect of the subject, concern the content, or rather the scope of materials discussed within the pages of *Against Architecture*. As I have already explained, Denis Hollier's critique of architecture in 'the Architectural Metaphor' is not based on a close reading of Bataille's articles and texts on the subject. Rather it is constructed on several texts borrowed from the realm of architectural theory and philosophy. Hollier quotes, first Johannes Kepler in order to demonstrate that the world is conceived on an architectural model, then Quatremere de Quincy in order to claim that architecture is its own model, and finally Vitruvius on the archetypal status of architecture. The one and only, among the numerous of Bataille's texts and articles on architecture that Hollier critically assesses during the (re)definition of his 'thesis', apart from *Notre Dame de Rheims* and 'The Labyrinth' (which is discussed from the perspective it opens on 'Language' and the nature of 'Being', and thus not for its critical potential with regard to architecture), is the article entitled 'Architecture'. Moreover, Hollier discusses this article at the end of 'The Architectural Metaphor' immediately after his own critique of architecture as been stated. The article 'Architecture' is thus read from the perspective of Hollier's critique, seriously influencing

the reading of Bataille's critique. The other texts on architecture, such as 'Factory Chimney', 'Space', 'Slaughter House', 'Museum' to name but a few, are simply silenced or briefly touched on, without their content being carefully discussed.[42] Furthermore, this restriction in the range of texts studied in *Against Architecture*, is not limited to those having architecture as their subject. Indeed, as Hollier himself acknowledges, the time frame of *Against Architecture* spans the last days of the First World War (with the publication of *Notre dame de Rheims*) to the first days of what was to be the Second World War (with the first lines of Bataille's book *Guilty*).[43] Thus, Bataille's texts written and published during and after, the Second World War, are simply omitted or just named without being discussed. Hence, Bataille's major 'theoretical' trilogy on 'excess' and the means of 'expenditure' related to it, published (for the first volume: *Consumption*) in 1949, under the title *The Accursed Share*, is totally ignored in Hollier's reflections. This omission constitutes in my view, the 'Achilles' heel' of *Against Architecture*. Indeed, this trilogy on 'excess' and 'expenditure' as a theorization, as a discourse *on* the 'excess', forms the major counterpart to Bataille's *writing* as the *writing* which exceeds meaning, the writing *of* the 'excess'. Thus, taking into consideration those omitted texts might lead to a completely other interpretation of Bataille's work, and by extension to a new understanding of Bataille's view on architecture, and finally, of the 'base' relevance of Bataille's oeuvre to architectural theory and criticism.

My last set of remarks refers directly to *Against Architecture's* relevance to architectural criticism and theory. Bataille, above all, was a writer, and the numerous scholarly works on the subject of Bataille, in the field of literary studies, focus mainly on his *writing* (ecriture), and I hope to have shown that Denis Hollier's *Against Architecture* is not foreign to such endeavours. Those endeavours might be qualified as linguistic or literary studies and it is, in my view, precisely the literary or linguistic nature of those studies that limit their pertinence to architectural criticism. To apply literally their critiques and their subsequent outcomes (the unveiled patterns) to the architectural field demands the restriction, in my view, of one's understanding of architecture to, simply, a language. In other words the transposition of, linguistic or even literary criticism to architecture might end up narrowing the discussion of architecture through the linguistic analogy. Of course, I am well aware of the 'tradition' of the 'language analogy' in architecture. A language analogy which started as early as the mid- eighteenth century with, for example, the theoretical work of Francesco Milizia *Principii d'architettura civile* in Italy or the *Livre d'Architecture* of Germain Boffrand and the *Cours d'Architecture* of J.F. Blondel in France, which appeared also during the nineteenth century in the work of such well known architects as Quatremere de Quincy, J.N.L. Durand, John Ruskin, Claude Nicolas Ledoux, Gottfried Semper or William Morris, finally extending into the second part of the twentieth century with the work of Venturi, Christopher Alexander, Rossi, or Peter Eisenman.[44] However, in my view, the problem of the 'language analogy' in architecture resides in the restrictions it imposes on architecture and by extension onto architectural criticism and the way this 'analogy' distorts the reception of theoretical sources. It is one thing to perceive that architecture contains a certain complexity within its expressions and articulations in a way that is similar to the proper complexity of language, but, it is another thing to conclude from this observation, that architecture *is* a language, or perhaps worse, that it can be studied (and worked out) *like* language, i.e. through a semantic, semiotic or linguistic process. My view is best summarized in the words of the late British critic Robin Evans, who, with the most disarming irony and clarity, has expressed the problem of the 'language analogy' for architecture:

> *'(...) a few more words might be spent on language; more particularly, on the common antilogy that would have architecture be like language but also independent of it. All things*

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[42]. Here, it is important to notice that in the introduction written for the English publication of *La Prise de la Concorde* in 1989, entitled 'Bloody Sunday', Hollier discusses two Bataille texts, which were silenced within *La Prise*. Those are the articles 'Museum' and 'Slaughterhouse'. Their discussion in this new introduction seems somewhat awkward, due to the fact that Hollier is forced there to discuss the notions of expenditure and excess as well as Bataille's theorization of them while he refrained to assess it in the original body of text of *La Prise*. See, Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, p. xii.

[43]. See the Backcover of *La Prise de La Concorde*, Paris: Gallimard, reprint, 1993.

[44]. For a more complete account on the 'Language analogy' in architecture, see Adrian Forty, *Words an Buildings*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2000, pp. 62-85.

with a conceptual dimension are like language, as all grey things are like elephants. A great deal in architecture may be language-like without being language'.[45]

Although Evans' critique is directed at the paradoxical understanding of architecture achieved by some scholars championing the 'language analogy' for defending a certain architectural autonomy (who perceive architecture as a language but still autonomous from 'The' language), and not simply at the 'language analogy' in architecture, I must mention that, in my view, within the particular frame of a study on Bataille's texts that refer to architecture, the 'language analogy' would not only restrict the scope of what is understood as the architectural, but also betray Bataille's radical discussion of architecture as bound to the socio-political realm. To consider architecture only as a language is per se to avoid discussing its socio-political function. Thus to read Bataille's texts from this analogism or perspective, as might be the only choice for the reader of *Against Architecture*, means also to literally amputate Bataille's texts on architecture from their radical dimension. In other words, to consider that, as Bataille might have written against the architecture of the discourse from within this discourse, one could write some architectural language against architecture itself, is, apart from violently limiting the scope of the architectural to a formal realm, also to restrict, by analogy, Bataille's criticism to a simple discussion on architectural form.[46] Paraphrasing Evans, I'd like to say that for sure, not all grey things are like elephants, more especially ivory hunters wearing grey jackets. Hence, as impressive and brilliant as Hollier's study might be, to simply construct a critique of architecture or to develop a theoretical attitude based on it, i.e. to discuss the 'form' of architecture and the potential transgression that Bataille's *writing* might represent for it, would be, in my view, to radically miss Bataille's perception of architecture's socio-political function and consequently to limit, to restrict and to bias its relevance to architectural criticism and theory.

I.2. Bernard Tschumi's early writings

Perhaps the first noticeable evidence of the influence exerted by Bataille's oeuvre on architectural theory and criticism is to be found in the early writings of the young French-Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi. In 1975, Tschumi published his seminal 'Advertisements for Architecture' in *Art Forum* and his essay 'Questions of Space: The Pyramid and the labyrinth or the Architectural Paradox' in *Studio International*.[47] A few months later during the winter 1976, another extremely important text with regard to the definition of Tschumi's theoretical position, appeared in *Oppositions* 7, its title: 'Architecture and Transgression'.[48] In these texts Bernard Tschumi criticises modernism for its purism and functionalism for its dogmatic approach towards form, hoping to establish an alternative to those by defining a 'critical', 'eroticised' and 'transgressive' architecture. As Renata Hejduk brilliantly demonstrated in her doctoral thesis entitled, *Models of the Mind: A Theoritical Framework for the continental Radical Avant-Garde in Architecture around 1968*,[49] Tschumi's critique of Modernism and his sympathy for transgression and the rupture of limits, boundaries and

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[45]. Robin Evans, 'Translation from drawing to Building', in *Translations from Drawing to Building and other Essays*, London: AA Documents n.2, 1997, p. 154.

[46]. Furthermore, the problem of analogy, transfer or transposition, was identified by Bataille himself, in the last essay he published in the review, *Documents*, 'The Modern Spirit and the Play of Transpositions'. This essay is a condemnation of art as nothing but another layer of transposition, an allusion, which through an analogy pretends to unleash "baseness" but actually ends up in its sublimation. Although Bataille does not use here the word 'analogy' it is clear, in my view, that, beyond condemning modern art's impotence, he wishes to discredit any form of analogy between the realm of practice and the one of the visual art, between socially subversive operations and their visual representation. Thus, it is no risk to state that Bataille would have been horrified by the transposition of his *writing* into an architectural language even for the sake of its transgression for the simple reason that such an endeavour would simply transform the transgression raging within *writing* into its sublimation in architectural form. See, Georges Bataille, 'L'Esprit moderne et le jeu des Transpositions', in *O.C.* vol.1, Paris: Gallimard, 1976, pp. 271-74.

[47]. Bernard Tschumi, 'Questions of Space: The Pyramid and the labyrinth or the Architectural Paradox' in *Studio International*, Sept-Oct, 1975

[48]. Bernard Tschumi, 'Architecture and Transgression' in *Oppositions* 7, Winter, 1976, pp. 55-63.

[49]. Renata Hejduk, *Models of the Mind: A Theoritical Framework for the continental Radical Avant-Garde in Architecture around 1968*, Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 2001.

hierarchies is not very surprising given the context of his intellectual formation as an architect at the Parisian Beaux Arts school during the events of May 1968, and his subsequent acquaintance with the Situationists' writings and the work of Henri Lefebvre. However, I disagree with Hejduk's 2007 article for *The Journal of Architecture* in which she states, after having pointed to Bataille's influence on Tschumi's understanding of notions such as transgression, violence and eroticism, that 'Tschumi has learned his lessons of violence well'.[50] Indeed, my claim here is that actually, Tschumi didn't read Bataille properly, and my thesis would be that he probably did not read Bataille at all, but rather Denis Hollier's *Against Architecture*. Moreover, I hope to demonstrate that his reading of Hollier constitutes, unfortunately, a misreading which leads to a serious betrayal of Bataille's textual practice. In order to do so, I will limit my argument to those of Tschumi's essays which quote Bataille's work, or at least refer to him directly: 'The Architectural Paradox' and 'Architecture and Transgression'. Thus, I won't discuss here those essays of Tschumi which perhaps discuss notions, terms and concepts familiar to all Bataille's readers but which do not explicitly show a connection to Bataille's work: 'The pleasure of Architecture', 'The Violence of architecture' and 'Architecture and the Limits I, II, III'.[51] To do the opposite — i.e. to suppose the influence of Bataille on these (as Hejduk did in her *Journal of Architecture*'s article) — on the one hand would mean to display a relative incapacity for clearing out the entanglement of Tschumi's influences (Barthes, Althusser, Foucault, Lefebvre and the Situationist) and consequently to draw academically inappropriate conclusions, and on the other hand, doing so could appear to be a subterfuge, used to facilitate my claim's demonstration of Tschumi's misreading of Hollier and non-reading of Bataille.

I.2.1. The Architectural Paradox

'The Architectural Paradox' was first published in the *Studio International*'s issue of September-October 1975. It was then reedited in a different form for the 1994 release of Bernard Tschumi's essays compilation *Architecture and Disjunction*. I will discuss in what follows this last version, that is, the twenty one segments in which Tschumi points to the irreducibly dichotomous situation in which Architecture, in the 1970s, found itself trapped — with the aim to subsequently propose a way out or even a 'solution' to this issue that he also names 'The Architectural Paradox'.

Within the two first segments, Tschumi announces his claim and problem statement, that is, none of the utopian ideals of the twentieth century have succeeded, and, indeed, a split between social reality and the 'modern' project has appeared. Moreover, in Tschumi's view, those failures led to two equally problematic consequences. First, they induced the need to reformulate the very concept of architecture, and then, bound to this, they led to the materialization of a *new* 'split' or dichotomy around this essential element for architecture: 'Space'.

> *'(…) architecture has entered an unavoidable paradox that is more present in space than anywhere else: the impossibility of questioning the nature of space and at the same time experiencing a spatial praxis'.*[52]

Tschumi, thus considers that the new 'split' which appears in the early 1970s, concerns these two opposite stances developed around the notion of space and their impossible reconciliation: to conceive of space does not allow us to experience it. His aim, in this essay, is first of all to unveil the different components of this 'paradox', and then to propose a 'solution', a way to go 'beyond this self-contradiction' (his own words).[53]

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[50]. Renata Hejduk, 'Death becomes Her: transgression, decay, and eROTicism in Bernard Tschumi's early writings and projects' in *The Journal of Architecture*, vol.12 n.4, *Routledge*, 2007, pp.393-404.

[51]. 'The pleasure of Architecture' was first published in *Architectural Design*, vol.47, n.3, 1977, pp.214-218; 'The Violence of Architecture' was first published in *Artforum*, vol.20, n.1, Sept.1981, pp.44-47; and 'Architecture and Limits I, II, III' was first published in *Artforum*, vol.19 & 20, n.4 & 1, Dec. 1980 & March, Sept 1981, pp.36,45, and 40. All those essays and also "Architecture and Transgression' and 'The Architectural Paradox' have been reedited in Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994.

[52]. Bernard Tschumi, 'The Architectural Paradox', in *Architecture and Disjunction*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994, p.28.

[53]. Ibid.

'I will examine first those trends that consider architecture as a thing of the mind, as a dematerialized or conceptual discipline, with its linguistic or morphological variations (the Pyramid); second, the empirical research that concentrates on the senses, on the experience of space as well as on the relationship between space and praxis (the Labyrinth); and third, the contradictory nature of these two terms and the difference between the means of escaping the paradox by shifting the actual nature of the debate, as for example, through politics, and the means that alter the paradox altogether (the Pyramid and the labyrinth)'.[54]

Tschumi, before discussing his problematic, introduces it in historical terms with the third, fourth, fifth and sixth segments. He presents a discrepancy between a philosophical understanding of the act of 'defining space' that would be to 'state the precise nature of space' and an architectural definition, that is, 'to make space distinct'. Here, in passing we should notice that, although in the first segment Tschumi stated that the 'paradox' was a 'new' condition, within segments three and four, he traces its origin to the seventeenth century philosophical discourse with Descartes' conception of absolute 'space' and in the early modern architectural heritage with the notion, taken from German aesthetics, of 'Raumempfindung'. Within the space of two pages the 'new' paradox becomes historically grounded. Tschumi also discards within those introductory segments, a politico-philosophico-historico-marxist attempt to bridge the gap between 'ideal space' and 'real space' and another opposite attempt, while somehow potentially connectable, to set architecture back, far from reality. Tschumi rejects the first attempt, which he does not clearly name (Tafuri?) for the simple reason that, as the outcome of such an attempt, space is 'reduced' to one of the 'numerous socio-economic products that perpetuate a political status quo'.[55] He also opposes the second attempt, which he qualifies as 'the search for architectural autonomy' (Eisenman?) for the understanding of the architectural – as having nothing to do with some 'purposeful exterior need' – that it proposes.[56]

The segments seven till ten are grouped under the sub-header: 'The Pyramid: Stating the Nature of Space (or the Dematerialization of Architecture)'. They discuss the first polarity of the 'paradox': the 'Pyramid' i.e. the ideal conception of space. Tschumi begins by mapping the attempt to 'dematerialize architecture into the realms of concepts'. According to him, traces of this endeavour can be found in past architectural writings on architecture as for example, with Boullee's defence of the primacy of conception over production, of the superiority of the 'scientific part of architecture' over 'the art of building'. Such interests, in roaming over the realm of concepts are, in Tschumi's view, also visible in the 'architectural attitude' that El Lissitsky and the Vesnin brothers proposed in the early twentieth century, but also in the 1970s antithetical ideological stances of 'radical architecture' and 'rational architecture'. Finally, Tschumi links the 'language analogy' so dear to some architectural circles to this attempt to 'dematerialize architecture into the realms of concepts'. He notices that among the great variety of 'language analogy', two figure prominently.

The first one, that follows a concern for 'the Hegelian supplement' i.e. everything within a building that is not simply an act of construction but rather is constitutive of 'architecture', proposes that this 'supplement' is immediately taken in a movement of semantic expansion that obliges it to be less an architectural feature than the representation of an exterior entity. Here, in passing, two things should be noted: firstly such an account would be very close to Hollier's reading of Bataille's article 'Architecture'; and, secondly Tschumi, actually, opposes such a reading or understanding of architecture, for 'architecture would then be nothing but the linguistic product of social determinants'.[57] The second 'Language analogy', that Tschumi discredits, is the one concerned with an understanding of architecture as a language that refers to meanings *within* itself – as for example in the work of Aldo Rossi. He concludes then, with the dangers that face architecture if these 'language analogy' theories were to become 'the generative matrices of today's work', Tschumi simply summarizes the situation in these terms:

'(…) the architect is once again "the person who conceives the form of the building without manipulating materials himself." He conceives the pyramid, this ultimate model of reason.

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[54]. Ibid. pp.28-29
[55]. Ibid. p.32.
[56]. Ibid. p.33.
[57]. Ibid. p.36.

Architecture becomes a cosa mentale and the forms conceived by the architect ensure the domination of the idea over matter'.[58]

Having discussed the first polarity of the 'paradox', Tschumi then turns to the second term: 'The Labyrinth: Making Space Distinct (or The Experience of Space)' to which the eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth segments are dedicated. Tschumi here begins by pointing to the limits of theoretical prescription on space as showed by experiential and sensory approaches. He contends, in a digression on the work of the dancers Trisha Brown and Simone Forti, that, through the emphasis given to dance's movement for defining and articulating space, the relationship between theory and practice, reason and perception had to change: 'the concept of theoretical practice could not be simply indicative'. He thus seems to oppose the idea that, as the analogy between art and language could be demonstrated, there could be a simple analogy between spatial practice and the discourse on space:

'If it could be argued that the discourse about art was art and thus could be exhibited as such, the theoretical discourse about space certainly was not space'.[59]

However, Tschumi also points out that sensorial perception is not totally independent from 'reason'. Indeed, with the famous example of the cube and its six faces, he demonstrates that the perception of only parts of the cube is insufficient for conceiving the cube as a whole. Thus reason is also part of the process of global perception. Yet, Tschumi discusses how, in his view, conceptual artists have mirrored or inverted before finally disintegrating it, this process of perception that follows the equation of sensory perception + rational conceptualisation= global perception. Thus, he discusses, very briefly, the work of artists such as Bruce Nauman, Doug Wheeler, Robert Irwin or Michael Asher who, by restricting in their installations sensory perception to its minimum, turn the expected experience of space into something 'altogether different'. The viewers or users of their installations are literally thrown back onto themselves. As Tschumi states: 'By a series of exclusions that become significant only in opposition to the remote exterior space and social context, the subjects only experience their own experience'.[60] What interests Tschumi in such works, is their 'double content': the way they define space physically is only a means to question the nature of space itself; a 'nature of space' that could only be subjective and that remains unsaid. Thus Tschumi concludes, that, in opposition to the pyramid of reason:

'(...) the dark corners of experience are not unlike a labyrinth where all sensations, all feelings are enhanced, but where no overview is present to provide a clue about how to get out.[61]

With his metaphorical labyrinth of sensory perception, Tschumi wishes to oppose Hegel's dialectical distinction between the moment of perception and the moment of experience (when one's consciousness makes a new object out of a perceived one). The perception within the labyrinth is immediate, experiential and subjective.

The final part of the essay, entitled 'The Pyramid and the Labyrinth: The Paradox of Architecture' forms a rather peculiar conclusion. It spans the seven last segments from the fifteenth to the twenty-first one. Before proposing a solution to the 'paradox' that he has just exposed, Tschumi, in what might be an ambiguous attempt to prevent us from expecting too much of his 'solution', discusses the 'usefulness' of architecture from a socio-political point of view. For Tschumi architecture or rather the architects are taken in another paradoxical situation with regard to the function of architecture on the political chess-board. On the one hand the isolation of architecture in the search for autonomy, and thus its independence from ideological and economic powers, actually only leads to its integration as a commodity, within the art's compartment of capitalist ideology. On the other hand, if architecture refuses this status as an art for art's sake, it also accepts, in Tschumi's view, the mechanisms of society, and thus basically reproduces the socio-economic position in which it lies. However, he disturbingly and laconically concludes that

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[58]. Ibid. p.38.
[59]. Ibid. p.40.
[60]. Ibid. p.42.
[61]. Ibid.

the only way for architecture to survive is to negate the 'form' that society expects of it. Thus architecture's radicalism lies in its uselessness:

> *'I would therefore suggest that there has never been any reason to doubt the necessity of architecture, for the necessity of architecture is its non-necessity. It is useless, but radically so. Its radicalism constitutes its very strength in a society where profit is prevalent'.*[82]

Hence, as architecture's non-necessity throws it back on itself, it seems logical, as Tschumi contends, that the true challenge which architecture has to face, is its self-definition, a definition that oscillates between the two polarities of the paradox: Ontological discourse on space (the Pyramid) and the sensual experience of space (the Labyrinth). Tschumi, then, restates his point, i.e. architecture is made up of two terms that are interdependent but mutually exclusive, by referencing another of his numerous influences, Baruch Spinoza:

> *'(...) architecture constitutes the reality of experience while this reality gets in the way of the overall vision. Architecture constitutes the abstraction of absolute truth, while this very truth gets in the way of feeling. We cannot both experience and think that we experience. "The concept of dog does not bark"; the concept of space is not space'.*[83]

Here Tschumi arrives at the consequences of the 'paradox': defined by its questioning, architecture is always the expression of a lack, a shortcoming or a non-completion. Architecture always misses something, either the reality of experience or the abstraction of reason. The only alternative to the paradox seems to be 'silence': the ultimate 'punch-line' of architectural history, its self-annihilation. Yet, Tschumi wants to believe in a way of accepting the paradox while refuting the silence it imposes. His solution is rather simple: it is to be found in the experience of the metaphorical labyrinth of sensory perception. For Tschumi, this experience bridges sensory pleasure and reason. However, such an experience, which should 'transcend' the paradox (Tschumi's words), is not independent of the mind as its main vector would be 'imagination'. Hence:

> *'(...) the solution of the paradox is the imaginary blending of the architecture rule and the experience of pleasure'.*[84]

Having discussed the claims, problematic, thesis and structure of 'The Architectural Paradox', I should turn now to Tschumi's use of Bataille's notions and its purpose. Within the body of the text, Tschumi twice refers directly to Bataille, the first while discussing the inescapability of the Labyrinth in the fourteenth segment, and the second, in the twentieth segment, while searching for the solution to the 'Paradox' in an experience similar (according to Tschumi) to Bataille's 'Inner Experience'. Furthermore, the sub headers used to structure the whole essay, can also be seen as an obvious attempt to mark the influence of Bataille's terms (the Labyrinth and the Pyramid).

Just before discussing Tschumi's references to Bataille, I should say that I find extremely awkward his omission of Bataille's article entitled 'Space'.[85] Indeed, as Tschumi's main problematic circulates around the notion of space and its 'definition', and if Bataille is to be a seminal influence in the elaboration of the essay, shouldn't it be necessary, logical and relevant to include this short article within the reflection and to clearly refer to it as, at the very least, a source? This omission might be seen as a simple lack of knowledge concerning Bataille's work. However, this observation led me to admit the hypothesis that, perhaps Tschumi didn't read Bataille but rather went through some other sources on Bataille. Nevertheless, this omission appears also as somehow ironic under the light of Tschumi's questioning on 'space' in segment eleven:

> *'Shall architecture perform at the service of illusory functions and build virtual spaces? My voyage into the abstract realm of language, into the dematerialized world of concepts, meant*

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[82]. Ibid. p.46.
[83]. Ibid. p.48.
[84]. Ibid. p.52.
[85]. Georges Bataille, 'Space' in OC. Vol.1. Gallimard: paris, 1976.

the removal of architecture from its intricate and convoluted element: space'.[66]

To respond to Tschumi, I would say that, I don't know if his 'voyage' led him to 'remove architecture' from 'space', but for sure it seems that his 'voyage' didn't lead him far enough to encounter Bataille's 'Space'.

My feeling that Tschumi didn't read Bataille is reinforced or even made a certainty by his naïve acknowledgement of his source and reference. Indeed, when Tschumi mentions the name of Bataille for the first time in the fourteenth segment that is the last one of the second part of the text which bears the sub-header 'The Labyrinth: Making Space Distinct (or The Experience of Space)', for describing the 'Labyrinth' as a space without any way in or out, he directly mentions Denis Hollier's study on Bataille:

'Denis Hollier, in his book on Georges Bataille, points out that from Bacon to Leibniz the Labyrinth was linked with the desire to get out, and science was seen as the means to find an exit. Rejecting such an interpretation, Bataille suggested that its only effect was to transform the labyrinth into a banal prison'.[67]

A footnote (footnote 8) to this paragraph elucidates with the greatest clarity the question of Tschumi's real sources:

'Denis Hollier, La Prise de La Concorde (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), the reading of which suggested the opposition between the labyrinth and the pyramid'.[68]

Thus, beyond providing the content necessary for sustaining the reflection presented in 'The Architectural Paradox', Denis Hollier's *Against Architecture* also imposes its structure. Hollier's essay 'The Labyrinth, the Pyramid, and the Labyrinth' is the structural model for Tschumi's essay. Thus, the sub-headers which are used to structure the whole essay, are perhaps a reference to Bataille's terms (the Labyrinth and the Pyramid), but indirect and biased.

Furthermore, most of Tschumi's text, or at least the parts which discuss the 'Labyrinth', the 'Pyramid' or architecture in more philosophical terms, appear as unashamed paraphrasing (or worse a simple plagiary), of Hollier's book. For example, this passage in the ninth segment of 'The Architectural Paradox' in which Tschumi writes:

'(…) the Hegelian "supplement," added to the simple building and constitutive of architecture, is immediately struck by some semantic expansion that would force this architectural supplement to be less a piece of architecture than the representation of something else. Architecture is then nothing but the space or representation. As soon as it is distinguished from the simple building, it represents something other than itself: the social structure, the power of the king, the idea of God, and so on'.[69]

A passage which is put into a very interesting perspective, with regard to Tschumi's 'authorship', if read in parallel with this:

'(…) this sort of artistic supplement that, by its addition to a simple building, constitutes architecture, finds itself caught from the beginning in a process of semantic expansion that forces what is called architecture to be only the general locus or framework of representation, its ground. Architecture represents a religion it brings alive, a political power that it manifests, an event that it commemorates, etc. Architecture, before any other qualification, is identical to the space of representation: it always represents something other than itself from the moment that it becomes distinguished from mere building'.[70]

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[66]. Bernard Tschumi, 'The Architectural Paradox', in *Architecture and Disjunction*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994, p.40.
[67]. Ibid. p.43.
[68]. Ibid. p.262.
[69]. Ibid. p.37.
[70]. Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, p.31-32.

To reinforce my claim, I should give another example of Tschumi's paraphrasing. In segment nineteen, when Tschumi restates the impossibility of leaving the 'Labyrinth', he writes:

'One can participate in and share the fundamentals of the Labyrinth, but one's perception is only part of the Labyrinth as it manifests itself. One can never see it in totality, nor one can express it. One is condemned to it and cannot go outside and see the whole. But remember: Icarus flew away, toward the sun. So after all, does the way out of the Labyrinth lie in the making of the Pyramid, through a projection of the subject toward some transcendental objectivity? Unfortunately not. The Labyrinth cannot be dominated. The top of the Pyramid is an imaginary place, and Icarus fell down: the nature of the Labyrinth is such that it entertains dreams that include the dream of the Pyramid'.[71]

This passage is obviously only by accident fairly similar to Hollier's conclusion of 'The Labyrinth, the Pyramid, and the Labyrinth':

'The summit (sum) is the locus of the imaginary. Icarus flies away, but he falls down again. One of the labyrinth's most subtle (treacherous) detours leads one to believe it is possible to get out, even making one desire to do so. Sublimation is a false exit that is an integral part of its economy. The pyramid is only a product of the labyrinth itself and thoroughly belongs to it'.[72]

Hence, it seems rather clear that Tschumi's sources are not Bataille's texts, but rather Denis Hollier's study on Bataille, *Against Architecture*, and more particularily, in the case of 'The Architectural Paradox', Hollier's essay 'The Labyrinth, the Pyramid, and the Labyrinth'. Bataille's influence on Tschumi, and thus the earliest evidence of Bataille's work reception in the realm of architectural theory and criticism appears as limited and/or biased; limited by the narrow range of Bataille's notion discussed by Tschumi (indeed, Tschumi's never refers to Bataille's texts on architecture) and biased, per se, due to its interpretation through Hollier's studies and its own bias.

But, perhaps it is even worse than this. I believe the evidence shows that Tschumi didn't read Bataille. Fair enough. But does this mean he read Hollier fairly? If not, does Tschumi's undirect, and thus biased, reading, betray significantly Bataille's thought? In my view, Tschumi's misreading of Hollier and his betrayal of Bataille's thought is clearly visible, if one looks, first, at Tschumi's will to provide a 'solution' to the 'paradox', and then, at the actual nature of the 'solution'.

Indeed, although Tschumi states the inescapability from this predicament that the 'Paradox' constitutes, he nevertheless permanently searches for an escape, for a 'solution'. What I find problematic in Tschumi's will to find a 'solution', with regard to his reference (that is, here, Hollier's essay) is that it appears, itself, as a pyramidal moment or, as Hollier names it, as the symptom of a 'pyramidal reading' of the tension between the 'labyrinth' and the 'pyramid'. Tschumi's believes, that he can solve the problem, that he can escape the labyrinth (like Icarus), and this attempt to escape the labyrinth is nothing more than the attempt to construct the pyramid. Somehow Tschumi's essay — as it wishes to find a reasonable solution to the 'paradox' — appears as one the 'polarities' of the 'paradox' it *reads* a 'pyramid'. For Hollier the permanent oscillation within language between a 'labyrinthine' reading and a 'pyramidal' one is unavoidable, and it is exactly why Hollier does not pretend to have unveiled any 'truth' about Bataille. It is why he does not pretend to have found the 'key' to Bataille's 'labyrinth', why he does not propose a 'pyramidal' reading of Bataille. Rather Hollier writes through Bataille's 'labyrinth'. Consequently, if Tschumi had properly read Hollier the questions raised by 'The Architectural Paradox' should lead to the opening of a labyrinth; to the questioning of the means and supports of architectural theory not to a simple solution in the definition of architectural space, but to the transgression of that pyramid which is architectural theory. Hence, it seems to me, that Tschumi misreads Hollier.

Then, what I also find problematic, in Tschumi's attempt, is the nature of the solution he provides. Tschumi writes: *'(...) the solution of the paradox is the imaginary blending of the architecture rule and the experience of pleasure'.*[73] Thus, it is clear that the 'solution', as it

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[71]. Bernard Tschumi, 'The Architectural Paradox', in *Architecture and Disjunction*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994, p.49.

[72]. Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, p.73..

[73]. Ibid. p.52.

demands the participation of the 'imaginary', is provided through the mind and with recourse to the 'idea'. This 'solution' is consequently not provided through a material practice but through an abstract, one can say idealist, thinking. I can't *imagine* that Bataille — obsessed by a radical materialism, as he was — could have simply *imagined* anything other than a material practice as a solution (if he ever had considered the possibility of finding one) to the tension between the 'pyramid' and the 'labyrinth'.[74] Hence besides not reading Bataille's texts, Tschumi also misread Hollier's essay, finally betraying Bataille's textual 'practice'.

I.2.2. Architecture and Transgression

'Architecture and Transgression', an essay published for the first time during the winter of 1976 in *Oppositions* 7,[75] also displays some obvious references to Bataille's work, consequently affirming Bataille's influence on the young Tschumi. Bringing some nuances to what I have demonstrated above, I should say that in 'Architecture and Transgression' Tschumi seems to use direct references to Bataille's work. Thus he seems to have read Bataille, or at least he seems to have read Bataille's *Eroticism*. However, as Hollier's influence cannot be denied from one text to another, and as the first part of 'Architecture and Transgression' is actually a summary of 'The Architectural Paradox', it is clear that Tschumi's reading of Bataille is still a biased one. Furthermore, as signs of Tschumi's plagiarism of Hollier's study are still obvious, and as several discrepancies between Hollier's understanding of Bataille's notion of 'eroticism' and Tschumi's use of that term are visible, I still maintain that Tschumi continues to misread his source.

'Architecture and Transgression' opens on a quote from Bataille's Eroticism. Although, Tschumi should get some credit for that, it is important to notice that the quote is not properly referenced, i.e. the edition, date, place and translation, as well as the page are not mentioned. Thus, it is still possible to doubt of Tschumi's direct reading of Bataille. The quote is as follow:

> '*Transgression opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but maintains these limits just the same. Transgression is complementary to the profane world, exceeding its limits but not destroying it.*
>
> Georges Bataille, Eroticism'.[76]

Building on this quote without referencing it, Tschumi, in his short introduction, states that although within society, crimes and transgressions of the law are a little more than sporadic, architectural theory and criticism remain too often in their complacent attitude tainted of puritanism. His aim, as he states it, is not to criticise the rules or to propose an alternative to these; rather he wishes to demonstrate: 'that transgression is a whole, of which architectural rules are merely one part'.[77]

The first part of the essay, entitled 'Part One: The paradox' is a simple rehearsal of the arguments contained in 'The Architectural Paradox'. Tschumi, there, simply restates, first, his claim, i.e. 'the impossibility of simultaneously questioning the nature of space and, at the same time, making or experiencing a real space'.[78] Then, he describes the only potential outcome of this 'Paradox': 'Was the only alternative to the paradox silence, a final nihilistic statement (...)?'[79] Finally he supposes the existence of 'a way around this paradox' and thus the possibility of refusing the silence it implies. The reader at this point, is left alone in front of those statements, hoping that what follows will describes the 'solution', although he is warned that this alternative may 'prove

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[74]. As I will demonstrate it, I contend (for the time being), that for Bataille architecture is indeed taken in a paradox (its 'function' is paradoxical), yet this 'paradox' has not so much in common with Tschumi's one. Furthermore, I also contend that Bataille neither perceived a solution to the 'paradox' nor accepted 'silence' as a finality, but that he rather demanded that one faces the 'paradox'; that one lives it. That is to say to confront it in dread, anguish but also ecstasy.

[75]. Bernard Tschumi, 'Architecture and Transgression' in *Oppositions 7*, Winter, 1976, pp. 55-63.

[76]. Bernard Tschumi, 'Architecture and Transgression', in *Architecture and Disjunction*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994, p.65. The original non-translated quote can be found in Georges Bataille, *L'Erotisme*, in O.C. vol. X. Gallimard: Paris, 1987, p.70

[77]. Ibid. p.66.

[78]. Ibid. p.67.

[79]. Ibid. p.69.

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intolerable'.[80]

The 'Part Two: eROTicism' proposes to explore the 'paradox' through two correspondences, the first one being the analogy with eroticism. Tschumi contends here that the 'paradox' shares more than simple similarities with what he considers to be 'eroticism'. For him, the resolution of the 'paradox' may find its model in the practice of 'eroticism'. He defines 'eroticism' not as the excess of pleasure but as the 'pleasure of excess'; this 'pleasure of excess' is seen as requiring 'consciousness as well as voluptuousness'. Tschumi thus states:

> *'Just as eroticism means a double pleasure that involves both mental constructs and sensuality, the resolution of the architectural paradox calls for architectural concepts and, at the same instant, the immediate experience of space'.[81]*

The second correspondence, (which is a correspondence or analogy only with regard to the junction between the opposite polarities it forces), as Tschumi acknowledges it, is 'immensely general'. It consists of the analogy between the 'paradox' and the diacritical coupling of 'life and death'. Tschumi states that society expects architecture to reflect its ideals and to domesticate its deepest fears. And among those fears, according to Tschumi, the fear of death and the horror of its signs (putrefaction and decay) have some primacy. The architecture of the Moderns should be seen as the best example of the attempt to repudiate death and its consequences. Tschumi demands that we believe that the fascination of the great master for the white ruins of ancient Greece is not a fascination for death or decay, but the acceptance of a certain death only: a clean, white death. As the white bones of a cleaned skeleton might be more acceptable than the putrefying flesh, the architects of the modern movement privileged white walls over a decaying structure. The campaign in favour of the renovation of the then derelict Villa Savoye, in 1965, is, in Tschumi's view, another clear example of society's and architectural circles' preferences for the cleanliness of life as opposed to the decay of death. However, Tschumi states that, in his opinion, 'the Villa Savoye was never so moving as when plaster fell off its concrete blocks'. Hence, he claims:

> *'(…) it is my contention that the moment of architecture is that moment when architecture is life and death at the same time, when the experience of space becomes its own concept. In the paradox of architecture, the contradiction between architectural concept and sensual experience of space resolves itself at one point of tangency: the rotten point, the very point that taboos and culture have always rejected. This metaphorical rot is where architecture lies. Rot bridges sensory pleasure and reason'.[82]*

'Part Three: The Transgression', should normally lead the reader to understand in what consists precisely this transgression of the paradox, this 'erotic' architecture or this architecture at the 'rotten point'. Unfortunately Tschumi does not give any particular examples, he simply underlines four 'implications' to which the two correspondences lead. First, the two correspondences are aspects of the same phenomenon, i.e. they happen in a proscribed space, which is at the junction of ideal and real spaces.[83] Second, this 'place' may possess the marks and traces of everyday experiences, the signs that the passage of time might have left grafted onto the built form. Third, this 'proscribed meeting place' is a threat to the autonomy of, and to the distinction between, concepts and spatial practices. And fourth, this 'meeting place' is by extension, ultimately architecture. Finally, all those 'implications' just allow him to simply re-state that architecture only exists at the junction of real space and ideal space:

> *'Whether through literal or phenomenal transgression, architecture is seen here as the*

[80]. Ibid. p.70.

[81]. Ibid. p.71.

[82]. Ibid. p.76

[83]. Tschumi writes: '(…)the two correspondences—that of rot and that of life and death—are the same aspects of the same phenomenon'. This sounds rather awkward. Till now the two correspondences where the one with 'eroticism' and the other with 'life and death'; the digression on 'rot' was part of the analogy with 'death and life'. I am sorry to say that I don't have an explanation to propose in front of this obvious contradiction. See, Bernard Tschumi, 'Architecture and Transgression', in *Architecture and Disjunction*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994, p.76.

momentary and sacrilegious convergence of real space and ideal space'.[24]

Tschumi refers to Bataille twice in 'Architecture and Transgression', first through the opening quote, then in the second part where he attempts to define 'eroticism', thus, it might seem that while writing this essay, Tschumi had truly read Bataille. However, as the first part of 'Architecture and Transgression' is just a rehearsal of 'The Architectural Paradox', and as I hope to have demonstrated how much this text is deeply influenced by Denis Hollier's *Against Architecture*, it is clear that Tschumi's reading of Bataille is not completely direct, but, at least a partially biased one.

Furthermore, although Tschumi made some progress in the cover up of the paraphrasing of his sources, some obvious evidences remains. For example, in the second part, while trying to express the modern architects' aversion for decay and putrefaction, Tschumi states:

'Death is tolerated only when the bones are white: if architects cannot succeed in their quest (…), they can at least be comfortable in front of the white ruins of the Parthenon. Young life and decent death, such was the architectural order. (…) Life was seen as a negation of death (…) a negation that went beyond the idea of death itself and extended to the rot of the putrefying flesh. The anguish about death, however, only related to the phase of decomposition, for white bones did not possess the intolerable aspect of corrupted flesh. Architecture reflected these deep feelings: putrefying buildings were seen as unacceptable, but dry white ruins afforded decency and respectability.(…) Were the rationalists or the "New York Five" unconsciously striving for respect through the white and timeless skeletons they proposed?[25]

This statement should be mirrored with a passage from Hollier's book, more precisely with this excerpt taken from the paragraph in which Hollier analyses the second part of Bataille's article 'Architecture':

'Classical, academic painting, under the control of architecture, is limited to masking a skeleton. Painting conceals it, but the skeleton is its truth. In many primitive societies the skeleton marks the moment of the second death—a death that is completed, clean, and properly immutable: that which survives putrefaction and decomposition. The skeleton, as architectural, is the perfect example of an articulated whole. Modern painting rediscovers death in its first guise of the human's figure's decomposition, an incomplete death, a mortal wound to form, a rotting corpse rather than a skeleton. Rotten painting'.[26]

Out of those paralleled observations, it becomes clear that Tschumi is still reading Hollier and not Bataille directly. But, is he now reading Hollier properly? Unfortunately, it is still my opinion that he is not. And the following excerpt, in which Bataille is mentioned, should prove it:

'In his studies of eroticism, Georges Bataille, Le Corbusier's contemporary, pointed out that the fundamental prohibitions of mankind were centred on two radically opposed domains: death and its obverse, sexual reproduction. As a result any discourse about life, death, and putrefaction implicitly contained a discourse on sex. Bataille claimed that at the key moment when life moved toward death, there could no longer be reproduction but only sex. Since eroticism implied sex without reproduction, the movement from life to death was erotic; "eroticism is assenting to life up to the point of death," wrote Bataille'.[27]

First of all, Bataille's quote is not referenced, and although he doubtless wrote that 'eroticism is assenting to life up to the point of death', this sentence did not simply mean that due to the impossibility of reproduction when 'life moved toward death' there could be 'only sex', and consequently this does not lead to this 'movement' being erotic. Tschumi takes the words out of their context (without properly referencing them) in order to focus on an estranged meaning.

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[24]. Ibid. p.78.

[25]. Ibid. p.72

[26]. Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, p.52.

[27]. Bernard Tschumi, 'Architecture and Transgression', in *Architecture and Disjunction*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994, p.74.

Seriously, did he mean that elderly people and their deaths are erotic? Tschumi seems either to consciously betray Bataille's terms or to simply misread his source. Indeed, his source, Denis Hollier, defines 'eroticism' and elucidates its relationship with life and death in the clearest way:

'(…) we must make a distinction here between eroticism and sexuality (…). Eroticism is the presence in sexual reproduction (insofar as it produces traces) of its other, scissiparity (insofar as it implies the absence or, here, the obliteration of the trace). Life is approved even in death. Obliteration of the trace or loss within the trace comes down to the same thing. It is not a question of regressive return to scissiparity, but rather a return of scissiparity—its return into the midst of complex beings, sexual organisms, whereas simple scissiparity happens in simple beings—single cell organisms'.[88]

Scissiparity is the process through which single cells organisms reproduce themselves: a single cell split into two, and as such, in itself, disappears without leaving behind any trace. The death of the parent is the birth of the children. However, scissiparity is not 'erotic', due to the total absence of sex in the process. There could be, for Bataille, no eroticism without sex. Yet, reproduction is not simply erotic either. Bataille states it: 'what differentiates eroticism from simple sexual activity being a psychological quest independent of the natural end provided by reproduction and a concern for children'.[89] Reproduction becomes 'erotic' when scissiparity 'returns' in its process, which leads to the non-production of children (and thus to the non-reproduction), to the disappearance of the expected traces. Under this light, it is obvious that Tschumi misread Hollier again. The derelict Villa Savoye, in 1965, could not be 'erotic' because it was simply falling apart, or because it was heading towards its collapse (and death). Eroticism, in Bataille's view, is bound to the erasure of 'traces' not to their appearance. Ironically it is rather Tschumi's text, in its incapacity to deliver meaning, in its aborted attempt to find a solution to the 'paradox' that he has formulated (and intuited as solvable), in its inability to 'reproduce' the standard of architectural theory, in its incapacity to ensure its visibility as a 'trace' (by betraying or erasing its sources), which is deeply erotic. However, I am sure that this 'erotic' side of 'Architecture and Transgression' remains unknown to its author.

As a way to conclude this discussion on Tschumi's essays, I would like to quote extensively a passage from Denis Hollier's introduction to the American edition of *Against Architecture* from 1989, entitled 'Bloody Sundays', in which he shows signs of the great esteem he has for Bernard Tschumi and his writings:

'Is the prison then the generic name designating all architectural production? Is architecture in a position to reply to poststructuralist accusations that reveal and denounce a prison in every monument or building? Is it possible to conceive of an architecture that would not inspire, as in Bataille, good social behaviour, or would not produce, as in Foucault's disciplinary factory, madness or criminality in individuals? Architectural devices, according to Foucault, produce subjects; they individualize personal identities. But why would they not work in reverse, leading against the grain to some space before the constitution of the subject, before the institutionalization of subjectivity? An architecture that, instead of localizing madness, would open up a space anterior to the division between madness and reason; rather than performing the subject, it would perform spacing: a space from before the subject, from before meaning; the asubjective, asemantic space of an unedifying architecture, an architecture that would not allow space for the time needed to become a subject.

A current important project for public spaces in Paris has been presented in terms of just such an architecture, an architecture that Derrida has described as "spaced out" (or "spacy"). Bataille's 1929 article interpreted the storming of the Bastille as the revolt of the mob against the monuments. The Parc de la Villette would realize a paradoxical storming of architecture—by itself. A Bastille in no way different from its storming. "Architecture against itself," Bernard Tschumi, the park's architect, labels it: architecture against architecture. As if a donjuanesque architecture would escape finally from the stiff, punitive order of the

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[88]. Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, p.69.
[89]. Georges Bataille, *L'Erotisme*, in O. C. X. Gallimard: Paris, 1984, p.17.

Commendatore. It would enter into games and begin to dance. "The program can challenge the very ideology it implied." Such a project calls upon a loss of meaning, to give it a dionysiac dimension: it explicitly takes issue with what Tschumi describes as an essential premise of architecture, "the idea of meaning immanent in architectural structures"; the park, a postmodern "assault on meaning", claims as its main purpose to "dismantle meaning."

Would Dedalus be happy at losing the meaning of the labyrinth he constructed? What is hiding under this uncanny park that somehow claims to be the official park of the Uncanny? Or really, what would a labyrinth be without a Minotaur: a labyrinth without blood? And, since this is all taking place in real space, in a real city, since this performative loosening of space takes place in a precise spot on the map of Paris, namely La Villette, I am going to take a short detour to the butcher's'.[90]

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[90]. Denis Hollier *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, tr. Betsy Wing, London: MIT press, 1989, pp. x-xi.

CHAPTER II

Variations on the 'Formless'
uselessness:
how to put in form, at work,
or in movement,
a non-stable, unemployed and
ungraspable negativity?

Chapter II. Variations on the 'Formless' uselessness: how to put in form, at work, or in movement, an non-stable, unemployed and ungraspable negativity?

More than twenty years after its initial reception into architectural culture – as we have seen in the writings of Bernard Tschumi – Bataille's oeuvre became again the focus of some theorization: first in the field of modern art, then in architectural criticism and theory. To start with, in the late nineties, one of Bataille's terms, the 'formless' (informe) became the locus of some conceptual discussions or even dissensions within the discipline of art criticism. In very brief terms, those scholarly dissensions are built on two different readings of the 'formless' and on two opposite understandings of Bataille's position regarding the 'Hegelian' dialectics.

The first reading of the 'formless' as exemplified by the work of Georges Didi-Huberman[1] places more emphasis on its metaphorical and morphological aspects. It considers the 'formless' as a 'thematic', as it conflates it with the concept of 'deformation'. With regard to the dialectic, it proposes an interpretation of the 'formless' as 'dialectically' transgressing 'form' in order to present another, 'transgressed form' or 'symptom', a form that he names in French '*la ressemblance informe*' or 'formless resemblance'. (However, as we will see, Didi-Huberman's exposé is rather ambiguous regarding his 'dialectic of form': Is this dialectic leading to the assumption of a third term or does it remain unable to supersede its ontological groupings? Is the 'symptom' a third term or a simple negativity, ungraspable yet productive?). The second reading, defined by two others eminent scholars from the field of art theory, Rosalind E. Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois,[2] considers the performative aspects of the 'formless'. It theorizes the 'formless' as what lowers the status which is granted to 'form', in the rather old conception of Modern Art as defined by Clement Greenberg; thus, the 'formless' is here seen as aggressive towards the structure sustaining 'form' rather than what dialectically opposes its morphologic dimension. The formless is discussed as a process (operation) which has not much to do with resemblance or reference, or with the will to form or even re-form, and subsequently with the Hegelian dialectic. (However, as we should also note, Krauss and Bois are at pains to demonstrate that their 'deployment' of the 'formless' leads to anything other than a structural reorganization of the 'Modernism cards', autonomously from any politico-social context, and as such, it severely betrays Bataille's formless radicalism).

The theoretical schism between those two interpretations is actually bound up with the answers to two seminal questions, the first being, is Bataille a dialectician? Obviously, as I hope to show, Didi-Huberman would answer yes, while Krauss and Bois would say no. Second: Is the 'formless' an autonomous operation or is it bound to socio-cultural taboo, to some distinguishable thematic, to some references exterior to the narrow field in which scholars aim to 'apply' it? Again, I hope to show that the different protagonists on this precise question also disagree: Krauss and Bois wish to restrict 'disciplinarily' the impact of the 'formless' to a problematic inherent to art theory (and as such they obliterate its socio-cultural aspects), while Didi-Huberman's work, although it perceives the 'formless' ties to socio-political issues, merely restricts 'thematically' its impact by reading the 'formless' metaphorically (resemblance) and by discussing it as a concept-theme synonym of 'deformation' (and thus he misses the truly operative value of the 'formless'). Out of those studies appear two different ways of 'understanding' Bataille's articulation of the 'formless' in relation to society, to culture, to art, to the image, and finally to 'form' – both of which postulate a rather different comprehension of Bataille's ties to the Hegelian dialectic. These differences, in my view, find their genesis in the answers to three other questions. Is there such a thing as an unemployed negativity? In which way can it stay unemployed: autonomy or political radicalism? Can it be theorized?

Indeed, and although I believe that these seminal questions lie at the basis of these differences, both studies, beyond their proper limitations, seem, in my view, to really miss the point; that is, by proposing a mere *operative* interpretation of the 'formless' limited to the field of art and its proper issues or by discussing, theoretically, the 'formless' *morphological* effects without daring to experience its performance, they somehow either 'put it in form' or 'put it to work' and, as such, they both function as a double betrayal (although Krauss and Bois acknowledge that they

[1]. Georges Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance informe ou Le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille*, Paris: Macula, 1995.

[2]. Rosalind E. Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide*, N-Y: Zone books, 1997.

don't follow Bataille all down the line) of Bataille's oeuvre. First they both betray, by *either* circumscribing (stabilizing, formalising, thematizing, discussing, 'putting it in form') its materiality *or* employing its negativity ('putting it to work'), the 'formless' which was perhaps the most significant example of the subject matter of Bataille's life-long search, a disruptive (for thought) and ungraspable (for economy) unemployed negativity. Second, by opposing each other and each maintaining their interpretation of Bataille's work as correct, they also betray Bataille's radicalism (while paradoxically giving him the upper hand), which resides, in my opinion, in the non-resolvable tension between reference and process, between metaphor and operation, between writing *on* and writing *of*, between theorization and practice.

A few years after the publication of these divergent and problematic studies, Andrew Benjamin released *Architectural Philosophy*, a book which as I will show, is undoubtedly influenced by its predecessors. Indeed, in those chapters of his book *Architectural Philosophy* which discuss Bataille's 'formless', Andrew Benjamin actually acknowledges the influence of the opposite stances of Georges Didi-Huberman, Krauss and Bois on the subject. While the book's definite aim and assumed task is somehow larger than the mere investigation of a 'formless' architecture, it nevertheless significantly contributes to the reception of Bataille's oeuvre within the architectural discipline. Benjamin proposes a particular interpretation of the 'formless' as distanced from social grounds and as what might 'form'. It is through these theorizations that he attempts to define the 'formless' relevance to the architectural discipline, subsequently defending a conception of the 'irreducibly architectural' as autonomous. However, as I hope to show, Benjamin's study also brings to the fore several issues, paradoxes and problems. Certain of these pertain to the method used, others are linked to the nature of the material considered, while some are the simple consequence of the book's aims. In brief terms, I will demonstrate how, in my view, Benjamin betrays Bataille's thought, by rejecting his texts on architecture, thus reducing its relevance to the discipline, by conflating Bataille's thinking with the approach of 'Process Philosophy', by using this notion of 'formless' for restating the autonomy of architecture, and finally for restoring Peter Eisenman's criticality.

II.1. Georges Didi-Huberman's
La ressemblance informe ou Le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille

Georges Didi-Huberman in *La ressemblance informe ou Le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* published in 1995 and unfortunately to date, still not translated from the French, attempts to present and thus to understand the peculiar articulation between images and 'notions' which Bataille displayed and discussed in his review *Documents*, during the years 1929-1930. The aim of this enterprise is thus to face up to Bataille's 'thinking of the image', the relationship of the image to the text, that, according to Didi-Huberman, 'the art historians did not always dare to tackle' and as such gave up 'the possibility of understanding what "symptom", "form" or "image" mean',[3] (I should add to that list, the 'formless' or *informe*).

II.1.1. A 'Formless' Resemblance

Didi-Huberman wishes to understand what he perceives as Bataille's theoretical project, and in order to do so, proposes a particular reading of the 'formless'. He reads Bataille's short article not as the enunciation of a process or operation which brings along its utterance, a taxonomic or structural disorder but rather as a metaphorical allusion to, or a poetic definition of what is the 'formless'. Indeed, he simply reads Bataille's sentence, 'affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only "formless" amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or a spit',[4] through the resemblance that is indicated: the metaphorical 'something like'. And it is this metaphor which leads him to formulate the oxymoron '*ressemblance informe*' or 'formless resemblance' (as in the title of the book). Thus, his discussion of the 'working' of the 'formless' is merely emphasising its metaphorical aspects and its morphological effects. The 'formless' would be

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[3]. Georges Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance informe ou Le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille*, Paris: Macula, 1995, p.379.

[4]. Georges Bataille, 'Informe' in *Documents 7*, Dec. 1929, p.382. Reprinted in *OC I*, p.217. Trans. in Alan Stoekl, (ed.), *Visions of Excess*, p.31.

this 'something like' which is opposing the human figure and its co-opting of the foreign form through 'resemblance'. The movement of the 'formless' appears, 'once the human face is decomposed and resemblances shriek',[5] hence, Didi-Huberman considers the 'formless' as a synonym of 'human deformation'. The 'formless' specifies:

> *'un certain pouvoir qu'ont les formes de se déformer en permanence, de passer rapidement du semblable au dissemblable, et plus précisément— car il eut suffit de parler de déformation pour nommer tout cela— d'attaquer la forme humaine dans un procédé ou la forme s'ouvre, se réfute, et se révèle en même temps',[6]*

> *'a certain power that forms have to deform themselves constantly, to pass quickly from the like to the unlike, and more precisely—for it had sufficed to say deformation to cover all of that— to engage the human form in this process in which form opens itself, "refutes itself", and reveals itself at the same time [...];'*

Through this interpretative frame, the whole project of *Documents* becomes some 'anthropology of resemblances and cruelty'.[7] From this perspective, the aim of the review is not to abolish 'form' but to 'transgress' it. This transgression is seen as an 'anthropologicalo-religious' term as the 'form' which should be transgressed is the object of a 'taboo'.[8] Here, Didi-Huberman joins, rightly in my view, the 'formless' to a socio-cultural and even, perhaps, political problematic: the 'formless' engage with a 'good' form, which is socially sacralised (its transgression being a social taboo).

However, and although I agree with Didi-Huberman's connecting of the 'formless' to socio-cultural issues, I must point to what I consider a major problem in his study. As an overall perception, the 'formless' appears as nothing more than a theme-concept (deformation), and as such Didi-Huberman's study strips the 'formless' of most of its radicalism. More specifically the operative side of the 'formless' in Bataille's article, as what impacts the structure of thought, as what operates a loss of meaning, as what lowers the status of concepts, is totally removed from Didi-Huberman's reflexion.[9] Didi-Huberman innocently gives to the 'formless' the status of a theme-concept, or worse, an idea.

II.1.2. The 'Dialectics of Forms'

Beyond this problem of the conceptualization of the 'formless', another issue appears within Didi-Huberman's study: he seems to hesitate with regard to the kind of 'structure' at work within *Documents*. In other words, his interpretation of the nature of the 'process' at the core of Bataille's 'thinking of the image' is more than ambiguous. Didi-Huberman, without a doubt sees Bataille as a dialectician, an idea he develops merely from the fact that the term 'dialectic' makes a discreet appearance in *one single* text written by Bataille for *Documents*: 'The Deviations of Nature'. But right through the book, he seems to alternate irrationally, between two different but seminal understandings of Bataille's dialectics. At some points in the text he appears to view Bataille as a dialectician in the pure vein of Hegelian thought, while at others he appears to considers the process operating within *Documents* as some sort of 'dialectics of forms' but without super-session.

For example, in the first pages of the book, Didi-Huberman considers Bataille's formless not as the process which in itself, is at the heart of *Documents*, but as merely a part or a half of it; the process in question being one of 'form's transgression'. It is precisely this process of transgression which is strangely qualified, later in the book, as being 'dialectical', in the sense that the 'form' must be sustained or preserved in order to be 'touched' by the 'matter' (formless) which is its 'inseparable contradiction'.[10] Thus, 'form' transgressed but not annihilated by its own internal

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[5]. Georges Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance informe ou Le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille*, Paris: Macula, 1995, p.357.

[6]. Ibid.p.135.

[7]. Ibid,p.307.

[8]. Ibid.pp.25-29.

[9]. See See Georges Bataille, 'Informe' in *Document 7*, Dec. 1929, p.382. Reprinted in *OC I*, p. 217. Trans. in Alan Stoekl, (ed.), *Visions of Excess*, p. 31.

[10]. Georges Didi-Huberman, *La ressemblance informe ou Le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille*, Paris: Macula, 1995, p.212.

heterogeneity (formless matter), opens up to other 'forms': its 'transgressive forms' (which constitutes the 'ressemblances informe' or 'formless resemblances'). This movement of tension, which is sustained without any super-session, (in Didi-Huberman's view at this point of the text), between terms which are bound by their contradictory natures, is coined as 'the dialectics of forms'.

Didi-Huberman's ambitious and risky project is thus to show that the image functions for Bataille according to a 'double dialectical regime', the one of the 'form' and the other of the 'formless'; a formless whose negativity would be productive without, nevertheless and perhaps paradoxically, abandoning its negativity. There should be no assumption of a third a term. However, he announces his thesis in these terms:

> *'Transgresser les formes ne veut [...] pas dire se delier des formes [...]. Revendiquer l'informe ne veut pas dire revendiquer des non-formes, mais plutot s'engager dans un travail des formes equivalent a ce que serait un travail d' accouchement ou d'agonie: [...]un processus dechirant mettant quelque chose a mort et, dans cette negativite meme, inventant quelque chose d'absolument neuf, mettant quelque chose au jour [...]'.[11]*

> *'To transgress forms does not [...] mean to unbind one from the forms [...]. To claim for "formless" does not mean to claim for non-forms, but rather to engage oneself in a work on forms equivalent to what could be the labour of birth-delivery or slow death: [...] a bursting process throwing something in its death throes and, within this negativity, creating something absolutely new, giving birth to something [...]'.*

Limiting a reading to this passage only, it would seem obvious that for Didi-Huberman, and contrary to what he might state somewhere else in his book, the negativity is simply put to work in order to replace one form by another but similar one, or worse it is used in order to replace an 'original' form by a more developed one, according to a typically Hegelian dialectical process. The formless would participate in some sort of *aufhebung*. But, as Didi-Huberman knows the incompatibility of Bataille's oeuvre with the Hegelian enterprise, he tries, in the following lines, to diminish the extent to which should be carried the super-session he has just described. The aforementioned 'birth' is:

> *'[...]le jour d'une cruaute au travail dans les formes et dans les rapports entre formes –une cruaute dans les resemblances. Dire que les formes 'travaillent' a leur propre transgression, c'est dire qu'un tel travail fait se ruer les formes contre d'autres formes [...]. Formes contres formes et matieres contre formes, matieres touchant et, quelquefois, mangeant des formes. Et ce qui aurait fait l'enjeu [...] d'un tel conflit fecond n'etait rien d'autre qu'une nouvelle facon de penser les formes, processus contre resultats, relations labiles contre termes fixes'.[12]*

> *'[...] the birth of a cruelty at work within the forms and in the relationships between the forms –a cruelty in the resemblances. To say that the forms "work" at their own transgressions is to say that such a work pushes the forms to crash into other forms [...], forms against forms and matters against forms, matters touching and, sometimes eating forms. What would have been at stake [...] in such a prolific conflict was nothing less than a new way to think the forms, process against results, mobile relations against fixed terms'.*

Thus, Didi-Huberman sustains his claim that the 'dialectics of forms' he perceives in *Documents*, is not a 'pure' Hegelian dialectic, i.e. this articulation between form and formless does not lead to new superseded 'form', yet, the 'prolific conflict' is by definition productive. This production, Georges Didi-Huberman would like to present it as a simple 'new' way to think the forms'. But is the 'new way to think the forms' not a form in itself? Doesn't Didi-Huberman here read Bataille's work, within *Documents*, as paradoxically, simply Hegelian?

Furthermore, other examples show the ambiguities unleashed by Didi-Huberman's interpretation of Bataille as a dialectician. I am not discussing here the validity of Didi-Huberman's

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[11]. Ibid. p.21. the paragraph that follows is my own translation.
[12]. Ibid. p.21.

interpretation of Bataille as a dialectician, Hegelian or not. I just wish to show how Didi-Huberman's conception of Bataille's dialectical skills, shifts constantly from a 'pure dialectic' to a 'dialectic without third term' and vice versa. In the third section of the book, Didi-Huberman demonstrates what could be a dialectical reading of Bataille. Yet, this time, Bataille is convicted of employing a 'third term' and thus of presenting signs of a will to 'super-session'. Reading the article 'Bouche' (mouth) from the *Documents* "Critical Dictionary", Didi-Huberman distinguishes three consecutive moments: moment A, or the 'thesis', where Bataille positions the mouth as 'the prow of animals'; moment B, or the 'antithesis', concerning the mouth of 'civilized men'; and moment C, the third term, the outcome of the super-session (*aufhebung*), which Didi-Huberman names the 'Symptom', that is the development (the main point of Bataille's essay) of the mouth's bestiality 'on important occasions' of human life. Thus, Didi-Huberman acts here, as if Bataille posits, on the one hand, the animal mouth, and on the other, the human mouth, and finally, its synthesis, the animal-human-mouth.[13] However, a few pages further in the book, Didi-Huberman speaks of the 'symptom' as a simple antithesis, a denial, 'the return of the repressed', confirming as such, that contrary to what he just wrote, there is no third term.[14]

Hence, Didi-Huberman, as in this example (but there are several others) continually makes the thinking of the 'formless' into a dialectic —a dialectic aiming, sometimes at the assumption of a third term with the Hegelian synthesis renamed 'symptom', and at others, at a simple oscillation between form and formless, between thesis and antithesis, without synthesis (the 'symptom' becoming the antithesis).

II.1.3. Putting in Form the 'Formless'

Finally, beyond noticing this simple discrepancy, I would like to admit the hypothesis that this 'hesitation' is actually —using Didi-Huberman's term — the 'symptom' of a certain will: the will to 'put in form' through a discursive 'technique', the will to thematize, or at least to render 'meaningful' within art theory and criticism, Bataille's notion of 'formless'. It is, in my view, through this will that Didi-Huberman betrays Bataille's oeuvre. Indeed, by proposing an understanding of the relationship between the images and the text displayed within *Documents*, Didi-Huberman, unlike Denis Hollier, did not wonder to which extent his enterprise was not a reduction of Bataille's notion. A notion which in itself, is not only a metaphor but also a performative. It refers, not only to something exterior to itself, but in itself brings things down, it lowers the status (and thus the meaning) of the referent to which it is juxtaposed.[15] Hence, as to write quietly on something is somehow to expose, discuss and explain its structure and meaning, to write on the 'formless' is, consequently, to stabilize its meaning and as such to disrupt its radicalism, to limit its performance to the extent that it will lose all 'impact'. And in my view, Didi-Huberman's enterprise finds itself locked up in such a predicament. His desire to 'thematize' the 'formless' as what forms within what he names 'the dialectic of form', leads him to such hesitancy. On the one hand 'the dialectic of form' in order to be meaningful and thus explicable, should lead to the assumption of a third term 'the formless resemblance', while on the other hand, the 'formless' in order to preserve its radicalism (in order to avoid its super-session) should remain intact; the 'symptom' must stay a mere antithesis. This is what you risk if you attempt merely to conceptualize, and thus to discipline and stabilize this process which is the 'formless': it might seem that it 'transgresses' (and it doesn't matter if human or not) 'form', yet it does not mean it is stable enough to be 'put in the form' of transgression. The 'formless' might deform all formal aims, it might mutilate the form of the project, but it can never be 'formed' as a project (although it might just take on its appearance).

II.2. Rosalind E. Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois' *Formless: A User's Guide*

Formless: A User's Guide was published as the catalogue of an exhibition organized by Rosalind E. Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois and held at the Pompidou Centre in Paris during the summer of

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[13]. Ibid.pp.337-338.
[14]. Ibid.p.340
[15]. See Georges Bataille, 'Informe' in *Document 7*, Dec. 1929, p.382. Reprinted in *OC I*, p.217. Trans. in Alan Stoekl, (ed.), *Visions of Excess*, p.31.

1996. But beyond being simply a catalogue, this book also appears as a theoretical-historical monograph and a manifesto. The curators, who are both well-known scholars in the field of art and who were well-established professors in universities such as Columbia and Harvard at the time of the exhibition, attempt with this book to redefine the inner motivations of 'art' Modernism or at least to present a 'new' interpretation of it – going against the mainstream. In this enterprise Bataille's 'formless' (informe) is rendered instrumental (operative), literally, in the words of the authors 'put to use', in order to shake up the art world and as such to 'redeal modernism's card'.[16] At the difference of Didi-Huberman (but there are some others), they do not wish to understand Bataille's 'thinking of the image', i.e. they do not consider Bataille's *Documents* and 'formless' as the site of a historical inspection, but assume that the review with its central notion ('formless') can provide a set of tools for re-interpreting art. The nature of this re-interpretation (i.e. a simple internal paradigmatic shift, a mere structural rearrangement or a potential reformulation of theoretical methods leading to new points of contact between art and politics), constitutes in my view (and as I hope to show), the major issue of the book.

II.2.1. Bataille Versus Greenberg

For the authors the 'mainstream' interpretation of modern art is, naturally, the rather old fashioned, and thus, in my view, inoffensive 'Modernism' of Clement Greenberg which, on the base of a dialectical opposition between abstract and figurative art, defines the purpose of modern art as primarily 'the search for its own essence'. This enterprise is disqualified by Krauss and Bois as being 'ontological' and as promoting a 'myth' based on four founding postulates. First art is, or should be, 'purely visual' –the tactile or material 'does not exist [...] except as in-formed, made over into form'; second, temporality is completely removed from it, 'pictures reveal themselves in an instant and are addressed only to the eye of the viewer'; third, 'being purely visual, art is addressed to the subject as an erect being, far from the horizontal axis that governs the life of animals [...]. Art according to this (mainstream modernist) view, is a sublimatory (thus repressive) activity that separates the perceiver from his or her body. [...] it gathers the perceiver together around the core of its ideal unity'; and finally, art is defined by its formal plenitude – a work of art must have a beginning and an end, 'all apparent disorder is necessarily reabsorbed in the very fact of being bounded'.[17]

Bataille's 'formless' (informe) is 'put to use' against this background, in order to dismantle it. For the authors, it is a third term that stands outside the opposition of 'form versus content' on which Greenbergian Modernism rests, and whose operative function is to 'bring things down in the world' [declasser], to tear down hierarchies and systems as well as structures and forms. Hence, Krauss and Bois declare their aim in such terms:

> *[...]with regard to the* Informe, *it is a matter [...] of locating certain operations that brush modernism against the grain, and of doing so without countering modernism's formal certainties by means of the more reassuring and naïve certainties of meaning. On the contrary, these operations split off from modernism, insulting the very opposition of form and content – which is itself formal, arising as it does from a binary logic – declaring it null and void.*[18]

The authors do not simply base their understanding of Bataille's notion on the mere reading of the article defining it, (as it was published in *Documents*), rather they produce an interpretation of it as 'operative' through a reflection on Bataille's discussion of Edouard Manet's *Olympia*. Bataille did not consider this work to be the 'first' modernist painting, (as most art-history books tend to do with *Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe*), but as 'the first masterpiece before which the crowd fairly lost all control of itself'; this loss of composure being symptomatic of the scandalous nature of the painting, and thus conferring on it the status of a radical break.[19] Bois and Krauss states that if Olympia caused a scandal, it was, according to Bataille, because 'by means of it Manet refused the various

[16]. Rosalind E. Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide*, N-Y: Zone books, 1997, p.21.

[17]. Ibid. p.25.

[18]. Ibid. p.16.

[19]. Georges Bataille, *Manet*, in *OC IX*, p. 116, tr. *Manet*, NY: Rizzoli, 1983, p.16.

ideological and formal codes regulating the depiction of the nude, whether erotic, mythological, or even realistic'.[20] They paraphrase Bataille: 'Manet's subject is not located anywhere': For Bataille, Manet's subject is without roots or uprooted, not allowing for a conventional reading: a subject that slips out of the hands (or rather here the mind) of the interpreter. This slippage (glissement) is, for Bataille, Manet's secret: 'The true goal of his art is to disappoint expectation'.[21] And it is precisely this 'slippage' or 'disappointment' that the authors, following Bataille, consider not as a theme but as performance, an operation. Such an operation displaces both 'form' and 'content' present on the canvas, and as such renders limitative if not impossible, either an iconographic (post-modern) or a modern (Greenberg) reading of the painting. Finally this 'operation' of 'slippage' is seen as 'a version of what Bataille calls the *Informe* (formless)'.[22]

After this short excursus on Bataille's *Manet*, the authors are at liberty to read in the article 'formless' what constitutes its operative potential: 'Formless is *not only* an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to brings things down (declasser) in the world'.[23] They consequently state, without noticing Bataille's nuance ('not only'):

> *'(formless) is not so much a stable motif to which we can refer, a symbolizable theme, a given quality, as it is a term allowing one to operate a declassification, in the double sense of lowering and, of taxonomic disorder. Nothing in and of itself, the formless has only an operational existence: it is a performative, like obscene words, the violence of which derives less from the semantics than from the very act of their delivery. [...]. The Formless is an operation'.[24]*

Bois and Krauss, subsequently, 'put to use' the 'formless' operative potential for 'bringing down' the four founding myths of Greenbergian Modernism. They wish to unseal the 'coherence' of modernism's 'interpretative grid'. Thus here, the 'formless' is used for 'locating' certain art practices or pieces of art that have been omitted by the 'mainstream' modernist reading, to focus attention once again, on what had been 'repressed' by Modernism. Contradicting item for item, the four modernist claims, the authors propose in the name of the 'formless' four 'operations' that also constitute the four parts or categories of the book. Each of them represents a set of strategies through which form, meaning, the subject, language, structure, the project and, more than anything, sublimatory art can be knocked off their pedestals and brought down to earth so that what has been repressed can 'return': 'Base Materialism' must challenge and undermine modernism's obsession with opticality (the return of matter); 'Horizontality' has to disrupt and bring down its privileging of the vertical (the return of the animal); while 'Pulse' refuses the instantaneous Gestalt of the painted space and its aesthetic effect (the return of temporal); and 'Entropy' should disorganize the propensity to order that is seen as lying at the heart of the modernist project (the return of chaos).[25]

II.2.2. Opposing Thematic and Dialectical Readings of Bataille

Bois and Krauss, with *Formless: A User's Guide*, attempt to demonstrate that what matters in modernist art, is not so much, as 'mainstream' modernism maintains, the reduction of all aspects of the arts to some rarefied, purified essence, but something much more challenging, the lowering of man's sights from the clear sky of idealism to the mud down below, as well as the loss of meaning, hierarchy, structure and form this entails. But this is an issue fraught with difficulties because there are two very different ways to approach such a loss, such a descent: from the viewpoint of what is above, as a tragic loss, in an economy that demands redemption, restitution, explanation, thematic; or from the viewpoint of what is below, as liberation, as a true return of the repressed, in an economy of excess, rebellion, unreason.

Therefore the authors seem to be fighting a battle on two fronts: first, as I mentioned above,

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[20]. Rosalind E. Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide*, N-Y: Zone books, 1997, p.15.
[21]. Ibid.
[22]. Ibid.
[23]. See Georges Bataille, 'Informe' in *Document 7*, Dec. 1929, p.382. Reprinted in *OC* I, p. 217. Trans. in Alan Stoekl, (ed.), *Visions of Excess*, p. 31.
[24]. Rosalind E. Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide*, N-Y: Zone books, 1997, p.18.
[25]. Ibid. pp. 26-40.

against the old-fashioned and inoffensive Greenbergian Modernism, a sort of structural and idealized modernism, and second, against the more recent, and probably more threatening view of a postmodernism which would rather thematize the return of the repressed, than actively engage with, truly allowing its return.

Hence, the authors, beyond opposing Greenberg's view, are also opposing other scholars interested in Bataille's terms and their articulation with modern art productions, who would rather thematize the formless than to operate it. It is from the perspective of this 'hidden' agenda, that Krauss and Bois come across Georges Didi-Huberman and his *La ressemblance informe ou Le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille*, I discussed above. They dedicate to the critique of his intention, and hypothesis, two sub-chapters: 'Dialectic' and 'Figure'.[26]

With 'Figure', Bois and Krauss oppose Didi-Huberman's reading of Bataille's article 'formless' and his subsequent understanding of the 'formless' as a metaphor, the 'something like' that I already mentioned. They discard his oxymoron 'formless resemblance' for it reintroduces 'wholesale, everything the concept of *informe*, such as we understand it, wants to get rid of'.[27] In other words they simply perceive Didi-Huberman's account of the 'formless' as an other post-modern reworking, not as welcoming the return of the 'repressed', but paradoxically as allowing the return of the concept, theme, figure, morphology and meaning, all of which are precisely the operative targets of the 'formless' as they understand it. Discussing the passage of the article 'formless' that I quoted before: 'affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only "formless", amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or a spit',[28] and noticing first the semblance of a contradiction 'on the one hand there is the equation "resembles nothing=informe"; on the other, a vague resemblance is indicated: "something like..."',[29] they finally state their own interpretation:

> *'The informe is what must be crushed (or spat out), because it has no right in any sense, because it does not make any sense, and because that in itself is unbearable to reason (...). To say that the universe is informe is to say that it makes no sense and thus that it should be crushed like a spider or expectorated like mucous. Bataille's double proposition is thus not contradictory, the "something like" not referring to a resemblance but to an operation; the spit or the crushed spider are not themes (sic). Metaphor, figure, theme, morphology, meaning — everything that resembles something, everything that is gathered into the unity of a concept — that is what the informe operation crushes (...)'.[30]*

Although, I agree completely with their will to lay stress on the operative side of the 'formless', I can only disagree with their refusal to perceive the metaphoric and symbolic dimension of that notion. To cut it short, as I will soon go back to this issue, in their refusal to 'accept' Bataille's contradiction lies their misconception: Bataille's radicalism is to be found in the tension between irreconcilable opposites, i.e. Bataille's contradiction within the very definition of the notion 'formless' is what gives it such an edge.

In the sub-chapter 'Dialectic', the authors again tackle Didi-Huberman, but this time the main target of their attack is not his conceptualisation of the 'formless', but his belief in the presence of a 'dialectic of form' at work within *Documents*, and his subsequent understanding of Bataille as a Dialectician. For Krauss and Bois, the diacritical terms[31] often present within Bataille's oeuvre, such as for example, 'homogeneous' versus 'heterogeneous' have nothing to do with some dialectical enterprise aiming at the super-session of its ontological polarities into a third term. Rather, the presence of opposites within Bataille's theoretical prose should be interpreted as an example of the process governing Bataille's thought as a whole: sissiparity or scission. They clarify their interpretation in these terms:

> *'One must not confuse dialectics with scission (the division of everything into two, each*

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[26]. Ibid. see 'Dialectic', pp.67-73, and 'Figure', pp. 79-86.

[27]. Ibid. p.80.

[28]. Georges Bataille, 'Informe' in *Documents* 7, Dec. 1929, p.382. Reprinted in *OC* I, p. 217. Trans. in Alan Stoekl, (ed.), *Visions of Excess*, p. 31.

[29]. Rosalind E. Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide*, N-Y: Zone books, 1997, p.79.

[30]. Ibid.

[31]. In other words, marking a distinction.

having its high and its low part). The respective engines of these two operations might run on the same fuel – to wit, negativity – but the dialectic is geared towards a final reconciliation, toward the concord of absolute knowledge, while scission, on the contrary, always tries, by means of a low blow that attacks reason itself, to make the assimilation of the two opposites impossible. Scission is the basis of heterology as "the science of the wholly other". The dialectic, for its part, aims only at reinforcing homology: homology is simultaneously its foundation, its point of departure, and its point of arrival".[32]

Krauss and Bois subsequently refute the idea of Bataille as a dialectician and/or Hegelian. For them terms and notions such as 'informe', 'base materialism', 'heterology' and 'division into two', which often appear here and there in Bataille's work, all imply the exclusion of a third term. They form evidences of a thought functioning on a dualist mode and which, most importantly, refuses to resolve contradictions. Precisely this mode of thought 'sets a movement of asymmetrical division to work, separating high from low and through its asymmetry, implying a fall from high to low'.[33] They finally conclude their demonstration of Bataille's dualism or Manichaeism by affirming what is of importance in such thought, its ability to think matter non-dialectically.

'For Bataille, there is no third term, but rather an "alternating rhythm" of homology and heterology, of appropriation and excretion. Each time that the homogeneous raises its head and reconstitutes itself (which it never stops doing since society coheres only by means of its cement), the job of the informe, base materialism, and scission is to decapitate it. What is at stake is the very possibility of a non–dialectical materialism. Matter is heterogeneous, it is what cannot be tamed by any concept'.[34]

II.2.3. 'Structural Replacement' and 'Art's Autonomy'

Before going back to the issue of the misconception of the 'formless' that I mentioned above, I'd like to point out two other seminal problems that I notice in Krauss and Bois's book: first the issue of the 'structural replacement' they operate, and second, although bound to it, the peculiar problem of the autonomy of art they induce, in other words, in my view, the authors have committed two severe faults which are, although independently remarkable, nevertheless linked. By limiting their reading of the 'formless' operativeness to a critique of 'High' Modernism they merely consider Bataille's work, and more specifically the 'formless' as some 'structuralist' activity and term, and as a consequence of it, by refusing all form of external references to which is bound the operation of 'formless', they strip out Bataille's oeuvre and his notion from their socio-political fold. Thus they restrict their relevance to their own field and seriously limit the potential impact of modern art and theory on society.

As I already mentioned, there are two different ways to approach Bataille's work and the 'formless': as the site of a historical inspection, from the viewpoint of what is above, as an identification of the loss that these enterprise and notion cause in a stabilizing economy – a scholarly accepted discourse – that demands a thematic explanation. This is an interpretation, which is probably necessary in order to unveil the peculiar mechanism and articulation at work within this 'material'. Or, it is possible to approach them as a set of tools allowing a new interpretation of culture, art and the social, and as devices which operate a disruption of the standard methods of research, from the viewpoint of what is below, as liberation, as the return of the repressed, in an operative economy of excess, rebellion, unreason. Krauss and Bois seem to choose the second option: Bataille's 'formless' at the service of a new interpretation of modern art, disruptive of the 'old' (Greenbergian) one. However, in my view Bataille's radicalism or at least the mechanism at work within his work is not totally acknowledged by the authors. An interview the authors gave, published in an issue of *Artforum* at the time of the exhibition in Paris, might provide an explanation. There they innocently acknowledge the discrepancy visible between Bataille's intention and their own interpretation of it: 'Our position is not necessarily Bataille's position. We're aligned with Bataille when it pleases us to be so, and not aligned when it doesn't'.[35] Hence,

[32]. Ibid. p.67.
[33]. Ibid. p.69.
[34]. Ibid. p.71.
[35]. Lauren Sedofsky, 'Down and Dirty: Lauren Sedofsky talks with Rosalind Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois', *Artforum,*

Formless: A User's Guide proposes, in my view, an encounter between Bataille's 'formless' and modern art, where paradoxically, the true disruptive potential of the 'formless', as a whole, is somehow 'contained' by treating it as a structuralist activity, by simply producing a structural replacement of the 'old' Greenbergian, let's call it 'formed', interpretation of modern art, by a 'new', let's call it for the sake of structural symmetry, 're-formed' one.

Indeed, although the authors claim that their project resists the lure of 'totalization', one of the main features of 'mainstream' Modernism, it would appear to be a simple re-working of the material of its predecessor, while providing those interested in art with an array of viewpoints, allowing an understanding and practice of art in a certain authorized way (as a user's guide). This results in an approach to modern art corresponding symmetrically with the project of Greenbergian Modernism. The authors' enterprise ends up looking like a 'reformed' modernism, where its alleged attack on Greenbergian modernism produces not an undoing of this tradition but a re-doing. To be fair, this is not only and simply my critique. As a matter of fact it is exactly the one the well-known theoretician and historian Hal Foster outlined during a conversation recorded for the art-theory journal *October*, a few months before the exhibition opened:

> *'I hate to say it, but (...) you have collaborated on a story that feels almost as claustrophobic, as hermetic, as the old narrative. Only now, rather than a heroic history of form-givers, we have a heroic history of form-undoers, great debasers of form. But how changed are the names, the Oedipal structure, the mimetic rivalry, the value system? Yves-Alain uses the word 'debase', but in the structuralist reading of Bataille, Pollock, Twombly, and all the rest, the materiality, the bodiliness, the historicity of the informe, the base of the base, all but drop out'.*[36]

The critique of Foster is radical but also double: it suggests that on the one hand Bois and Krauss retain the very structure and structuring conditions of the 'canon', of the old frame of interpretation, and on the other hand that they empty the formless from its 'base', i.e. from its low socio-political aspects. While I will go back to Foster's criticism second fold, it is important to linger, here, on the first section of his critique: that is, the authors are simply proposing an alternative to Greenbergian Modernism which preserves its structure. This is clearly visible in the way their project reworks the main characteristics of Modernism without disturbing its structuring function: the 'formless' is split into four operations which should bring down modernism's central tenets, but are actually just four functionally similar, though semantically inimical, categories. They reverse the axioms of modernism but the function and content of the modernist canon are totally preserved, as many of the artists and much of the works discussed, are also familiar to the Greenbergian enterprise. Furthermore, the maintenance of a structural system is clearly enacted by the form of the book. At the end of each entry or article, the reader is oriented towards other parts of the book for reference. This creates a form of circularity within a system governed by structural relations.

But, before Foster's criticism, it is Bataille's himself within his article 'formless' who intuited a warning that the authors should not have missed:

> *'In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what there is, a mathematical over coat. On the other hand affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit'.*[37]

Although Bois and Krauss quote this passage within the first pages of *Formless: A User's Guide*, they seem to have been unable to perceive in this short article the very critique of their own enterprise. They are the academics (scholars) who wish to give 'shape to the universe', their 'structuralist' rearrangement or replacement is nothing else than the 'mathematical over-coat' that Bataille opposes.

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summer 1996, p.131.

[36]. Yves-Alain Bois, et al., 'The Politics of the Signifier II: A Conversation of the Informe and the Abject', *October*, 67, Winter 1994, p.12.

[37]. Georges Bataille, 'Informe' in *Document* 7, Dec. 1929, p.382. Reprinted in *OCI*, p.217. Trans. in Alan Stoekl, (ed.), *Visions of Excess*, p.31, quoted in Rosalind E. Krauss and Yves-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide*, N-Y: Zone books, 1997, p.5.

Going back to Foster's criticism second fold, which is similar to my criticism of the autonomy of art that Bois and Krauss induces, it is precisely by setting 'frock coats' against squashed spiders and gobs of spit that Bataille intuits a connection between the 'formless' and some socio-political, thus external to the art field, low matter. Bataille mentions the 'frock coats' in order to refer to those who wear them, the male bourgeois intellectual who offer a rationalist explanation of the world. And in his short prose, the squashed spiders and spits represent the objects of the phobias that the rationalist explanation attempts to reject. Bataille requests that we acknowledge the chaotic and low condition of the world, but he also offers a practice that leads to the 'de-frocking' of rational explanations through the privileging of socio-politically taboo material (spider and spits). Conversely, Bois and Krauss wish simply to undo (not to de-frock) a nowadays, relatively inoffensive historical-theoretical art paradigm, by invoking art-works, which are taboo only in relation to this paradigm and not to any socio-political good will. The reason for such a drawback is rather simple: the authors merely wish to gently and structurally rearrange Greenberg Modernism in order to defend Modern Art against certain criticisms and practices that would thematically refer to socio-political material which are by definition exterior to it. Bois and Krauss are actually the greatest defenders of art's autonomy.

II.2.4. Putting at Work the 'Formless'

In concluding this discussion of *Formless: A User's Guide*, I'd like to go back to the issue of Krauss and Bois's misconception of the 'formless', that I mentioned above. This misconception of the 'formless' as only an operation is, as I hope to have shown, bound to their own agenda. Indeed, due to their official and officious aims (a critique of Greenbergian Modernism, and a preservation of art's autonomy), they must refute everything that marks the formless as a metaphor, as referring to some exterior socio-political taboo, however this limitation is not inconsequential, it entails a certain predicament. By refusing to accept Bataille's formless metaphorical aspects, they deeply wound its critical potential: they separate it from one of its fold. In doing so, they betray, in a way that is opposite in its intentions and effects but similar in its consequences to Didi-Huberman's study, the radicalism of Bataille's work, radicalism which lies, (as I already mentioned it), in the non-resolvable tension between reference and process, between metaphor and operation, between writing *on* and writing *of*, between theorization and practice. They further betray Bataille's oeuvre, through their desire to 'to put it to work' or using their expression to 'put it to use'. Indeed, in their desire to 'put to work' the 'formless', not for what it does on its own, but for what it could do according to their proper aim, they operate against the very base of the 'formless', that is to be a disruptive and ungraspable, unemployed negativity for economic and productive work.. Here it is not a matter of questioning the reality of the uselessness or the usefulness of the 'formless': you can always argue for or against the usefulness or uselessness of anything. Rather what is at stake is the reality or possibility of operating the 'formless'. The question is not whether it is useful, but rather, to whom is it useful? Certainly not to the wearers of 'frock coats', obviously not to the academics wishing to give 'form' to what there is for protecting their rationalist interpretations and good taste, and thus not to Krauss and Bois. In my view the unemployed negativity is useless but radically so, that is, from the point of view of the controlling (thinking) subject. It might seems to work to undo, that is perhaps to be useful, yet it does not mean that it can be useful to some carefully determined aims or even that it is servile enough to be 'put to work' for simply undoing. The 'formless' is a radical form of unemployed negativity in the sense that it works but cannot be rendered instrumental. This unemployed negativity might operate against the productive aim, against the project, but it can never be 'employed' by or 'work' for/with it (although it might just seem to do so, in appearance only).

II.3. Andrew Benjamin's 'becoming' of the 'formless' (*Architectural Philosophy*)

Released a few years after the publication of *Formless: A User's Guide* and *La ressemblance informe ou Le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille*, Andrew Benjamin's *Architectural Philosophy* is, without doubt, deeply influenced (as its author references them but also joins paradoxically, in my view, two of their arguments) by those two books. It proposes a particular interpretation of the 'formless' as what might 'form' and as such attempts to define its relevance to

the architectural discipline, subsequently defending a conception of the 'irreducibly architectural' as autonomous. While the book's definite aim and assumed task is somehow larger than the mere investigation of a 'formless' architecture, it nevertheless significantly contributes to the reception of Bataille's oeuvre within the discipline.

In opposition to some attitudes which claim to speak from a position 'on the margins' of the architectural discipline, and from there attempt to render the boundaries of the discipline as the site of theoretical and critical inspections, thus discussing the articulation of the discipline to its context and asserting architecture's lack of independence (as Bernard Tschumi might have wished to do), Andrew Benjamin's *Architectural Philosophy* inquires what might constitute, in the view of its author, the peculiarity of the architectural discipline, its core, that is and what constitutes the discipline from within. It is precisely in this perspective that the book defends what appears as the vector of a kind of autonomy: the 'irreducibly architectural'.

Architectural Philosophy does not exactly state that architecture is a discipline possessing a 'bounded' sense of identity, but rather understands the discipline as a particular 'operation' that it describes as this 'irreducibly architectural'. In other words, for Benjamin, if the essence of the architectural can be defined, this should not be done by setting up some 'spatial boundaries' framing a certain 'being' but rather by unveiling a particular architectural process of 'becoming'. Benjamin does not ask 'what is architecture,' 'where it ends' or 'where it starts' but 'how the architectural operates' or 'what is the thinking of architecture',[38] which means he is interested in what constitutes architecture's particularity but also how this particularity works in other domains, such as philosophy for example.

While this endeavour is itself problematic as most of the attempts of this kind often end-up in some sort of solipsism, it is also from the onset paradoxical. Indeed, it is rather paradoxical to refer to Bataille's oeuvre and notions, which are more often than not perceived as being 'on the margins', for unveiling what constitutes architecture from 'within', for defining what is the 'essence' of the architectural, or (using Benjamin's terms) the 'irreducibly architectural'. Furthermore, as I hope to show, Benjamin's study brings to the fore several other issues, paradoxes and problems. Certain of them pertain to the method used, others are linked to the nature of the material considered, while some are the simple consequences of the book's aims. For reasons which pertain to the nature of Benjamin's study, those problems are better named through the use of couples signifying what they operate: first, there is the intrinsic problem of 'Re-peating and Re-jecting', then the paradoxical extractions from Bataille's oeuvre as well as from Benjamin's influences that I perceive simply as 'Re-ducing and Re-hearsing', and finally the issue of architecture's autonomy and the problem of operative criticism that I qualify as 'Re-stating and Re-storing'.

Yet, as my aim is not to discredit as a whole Benjamin's understanding of the architectural, but to discuss the way he uses Bataille's 'formless' and subsequently the reception of this notion within architectural theory, I will only, in what follows, briefly explain some parts of *Architectural Philosophy*'s content—parts which seem of interest for the purpose of this chapter — and then I will discuss the problems (mentioned above) that those parts bring to the fore. In order to show what Bataille terms employment from such a perspective means for the discipline, as well as what it does to the notion itself — to the 'formless' — I will proceed through three steps. I will begin by giving an account of *Architectural Philosophy*'s aims and claims. Then, I will focus on Benjamin's first chapter 'Time, Function and Alterity in Architecture' which discusses the 'formless': I will address Benjamin's understanding of the 'irreducibly architectural', expound what he consider to be 'in' architecture, explain his dismissal of Plato's 'Khora', investigate how Benjamin develops an instrumental concern for Bataille's 'formless', and finally, unveil his identification of the 'formless' 'in' architecture. Subsequently, I will conclude on the three problematic consequences and effects (which I mentioned above) that Benjamin's endeavour has on the 'architectural', on Bataille's work and on its reception within architectural culture.

II.3.1. Architectural Philosophy

Architectural Philosophy consists of nine different essays/chapters which had been already published in various architectural and philosophical magazines and journals such as *AA Files*,

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[38]. Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000, p.viii.

ANY, Architectural Design, The Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts, during the decade previous to its release in 2000. It is, according to its author, an attempt to question the relationship between architecture and philosophy in a way that does not reduce the particularity of the architectural to nothingness, i.e. in a fashion that maintains the presence of the 'irreducibly architectural' while opposing the employment of the architectural as a mere example of 'philosophical thinking'.[39] (One may also wonder, beyond its simple desire not to consider the architectural as a mere illustration of theoretical accomplishments, to which extent this 'philosophical task' [which appears within language, through the words of a philosopher] that is to 'think' the 'irreducibly architectural', that is to understand what it terms 'the thinking of architecture', is not biased, or worse, impossible, from the very onset due to its, precisely, 'philosophical' nature). As this philosophical task's primary aim is not to discuss if there is such a thing as the 'irreducibly architectural' but rather to state what it is, *Architectural Philosophy* takes for granted the presence of the 'irreducibly architectural' in all form of 'true' architecture – as what is repeated. Consequently, the book investigates what is given 'in' architecture to be repeated as 'irreducibly architectural'. From this perspective, it is not surprising that what is given to be repeated with architecture is neither its lack of autonomy nor its socio-political effects (for perceiving it one should focus 'on the margin of the discipline' but the author refuses to do so). Instead, it appears, (as Benjamin focuses on the constitutive 'operations' of architecture) that what is given to be repeated in architecture consists of 'form' and 'function' and the nature of their relationship. Yet, for Benjamin this does not lead to a rehearsal of the somewhat outdated 'form-function' paradigm,[40] but, to a theoretical engagement with form, function, their repetition and the nature of their relationship as 'irreducibly architectural' concerns. According to him, his reflection on the impossibility to escape from those 'concerns' is not the sign of the wish to define the discipline's identity and to achieve its stability (autonomy), but an attempt to 'think' the relation that experimentation (that he links to alterity and criticality in architecture) might have with those aforementioned 'concerns', and its effects on the constitution of architectural design's operations.

The reflection on those 'concerns' takes place all over the book through various discussions and encounters different topics: from the contemporary architectural practices of Eisenman as well as Reiser and Umemoto (Part I), to the figuration of spatio-theoritical problems in the work of philosophers such as Bataille (Part I), Blanchot, Kant, Leibniz, (Part II) and Descartes (Part III), or the question of the diagram in current architectural discourse (Part II), the filmic representation of architecture, and the politics of memory and the memorial (Part III). However, as I already mentioned, I will limit my discussion of Benjamin's book to its first part, entitled 'Complex Spacing' and more precisely to its first chapter, 'Time, Function and Alterity in Architecture' which is without a doubt seminal for Benjamin's claim but which also matters within the scope of this dissertation as it attempts to meditate on Bataille's 'formless'.

Part one's overall claim, is that the 'space' of the critical, (which is bound to experimentation) is unavoidably linked to the creation of other possibilities within and for function. In Benjamin's own words:

> *[…] claim is that the possibility for alterity and criticality within architecture, depends upon retaining particularity, as the site of activity. Particularity in architecture is indissolubly connected to function'.[41]*

Function, for Benjamin should be understood through a complex structure of repetition. That is, function is given 'within, and as, forms of repetition'. This repetition of function is what allows alterity, and thus criticism (or even a critical architecture) to appear. Because this assumption of the critical as what rises through repetition might seem awkward, (indeed, how could the repetition of something stable, due to its reiteration, as function be anything less than conservative?), Benjamin explains himself in this way:

> *'Rather than allowing for a prescriptive or didactic conception of criticism, the primordality of repetition means that alterity has to figure within the possibility of a repetition that takes again*

[39]. Ibid.p.vii.
[40]. Ibid.pp.10-11.
[41]. Ibid.p.2.

for the first time. The paradoxical nature of this formulation is the consequence of holding to the necessity that the architectural be defined in terms of function, even though the formal presence of that function and thus the way formal presence effects function are themselves not determined in advance'.[42]

Thus, although the paradox which is here presented is simply the consequence of the will to define the 'irreducibly architectural' in relation to function and repetition, Benjamin sustains his claim: the critical within architecture is interdependent with/on the repetition of function. Hence the critical move (criticism), which is bound with repetition, on the one hand allows the retention of function, while on the other hand it maintains in a state of unpredictability, the formal appearance of that function as well as its effect on function itself.

This claim and its paradoxical consequences, which are until now purely philosophical (one might say purely abstract and not particular), request, in Benjamin's view, the development of two different 'formulations'. The first involves showing that, the aforementioned unpredictability 'necessitates that certain practices demand an understanding of the architectural, and of the generation of 'form', in terms of a relationship between the material and the immaterial'.[43] This actually entails an excursus, on Plato's Khora and Bataille's 'formless', which is the purpose of the first chapter. The second 'formulation', which is, according to its author, a 'theoretical argument' considers 'the co-presence of continuity and discontinuity' within repetition.[44] Such 'formulation' means, I guess, that, before the necessity of considering the constraint of function's presence while not allowing this constraint to determine either form or the particular way that function is understood, one does not have any choice, other than to understand the 'space' of the critical as the locus of the conjunction of two irreducible terms (in this case, the abstracts 'continuity and 'discontinuity'). In less abstract terms, this means, I suppose, that any architectural object in order to be critically relevant to the history of architecture, in Benjamin's view, must be such that it forms 'a part' of the history of architecture, while it must be also 'apart' from the forms of finality demanded by the simple repetition of function (I should add that this 'apart' repetition should be original: an object repeating for the second time the discrepancy between finality and expectation would thus merely be a conservative repetition of an original one, it would merely be 'a part' from what was 'apart').[45] The co-presence, within architectural practices, of those two relations or logics – being 'a part' while being also 'apart from' – and the conjunction of those two terms 'a part'/'apart', forms the subject of the discussion at the heart of the second and third chapters. For Benjamin the value of those logics resides in that they allow the architectural to be sustained within its own 'spacing'; that they always permit the repetition of what is given in architecture, but always with the desire to create a distance from what this repetition might imply about the fixing of stable meanings. In other words, those logics of 'apart/a part' define the space of the critical as internal to the work of the architectural object. Judgement in architecture occurs then upon the nature of the relationship between repetition and the particular conditions of the architectural experimentation at hand. That is, not by judging 'how far one has moved away' in this architectural experimentation, but rather by assessing how a space has been established for criticality as a part of architecture. Consequently, this entails that criticism and judgement in architecture are internal to the discipline and not built on exterior criteria. Thus, as any appraisal within the discipline is autonomous from socio-political concerns, it is obvious that, for Benjamin, the discipline is, in itself, autonomous. But is this not an instance of solipsism?

II.3.2. Time, Function and Alterity in Architecture

In the first chapter of the book, 'Time, Function and Alterity in Architecture' Benjamin discusses

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[42]. Ibid. p.3.
[43]. Ibid.
[44]. Ibid.
[45]. From there, one may turn the argument the other way around. In the case of Peter Eisenman's work, (the object that must be investigated, once this theoretical excursus is over), one may wonder which projects are 'apart', which ones are 'apart' and which ones are 'apart/a part'. In other words, does not the fact of constantly being 'apart/a part', as Benjamin would like Eisenman's work to be, lead to simply being 'a part' of an 'apart/a part' paradigm? And, if the paradigm is an architectural one, it should be itself 'apart' of architectural history. Thus, does not such a line of reflection simply lead to perceiving Eisenman's work as 'apart' of 'apart'? So what's the big deal?

form and function 'in' architecture in the context of their relation with the philosophical categories of time, repetition and alterity. Categories which appear – according to Benjamin – as 'in' architecture and which are also interconnected or, rather, share interdependent definitions.

He begins by asking: 'What is time in architecture?'[46] But, as this question is, in his view, not so much about the relationship between time and architecture as about the comprehension of the 'in', he first considers what it is that constitutes the architecture from the inside? What is the 'in' or what is there, in this 'in' architecture? What is worthy of consideration 'in' architecture? What takes place 'in' architecture, gives to it an architectural status, and thus itself appears as the 'irreducibly architectural'? The first aspect to be considered as 'in' architecture is therefore, for Benjamin, time. He claims that time is inscribed 'in architecture' from the beginning. It is not only that the building has a certain temporality by its being present within the complex movement of historical time, but also that the architectural object has a temporality of its own, that certain temporal determinations are involved within the architectural. As he puts it:

> *'(...) the inscription of function and the particular determinations of function engender a series of expectations and possibilities that position the architectural experience in terms of the varying forms of accord that these demands envisage. What is envisaged, and the accords suggested, involves temporal determinations'.*[47]

Time 'in' architecture is, for Benjamin, also related, or interdependent with other features or categories (which are also 'in' architecture). For example, alterity 'in' architecture, which can only appear in relation to a 'critical engagement' with repetition (of function), is bound up with time. Indeed, as for Benjamin, alterity is not the intrusion of an external 'other' but the interruption of the repetition (of function), obviously linked to time or at least to a particular temporality. Thus, time 'in' architecture is interconnected per se, with alterity (and thus criticality), function and repetition: 'The complex temporalities of objects and their history comprise the different possibilities for repetition'.[48]

The second aspect that Benjamin discusses as 'in' architecture, although he has already mentioned alterity and repetition in their interdependency with time, is function (and its repetition). As already stated, function, for Benjamin should be understood through a complex structure of repetition: function is given 'within, and as, forms of repetition'. Yet, the analysis of function is always constrained by specificity. For function is always discussed 'in' the particular setting of its application. Thus, an account of the presence of function must always be given in 'the terms of its detail'; which means that the interconnection of the architectural object with function has to be investigated, not in general terms, but in terms of 'a particular relationship to the presence of that which is given through repetition'.[49] In other words, I guess this means that, for Benjamin, the interdependence of function and repetition does not consist in a literal repetition of function but is rather a relationship in which function is preserved while somehow also disrupted. Benjamin considers that this 'opening up' of function leads to the possibility of alterity 'in' architecture, that is what Benjamin refers to as the 'yet-to-be' which might surface within function at the present, that is 'in' architecture:

> *'The opening up of function and thus the possibility of its displaced retention becomes (...) the inscription of the future into the present. The future taken on the quality of the yet-to-be and therefore its having this quality rids architecture of the didactic hold of the utopian. This takes place by demanding of the object that it work in terms of the inscribed possibility of the futural – always understood as the yet-to-be – into and as part of the building presence at the present. Opening up temporal complexity allows for the intrusion of alterity into architecture because it both distances the hold of dominance while allowing for the retention of function'.*[50]

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[46] .Ibid.p.6.
[47] .Ibid.
[48] .Ibid.p.7.
[49] .Ibid.p.7.
[50] .Ibid.

Hence, this 'yet-to-be' is the mark of alterity (that is the critical), the space in which experimentation (criticism) in architecture – and not outside of it, given, for Benjamin the 'irreducibly architectural' questions of form and function – can explore the very constitution of and relationship between form and function. However, the co-presence of the 'present' (that is the present form) and the 'yet-to-be', for Benjamin, does not generate or even has a 'form' of itself; for he simply states that this 'architectural possibility' could not have an equivalent 'form'.[51] In order to repeat, (as the reader will become aware, repetition and rehearsal are seminal to and for Benjamin's argument) for Benjamin, the problem on hand can be presented as questioning the nature of the series of interconnections 'in' architecture, that constitute it: the presence of architecture involves a concern with time; time is bound in the architectural with repetition; time in architecture while working with the complexities of repetition is to be related to the presence of function as it might 'open it up' (alterity) to the 'yet-to-be'; and function (already opened up) 'opens up' in its turn, the question of the nature of its relationship with form.

Having identified what constitutes, in his view, the 'in' architecture, and having thus created a certain complexity at work in the interconnections of features and categories which constitute this 'in' architecture, Benjamin proposes to 're-consider' the possibility of temporal complexity 'in' architecture which means simply to 'rehearse' the relation between 'time and function in the terms they set',[52] and from there to 'repeat' his conception of a 'link between complexity and the theoretical question of the generation of form'. Although I don't wish to repeat myself, but as it seems to be extremely important for Benjamin to do so, I will continue to follow his rehearsals and repetitions in the subsequent paragraphs.

….'in Architecture'. After re-addressing the question of time 'in' architecture, and after repeating that architecture works along a logic of repetition, which means for its author, this time, that architecture holds social and cultural oppositions in place by repeating them, Benjamin provides a definition of what is a 'real critique' of, or rather 'in' architecture.[53] 'Real critique' and with it a critical architecture (as critique should be 'in' architecture) should not question the oppositions themselves but rather the architecture. That is, criticism must operate at the level of what permits the material reproduction of such oppositions (the question still remains, in my view, as whether or not architecture maintains and reproduces on its own such oppositions without the intervention of any exterior vector [social, political or cultural]). Hence, criticism's space is within the complex interconnections, which constitute the 'in' architecture, where the oppositions are retained, 'though with the possibility that what had been precluded may be sanctioned [sic] and that the hierarchies that were to be expected are challenged'.[54] This possibility appears through what Benjamin again calls an 'opening' within the retention (repetition) of function. Here, Benjamin simply rehearses what he has already stated, that criticality's possibility appears thus, through the 'opening' towards the already present futurity of the 'yet-to-be'. This has some interesting consequences for architecture, as Benjamin acknowledges that it appears 'ubiquitous'. Architecture is the site that retains oppositions, while it is also the place of their critique, where they are challenged.

This claim, in Benjamin's view, leads to two others concerning two further aspects of the architectural, which must be in their turn, understood as fundamental. However, both are just repetitions: the first rehearses what he has already declared concerning the relationship between architecture and repetition: 'Architecture works to allow for the repetition of the already given'. Then, the second concerns the inevitability of the articulation of architecture with function: 'This point needs to be understood as claiming that architecture is inevitably inter-articulated with function or with programmatic considerations'.[55] Furthermore – though the reader has already encountered this statement under a different form – ubiquity, repetition and function stage specific relations with time 'in' architecture. Those relationships through their plurality, complexity and interconnections, demonstrate, according to Benjamin, that time is not singular. The lack of pure temporal singularity in its turn allows a concern for interconnectedness, relativity and alterity, which is the locus of criticality. Hence time and alterity are, obviously, 're-connected'.

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[51]. Ibid.
[52]. Ibid. p. 8.
[53]. Ibid. p. 9.
[54]. Ibid.
[55]. Ibid. p. 10.

The question of form is re-'opened' by Benjamin in his re-questioning of its relationship to function. In its relationship to function, form is not defined in such a fashion that form should follow function or function should follow form. Yet according to Benjamin both terms are related. For him, 'form functions', that is to say it must be understood 'as the enacted presence of a specific function in a given location'.[56] Alterity's interconnection with time having been just re-stated, Benjamin adds to this claim by repeating that alterity is also bound up with function. Yet, as already mentioned this alterity should not be understood as an intrusion of otherness in function, but as that other temporal possibility emerging from within function 'in' architecture. Alterity splits the singular, unsettles the determinations of tradition, while nonetheless permitting another settlement. It allows the critical to find a home. Finally this alterity is also interconnected with form, as form and function should be interrelated. Alterity's relationship to form is defined, by Benjamin as, 'the disruption of the homological relationship between form and function'.[57] This alterity does not have a new form, it generates form anew.

Khora. In order to address the questions of the generation of form in architecture, of the relationship between form and function, and of its nature, Benjamin proposes a digression on two philosophical texts, Plato's dialogue *Timaeus* and Bataille's article 'L'informe', which should reveal 'how it is possible to maintain that which figures within the co-presence of work and the yet-to-be as a possibility within architectural practice'.[58] In other words he wishes to find out which philosophical terms (that are exterior to the architectural discipline, by the way) might allow an understanding of how alterity (i.e. new form's generation) could be present within the repetition of the already given (i.e. form-function homology) 'in' architecture.

The discussion of the first text, Plato's *Timaeus*, which deals with 'khora', is supplemented with an investigation of Derrida's engagement with it, entitled *Khora*. The necessity of these first readings seems somehow doubtful as they are done only to allow Benjamin to conclude that 'Plato's conception of 'khora' adds little to an understanding of architecture once the latter is defined as the relationship between function and the generation of form'.[59]

Benjamin begins by exposing *Timaeus'* account of 'khora'. Plato's *Timaeus* outlines what is often considered to be the first written account of the whole universe and its binary structure. Indeed, Plato divides it into two parts: the intelligible and the sensible. The former defines the world of ideas, those that are governed and grasped by reason, while the 'sensible' represents the material and changeable world that is generated and only apprehended by the senses. Plato believes that the world of ideas contains the original templates of all 'matter'. The 'sensible' or material state is therefore an inferior copy of the 'intelligible.' But, Plato also finds that there is, within his account of 'all that there is' the necessity for a third term, a third 'space' from which the whole is created; the place from which the question of 'what is all that there is' is itself generated. This is a place standing outside the opposition by definition. This place, as well as its relationship to the whole and its proper regulations, becomes per se problematic as it escapes the scope and consequently the status of what it founds. In other words, Platos' account of the totality of 'all that there is' generates a necessary complexity. There is something outside of 'all that there is', something that generates, defines and states it, as 'all that there is', while at the same moment works to undo what it just founded (the 'all that there is' and its constitutive opposition), by being outside of it. Generation undoes itself from the outside. This place Plato names 'khora' – Greek for 'space', 'site' or 'place' – while he also defines it within the dialogue as 'ever existing place'. The 'logic' of the 'khora' is thus two fold: first it has a generative or productive dimension. Second, the 'khora' can't be positioned within that which it positions, generates, produces or founds. Furthermore, 'khora' is also defined as a 'receptacle of all becoming', that is a space where ideas might become materialized (formalized). Yet this' space' must have no form, it is rather a process: the place of generation.

Benjamin acknowledges the paradoxical condition of 'khora' as he notes the subsequent problem: as 'khora' works in its differentiation from that which it founds, and as it situates itself outside the problem of relation (opposition), 'how is this outside to be understood when it is the

[56]. Ibid. p. 11.
[57]. Ibid.
[58]. Ibid. p. 12.
[59]. Ibid. p. 3.

very outside that generates the opposition between inside and outside'.[60] However, his aim, here, is not to answer this question, but rather to investigate the relevance of 'khora' to the 'architectural': 'the question is the extent to which 'khora' as the necessarily unlike – for Plato a "third kind" – figures within architecture'.[61] Although the reader might be able to understand on its own what the answer is, Benjamin claims that a short digression on Derrida's essay entitled *Khora* is needed at this point.[62]

Derrida locates the 'khora' almost at the center of Plato's dialogue, *Timaeus*. 'Khora' is here also interpreted as a 'chasm' or an 'abyss' (or even an 'abyssal moment'). Yet, Derrida also identifies within the text, not simply within the 'content' of the text, but rather within its presentation, its formal presence, a doubling of the chasm or abyss. The dialogue while acknowledging the necessity of 'khora' also pretends, at its beginning as well as its end, to have covered the 'all that there is'; to have presented it as a whole. Thus, the movement of the dialogue seems to hide what it just had identified, the 'khora'. It defends a certain conception of an all inclusive totality or completion. Hence, for Derrida, the conclusion and beginning of the *Timaeus* are not only covering up or hiding the abyss, the 'khora' – identified at the center of the book – that lies between all oppositions, but also '[the abyss] between all these couples and another which would not even be their other'.[63] This means that this 'another' that would not even be 'their other', which can be safely mentioned as the 'khora' of the *Timaeus* itself, is simply standing outside the book (erased or hidden or forgotten).

Benjamin deduces from Plato's account of 'khora' as well as from Derrida's engagement with the dialogue 'that there is a pervasive sense of incompleteness'.[64] He considers that in the case of Derrida's identification of the doubling of the 'abyss', which is a sort of 'mise-en-abyme' within the dialogue (the relationship between 'khora' and the oppositions prefigures the relationship between 'khora' and the account of the 'whole'), the identification of incompletion is only possible due to the 'desire for a type of philosophical closure'. This means, for Benjamin, that it is 'the desire for philosophical closure' which generates its own incompletion. In the case of 'khora' within the dialogue, Benjamin considers that as its limits 'become the limits of the outside and thus of a conception of complexity generated by relation',[65] the productive potential of 'khora' was consequently always outside. Thus, what was generated was always 'complete'. The identification of the incomplete, that is, I guess, the acceptation of the necessity of 'khora' does not affect the form of the completed.

Benjamin considers that 'alterity' must appears 'in' architecture, i.e. the 'incomplete' or 'yet to be-come' must be incorporated 'in' the architectural object: '[...] allowing for the incomplete in architecture necessitates the inscription of the incomplete as part of the object's formal presence'.[66] This means, for Benjamin, that 'khora' as an otherness (alterity) standing outside the complete, adds little to 'an understanding of architecture once the latter is defined as the relationship between function and the generation of form',[67] i.e. 'khora' is of little help for understanding what could be such a productive and generative alterity operating 'in' the architectural and on its formal presence. 'Khora' is thus discarded.

Although, a lot might be said about Benjamin's rough treatment of Plato's dialogue and of Derrida' engagement with it, as well as about Benjamin's rather brief, awkward and poorly argued final claim, I think it is more important to wonder why Benjamin decided to investigate the potential of 'khora' as a means of coming to terms with the problem at this point in the book. Indeed, the question could be formulated as to why it should be considered necessary to discuss the 'khora', when there had been no request to do so and when there was no obvious link, between the problem discussed and this 'abyss', for finally discarding its relevance to the matter concerned? Is there not in this passage of *Architectural Philosophy*, something hidden, here in the middle, something not mentioned that might constitute the 'khora' or 'abyssal moment' of the book itself? Is

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[60]. Ibid. p. 19.
[61]. Ibid. p. 14.
[62]. See Jacques Derrida, "Khora" in *On the Name*, trans. David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., & Ian McLeod, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
[63]. Ibid. p.104.
[64]. Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000, p. 21.
[65]. Ibid.
[66]. Ibid. p.22.
[67]. Ibid. p.3.

this not already perceptible as a certain 'mise-en-abyme' and thus, what would be the significance of such a mise-en-abyme?

Even though I do not wish to submit to hypothetical conclusions, the consideration of the facts that the theoretical excursus of chapter one should lead the reader to an investigation of Peter Eisenman's work, and that this architect had in the 1980s a direct collaboration with Jacques Derrida — bearing on the design for a garden in La Villette park in Paris — that out of this collaboration a book was published in 1997, bearing the title of *Chora L Works* (a title which obviously references the centrality of Plato's dialogue within their exchange), and that Benjamin is himself one those 'experts from down under' (the other would be Mark Wigley) on Derrida and deconstruction,[68] make it difficult not to reach the conclusion that a secret , long buried frustration, continues to remain hidden.

Chora L Works consists of Derrida and Eisenman's discussion transcripts, drawings, letters exchanged and essays produced while they worked on their concept for the garden; it even includes an unfinished draft of Derrida's interrupted essay, at the time of the collaboration, on 'chora', which later became "Khora" in *On the Name*. Derrida and Eisenman had chosen together 'chora' as a theme for the garden, the reason being, that Eisenman believed that the in-between state of 'chora' would tie in well with his own attempts to challenge the dominance of 'presence' in architecture. At the time, he was already interested in creating spaces in which presence and absence would work together in a balanced fashion, against a traditional hierarchy that equates 'presence' with solidity and 'absence' with void. Somehow, his wish was to materialize the presence of absence (or to use Benjamin's description, to inscribe the incomplete as part of the object's formal presence). Thus 'Chora' and its logic as what states but also refutes the binary conception seemed to be an ideal theme for the collaboration of two men who attempt to disrupt western philosophical and architectural traditions. Yet, as the story goes, due to budget issues, the garden never materialized.

The book itself also ends up being quite a deception, if not simply funny, as it often notes a failure of understanding between the two collaborators. For example, at one point in the book, Eisenman says of Derrida: 'He wants architecture to stand still and be what he assumes it appropriately should be in order that philosophy can be free to move and speculate (...) he said things to me that filled me with horror: "How can it be a garden without plants", "Where are the trees", "Where are the benches for people to sit on" This is what philosophers want, they want to know where the benches are'.[69] Too often, Eisenman is again and again amazed by Derrida's 'architectural conservatism'. For Eisenman the material is something that can be shifted in relation to theory, while Derrida seems to understand materiality as a fixed form around which ideas could move. The distinction between Eisenman's and Derrida's positions becomes clear when Derrida is asked to design a monument for the garden, without referent. Derrida draws a sieve (one of the metaphors that Plato uses to describe 'Khora') much to the distress of Eisenman who was hoping for a less literal representation. The funniest parts of the book are without doubt the passage when Eisenman proposes to build a quarry from which visitors will pick up rocks and carry them to another part of the site. Derrida questions whether it would be possible to force people to do this; he is concerned that the project might come to resemble a miniature golf course; and when Derrida asks if Eisenman is being 'concrete' (as opposed to speaking abstractly), Eisenman answers, 'Yes, concrete', in the belief that Derrida is asking what material he will use to build the garden. Derrida, who had become aware of the problem and increasingly embarrassed at the thought of their discussions being published, even said at one point (humorously or not), 'Peter, I would suggest something. In this association, it is as if you were the dreamer and I was the architect, the technician. So you are the theoretician and I am thinking all the time of the practical consequences'.[70]

Against this background, or hidden 'chasm', it seems to me that Benjamin's engagement with 'khora', has little to do with the problem on hand. Rather I perceive his rejection of 'khora' as a critique of Derrida, or rather as a critique of Derrida's understanding of architecture, and more precisely of the 'in' architecture. After all Derrida proposed his unfinished essay on 'khora' as a

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[68]. See for example, Andrew Benjamin, with Christopher Norris, *What is Deconstruction?*, New York: St. Martins Press, 1988.

[69]. Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman, *Chora L Works*, ed. Jeffrey Kipnis and Thomas Leeser, New York: Monacelli Press, 1997, p. 139.

[70]. Ibid. p. 48.

starting point for their discussion with Eisenman. Thus, it seems to me that *Chora L Works* is *Architectural philosophy's* 'Khora', that is the 'in-between' Benjamin and Eisenman, an 'in between' that must not be mentioned because it somehow shows that there is something that impacts the architectural that will always be beyond its scope, i.e. the possibility for an alterity not 'in' architecture (the garden was perhaps not realized due to the impossibility to formalize the 'Khora', thus it might have a true impact [while being outside of it] on the complete [the architectural] by rendering it incomplete [inexistent]). In other words, if as Benjamin states, 'the desire for philosophical closure' generates its own incompletion, one might also wonder if the desire for incompletion within completion does not generate the closure (erasure) of a particular philosophy.[71]

'L'Informe'. Having discarded the 'khora', Benjamin turns to what this chapter is mostly interested in, i.e. the reading of a second philosophical text, Bataille's 'formless', with the aim to expound what could be such a productive and generative alterity operating 'in' the architectural and on its formal presence.

Benjamin begins his discussion of 'formless' by stating that Bataille's writings on poetry (in their form as well as in their content) stage 'an encounter with architecture that works to undo his own famous entry on architecture in the "Dictionnaire critique" [of *Documents*]'.[72] While this claim would necessitate, in my view, an immediate demonstration, Benjamin moves on to state some other things, which are equally disturbing:

> *'While poetry may appear to be distanced from the reality of architecture, it remains the case that within Bataille's digression [on poetry] the two touch, because his concern with poetry becomes a concern with the presence of form, though more significantly with the generation of form [sic]. This is the reason that texts ostensibly on architecture – and here this includes both the text 'Architecture' as well as 'L'obélisque', 'le Labyrinthe' and 'Musée' – need to be distanced from a concern with the architectural [sic] once the architectural is understood as the problem of the generation of form'.[73]*

Thus, Benjamin begins his theoretical excursus on 'formless' with three statements which are all, in my view, awkward: the first one declares that there is some unnoticed discrepancy in the relationship between Bataille's poetry and architecture and what Bataille mentions in his 'famous' article about architecture. The second attempts to explain how Bataille's poetry might be connected to architecture: Bataille's poetry and Benjamin's architectural are both mainly concerned with the issue of the generation of form. Finally, with the last statement the reader is told to simply assume that most of Bataille's writings on architecture are not concerned with Benjamin's definition of the 'architectural'; those texts should consequently be dismissed by every attempt to think the 'architectural'. While those statements are in my view false, they nevertheless speak some truth: they show clearly that Benjamin's aim is not to comprehend Bataille's own conception of the architectural, but rather to extract from Bataille's oeuvre something that might serves his own definition of it. In other words Benjamin isn't interested in Bataille's 'critique' of architecture, but in 'putting to use' Bataille's corpus – or at least parts of it – in order to reinforce his definition of the architectural as mere generation of form.

In those introductory lines, probably the most striking of Benjamin's disturbing statements, is the one which assumes that out of the analysis of Bataille's texts on architecture emerges an understanding of the architectural as 'having a symbolic dimension and it is this symbolic dimension that determines the building's meaning'.[74] Although I definitively oppose the naivety and simplicity of this statement, (indeed as I will show, in the next chapters of this dissertation, Bataille obviously perceives that architecture has a symbolic-political dimension but also an economic-cultural one, and these dimensions do not determine the building's meaning, but its social function), I consider more important, here, within the scope of this prologue, to note how Benjamin

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[71]. One could also admit the psychoanalytic-hypothesis of Benjamin's Oedipal complex i.e. he attempts to kill the figure of the father [Derrida]. This interesting hypothesis should be demonstrated but unfortunately, it is not my aim. Yet, such a move would necessitate answering the other funny question, "Who is the mother, Eisenman?"

[72]. Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000, p. 22.

[73]. Ibid.

[74]. Ibid. pp. 22-23.

argues for his claim. Instead of engaging with Bataille's texts on architecture, Benjamin discusses an excerpt from *Story of the eye* (one of the first novels which Bataille published, a text on/within poetry and not about architecture). Benjamin notices that within the 'episode' of the 'sacrilege' achieved by the heroin of *Story of the eye*, Simone — that is the scene when she masturbates within the confessional of a church — the architecture's form (of the church, of the confessional) is left 'untouched'. Furthermore, Benjamin's points out that within the narrative, form is only the locus of 'symbolic re-workings'. For example, in Benjamin's view, the formulation of one of the male protagonists of *Story of the eye* concerning the elements of the Eucharist simply 'holds form in place'.[75] 'the wafers [...] are nothing other than the sperm of Christ in the form of a small white cake'.[76] Somehow forms are only re-invested by a different symbolic value. This leads Benjamin to conclude that within Bataille's text, as form is neither touched nor its generation is even considered, there is no 'real confrontation with the architectural but only with the symbolic dimension of the building and thus with its meaning',[77] and consequently that 'architecture comes to be abandoned as a concern in the texts that take architecture as the ostensible object of analysis'.[78]

However, as I mentioned above, *Story of the eye* is definitely not one of Bataille's texts on 'architecture'. That architecture is present and mentioned in it is one thing but that the primordial concern of the text is architectural is quite another. Thus, surprisingly, Benjamin attempts to demonstrate his claim (i.e. Bataille's texts on architecture are not concerned with the architectural), by analysing a text, which is obviously not concerned with the architectural (it is rather concerned with the circulation of an egg-shape as Roland Barthes brilliantly demonstrated). If I summarize this rather fuzzy beginning: first, willing to show how Bataille's 'formless' participates as a productive and generative alterity operating 'in' the architectural and on its formal presence, Benjamin begins by praising Bataille's writings and their 'digressions' on 'poetry' for having an 'obvious' concern with the generation of 'form', while he discards Bataille's texts on architecture for the simple reason that they are merely interested in the symbolic dimensions of buildings and their meaning. Then, in order to demonstrate this claim he does not discuss one or more of those texts on architecture, but an excerpt from one novel that is in fact a 'digression' on poetry. Finally, it appears in conclusion, that the text analysed (which is, I repeat, an excerpt from a novel, thus a 'piece' of 'poetry') has no concern with the architectural as Benjamin perceives it, the 'generation of form'. Here, a careful look at Benjamin's argument proves to undermine it. It would seem that even Bataille's poetry, in this case the poetry grouped under the header *Story of the eye*, contrary to what Benjamin stated earlier, has nothing to do with the 'generation' of architectural form. Hence, if Bataille's texts on architecture are foreign to Benjamin's definition of the architectural, and if, as Benjamin seems — against his own interest — to have unfortunately demonstrated, Bataille's poetry, too, has little to do with such a definition, then it would seem logical, as a conclusion, to acknowledge that Bataille's oeuvre, as a whole, has nothing in common with Benjamin's enterprise.

Perhaps unable to acknowledge the result of his own demonstration, Benjamin still perseveres in his desire to demonstrate the connection between Bataille's poetry and the architectural. Consequently, he simply moves on to discuss another of Bataille's digressions on poetry as it appeared in *The Inner Experience*, hoping to bind Bataille's account of poetry to his own understanding of the irreducibly 'architectural', through an analogy. As I have already alluded to Bataille's denunciation of 'analogy' earlier, I don't think it is necessary to repeat it. Yet, I must reaffirm that in consequence, Benjamin's methodology here is in complete contradiction to Bataille's enterprise. Benjamin constructs his reflection on Bataille's definition of poetry as the move from the known to the unknown, as a sacrifice of knowledge, science and meaning, as loss. However, for Bataille, sacrifice and thus poetry do not operate outside the realm they target. As Benjamin rightfully quotes:

> *'The plan of the moral is the plan of the project. The contrary to project is sacrifice. Sacrifice takes on the forms of project but in appearance only'.[79]*

[75]. Ibid. p. 23.
[76]. See Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye*, in *OC* I, Paris: Gallimard, 1976, p. 63.
[77]. Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000, p. 23.
[78]. Ibid. p. 24.
[79]. Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, in *OC* V, Paris: Gallimard, 1976, p. 158, quoted in Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000, p. 24.

Benjamin concludes from this excerpt, that Bataille's poetry (as a sacrificing practice) not only operates from within the boundaries it wishes to transgress, but also demands to be maintained within the form of the yet-to-be transgressed, that it must be present within the project's appearance while also presenting its own form in order for it to be 'work full' (that is to transgress). Here, Benjamin, in my view, shifts the perspective through which one should look at Bataille's oeuvre. As I have already mentioned while discussing Georges Didi-Hubermann, Yves-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss's understanding of the 'formless', there are two ways to look at Bataille's challenging thought and the 'loss' it practices. One can look at it from above in an economy which demands redemption, or from below as liberation, as the return of what was repressed. Benjamin obviously chooses the former. From being the place of ecstatic loss, Bataille's poetry becomes the locus of form's redemption; Benjamin doesn't look at sacrifice and poetry as signs of the 'return' of the repressed, discarded, the unknown, the socially 'low' but as the appearance of a 'productive negativity', as some operations altering 'form' which must have an appearance (form) in order to participate in 'the generation of form'. Hence, Benjamin sees poetry as the locus of a complex of interconnections between the project, form of the project, materiality of words, their own immateriality and appearances. It is obviously by chance that this 'portrait' of poetry mirrors his previous definition of the architectural and its irreducibility 'marked by a complex series of interconnections' between form, function, repetition, time, alterity and generation. Poetry's negativity must sustain its own negation, as the repetition of function 'in' architecture must allow its own alteration for there being a 'critical' architecture'. Consequently poetry and the architectural seem to share a rather significant feature, as both 'may sustain the productive presence of a negativity resisting negation'.[80] In this perspective, and although it betrays Bataille's oeuvre and Bataille's own view on 'analogy', it is possible to perceive an analogy between Bataille's poetry (sacrifice) and architecture; Benjamin states it in these terms: '[...] what is essential to architecture is that which will always allow for the divide that is at work within Bataille's construal of the distinction between poetry and project'.[81]

Having thus mentioned a possible analogy between Bataille's poetry and architecture, Benjamin finally risks himself (one brief paragraph of fifteen lines or so) in an analysis of one of Bataille's texts on architecture that he had previously rejected: the article 'architecture'. However, Benjamin's analysis does not demonstrate anything, but simply reiterates what he had already stated, i.e. Bataille's texts on architecture are mainly involved with the 'symbolic dimension' of the buildings. Yet, it is important to notice how Benjamin proceeds to re-claim this. After briefly quoting a passage from Bataille's article ('it is in the form of cathedrals and palaces that the state addresses itself to and imposes silence on the multitudes')[82] Benjamin concludes with these words:

> *'What is fundamental to this formulation is the role attributed to the symbolic presence of buildings and thus to their presence as monuments rather than as the ostensibly architectural [sic]. Form only occurs in this presentation in terms of providing the symbol[sic]. What this establishes is a distinction between a conception of form that is symbolic and thus works as a monument, and form emerging and thus demanding to be understood in terms of that which generated it[sic]. In sum, it is as though form is held within a distinction between building and the monument on one side and architecture on the other [sic]. [...] Once it becomes possible to open up a consideration of form as that which is produced rather than linking architecture to monumentality [...] it then becomes necessary to link that movement to Bataille's own conception of a productive negativity [sic]'.[83]*

Several assumptions within this quote, (if not the quote in its entirety), are in my view disturbing. First, there is the definition of the monument as 'non-architectural' without further argumentation. Second, there is the affirmation that form, here, only occurs as what sustains the 'symbolic', while, if I read Bataille's quote correctly, form is also what impacts the crowd: what 'imposes silence' on the nation, thus form, in Bataille's text, is not simply representing but also functioning. Third, I do

[80]. Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000, p. 25.

[81]. Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000, p. 27.

[82]. Georges Bataille, 'Architecture', in OC I, Paris: Gallimard, 1976, p. 170, quoted in Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000, p. 27.

[83]. Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000, pp. 27-28.

not see where, within the quoted passage, Bataille establishes a distinction between a so-called 'symbolic-form' and a 'form emerging', between a concern for monumental formalism and an interest in form's generation. If there is the possibility for such distinction it is not to be found in Bataille's quote but rather within Benjamin's position. Fourth, Benjamin restates his opposition to the monument and architecture as if Bataille's quotes induced this; yet, I also do not see in Bataille's quote a distinction between the monument and architecture. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, with his last claim Benjamin simply assumes, without demonstrating it (or even mentioning the wish to do so) that Bataille conceived of 'a productive negativity'. This claim has huge consequences, for it allows Benjamin to consider Bataille's 'formless' as precisely, productive. However, as I propose to argue in the following chapters, Bataille's 'formless' is probably the most radical example of an 'unemployed negativity': a negativity refusing to be 'put to work', refusing super-session and thus taking part in some 'form's generation' and rather 'bringing down' all forms. Hence, it seems to me that Benjamin uses rather non-academic paths for arriving his destination. Nevertheless, after such a painful odyssey, he finally comes to the core of his discussion: 'formless' as 'a productive negativity'.

As I just mentioned, Benjamin does not understand Bataille's 'formless' (informe) as what simply undoes or opposes form, rather he wishes to see it as what can re-form, as what is 'productive'. This means that instead of seeing it as a radical unemployed negativity, which disrupts all formal pretensions, Benjamin neatly posits the 'formless' as participating in the 'generation of form'. In order to do so, he proceeds to a detailed reading of the article 'formless' and demands that the ontological definition of 'form' and 'formless' be shifted from an ontology of being towards an ontology of becoming.

Hence, Benjamin begins his somewhat awkward demonstration by attempting to quote precisely Bataille's short text. However, as he puts the original in French and its English version side by side, the reader can perceive a slight problem with Benjamin's translation:

'[…] a term working to undo/disturb/rearrange, demanding generally that each thing has its form/the form proper to it'.

'[…] un terme servant a déclasser, exigeant généralement que chaque chose ait sa forme'.[24]

It is important to notice that from the onset, Benjamin is at pains to propose a proper translation of Bataille's text. This is rather difficult to understand, as numerous translations of that short article have already been published. Instead of referring to a collection of Bataille's translated texts, such as, for example Alan Stoekl's *Visions of Excess*, Benjamin prefers to express what the 'formless' does in English by giving three different terms 'to undo', 'to disturb', 'to rearrange' as a translation for the verb 'déclasser'; a translation which leaves the reader with an impression of vagueness with regards to what the 'formless' does. This obvious lack of scholarly rigour, actually allows him to intuit that the 'formless' is not only disruptive, but productive, as the verb 'to rearrange' signifies. However, the verb 'Déclasser' means in French without any doubt 'to undo' or 'to disturb', (I would prefer to say that this verb signifies a loss of status, or of class), but it doesn't mean 'to rearrange'. That after such an 'undoing' ('déclassement'), a rearrangement might occur is just a possible consequence. A consequence of which the 'formless' would only be responsible as what undoes, rather than re-do. To state that the 'formless' which operates such an 'undoing' ('déclassement') is also performing this rearrangement is, in my view, a simple misconstruction. If I may use a metaphor, a sunny afternoon might be followed by a few showers, but those showers aren't responsible for the return of the sun. Thus, it seems that Benjamin consciously misreads Bataille from the premise of his demonstration.

Willing to maintain his claim against all factual evidence, Benjamin again quotes Bataille's metaphorical outlining of the 'formless': '[...] affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless comes back to saying that the universe is something like a spider or a spit'.[25] However, this time Benjamin does not simply (consciously or not) misread or mistranslate Bataille, rather he considers that Bataille himself 'misrepresents' the formless:

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[24]. Georges Bataille, *'Informe'*, in *OC* I, Paris: Gallimard, 1976, p. 217, quoted and translated in Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000, p. 29.

[25]. Ibid.

'The last point is in the end the most revealing. It comprises the moment at which, it could be argued, that, Bataille comes to misrepresent the 'infome' by seeking to represent it. Or rather in representing it – in literalizing it – its structuring force is betrayed'.[26]

Setting aside its arrogant tone, one must acknowledge that this quote is extremely informative: on the one hand it shows that Benjamin is unable to conceive of a genealogy for the 'formless' and on the other hand it clarifies Benjamin's assumption concerning the question of how the 'formless' should operate. First, Benjamin seems unable to understand that for Bataille, the 'formless' is not a simple abstraction operating against 'form', but rather a process deeply grounded within a socio-cultural taboo. The reference to 'spiders' and gobs of 'spit' is here not a dangerous literalizing, but the mark of a thought that is socially grounded. Spiders and gobs of spit are formless because they are socially low and thus transgressive for a certain high 'form' (a reference to the form desired by academic men). Bataille's paradoxical philosophy is not an abstract autonomous one but rather a radical materialism. Second, Benjamin also perceives for the 'formless' a 'structuring' potential. Here, he simply seems to be lost in translation again. Indeed, as I mentioned before, 'déclasser' does not mean 'to rearrange' or 'to structure'. The aim of this mistranslation starts to be clearer: Benjamin needs the 'formless' to operate productively or structurally, although the text tells the reverse, in order for it to participate in the 'generation of form'.

Having, in his view, demonstrated that the aim of the 'formless' is to be productive, to re-arrange, Benjamin moves on to tackle his second problem, the opposition of 'form' and 'formless'. Benjamin refuses to understand the 'formless' as a mere opposite to form. He consider that the way the 'formless' operates, that is (again, in his view and only in his view) it 're-arranges' form after having lead it to lose its status, means it is impossible to consider both terms as mutually exclusive:

'[…] when Bataille suggests that one of the function's of the 'l'informe' is to bring about a change in register and thus reposition the exigency linked to form, then part of that process will be the distancing of the opposition between 'la forme' and 'l'informe' understand as mutually excluding either/or'.[27]

In my view, Benjamin has some difficulties understanding Bataille here. He is right to notice that form and the 'formless' are not excluding each other. Indeed the formless might operate from within form. Yet, this does not mean that the 'formless' does not oppose form or worst that it might re-form. The 'formless', paradoxical as it may seem, undoes form, by opposing it from within. Thus, form and 'formless' are not mutually exclusive in terms of 'geography' (they proceed within the same space: the locus of form), yet they are opposite in their operative function ('formless' undoes form). The whole article on 'formless' should not be seen as a simple definition of what the 'formless' is, but as its material presentation (the article content reaches beyond its own limits as an article, beyond its own 'form') as well as a good example of the paradoxical nature of Bataille's thought. If I summarize thus, the paradoxical nature of the 'formless' is *present* within the article on 'formless'.

At some point Benjamin seems to understand this (although the term 'analogy' is problematic), as he states that 'what re-emerges at this precise point is the analogy with poetry'.[28] Indeed poetry for Bataille, as already mentioned, appears within language while it opposes the main function of language that is to deliver meaning; it operates from within the boundaries it wishes to transgress. Yet, Benjamin recalls this 'analogy' not for showing the coherence of Bataille's oeuvre (a coherence visible in the fact that the 'formless' and Bataille's poetry share the same operative mode), but for binding his understanding of the 'formless', as that which 'forms', to his conception of the architectural. For Benjamin, the 'formless' and poetry (in its move from the known to the unknown) bring both into play a staging of the incomplete and allow for 'a positioning of the architectural in relation to time'.[29] In other words, as 'in' the architectural Benjamin perceives

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[26]. Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000, p. 29..

[27]. Ibid.

[28]. Ibid.

[29]. Ibid. p.30.

the complex relation of the complete (the physical presence of the building) with the incomplete (the yet-to-be of criticality), he simply states that the 'formless' (as what by analogy with poetry moves from the known to the unknown) should be present or operates 'in' it. Hence, he demonstrate the relationship between the 'formless' and the architectural in these terms:

'Complexity in architecture therefore has to be a consequence of the work of 'l'informe'.[90]

However, Benjamin, perhaps aware of the consequence of such statement, considers that it is necessary to return to the article on 'formless' for demonstrating it. He subsequently quotes a slightly longer part of that text:

'A dictionary begins from the moment when it no longer gives the meaning but the tasks of word' [...] a term working to undo/disturb/rearrange, demanding generally that each thing has its form/the form proper to it'.[91]

Benjamin notices the contrast here presented between the meaning ('le sens') and the 'task' ('la besogne') of the words. However, he interprets the word 'task' as a synonym for 'work'. The French expression 'la besogne' while difficult to translate from the French, is in my view closer to the words 'job' or 'task', if a connotation of drudgery is understood to attach to the words, than the more conventional 'work'. Furthermore, as Bataille often opposed the servility of 'work' in his search for sovereignty,[92] I would like to admit the hypothesis that Bataille employed the term 'la besogne' precisely in order to mark its difference from 'work' ('travail'). Thus, while Benjamin perceives the shift Bataille operates within his 'dictionary' from 'meaning' towards more operative notions, he does not fully grasp the signification of such move; a move towards disruption and not towards composition. It is not that the 'formless' has simply no 'meaning' and that it works to re-form, rather the 'formless' undoes 'meaning', it has a *dirty* job to do against form. This lack of understanding is visible within Benjamin's statement that 'the detail of the term 'work' is not central'.[93] Against this claim I would point out that it is precisely, beside its 'genealogy' (that is the fact that the 'formless' is socially grounded), the term's operative mode, which is central to a comprehension of the 'formless'. Hence Benjamin, refusing to perceive the subtleties of Bataille's prose, moves on to claim that what is important within the article 'formless' is the shift from an interest in the definition of 'form', towards a concern with the 'generation of form':

'[...] it is vital to note that an important shift takes place within [the article]. There is a move from what is – i.e. the giveness of a form – to what becomes or to what is generated. This is the consequence of the move from meaning to work. Finitude yields its place to a specific modality of becoming. However [...], finitude and becoming are not mutually exclusive'.[94]

The last words of this statement ground the 'formless' within a certain complexity; a complexity linked to the co-presence of ontological registers (finitude and becoming), which are irreducible. This complexity identified as occurring within the article means, for Benjamin, that the 'formless' demands to be thought of, not in terms of its 'being', that is within the perspective of 'conventional' philosophy, but within a conception of the ontological 'in which the productive presence of a complexity has to be taken as the point of departure'.[95] In other words, the problem of form and the 'formless' should not be thought of as being within the tradition of 'conventional metaphysics', but through the sieve of 'Process Philosophy'; that is, through a way of thinking that is focused on 'becoming', and the complexity of the origin from which it unfolds. It is precisely from this 'perspective', that Benjamin defines the 'formless' as what:

'[...] undoes the presumed relation that form has to "that which is", or the form taken by "that

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[90]. Ibid. p.30

[91]. Georges Bataille, *'Informe'*, in *OC* I, Paris: Gallimard, 1976, p. 217, quoted and translated in Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000, p. 31.

[92]. See, for example Georges Bataille *The Accursed Share*, NY: Zone Books, 1991.

[93]. Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000, p. 31.

[94]. Ibid. p. 32.

[95]. Ibid.

which is" – in other words it undoes the logic of the gift – then its presence within the inevitability of form must have a transformative effect on what there is. What emerges as a real possibility therefore is that 'l'informe' forms [sic]. Allowing for its continuity is to hold to the co-presence of form and 'l'informe' and as such to maintain the power of the negative [sic]. Whatever 'l'informe' marks out, it is not that which always is negated, of necessity, by the presence of form [sic]'.[96]

With this statement Benjamin attempts to demonstrate the relevance of the 'formless' to the architectural. The 'formless', in a way similar to a 'critical architecture' (following Benjamin's definition), is what undoes the form given through repetition, while it sustains itself in order to form (to give a new formal possibility). Although I might agree with the first sentence as quoted above, I oppose the three other statements that follow it, . As I hope to have already intuited but also as I will argue: the 'formless' does not 'form' because it is not an instance of 'productive negativity', but an 'unemployed' one. The 'power' of the negative does not reside in itself being maintained within any philosophical system ('conventional metaphysics' or 'process philosophy'), but rather its power resides in its capacity to remains outside all forms of super-sessions, and whatever the 'formless' marks out, it is always under the threat of being 'crushed' (to use Bataille's terms) by 'form' or the will to 'form', (which is probably what Benjamin's does).

'L'informe' in Architecture. After he has defined, in rather abstract terms, what is 'formless' or rather what it does, that is: 'It works. It works to undo a particular given formal determination; not to end up with simple formlessness but with another formal possibility',[97] Benjamin proposes to identify what could be the 'formless' in architecture.

Needless to say, Benjamin quickly finds an answer to his question in the formal productions of an architect, well-known for being the defender of a problematic 'architectural autonomy' as well as the ultimate opponent of architectural functionalism: Peter Eisenman. Benjamin wants the reader to believe that the choice of Eisenman for clarifying what might be the 'formless' in architecture is the result of a logical reflection and not the symptom of a mere operative criticism. He states that to consider:

> *'[…] Eisenman allows for an opening in which an important connection can be drawn between alterity and sustaining the presence of 'l'informe'. His architecture is almost invariably concerned with the complex interplay of production and disruption. And in his architectural practice there is the affirmed retention of the yet-to-be, where the retention and with it the inscribed futurity are determined by an engagement with function'.[98]*

Although the well-informed reader might notice the subterfuge, it is important to say that this is not the first time that Benjamin and Eisenman cross paths. Indeed, Benjamin has already written numerous articles on the American architect before publishing the present opus; articles of which the most famous is probably 'Peter Eisenman and the Housing of Tradition' published for the first time in the *Oxford Journal of Art* in 1989.

Hence, Benjamin 'chooses' Eisenman or rather needs Eisenman for claiming that his conception of the architectural is also acknowledged by architects operating within the discipline. More specifically Benjamin is interested in Eisenman's texts for a notion which appeared in his prose at the turn of the millennium: a notion that he pompously names, the 'interstitial'.

The 'interstitial' is what Eisenman perceives in the project of Bramante for St. Peters, as the transformation, and its effects, of an inert mass between forms, a '*poché*', into 'something' volatile and highly mobile. Hence, the 'interstitial' becomes for Benjamin, an 'element' which is both process and effect, something which might 'generate forms'.[99]

Attempting to define the modus operandi of the 'interstitial', Benjamin discusses briefly two projects of Eisenman's, the United Nation's project in Geneva and the Aronoff Centre, as well as the texts the architect wrote as a user's guide for those buildings. The 'interstitial' detailed in

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[96]. Ibid. p.34.
[97]. Ibid. p.35.
[98]. Ibid.
[99]. Ibid. p.36.

Benjamin's perspective, appears as something which does not undo the presence of either the structure or the function of the buildings, but rather the homological relation between form and function. The transformation it consists of, does not provoke a move from form to 'formless', rather it reintroduces:

> *'[…] into the presence of form an indeterminate quality which alters the perception and practice of the building while at the same time allowing for programmatic possibilities that had not been determined in advance'.*[100]

Hence, the 'interstitial' appears to confer on the building it 'transforms', all the characteristics which define a 'critical architecture' as Benjamin theorises it. The 'interstitial' is not simply a space 'in-between', a left over, an effect, but also a process that disrupts and produces in a way similar to Bataille's 'formless', or rather similar to Benjamins' understanding of Bataille's 'formless'. Finally, Benjamin concludes:

> *'The value of the work of the interstitial, deployed in Eisenman's sense, or Bataille's conception of 'l'informe', is that they allow for the development of alterity in architecture because they maintain the primordality of relation and therefore can be interpreted as positioning architecture within the complex field of repetition'.*[101]

Thus according to Benjamin, the 'formless' or the 'interstitial' are of 'value' within an architectural setting simply because his interpretation of them, gently fits into his conception of architecture as the space of a 'complex field of repetition'. Somehow the 'value' of the 'formless' is the cause of architectural alterity while also its consequence. The 'formless' allows for alterity and this alterity causes the formless to be what it is. Is not all this 'process philosophy' becoming some kind of tautology?

II.3.3. Re-peating, Re-jecting, Re-ducing, Re-hearsing, Re-stating and Re-storing

Although Benjamin's study might be interesting to certain interested parties, it nevertheless, in my view, results in several issues, paradoxes and problems. Some of those pertain to the method used, or rather the peculiar take on the 'philosophy' it proposes ('Process Philosophy's repetitions and Plato metaphysics' rejection). Others are linked to the nature of the material considered (Bataille's view on architecture's reduction as well as Krauss, Bois and Didi-Huberman's arguments' paradoxical rehearsal), while some are the simple consequences of the book's aims (architectural autonomy's restatement and Peter Eisenman criticality's restoring). Those issues and problems have, obviously, in their turn, important consequences. First they affect how the relevance of Bataille's oeuvre to the architectural discipline might be perceived, then they have consequences on the discipline itself, due to the rather restrictive understanding of the architectural they provide. Hence, in the last segment of this prologue, although I have already stated certain critiques above, I wish to point to what I consider to be *Architectural Philosophy*'s three fundamental issues and also to their genesis and consequences. For the sake of clarity I would like to name these issues according to how they operate or, signifying my respect for Benjamin, according to how they *become*, according to what is their process: first 'Re-peating and Re-jecting', then 'Re-ducing and Re-hearsing', and finally 'Re-stating and Re-storing'.

Re-peating and Re-jecting. First of all, there is the issue of the peculiar methodology Benjamin puts to work within his book or what could be identified as his particular take on philosophy. Indeed, as I hope to have shown, Benjamin's aim is not to define architecture's being (that is to unveil the 'boundaries' of the discipline), but rather to display what 'operates' within the discipline; what is, within it, as 'irreducibly architectural'. Benjamin is interested in 'how the architectural operates' or 'what is the thinking of architecture',[102] in other words, Benjamin is interested in architecture's

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[100]. Ibid.
[101]. Ibid.p.42.
[102]. Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000, p. viii.

'process', not in its 'being' but in its 'becoming'. Moreover, it appears that, from a reading of his prose, this aim cannot be fulfilled within the frame of a conventional methodology, which would simply attempt to define what architecture is. Thus, the necessary method should not *be* but rather *become*: it must possess the precise nature of a 'process'. This aim (to present architecture as a process: the 'irreducibly architectural'), its adjunct methodology (a process in itself) and the subsequent vocabulary used to give an account of the study on hand (becoming, process, operation etc....), all intuit that there is, here, at work within that book, a rather peculiar philosophical mode. Although it is never clearly stated, *Architectural Philosophy* is not any kind of philosophy: it deploys itself according to the rule and aims of a mode of thought self-proclaimed as 'Process Philosophy' or 'Ontology of Becoming'.

'Process Philosophy' is a genre of metaphysics, a peculiar approach to its aim. Its concern, similar to 'conventional metaphysics' or 'ontology of being', is to discuss reality (what exists in the world) and the terms of reference through which this reality can be understood, expressed and explained. However, it differs to 'conventional metaphysics', in that this approach claims that the real is best comprehended in terms of processes rather than in defining things. In other words, 'Process Philosophy' is not interested in 'Being' but in 'Becoming', and thus, not in fixing identities but in acknowledging operations. Consequently, it opposes the old tradition of philosophy, that runs from the Pre-Socratic, through Plato and Aristotle, till Hegel, which denies processes or radically downgrades them in the 'order' of being, by subordinating them to substantial things. Conversely, Process Philosophy defends a vision of the real and of all existences it encompasses as processual.[103] 'Process philosophy' thus marks the rift between 'ontology of being' and 'ontology of becoming'. Although the question of the origin of such a 'philosophy' (as well as of its expression) remains problematic for intrinsic reasons, it is often considered that it began with the Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus and his *'On Nature'* which saw reality not as a system of things and 'being' but as a network of processes and 'becoming'.[104] However, during the twentieth century 'Process Philosophy' was the name given to the philosophy of Leibniz, Bergson, and later, the banner under which the thoughts of Alfred North Whitehead and his followers were grouped, while even Gilles Deleuze's work was at times also considered as such.[105] Interestingly, the fact is, that 'Process Philosophy' must itself proceed and it does so around five basic propositions (propositions of which the processual character can still be argued in my view). First, 'time' and 'change' are the categories around which a metaphysical understanding is possible. Second, 'process' is the principal category of ontological study. Third, 'process' is more 'important' than 'things' for ontological theory. Fourth, all of the major elements of an ontological study (God, nature, persons, matter) are best comprehended through a processual vocabulary. Finally, contingency, emergence, novelty, and creativity are among the terms and categories fundamental to this particular metaphysical understanding i.e. the 'ontology of becoming'. Hence 'Process Philosophy' dwells within a vocabulary and a set of factors such as temporality, transformation, change, alterity, passage, and emergence, perceiving everything as the product of processes, leading thus process to have primacy over product ontologically as well as epistemologically. Processes are paradoxically the causes, the vehicles and the effects (consequences) of some irrelevant (process-philosophically speaking) things.

Through the frame of 'Process Philosophy" that is through the philosophical approach to which Benjamin submits his study, a new signification of the rejection of Plato's Khora appears. Although I still maintain, as I mentioned in the preceding text, that Benjamin might have rejected Plato's 'Khora' as a way of coming to terms with some undisclosed, long buried frustration with Derrida's work (or perhaps more simply as a way to solve his Oedipal complex with this philosopher), it becomes rather clear now that it is also Benjamin's particular philosophical approach which necessitates the rejection of Plato's thought. Indeed, Plato's thought is without any doubt deeply opposed to 'Process Philosophy' as one of the earliest philosophies participating in some 'ontology of being'. Beyond his critique of Heraclitus' conceptions in *Cratylus*,[106] it is the

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[103]. An interesting account of 'Process Philosophy' might be found in Nicholas Rescher, *Process Philosophy: A Survey of Basic Issues*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000.

[104]. See, Heraclitus of Ephesus, *'On Nature'* in *Fragments: The Collected Wisdom of Heraclitus*, tr. Haxton Brooks, New York: Viking, 2001. And, Diogene Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* Book IX, tr. Robert Drew Hicks, ed. Loeb Classical Library, 1925,

[105]. See, Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, New York: Macmillan, 1929.

[106]. Plato, *Cratylus*, 440 C, in *Plato: Cratylus, Parmenides, Greater Hippias, Lesser Hippias*, tr. H. N. Fowler, ed. Loeb

whole Platonic understanding of the real, its binary structure and its necessary outside, 'Khora', as enounced in *Timaeus*, which are contrary to Benjamin's approach. Actually it is not so much 'Khora' which is disturbing for 'Process Philosophy' rather than its externality, indeed, 'Khora' appears as the place were the 'whole is generated', as the place of process, to the point where it is in itself nothing less than a process. Rather, what is disturbing for 'Process Philosophy' is the articulation of the two categories of 'being' that 'Khora' permits: the 'intelligible' and the 'sensible': the ideal 'being' and the material one. As for 'Process Philosophy', everything is 'process' nothing can be external to 'process'. Thus, 'Khora's externality, which is also the externality (from the process) of the 'intelligible' and the 'sensible', and the subsequent articulation between those terms, are impossible to conceive according to Benjamin's approach. Hence, 'Khora' is not discarded after a conventional demonstration of its lack of viability for the architectural discipline (indeed, as mentioned, Benjamin's final dismissal of Khora's relevance to the architectural is rather brief, awkward and poorly argued) but rather because Benjamin's conception of the 'irreducibly architectural' bound to the dogmatic-processual approach of 'Process Philosophy' can't conceive of such externality. A philosophical feature ('Khora') which is deeply bound to the Platonic conception of the universe, is rejected not because of its incapacity to define the architectural, but because of its incapacity to fit within Benjamin's 'Process Philosophy's definition of the architectural. One would like to ask Benjamin : what about this 'process' of rejection? Isn't it based on an inadequacy between two things, between two statements, between two definitions of the 'architectural', between two 'beings'? Thus, in which way is it a process, if its origin lies in such a material and substantial opposition?

Moreover, as seen from the perspective of 'Process Philosophy', Benjamin's permanent recourse to repetitions (as already mentioned) all over his text also appears to be significant. It would appear that those repetitions are not a simple lack of literary skill but rather an essential feature, a tactic, of Process Philosophy's methodology. Indeed, as 'Process Philosophy' attempts to define the entirety of the real as a process, it must itself submit to such a predicament i.e. it must be a process in itself. Thus, with the aim of demonstrating that what 'operates' in the 'architectural' consists of a complex network of repetition, what could be a better way to 'proceed' than to constantly repeat this 'statement' through a complex network of intertwined claims? As such the 'irreducibly architectural' would be mirrored by the 'architecturally philosophically irreducible' through their shared territory: repetition. Somehow the 'beauty' of *Architectural Philosophy* is that while it defends the attempt to break the homology between form and function, it nevertheless expresses this through its own homology of form and content. Hence, the continuous repetitions of Benjamin's claim are, to paraphrase him, 'apart' of his argument (as a way to demonstrate it) while also 'a part' of it (as they embody this claim). Although the reader might perceive these 'rhetorical repetitions' as a kind of helpful reminder allowing him to stay focused on this self-demanding text, I am sorry to say that I see such 'repetitions' as an annoying display of almost 'esoteric' incantations, a device used simply in order to convince the reader. In other words those repetitions appear to me as no more than a Couéism or a Coué's method, a trick to optimistically affirm without demonstration, Benjamin's claims.

Furthermore, beyond the pretentious rejection of 'Khora' it entails, the unnecessary complexity, fuzziness, and rhetorical repetitions it annoyingly sustains, Benjamin's Process Philosophy appears also problematic with regard to its treatment of Bataille's thought, more precisely in its will to confer on this thought, a processual 'frock coat'. In other words, Benjamin's Process Philosophy issue of 'rejecting and repeating', leads in my view to a processual misconstruction of the 'formless'. While such an account of philosophy (ontology of becoming) might need a particular check of its own — a task which is however beyond the aim of this dissertation — I claim that Benjamin's methodology and aim when applied to Bataille's oeuvre and more particularly to his notion of 'formless', significantly betray his thought. Indeed, although 'Process Philosophy' dismisses the conventional metaphysical definition of 'being', (that is, the 'ontology of being'), as Bataille might seem to have done, it nevertheless wishes to take over the entire realm occupied by metaphysics. In other words 'Process Philosophy' proposes that the entire environment can be rendered intelligible, rational, logical and meaningful, by inquiring, not into the 'essence of being' but the 'essence of becoming'. It is because of this final aim that Bataille's thought is seminally different from the 'ontology of becoming'. In my view (and as I will

demonstrate in the chapters subsequent to this prologue), Bataille never wished to replace 'metaphysics' by another system of rationalisation of the world but rather to simply transgress it by showing its 'proper' limits. Hence, to discuss Bataille's oeuvre through the frame of 'Process Philosophy' and to conflate their concerns, methods and aims appears to me as nothing less than a misconstruction (conscious or not) of Bataille's oeuvre and a limitation of its relevance to criticism as a whole.

Re-ducing and Re-hearsing. The second problem that I perceive as emerging out of *Architectural Philosophy* concerns yet again, the way Bataille's oeuvre is treated and the subsequent betrayal of his thought by the aforementioned book. This time however, it is not the camouflage of Bataille's thought under the 'frock coat' of 'Process Philosophy' that I would like to deal with, but rather the severe reduction of Bataille's view on architecture which is proposed in *Architectural Philosophy*. Indeed, as we have seen, in order for his claim to match with reality, (that is in order to show that Bataille's 'formless' is at the core of the process allowing for alterity 'in' the 'irreducibly architectural'), Benjamin must per force reduce Bataille's texts on architecture (which obviously do not match his definition of the 'irreducibly architectural') as irrelevant to 'architectural concerns', as only interested in the symbolic dimensions, as well as their potential reworking, of buildings. I should here again present the way he proceeds: first, he states that out of the analysis of Bataille's texts on architecture, emerges an understanding of the architectural as 'having a symbolic dimension, and it is this symbolic dimension that determines the building's meaning'.[107] Then, he contends that the 'irreducibly architectural', if such a thing exists, is only concerned with 'the problem of form's generation'. He consequently reduces his demonstration to some specific texts of Bataille which discuss, in his view, the problem of 'the generation of form': paradoxically only those texts of Bataille which are not on architecture are relevant to the architectural. Quoting him again:

> '*This is the reason that texts ostensibly on architecture – and here this includes both the text 'Architecture' as well as 'L'obélisque', 'le Labyrinthe' and 'Musée' – need to be distanced from a concern with the architectural [sic] once the architectural is understood as the problem of the generation of form'.*[108]

Hence, Benjamin simply wishes to extract a notion ('formless') from its context, in order to demonstrate the validity of his definition of the 'architectural'. He rejects Bataille's texts on architecture for the simple reason that they do not 'mirror' his conception of the architectural. This 'trick' has two seminal consequences, first it reduces, as mentioned, the relevance of Bataille's oeuvre to the architectural discipline, by refusing to treat Bataille's texts on architecture and thus his oeuvre as a whole (Indeed, there is here another paradox: wouldn't it be the task of 'Process Philosophy', normally, to proceed from within Bataille's oeuvre as a whole, as itself a process, in order to define the modus operandi of the 'formless', in order to present its becoming?). Then, it also influences the reception of this oeuvre in a significant way, by intuiting that Bataille's reflection on architectural matters is limited to a concern with 'the generation of form'; henceforth presenting the 'formless' as nothing more than the participant of a formal game. Consequently I state that Benjamin's reading of Bataille cannot be considered as an adequate scholarly study of Bataille's thinking on architecture to our discipline, for two reasons: first this reading is an extraction (it reduces Bataille work's relevance to the discipline), thus it does not cover Bataille's oeuvre as a whole. Second, it misrepresents the 'formless' as 'what forms' due to its own biases and agendas.

Furthermore, it seems that *Architectural Philosophy*'s issue with 'reducing' is also tied to the one of 'rehearsing' its influences. I contend here, that beyond its proper biases and agendas the reasons for *Architectural Philosophy*'s necessary reduction and misrepresentation of Bataille's oeuvre and notions might be found also in the paradoxical 'rehearsing' of its influences. But what are those influences? In an attempt to intuit the relevance of Bataille's 'formless' to the architectural discipline, Benjamin, states at the beginning of the chapter 'Time, Function and Alterity in Architecture' that:

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[107]. Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000. pp. 22-23.
[108]. Ibid. p.22.

'[...] the term – l'informe – often translated as 'formless', has had a pervasive influence in both architecture and art criticism'.[109]

In a footnote to this passage, Benjamin argues for this claim, not by mentioning works that treat Bataille's oeuvre from an architectural perspective (i.e. that discuss Bataille's texts on architecture), but rather (and paradoxically) the two studies (Didi-Huberman's and Kraus/Bois's) that I have already discussed, which pertain to the field of art criticism; Benjamin in this way acknowledges the influences of those authors and studies through his own reflection:

'The most important work here is by Rosalind Krauss and Yves Alain-Bois. While the term and its effects have been deployed within their writings at different times, they have produced a joint work that provides a more sustained version. See their Formless, MIT Press, Boston, 1997. For a different, and in the end, more persuasive use of this term see Georges Didi-Huberman, La resemblance informe, Macula, paris, 1995'.[110]

After such a statement it is easy to understand that the two works mentioned, have obviously influenced Benjamin. Yet, in what way have those influences been absorbed? Or rather what did Benjamin extract from them?

As we have seen, Georges Didi-Huberman's study and Rosalind Krauss and Yves Alain Bois' catalogue, although they share the same subject matter, have significant divergences. They can be circumscribed around two centres of oppositions: one will concentrate on the reality of Bataille's dialecticism (Krauss and Bois refuse to see Bataille as a Dialectician, while Didi-Huberman's primary aim is to demonstrate he was), the other will focus on the modus operandi of the 'formless' (Krauss and Bois perceive the formless as an operation autonomous from the socio-political domain, while Didi-Huberman conceives it as a transgressive term socially grounded, for the form it transgresses is socially taboo). Hence, there are, indeed, some seminal differences between the two studies and their representation of Bataille's enterprise and the 'formless'.

However, Benjamin, interestingly enough, does not follow simply one book or the other . Rather it seems that he operates some sort of random 'shopping'. Indeed, it is possible to see Benjamin's take on Bataille and the 'formless', as a simple rehearsal of its influences' arguments, yet this rehearsal is paradoxical. While Benjamin proposes a reading of the 'formless', fairly similar, at least with regard to the way the 'formless' operates, to Didi-Huberman's, (that is, for Didi-Huberman, the 'formless' is what deforms and forms, as what is at the core of a 'dialectics of forms'; and if I use Benjamin's words, the 'formless' is what undoes the 'form' taken by 'that which is' and finally 'forms' new possibilities), he also considers the 'formless' as an operation, independent of culture and society, that allows alterity to appear within the 'irreducibly architectural'. That is, the 'formless', as in Bois and Krauss's book, is merely perceived as a 'structural' operation internal to the discipline, this time not in the realm of Modern Art, but within the 'architectural' one. Furthermore, the 'formless' for Benjamin is not bound in any way to some socio-cultural taboo (the form to be transgressed should be socially taboo, for Didi-Huberman, not simply a model within a discipline), rather it is undoing a disciplinary dogma: the homology of form and function (autonomously from social matters).

Benjamin's recovers from Didi-Huberman the 'engine' of his interpretation of the 'formless' that is the 'dialectic of form' (form should be maintained to be superseded) while he absorbs Krauss and Bois's understanding of the 'formless' as an internal, isolated from the outside, operation defining the 'irreducibly architectural'. These rehearsal-extractions (or random shopping) which form a paradox, are also, in my view, responsible, as much as the proper biases and agendas of *Architectural Philosophy* for the reduction of Bataille's work: on the one hand the 'formless' is reduced to a mere agent of a formal game, autonomous from all socio-political contexts, and on the other hand 'the formless' is also reduced, (although there are important differences between typical Hegelian Dialectics and 'Process Philosophy', between the diverse ontology of 'being' and 'becoming') as a term absorbed within a dialectical super-session towards a third term, or at least rendered productive of a 'new' possibility for form.

Although the idea of confronting the study of Krauss and Bois with the one of Didi-

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[109]. Ibid. p. 12.
[110]. Ibid. footnotes 5, pp. 205-206.

Huberman is far from being uninteresting, I claim that Benjamin allowed himself to be wrongly influenced. Instead of joining Didi-Huberman's reductive perception of the 'formless' as what forms with Krauss and Bois's reduction of the 'formless' as an autonomous device, I must state that to link the 'formless' as a socially grounded device, to a particular way of operating from within form but against it, independently of dialectical means, and without aiming at a 're-forming', would present a picture of the 'formless', in my view, much closer to Bataille's.

But unfortunately, here, Bataille's thought is simply 'put to work' (in Krauss and Bois's fashion) in order to defend a certain conception of the 'architectural' totally foreign to its own conclusion (independent from social matters), while the 'formless' is also 'put in forms' (in a way similar to Didi-Huberman's), rendered through some obscure theoretical construction as a process which re-forms. Hence, Benjamin's reduction of Bataille's work and its misrepresentation appears also as the consequence of the paradoxical rehearsal of its influences.

Re-stating and Re-storing. My last set of remarks regarding the issues, problems and paradoxes that Benjamin's study presents, concerns more specifically the disturbing condition of the architectural that it defines and the equally disturbing operative criticism it indulges in. As we have seen, Benjamin's employment of 'Process Philosophy' and it's subsequent betrayal of Bataille's thought are deeply opposed to what concerns this dissertation. Moreover, they also lead to the consequential issue of the 'autonomy of the discipline's re-statement.

Benjamin's *Architectural Philosophy* attempts to think the 'architectural' according to the rules of 'Process Philosophy'. Although this endeavour might be interesting if it considers the wide range of processual impacts that the so called 'architectural' might have, and if, in parallel, it investigates the wide range of processes influencing it, however, I must state that the way Benjamin refuses to enlarge his frame of inquiry, that is, the way he states, from the onset, the existence of a self-consistent 'irreducibly architectural' precinct, renders, in my view, his whole 'Process Philosophy' rather limited or worst irrelevant. Indeed, while seeking what defines the 'architectural' from within, Benjamin simply proposes not a self-consistent definition of the 'being' of architecture, but a self-consistent definition of the architectural as 'becoming'. Out of such a methodology two consequences result. One concerns the possibilities allowed to architecture, the other concerns its definition: first, Benjamin's endeavour, its definition of alterity 'in' architecture as a disruption of the homology between form and function, and the subsequent possibility for new 'forms' to emerge, clearly reduces, the discipline of architecture to merely a formal game. Second as the 'irreducibly architectural' and consequently the possibility for alterity are separated from all cultural, social and political concerns, architecture is defined as an autonomous 'becoming'. Thus, Benjamin's theoretical excursus appears in the end, as just another 're-statement' of architecture's autonomy.

Beyond the simple issue that this 'conception' of the architectural as autonomous betrays in many ways Bataille's thought on architecture, which is, within that project, meant to support it, the true questions concern the reality of this architectural 'essence' of 'becoming' (as it is defined by this understanding of the discipline as a particular self-consistent process), and how it can have the capacity to sustain itself autonomously.

Furthermore, besides re-stating architecture's autonomy, Benjamin's *Architectural Philosophy* also leads to another very disturbing, in my view, outcome: the re-storing of Peter Eisenman' criticality through an unashamed operative criticism of his work. On the one hand this is not surprising, but on the other hand it is extremely disturbing. This not surprising if one considers that the main task that Benjamin gave to himself was to re-state the autonomous status of architecture through a redefinition of the 'irreducibly architectural', of alterity (as the disruption of the functionalist homology) and thus of criticality as purely internal to the discipline. Thus, there could not be a better case study for illustrating (although Benjamin contends he does not so) how this specific 'condition' of architecture comes to be materialized, than to investigate how it is present in the work of an architect, world famous for his opposition to architectural functionalism, and its defence of certain 'architectural autonomy', that is, Peter Eisenman himself.

However, the whole discussion of Eisenman's work appears, in my view, as simply a case of 'operative criticism'. Indeed, it is rather difficult to avoid the feeling, when faced with the number of issues, problems, paradoxes, poorly argued claims etc... which form the body of the text of *Architectural Philosophy*, that the whole aim and object of Benjamin's project, has been none other than to provide a theoretical frame for critically praising the work of the American architect. But

what I find most disturbing in this unashamed movement is, beyond the simple and absurd conflation of Bataille's 'formless' and Eisenman's 'interstitial' it proposes (nothing is more foreign to Bataille's thought than the idea of architecture's autonomy, as I will show in the following chapters), the re-storing of Eisenman's brand new critical aura. After the wide range of philosopher's names, such as Chomsky, Jameson, Derrida and Deleuze, which have been invoked for pompously qualifying Eisenman's numerous and ephemeral theoretical 'cover-ups', it is Bataille's 'formless' and its radicalism that Benjamin attempts to integrate within Eisenman's economy.

Concluding this section on Andrew Benjamin's *Architectural Philosophy*, I should summarize how, in my view, Benjamin's study betrays Bataille's oeuvre and as such cannot be considered a scholarly work, relevant to the discipline of architectural theory and criticism. First, Benjamin betrays Bataille's particular thinking by trying to absorb it within the approach of 'Process Philosophy'. Secondly, Benjamin reduces his frame of investigation to Bataille's texts, which do not develop an architectural concern. As Bataille's view on architecture displays a vision of the architectural radically different from that of Benjamin, it is simply omitted. Thirdly, Benjamin's extractions from his influences and the subsequent rehashing of their misrepresentations of the 'formless', unfortunately lead him also to a severe reductive-rehearsing of what the 'formless' is. Fourthly, Benjamin's use of Bataille's 'formless' for re-stating the 'autonomy of architecture' can't be sustained after a close inspection of Bataille's texts on architecture. Fifthly, Benjamin's unashamed operative criticism of Eisenman, through a misrepresentation of the 'formless', constitutes, in my view, not simply a betrayal of Bataille's thought but an insult to the intelligence of the reader. Finally, the overall problem that one can see within Benjamin's book, concerns, as with Didi-Huberman's, Krauss and Bois' books, the will to render instrumental the 'formless'. While Krauss and Bois attempted to 'put to work' the 'formless' and Didi-Huberman tried to 'put it in form', it seems that Benjamin unsuccessfully wishes to 'put it in movement'. Indeed, the whole process of his philosophical approach consists of identifying all things as 'flowing', as in movement, as in process. However, and although it is right to perceive the formless as a process, it is, nevertheless, also a substance, that is, an object. A physical negativity that remains disruptive for the mind, unproductive for economy, and unemployed by work. This process is indeed processing but in a way that might be considered truly radical: it is processing but it does not mean it can be processed. The 'formless' actually proceeds against all form of 'totalizing'. This means that it is also proceeding against 'Process Philosophy' and its will to give an account of the entirety of the real as 'process': it can never be proceeded, or put in movement, by the 'Process Philosopher', it actually escapes from, or reaches beyond, his proceedings.

PART II
EXCRETION

(Releasing Bataille's take on architecture)

CHAPTER III

Bataille's Formation, Influences, Groups, Polemics and Legacies

Chapter III. Bataille's Formation, Influences, Groups, Polemics and Legacies

*'The ebullition that I consider, which animates the planet, is also that which animates me.
The object of my research cannot be distinguished from the subject at its boiling point'.[1]*

Bataille's 'writing' (ecriture) of/on the excess, his 'paradoxical philosophy', is a critique, among others, of Phenomenology and its inability to constitute an unmediated account of experience: what is commonly named the phenomenological 'bracketing' of experience.[2] For Bataille the true nature of experience escapes 'discourse'. That is, experience cannot be 'presented' by any kind of philosophy without becoming a mere controlled, stabilized, and thus, denatured, hypertrophied 'representation' of itself.

In contrast to this claim, and as the quote above suggests, Bataille attempts with his 'writing' (or here 'research'), to not distance himself from the 'experience', which this 'practice' (his 'writing') unveils. The use of the term 'experience' is layered three fold: there is the 'experience' which the novelisation or reflection addresses (the object of discussion), the 'experience' of the author (personal) and the experience of writing (the practice). But, these three forms of 'experiences' are not differentiated so easily: the experience which lies at the heart of Bataille's texts, as the object of the novelisation or reflection, is more often than not, literally, that of its author, or at least definitively bound up with it, while this bond determines the pertinence of the 'experience of writing'. In short, the 'experience of writing' merges with the 'writing of experience' itself conflated with the 'experience' of the one practicing this 'writing': experience, writing, author, character, narrator and context all seem to be irremediably entangled.

From there, it becomes obvious that before understanding Bataille's 'writing' aims or content, and, a fortiori, before comprehending its relevance to architectural criticism, this dissertation must shed some light, first of all, upon what might be called the 'context' of this 'writing' and the 'experience' of its author.

Thus, this chapter situates Bataille's thought in the wider frame of the twentieth century's intellectual history through a discussion of Bataille's personal experiences, practices, reviews, groupings, polemics, influences and legacy. It attempts to show how Bataille's 'writing' (ecriture) of/on the excess emerges through these encounters, disputes and readings. In other words, it reveals how intertwined is this 'writing' with its 'context' and its author's habits.

Hence, this chapter exposes Bataille's own experience of the limit and its beyond, the excess, by discussing certain events and aspects of his life, which appear seminal to the development of his 'writing' on/of the excess. It also considers the manner in which Bataille discovers, relates to, and somehow ventures further than Bergson, Hegel, Sade, Nietzsche and Mauss. It discusses how Bataille develops his position from within certain reviews and groups, towards theirs margins, and at times beyond them. It further evokes the way he posits himself outside his contemporary 'Avant-Guard'; that is to say, in excess of Surrealism and later Existentialism, by launching intense debates with two of the most notorious figures of his time: Sartre and Breton. Finally this chapter addresses what 'exceeds' Bataille: his legacy. It thus suggests the relevance of his 'writing' to a whole generation of thinkers from the second half of the twentieth century: Foucault, Derrida, Baudrillard, Lacan, and the *Tel Quel*s group.

III.1. Bataille's early years: predestined for the excess

'So much horror predestines you'[3]

Usually the pertinence of the oeuvre of a writer, an architect or a philosopher is judged, from the stand-point of objectivity. That is, a set of concepts is assessed according to its importance for the history of the discipline to which it belongs, with the necessary distance that demands the putting aside, during the assessment, all sort of biographical matters, biases and influences. The problem with Bataille is, as the introductory quote to this chapter announces, that all his life, he refused to

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[1]. Georges Bataille, *La Part Maudite*, in OC VII. Paris, Gallimard, 1976, p.20.

[2]. See Leslie A.Boldt-Irons, 'Introduction', in *On Bataille: Critical Essays*, Albany: University Press of NY, 195, p.16.

[3]. Georges Bataille, *le Petit*, in OC III, Gallimard, Paris, 1971, p.61.

allow for the scientific 'distance' between the thinking subject and its object of reflexion. Hence, this makes it difficult to comprehend his 'writing' without acknowledging his peculiar life. Consequently, although my aim is not to write Bataille's biography, as this is beyond the scope of this dissertation (but also, as this has been brilliantly achieved by Michel Surya with *Georges Bataille, la mort a l'oeuvre,*[4]), I must here begin by recalling a number of chronological facts and aspects of Bataille's life which seem to be extremely important for the development of his 'writing'. In other words I wish to argue that, Bataille's 'writing' on/of the excess — a 'writing' as a 'textual' practice of the excess within discourse and a discussion of this excess's function within the 'physical' realm — is also deeply influenced by, or totally intertwined with Bataille's 'non-textual' physical practices, discoveries and encounters of the excess. (*Not to say that, if there is some truth about Bataille (which is still doubtful), it is to be found through a sort of biographical or psychological analytical enquiry. No, rather I aim to show that any attempt at seeking the 'truth' about Bataille and his 'oeuvre' (an enterprise doomed from the beginning) must take into account the disturbing reality of his 'experience'.*

III.1.1. Being in excess, from birth

Georges Bataille was born on 10 September 1897 in Billom, a small town nearby the administrative centre of Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand. While working on the manuscript of *On Nietzsche* during the year 1944, he would write about his 'conception' in a way which allowed him to underline the 'precariousness' of 'being':

> *'Considering my "conception" – the loss from which I exist (I exist, which does not simply mean that my being exists, but that it is clearly distinct), I perceive the precariousness of the being within me. Not that classical precariousness founded in the necessity of dying, but a new and more profound one, founded on the few possibilities I had of existing (that there was only my own being born and not some other)'.[5]*

For Bataille, man or its being is not simply living in a state of 'precariousness' because of its (perhaps imminent?) unavoidable mortality. But, rather as he writes it, being's precariousness is linked to the 'good fortune' of being existent. Indeed, as he learned from the works of Jean Rostand, *Les Chromosomes*, the being that he is, (Bataille), is only one combination among 225 trillion other potential ones. Thus, man, being and consequently Bataille (as the man and the being he was), are all not only mortal but also unlikely when consideration is given to the almost infinite number of potential results that the erotic conjoining of their progenitors' gametes could have provided. It is within this unlikeliness that being's precariousness must be found.

Hence, looking back to his conception and birth, Bataille does not recall joyful memories of his childhood or develop a certain nostalgia for that period. Rather, Bataille draws out of it some kind of anguish, not anguished by the mere logical fact that he will die, but rather by the potentiality that he could, also, not have been or that he could have been another 'combination' pulled out of the whole sum of probabilities. Somehow, the whole sum of potential combinations forms an undifferentiated mass out of which his being escaped and became no more 'probable' but a reality (a precarious one, yet still a reality). But, how to survive such anguish when it strikes, the anguish of the potentiality of not having been? What could be a better answer to this anguish than to affirm (loudly) the *condition* of this being which burst out of this undifferentiated mass of potentialities as an *excess*?

For Bataille, from its origin, a being must assume its precariousness, not the precariousness due to decay and its conclusions (the inevitability death) but the one due to its unlikeliness (the chance of being this being) and he must face this consequence: the condition of being in excess, (of being a discontinuous being) from the undifferentiated whole of potential (and continuous) beings that it could have been. For Bataille, from birth, being is in excess.

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[4]. Before going further, I must stress how much I am indebted to Michel Surya's precise biography of Bataille, for allowing me to get a subtle and nuanced picture of Bataille's life. See, *Georges Bataille, la mort a l'oeuvre*, Paris, Gallimard 1992, trans., *Georges Bataille, An intellectual Biography*, London, Verso, 2002.

[5]. Georges Bataille, *Sur Nietzsche*, in OC VI, Gallimard, Paris, 1973, p.444, (notes).

III.1.2. The first experience of the limit's transgression and the excess beyond it: madness, reversal of value, abandonment, and death

Bataille spent his entire childhood and adolescence in a rather dramatic, if not a tragic setting. He was fathered by Joseph-Aristide Bataille, a syphilitic and blind man, who at the time of his son's birth, began to suffer from general paralysis.[6] Nevertheless, this sick, paralysed, blind and soon insane, father had fifteen more years to live, fifteen years during which his agony became also the martyrdom of his wife and of his two infants, Martial (born in 1890) and Georges. In *Story of the Eye* ('Coincidences') and *Le Petit*, Bataille shares with the reader, in a rather shameless way, some of his memories of that period, memories of the long and painful agony which, despite his own effort at helping him, his beloved father went through:

> *'What upset me even more, was seeing, my father's shit such a great number of times [...]. It was very hard for him to get out of bed (I would help him) and settle on a chamber pot, in his nightshirt and, usually, a cotton nightcap (he had a pointed grey beard, ill kempt, a large eagle nose, and immense hollow eyes staring into space). At times, "lightning sharp pains" would make him howl like a beast, sticking out his bent leg, which he futilely hugged in his arms'.[7]*

Thus, during his entire childhood and the major part of his adolescence, George Bataille only knew his father as a cripple. Through all those years, this strange figure of authority was at best silent and calm, at worst insane and howling under the pain caused by the complications of his syphilis. Indeed, when the syphilis develops into its tertiary stage, the most important symptom consists of lesions located at the rear roots and cords of the marrow and is associated, most of the time, with vigorous pains leading to dementia. In 1911, when Bataille was nearly fourteen, it seems that his father's disease was just reaching this inevitable and final stage: Joseph-Aristide Bataille had definitively gone insane.

> *'One night, we were awakened, my mother and I, by vehement words that the syphilitic was literally howling in his room: he had suddenly gone mad'.[8]*

Then, Bataille's mother sent the young Georges to search for a doctor. Nevertheless, the practitioner's help was as useless as his diagnosis was dreadful. Bataille's father was beyond help. But, through the dramatic experience of witnessing his father becoming truly mad, Bataille also faced an improbable reversal of values which came with the (self)transgression of the usual figure of authority: the figure, precisely, of the father. While the physician was explaining the state of her husband to his mother in the room next to his, Joseph-Aristide Bataille in an insane burst of laughter, and in front of the young Georges who had stayed there for watching over him, shouted from his sick-bed: 'Hey, Doctor, let me know when you are done fucking my wife!'[9] This inexplicable, odious, insane and sexually connoted affirmation had a tremendous influence on the young Bataille. Years later he still recalled:

> *'For me, that utterance, which in a blink of an eye annihilated the demoralizing effects of a strict education, left me with something like a steady obligation, unconsciously suffered till now and unwilled: the necessity of continuously finding an equivalent to that sentence, in any situation I happen to find myself [...]'.[10]*

No one can confirm that the mad accusation of his father propelled the young Georges Bataille into adulthood, but it seems obvious that it nevertheless opened up for him, a realm beyond the limit which is represented in the mind of a child by parents and adults; beyond the limit constituted by

[6]. Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'oeil*, in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p.75.
[7]. Georges Bataille, *Le Petit*, in OC III, Gallimard, Paris, 1971, p.60.
[8]. Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'oeil*, in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p.76.
[9]. Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'oeil*, in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p.77.
[10]. Ibid.

parental authority. Indeed the sudden reversal of the authority figure into the figure of madness, insanity and vulgarity had a tremendous effect on the young man. Suddenly all that was not allowed by the agent of a 'strict education', was unleashed by this very same character, insults, violence and sexuality. All that was forbidden by authority, all that was concealed, erupted from this very same authority. Somehow, authority became its own transgression, and this spectacle was not simply traumatic but rather horrifyingly pleasant, as what was revealed was annihilating some 'demoralizing effects'. The transgression of the limit (authority) opened (through a burst of laughter) a realm of pleasure and freedom, a realm of excess in which a depressing and traumatic life could find an alternative to its fate. The forbidden behaviour and words, this form of 'excess', was actually profoundly liberating. So liberating, that it obliged conscientiously or not, the teenager to seek from then on, for the same experience of the limit and its transgression any time he could. Hence, as Bataille wrote, following this moment, his lone commitment would be to find an equivalent of that 'excess' in 'any situation', throughout his whole life. Everything that had been previously held on high (as authority), would have to be brought low (as a base element), and that which was low would be raised on high (in a parodic, transgressive and ephemeral way). This transgressive reversal would characterize all of his 'projects'. He would submit himself for his entire life, to a similar experience of the limit, rupture of authority and its inversion: a perpetual oscillation along the limit, a ceaseless crossing and re-crossing of boundaries; an endless repetition of the same and only rule. That is, rules are there to be transgressed, they conceal the ultimate realm of pleasure, and transgression opens this realm: the realm of the excess.[11]

But the unveiling of transgression, through reversal, and of the excess it unleashed was not simply 'enjoyable' as Bataille's quote might insinuate. He had also to discover what happens to the 'excess' after it is released, or in this precise case what happens to the figure that represented, then, this excess, his father. This also had a seminal influence on him and indeed, Bataille's 'paradoxical philosophy' is not simply interested in the excess, how it erupts and what it does, but also, and perhaps even more, is obsessed by what becomes of this excess, how society and 'beings' handle it, what is its 'fate' or destiny.

When Bataille was almost seventeen, in August 1914, the war broke out. The city of Rheims, the capital of Champagne, (where Joseph-Aristide Bataille had moved his whole family a few years after the birth of his son Georges), soon came under siege. Bataille (who had just converted to Catholicism earlier that summer) and his mother, fled away from town just before the heavy bombardments began. His father, too sick to be removed, was left behind with the housekeeper. The refugees found a home at Bataille's maternal grandparents, back in Auvergne, in the tiny mountain village of Riom-és-Montagnes, a few kilometres south of Clermont-Ferrand. They stayed there until the end of the year 1914 and most of the next one. But soon, his mother had fallen into a state of suicidal depression. It lasted for months and she was haunted by thoughts of damnation for having abandoned her blind, syphilitic and paralysed husband to an almost certain death, in a city now ravaged by war.[12] In the meantime Bataille developed a rather awkward relationship with her. He tried to help her, the best he could, as he did with his father, but she remained obsessed with self-destruction. One night she tried to drown herself in a small creek, but the water was not deep enough. He recalled finding her 'drenched up to her belt, her skirt pissing creek water'.[13] Exhausted by such behaviour, Bataille resorted to violence and attempted to get her back to her senses by confronting her physically, but it only resulted in an increase of his anguish. At that time, he started to fear that she might attempt to kill him in his sleep, so he removed a pair of heavy candlesticks that could have been used as blunt instruments, from his bedroom.[14] Her 'condition' persisted until the early days of the autumn 1915, when, due to a treatment administered by the local doctor, she finally regained her senses. However, news coming from Rheims brought mother and son into conflict again, Joseph-Aristide Bataille was near death, and while Georges deeply desired to go back to his father in order to see him for, probably the last time, his mother refused. When finally she accepted what her son requested, it was too

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[11]. I will show in a more substantial way how experience of the limit, transgression, reversal and oscillation along boundaries are essentials aspects of Bataille's writing of/on the excess, in the following chapter.

[12]. See, *Georges Bataille, An intellectual Biography*, London, Verso, 2002, p.19.

[13]. Georges Bataille, *Histoire de l'oeil*, in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p.78.

late, Joseph-Aristide Bataille died in Rheims on 6 November 1915, alone and refusing to see the priest, as the singular atheist he had been for all of his life.

For Bataille, Joseph-Aristide did not simply die alone. He died abandoned by his wife and son: '[...] I abandoned my father, alone, blind, paralytic, mad, screaming and twitching with pain, transfixed in a worn-out armchair'.[15] Bataille had already abandoned him twice before: when he left him in Rheims to escape the German armies' advance, but also when he converted to Catholicism in the early days of the summer of 1914. Indeed, as his father was an atheist, to convert to a God his father did not believe in, was also somehow to betray and abandon him. This appeared to Bataille, to be the fate of his father and later the fate of the excess, to be rejected and to die alone without having a chance of redemption and/or election, completely abandoned, by everyone: 'No one on earth, or in the heavens, was concerned with the anguish of my dying father'.[16] The excess (or the one in excess) is condemned to a tragic, lonely, merciless and atrocious death (later, Bataille will say to be squandered without purpose). This, in the eyes of an adolescent or a young man, is, without doubt, a terrible fate to embrace, and it explains why Bataille kept believing in the God his father did not believe in (and from who, thus, he couldn't expect mercy) for a few years after his father's death. It was a way to escape a fate similar to the one of his father:

> 'My piety was only an attempted evasion: by any means, I wished to elude my fate, I abandoned my father'.[17]

However, twenty years later (a long time after Bataille had lost his faith around 1920), Bataille, perhaps torn apart by guilt and regrets, through again a sort of reversal,[18] decided to praise this mad father, this figure of excess and his fate. His father did not appear merely as the figure of the excess, which transgresses the 'parental' authority, but more importantly as the excess transgressing the 'supreme' authority, God. His father transgressed the limit with which God scares the Christians, the fear of death that imposes on one to believe in order to be pardoned of sins committed and thus reprieved of punishment. His father faced up to fear with his blind gaze, and without succumbing to it, till the end. This did not mean, for Bataille, that God did not exist or that he was 'dead', but that there is something stronger than God, something that can go beyond it, something that can transgress its limit, and see the excess, that lies behind. It was the mad Joseph Aristide Bataille, who, although blind, could see what God conceals. Bataille's acknowledgement of his father's ability (within its disability), is obvious in a passage he wrote as a preliminary version of *The Inner Experience* 'I have seen [...] what dead eyes discern',[19] as well as his embrace of his father's fate (the fate of the figure of the excess) is clearly visible in this extract from that same book definitive version:

> '[...] it is necessary, in the end, to see everything with lifeless eyes, to become God, otherwise we would not know what it is to sink, to no longer know anything'.[20]

III.1.3. From deep religious piety to the dark conjoining of opposites: pleasure and unease

After his father's death, Bataille stayed in Riom where he spent most of his time studying, wandering on his bicycle in the beautiful Auvergne landscape and praying. His studies concerned his second Baccalaureate in Philosophy, which he passed in June 1915 (he passed his first on the eve of First World War) while his prayers were the sign of the deeply religious life he had chosen in order to escape 'his fate'.[21]

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[15]. Georges Bataille, *Le Coupable*, in O.C. V., Gallimard, Paris, 1973. p.504, (notes).
[16]. Georges Bataille, *le Petit*, in O.C III, Gallimard, Paris, 1971, p.61.
[17]. Ibid.
[18]. It is interesting to note that Bataille does not simply leaves the 'Father' for 'returning' to his father, that he does not replace God's figure with the one of Joseph-Aristide, but rather that he finally transgresses the figure of the 'Father' (God), by espousing the means of the figure who already showed him the path towards the excess; that is, the means of his father: transgression through reversal.
[19]. Georges Bataille, *L'Experience Interieur*, in O.C. V., Gallimard, Paris, 1973. p. 447, (notes).
[20]. Ibid. p.177.
[21]. Georges Delteil, 'Georges Bataille à Riom-ès-Montagnes', *Critique*, 195-6, Summer 1963.

In January 1916, he was drafted for service in the 154th infantry regiment, but he soon contracted a pulmonary illness and spent most of his time languishing on a hospital sickbed. He never made it to the front, and, after one year of convalescence, he was discharged in January 1917, due to his fragile condition. He subsequently returned to a life of piety in Riom-és-Montagnes. His faith led him to write his first essay, *Notre Dame de Rheims*, at the end of 1917: a patriotic pamphlet printed and published in Saint-Flour, Cantal, and dedicated to 'the youth of Haute-Auvergne'.[22] But, above all, Bataille was longing for a religious vocation. Rather than become a priest, he wished to experience the cloister's life, i.e. to become a monk. It seems he dismissed the idea of becoming a priest, because it is still a public life, a life in the community of the church, while the life of a monk, in a monastery, is one of solitude, isolation, escape, perhaps even abandonment. It is thus rather paradoxical that while he attempted to escape his father's fate, he was still wishing to surrender himself to the same abandonment.[23]

Thus, faith was what moved him, more than anything, during this period, and after receiving his confirmation in 1917, he tried to abandon himself, totally, to God as he entered the seminary at the bishopric of Saint Flour in the autumn of 1917. Before one year was gone, in the summer of 1918 he would have given up this aim, more precisely after he had spent, in June, on the advice of the Bishop of Saint Flour, a week devoted to Christian meditation in La Barde, a Jesuit monastery in Dordogne. In a letter to a friend he later reported, 'I lived five hurried, overheated, violent days at La Barde. I left with the conviction that there is no vocation for me and with real peace'.[24] This was perhaps the end of his longing for a religious vocation but not yet the moment when he would completely renounce his faith. Rather, Bataille took the opportunity to redirect the movement of his faith towards other aims.

He decided to dedicate himself to the study of the development of the Church in the era of its greatest dominance, the Middle Ages. In November 1918, (by ministerial decree) he was allowed to enter the Écoles des Chartes in Paris, where he would stay for three years, in order to become a specialist in medieval matters and a librarian. In October 1920 his research took him to London. While on his way, he stayed in another monastery, Quarr Abbey on the Isle of Wight and, it was there, if Bataille's testimony is to be believed, during those three days at Quarr Abbey, that he definitively lost his faith. What happened exactly? In the autobiographical note he prepared for his publishers in the late 1950s he just claimed that he 'brusquely lost his faith' after his visit to Quarr Abbey.[25] He finally defended his final thesis, an edition of *L'Ordre de Chevalerie*, an anonymous thirteenth-century didactic poem on the proper conduct of Christian knights, on the 30 January 1922, and on February 10, he was awarded the title of palaeographic archivist.[26]

Because, he finished his third year at the Ecole des Chartes as the second best student, Bataille was allowed to further his research at L'École des Hautes Études Hispaniques (which would become the Casa Velazquez) in Madrid, a centre for advanced scientific and cultural research in Spain. He spent six months there (from February till August 1922), which, literally, transformed him. According to the correspondence he maintained with one of his fellow students, Colette Renie, he experienced, 'a Spain full of violence and splendour, a very pleasant presentiment'.[27] The violence of Spain he sensed, certainly refers, among other aspects of Spanish life, to bullfights, (which became a lifelong and abiding passion for him); or more precisely to a very specific one. On 17 May 1922, Manolo Granero, a 20 year old bullfighter widely regarded as the best of his generation, was thrown against the wall of the ring and struck three times by a bull. The third blow tore through his right eye, directly into his skull. Bataille was stunned by the vision of Granero's eye dangling from its socket as his body was carried away from the field. This mutilation fascinated him to the point that this scene appears as central to his *Story of Eye* which he wrote five years later. The scene caused him feelings similar to the ones he experienced at the sight of his father going mad. Yet this time, more than a pattern of transgression and reversal, it was the

[22]. Georges Bataille, *Notre Dame de Rheims*, in OC. I., Gallimard, Paris, new edition, 1976. p.611-616.
See also for an analysis of that piece, Denis Hollier, Against Architecture, 1974. Trans. Betsy Wing, MIT press, 1989.
[23]. Georges Bataille, *Choix de Lettres, 1917-1962*, Ed. Michel Surya, Paris, 1997. p.14.
[24]. Georges Bataille, *Choix de Lettres, 1917-1962*, Ed. Michel Surya, Paris, 1997. p.19.
[25]. Georges Bataille, *Notice Autobiographique*, in OC. VII. Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p.459-462.
[26]. Georges Bataille, *L'Ordre de Chevalerie*, in OC. I. Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p.99-102.
[27]. Georges Bataille, *Choix de Lettres, 1917-1962*, Ed. Michel Surya, Paris, 1997. p.27.

conjoining of opposites that appeared to him as revealing, a superposition of death (horror) and light (pleasure), of quality and intolerability. As he described it 20 years later:

> *'I didn't know at what moment, in the arena, when the vast crowd got to their feet, a stunned silence fell; this theatrical entrance of death, at the festival's height, in sunlight, had an evident, expected and intolerable quality'.*[28]

The enucleation of Granero's eye, became another decisive event in the formation of his 'writing' (as it appears in *Story of the Eye*) but also in the development of his 'paradoxical philosophy', the intolerable beauty of death bursting out under the heavy Madrid sun, at the 'feria's' climax, allowed him to 'touch' a very paradoxical form of joy and 'to understand that unease is often the secret of the greatest pleasures'.[29]

A few days later, in June 1922 the Bibliothéque Nationale de France offered him a job in its department of printed materials, a work offer that the young Bataille could not refuse. Hence, Bataille's Spanish sojourn was cut short, but he came back to Paris with a pronounced taste for the kind of excessive and overwhelming experience he had had in Madrid's arena.

III.1.4. Meeting Leiris, Masson, Aragon, Breton; experiencing psycho-analysis and the release of the 'writing' of the excess.

The years 1924-25 are important marks within Bataille's development. It is through the friendships he made during that period that he infiltrated the Parisian intellectual circles of that time, and from there that he managed to 'release' his singular 'writing' (with the help of a rather unorthodox psycho-analysis).

Bataille met Michel Leiris[30] for the first time in October 1924 at the café Marigny, near the Elysée Palace, through the intermediary of Jacques Lavaud, a colleague from the Bibliotheque Nationale. The friendship developed into a long lasting one and it seems that Leiris immediately understood Bataille's singular habits and passion for brothels (probably the best proof of the profound taste for excessive experiences that Bataille brought back from Spain), as he later declared:

> *'When I met Georges Bataille, he was already living the most dissolute life. He was debauched, a drinker and a gambler. He played in select circles and was often cleaned out, appallingly so'.*[31]

The three of them (including Lavaud) soon spoke of founding a new literary movement and its magazine, which would contrast with the 'No-saying' childishness of Dada, which they saw as a mere provocative negation quickly to be appropriated by the establishment. Bataille wanted to found a 'Yes' movement, requiring a 'perpetual acquiescence to everything'.[32] Dada was somehow, not 'stupid enough', it did not go far enough as it failed to transcend itself into a larger vision of life.[33] The magazine and the movement would have used as their headquarters, a charmingly sordid and decrepit brothel, near the Porte Saint-Denis, where the three could discuss their ideas, and of course, the girls would contribute.[34] Although nothing came out of those discussions in the form of a movement, the pattern of thought discussed at that moment, the 'Yes' would make itself felt all through Bataille's life, showing, if it needed to be, that Bataille was never a 'nihilist'. Furthermore, the scepticism that Bataille displayed towards Dada might also explain his early

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[28]. Georges Bataille, 'A propos de "Pour qui sonne le glas?" d'Ernest Hemingway', in OC 11, Gallimard, Paris, 1988, pp.25-26.

[29]. Ibid. p.26.

[30]. Michel Leiris was among (in my view) the three most important and lasting friends Bataille never had (the others being André Masson, the painter, and the Dr Theodore Fraenkel; who both became Bataille's brothers in law). He was a writer, an ethnologist, and a member of the surrealist's group. He wrote, among others, *L'Âge d'homme*, *Miroir de la tauromachie*, *La Regle du jeu*, et *l'Afrique fantôme*. A review is especially dedicated to the study of his writings : *Les Cahiers de Leiris*.

[31]. See, *Georges Bataille. An intellectual Biography*, London, Verso, 2002, p.82.

[32]. Georges Bataille, and Michel Leiris, *Échanges et Correspondences*, Ed. Louis Yvert, Paris, 2004. p. 17.

[33]. André Masson, 'Le soc de la charrue' in *Masson le Rebel du Surréalisme*, Ed. Francoise Levaillant, Paris, 1994. p.75.

[34]. Georges Bataille, and Michel Leiris, *Échanges et Correpondences*, Ed. Louis Yvert, Paris, 2004. p. 17.

disdain of Surrealism, which from very early on, he believed to be just 'a boisterous fraud'. In consequence, this also shed some light on the way Bataille felt slightly betrayed by, and also a bit worried about, his new friend Leiris when he joined (or rather converted to) the Surrealist group shortly after they met, in October 1924, just after André Breton published the first *Surrealist manifesto*.

Although Bataille refused to join as a faithful member of the Surrealists, Leiris, who was the 'initiated one',[35] introduced him as a guest, to certain Surrealist circles or 'chapels'. He took Bataille to meet a heterodox group of Surrealists generally labelled as the 'the rue Blomet's group'. This group crystallised around the figure of the painter André Masson, and found its home, as its name indicates it, at his studio, 45, rue Blomet. There, Max Jacob, Roland Tual, Joan Miro, Georges Limbour, Jean Dubuffet and Antonin Artaud gathered to discuss Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, in order to enjoy opium, alcohol and a free sexuality (Masson was already an erotic painter), all things that were forbidden or disliked by the 'pope' of Surrealism, Andre Breton.

Indeed, it is important to stress that although Andre Masson was practicing a kind of automatic painting which was central to the Surrealist aesthetic (at that time), the rue Blomet's group was not the central tendency within the Surrealist initiative. At most it was a 'chapel of soon to become dissidents' and thus, it is equally important to state that Bataille did not surrender to the Surrealist's hegemony by spending some time at the 'rue Blomet'. Rather, it appears that he took up a position against Surrealism, from one of its margins, as an apostate. If the rue Blomet was a 'chapel of soon to become dissidents', the 'cathedral' or the 'Vatican' was to be found at the 'rue Fontaine' where André Breton lived, and where he gathered another group of writers and artists around him: Louis Aragon, Paul Éluard, Philippe Soupault, Benjamin Péret, René Crevel, Max Ernst and later Salvador Dali. The rue Fontaine was the original and true home of Surrealism.

During the summer of 1925, Michel Leiris finally managed to directly introduce Bataille to Andre Breton. Leiris requested, in Breton's name, a translation from Old French of the *Fatrasies* some thirteenth century poems lacking any kind of meaning. The transcription was to have been published in the October 1925 issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste*. A meeting was organized on the terrace of the Cyrano, a café on the Place Blanche, which was the regular meeting place of the Surrealists. Bataille delivered the translations in time, and consequently he met Paul Eluard, Gala, Louis Aragon and Breton himself. However Breton published the poems only the following year, in March 1926, he disliked Bataille and rejected him immediately and intensely. The feeling was mutual, Breton was rigid and moralizing, above the fray, Bataille was unstable and debauched, caught in the midst of life. Breton found Bataille obsessive, Bataille found Breton 'heavy'.[36] Until now, Bataille was sceptical of the Surrealist's writings, as he found the *First Manifesto* 'unreadable',[37] but following their meeting, he became more and more aware of the dangerous personality of the leaders of the Surrealist movement. 'They threatened [...] to reduce me to a powerlessness that would literally suffocate me'.[38] The nature of this first encounter anticipates the virulence of the polemic that will oppose them a few years later. (I shall return to that soon).

It is rather difficult to say on what grounds Breton dismissed Bataille and qualified him as being an 'obsessive'.[39] It could not have been on the basis of Bataille's prose, as Breton had not read anything Bataille was writing, but if he had, no doubt his moral judgement wouldn't have changed. Indeed, at the time of their first encounter Bataille was already attempting to 'write'. He drafted a novel entitled *W.C.*, which was 'in violent opposition to any form of dignity',[40] so violent in fact, that he claimed later he had burned the manuscript.[41] According to Michel Leiris, parts of this novel were preserved, and that the introduction to *Le Bleu du ciel* actually constitutes the beginning of *W.C.*, or a version of it.[42] A friend of Leiris and an acquaintance of the different Surrealist's

[35]. Georges Bataille, *Le Surréalisme au jour le jour*, in OC VIII, Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p. 171.
[36]. Ibid. p. 176.
[37]. Ibid. p. 172.
[38]. Ibid. p. 177.
[39]. The polemic of 1929-30 between Breton and Bataille can be explained through a discussion of their respective and elaborated positions at that time. Yet it is difficult to explain Breton's primary judgement, as anything else than a mere opinion, for Bataille did not published anything at the time of their first meeting in 1925.
[40]. Georges Bataille, *Notice autobiographique*, in OC VII, Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p. 460.
[41]. Ibid.
[42]. Georges Bataille, and Michel Leiris, *Échanges et Correspondences*, Ed. Louis Yvert, Paris, 2004. p. 17.

groups, Dr Camille Dausse, was so disturbed by the 'virulent obsessive' nature of the writing in *W.C.* and undoubtedly by Bataille's personal habits(his drinking, gambling and sexual habits), that he suggested to the author that he undergoes a psychoanalysis with Dr Adrien Borel, one of the founders, that year, of the 'Société psychanalytique de Paris'.

According to Bataille, the analysis he followed around 1926-27 was not very orthodox, but it was effective, transforming him from someone who was 'unhealthy' into someone who was 'relatively viable'. He spoke of it in terms of a 'deliverance', [43] and he contended in 1958, that '[...] it put an end [...] to a series of dreary mishaps and failures in which he had been floundering, but not to the state of intellectual violence, which still persists'.[44] Hence, beyond helping the man, the analysis was also important for his thought's development. Indeed, during their discussions, Dr Borel gave Bataille a picture that would obsess him as much as it would be a source of inspiration for his whole oeuvre. Furthermore, the analysis, because of the rather unorthodox process it followed, also allowed him to 'find' his 'writing': that is, to release the excess that was concealed within him. From then on, the 'writing' of the excess was unleashed.

The picture that Dr Borel gave to Bataille, was a photograph of a Chinese man being cut into pieces. It dated from 1905, and was brought back by Borel from a trip to China where he had witnessed the execution of the murderer of the Prince Ao Han Ouan: Fou Tchou Li. This last one was sentenced to be burned alive for his crime, but the Emperor considering that this method of execution was not a sufficient response to the crime committed, ordered that the slaughterer be subjected to the *Leng Tch'e* that he be cut into one hundred pieces. Whether to numb or to prolong the pain, Fou Tchou Li was given opium and suspended by his arms amid a crowd of onlookers, his shoulders undoubtedly broken by the weight of his body. Strips of flesh were cut from his chest, his sex was removed, his body dismembered piece by piece. This image would play an essential and lasting role in Bataille's oeuvre to the extent that it would be reproduced in the last book Bataille published before his death: *The Tears of Eros*. There he wrote, 'This picture had a decisive role in my life. I continued to be obsessed by this image of pain, at the same time ecstatic and intolerable'.[45] Why was such a picture so essential to Bataille? Perhaps because it presents within one frame, the two seminal experiences of the excess that he had known until then. In the photo Borel gave to Bataille, Fou Tchou li's eyes appear to have rolled back into his head while a mixed expression of joyful ecstasy and horrible pain emerges on his face (perhaps the effect of the opium?). Somehow the eyes of the martyr echo the tortured eyes of his blind and mad father, who showed him the path towards transgression, offering again, the strange conjoining of horror and pleasure: "What I suddenly saw [...] was the identity of these perfect contraries, divine ecstasy and its opposite, extreme horror'.[46]

Bataille's analysis was not an orthodox one, perhaps due to Bataille himself, but more probably because of the peculiar personality and method of the analyst, Dr Borel. He was a specialist in drug addiction, a consultant at Sainte Anne's hospital in Paris, and a friend of the Surrealists, who it seems, deeply valued his expertise. However, Dr. Borel was, before anything a 'heterodox' Freudian, taking great liberties with the dogma, even if it was the words of the founder. His treatment, if one may call it such, was in general adaptive, not very rigorous and not ritualised (which matched well with Bataille's anti-dogmatic attitude).For 'creative' people such as the Surrealists (it seems Borel had several of them, including Leiris, in analysis) this was a bonus, as he allowed his 'artistic' patients to struggle with the violence of their creativity and unconscious.[47] Bataille's analysis consisted it seems, in writing chapter after chapter of a novel that would become *Story of the Eye*.[48] It is worthy of mention that at this time Bataille also wrote other pieces, which probably benefited from the analysis and the 'release' or liberation of his 'writing': *The Solar Anus*,[49] printed only four years later in 1931 and which would be the earliest text Bataille published under his own name and continued to recognize throughout his life;[50] and, also *The Jésuve*,[51] and

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[43]. Madeleine Chapsal, 'Georges Bataille', in Chapsal Madeleine, *Quinze écrivains: entretiens*, Paris, 1963. p. 14.

[44]. Georges Bataille, *Notice autobiographique*, in O C VII, Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p. 460.

[45]. Georges Bataille, *Les Larmes d'Eros*, in O C X, Gallimard, Paris, 1987. p. 627.

[46]. Ibid.

[47]. For more on the Dr Borel and his method see, Elisabeth Roudinesco, *La Bataille de Cent Ans. Histoire de la psychoanalyse en France*, vol. 1., pp. 358-9.

[48]. Georges Bataille, *L'Histoire de l'Oeil*, in O C I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 9.

[49]. Georges Bataille, *L'Anus Solaire*, in O C I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 81.

[50]. Bataille never mentioned *Notre Dame de Rheims* and he published the *Story of the Eye* pseudonymously.

The Pineal Eye,[52] both unpublished during his lifetime but which are, indisputably, connected with *Story of the Eye*.

Borel, for his part, simply read what Bataille produced, and discussed these different fragments with him in order to find some 'analytical keys'; 'keys' which in their turn, under the encouragement of Borel, led Bataille to expand on them, before finally carrying the novel to its conclusion. Thus, Borel's contribution is extremely important to the 'release' of Bataille's writing. Without him and his method of analysis, Bataille might have found it impossible to 'write' *Story of the Eye* or probably anything else:

> *'I was able to write [Story of the Eye] only when psychoanalysed, yes, as I came out of it. And I believe I am able to say that it is only by being liberated in this way that I was able to write'.*[53]

Bataille's analysis allowed him to discern two processes that would become seminal features of his oeuvre. First, how far his own experience of the excess influenced his texts: to which extent the excess had an impact on his prose. And then, how this impact is displayed: how the excess is not simply represented within the text but also 'released' under a different, yet bound, form.

The episode of the 'testicles of the Bull' which is central to *Story of the Eye* and Dr Borel's contribution to the comprehension of its significance, clarifies fairly well how Bataille's awareness was raised. Bataille had, in an early version of the text, imagined the testicles as bright red like 'the animal's erect penis'. Borel corrected the anatomical mistake, the testicles of a bull have an ovoid form and the appearance of an ocular globe (they are white). Hence, the word 'testicle', beyond its primary sense, could be associated through its materiality with an eye. In other words, at the centre of *Story of the Eye*, appears a certain chain of associations, which was till now unknown to its author. The testicles due to their proper form and colour could refer to the dead eye of the priest slaughtered at the end of the novel, which is introduced in the cunt of the leading female character Simone, but also to the eye of Marcelle, another character on which Simone urinates, or to the dangling eye of Granero, the dead bullfighter, and finally and perhaps most importantly, to the tortured eyes of Bataille's syphilitic father. Here it becomes clear, how far Bataille's own experience of the excess influenced his prose. If all those incidents of excessive behaviour are discussed and associated within the body of the text, it is because they all recall Bataille's early experience of the excess, the white dead eyes of his insane father.

However, the analysis equally contributed to raising Bataille's awareness of how his own experience of the excess (his discovery of the excess through the madness of his father, the paradoxical form of pleasure he experienced in Madrid's arena and his own debauchery: his sexual, drinking and gambling excesses) was not simply 'represented' through the different sequences of words that can be linked or associated, but that also another form of excess was 'released' through these words and those associations, the excess beyond the meaning of the words. Indeed, through these associations, *Story of the Eye* also unleashes a certain form of excess at a lexical level. In *Story of the Eye* the word 'eye' not only refers to its definition (that is the organ of vision) but also within this context (the context of the novel and the one of Bataille's experience) and through the materiality of the object it attempts to define (the physical form of an eye, similar to an egg or to a testicle), to something exterior to this definition, something in excess of it. Hence, the word 'eye' within the novel also takes on the function of the word 'egg', or of the word 'testicle' etc...to the point at which 'eye' might disappear 'behind' or might be replaced by its 'alternatives', 'egg', 'testicle' etc...all of which take on, in their turn, the function of the 'eye'. Furthermore, this excess of/beyond meaning is also 'visibly' projected onto the products of the 'eye', the tears. Those refer to, or become substituted for, the product of the egg (white) or of the testicles (sperm). Hence, the excess that the novel unveils — the excessive sexual behaviour of the characters displayed within the story (which is definitively fuelled by Bataille's own experience) — is reinforced by, (while it also influences) Bataille's writing. The physical experience of the excess is not simply 'represented', the words do not simply mean what they are meant to mean, through their utterance something is

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[51]. Georges Bataille, *Le Ræuve* in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 13.

[52]. Georges Bataille, *L'Oeil Pineal* in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 21.

[53]. Georges Bataille in an interview with Madeleine Chapsal, in *Georges Bataille Essential Writtings*, Sage, London, 1998, p221.

released in excess of their definition; paradoxically the primary meaning of the words is transgressed due to their appearance. The excess, in *Story of the Eye* appears thus as dual: a narrated physical excess (the behaviour of the characters) and bound to it, a lexical excess (what exceeds the primary meaning of the words), is released. Following *Story of the Eye*, the whole of Bataille's oeuvre would essentially focus on this duality of the excess, an excess beyond profane existence (what he would later call the 'sacred'), and an excess beyond the simple meaning of the words (what he would later name their 'job' or 'impact'). Although he continuously wrote about the excess (what I call, the 'writing' *on* the excess), the peculiar analysis of Dr Borel released, through the development of *Story of the Eye*, his 'writing' *of* the excess.

III.2. Bataille's influences

Bataille was not educated as a philosopher. Consequently, he did not consider himself as such and his oeuvres are not registered in a particular 'strain' of thought or philosophy. Nevertheless, several philosophers, sociologists, thinkers and their 'oeuvres' played an important role in his 'intellectual' development, among them, Henri Bergson, Marcel Mauss, Friedrich Nietzsche, Donatien de Sade and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Rather than discovering his major intellectual influences and references through the usual scholarly process, that is, through the study of philosophy, he was introduced to these different ideas most of the time, by getting to know what friends and mentors had to say about them. Bataille learned the basis of his philosophical conceptions through obvious mediations. It is perhaps on the account of this singular philosophical 'training', but also, and more probably, due to his fascination for the excess, that his 'paradoxical philosophy' does not follow along the same lines of one of his influences nor it does reiterate them, nor, more simply put, does 'respect' them. Indeed, Bataille's 'paradoxical philosophy' can be seen as an attempt to write through, exceeding, reversing or even transgressing its own influences.

III.2.1. Exceeding Bergson's Laughter

As I already mentioned, in October 1920 Bataille went to London for research purposes, and it was during that trip according to his own account, that he stayed for a few nights in Quarr Abbey, a monastery on the Isle of Wight, where he 'definitively' lost his faith. While sojourning in London he met the then well-known French philosopher Henri Bergson. At that time, Bataille — as he acknowledged later — had barely read any philosophy, and even less Bergson's. Hence, in preparation for the meeting, he read in haste the only piece by Bergson that he could find in the bookshops, it happened to be the rather short, *Le Rire* (*Laughter*).

Bataille would later express his disappointment with the meeting, the man and also his book. For him the subject merited a different treatment and as a way to acknowledge his inability to pay respect to Bergson, but also as way to show how his own embryonic thought extended beyond the philosopher's conceptions, he admitted or affirmed (depending on the way one looks at it), that he already had 'an outrageous mind'.[54]

For Bergson, laughter is the answer to the comic. It precludes emotional involvement that is empathy for the one laughed at. It is a kind of corrective or punishment for those who fail to be 'flexible' and appear 'mechanical' in the eyes of the one who laughs at them. It thus presupposes the existence of a community of shared opinion and behaviour for which life is — as Bergson defines it— a perpetual movement, characterized by flexibility and agility. Laughter is a means of social cohesion. The punitive agent of a 'moral':

> '[...] especially the sense in which laughter "chastises morality". It makes us immediately try to make clear what we should be, what finally no doubt we will one day truly be'.[55]

Bataille's ideas however, were quite contrary. He saw nothing comical about laughter, rather he understood it as grave, a sort of trepidation or anguish. Furthermore, for him, laughter interrupts commonality, shatters the rational indifference of the mind, and brings into play the

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[54]. Georges Bataille, *Notes sur les conference 1951-1953*, in O.C. VIII. Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p.562.
[55]. Henri Bergson, *Le Rire*, in *Oeuvres Completes*, Paris, PUF, 1970, p. 395.

senses and the body. Laughter is always 'intermingled with a pleasant sensuality'.[56] While Bergson laughter is a light hearted but moral comedy, Bataille's is a convulsive and overwhelming descent into the absence of the moral. Bergson's laughter ensures social cohesion, while Bataille's laughter disrupts it. In short, while Bergson's laughter frames, Bataille's laughter exceeds that frame.

Hence, if Bataille was disappointed in both Bergson and the essay, it is also because he found in laughter something essential. It is not because of Bergson that he found it, but rather in spite of the French philosopher. He had a revelation: laughter is essential (he even said, although this is problematic, that 'laughter' is the 'foundation'). It does not dispose one to think or to use reason, but it can bring one 'much further than thought'.[57] Laughter led him to abandon his faith: 'In the beginning, I laughed, my life had dissolved, emerging from a long Christian piety, with a spring like bad faith, in laughter',[58] and to finally free himself: 'Laughing at the universe liberated my life'.[59] It would become, if his statement were to be taken '*a la lettre*', the 'core' of his 'paradoxical philosophy'. As he wrote in 'Non-knowledge, Laughter and Tears', a lecture given in 1953: 'Insofar as I am doing philosophical work, my philosophy is a philosophy of laughter [...] It is a philosophy that lets down the problems other than those that have been given to me in this precise experience'.[60]

III.2.2. Reversing (and potlatching) Mauss through Métraux

Bataille met Alfred Métraux one autumn afternoon in the year 1921, at the École des Chartes prior to his graduation. While Bataille was then looking forward to his upcoming trip to Spain, Métraux had just registered as a first year student. Due to an uncanny physical resemblance and a convergence of interests — Metraux just returned from Andalusia — they quickly formed a lasting friendship. Forty years later, remembering their initial conversation, Métraux explained what had been the true motivations behind Bataille's upcoming trip. It seems that the voyage's scholarly purposes were secondary to Bataille's interest in the Moorish influence on Spain and in bullfights.[61]

Upon Bataille's return to Paris during the summer of 1922, he renewed his friendship with Métraux. But by then, Métraux had quit the 'École' to pursue studies in ethnology under Marcel Mauss. These studies would lead him to become a well-known ethnographer and to publish several much-celebrated works on Latin American cultures: the Inca, Easter Island, the religious practices of indigenous populations and Haitian voodoo (the latter in which he became not only an expert, but also an initiate). This renewed friendship, allowed Bataille to stay in touch with the latest developments of anthropology and ethnography, for the rest of his life. As proof of his debt to his friend, Bataille credited Métraux, in the preface to *Eroticism* published in 1957, with introducing him to the fields of anthropology and the history of religions, saying Métraux's 'uncontested authority permitted me to feel secure — firmly assured — when I spoke on the decisive question of taboo and transgression'.[62] As another testimony of their lasting friendship and of his debt, Bataille included in his last book, *The Tears of Eros*, photos from Métraux's essay on Haitian voodoo, *Haiti, la terre, les hommes et les dieux*, and qualified it as a 'beautiful book' by 'one of the finest ethnographers of our time'.[63]

When Métraux began following his lectures, Mauss was studying archaic structures of exchange, the material that would become *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. His writings on sacrifice, magic and primitive classification, were already classics in a field fundamentally dominated by the work of Mauss' uncle and teacher, Émile Durkheim and his *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Métraux and Bataille spent hours talking about Mauss' teaching but also literature (Gide and Dostoevsky), and psychoanalysis (Freud), all of which were very recent discoveries for Bataille. It is thus interesting to note that, as it was the case with his

[56]. Georges Bataille, *Notes sur les conférence 1951-1953*, in OC. VIII. Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p .562.
[57]. Ibid.
[58]. Georges Bataille, *L'experience interieure*, in OC V, Gallimard, Paris, 1973. p . 80.
[59]. Georges Bataille, *Le coupable*, in OC. V. Gallimard, Paris, 1973. p .251.
[60]. Georges Bataille, *Conférence: Non-savoir, rire et larmes*, in OC VIII, Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p . 220.
[61]. Alfred Métraux, 'Rencontres avec les ethnologues', in *Critique*, 195-6, 1963, p.677.
[62]. Georges Bataille, *L'erotisme*, in OC X, Gallimard, Paris, 1987. p . 13.
[63]. Georges Bataille, *Les Larmes d'Eros*, J.J.Pauvert, Paris, 2001 p . 229.

discovery of Laughter, Bataille did not acquire his fundamental understanding of the anthropological thought of Marcel Mauss, in quiet independent or collegial study, but, (and as would be the case with his introduction to the philosophy of Nietzsche through a mentor, Leon Shestov) in conversation with a friend in this case, Alfred Métraux.

Hence, Métraux introduced Bataille to anthropology and to the history of religion by discussing with him the work of Marcel Mauss.[64] Mauss's influence on Bataille's thought equals that of Hegel, and Sade, though none were as influential as Nietzsche. Mauss's influence is perceptible behind most of Bataille's thought on social organisation, on the structures of exchange, communication, transgression and sacrifice. However, and although Bataille owes a lot to Mauss, he did not simply reproduce his thought, or through extension the one of Durkheim, rather it seems that he attempted to exceed his influence, or better said, in this precise case, to reverse it.

The fundamental book of Marcel Mauss is, according to Bataille, (but also for many anthropologists, ethnologists and sociologists), his already mentioned 'masterly study',[65] The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies. This book discusses a peculiar form of 'exchange' that takes place between tribes in Polynesia, Australia and even North-West America: the potlatch. This custom consists of a confrontation between two groups or individuals who 'exchange' presents, riches, tribe members and sometimes destruction or slaughter with the aim of winning prestige over their opponent. This last one, must, in order to regain the upper hand, squander more riches or objects with a greater value. Mauss names this process, the 'institution' of the 'Give-receive-reciprocate'.[66] The opponents must reciprocate the gift (gift and counter gift) in order to not lose their rank and power. Through gift-giving a social bond is created, however, this one is preserved only through the return of the gift. Thus, the potlatch is at the centre of social cohesion. Nevertheless, what strikes one most about the potlatch is its intensity, which can sometimes lead to the complete ruin of the tribes confronting each other.

For Mauss, this exchange or mutual squandering is also linked to a religious practice, the gift to other men, is actually a gift to the gods. The potlatch is thus a form of 'sacrifice',[67] a sacrifice which permits a communication between the two 'realms' that Mauss borrowed from Durkheim's oeuvre: the profane and the sacred world. Hence, beyond social cohesion, the gift-giving exchange, ensures the stability of the relationship between the community and the religious. Furthermore, for Mauss, this potlatch as a religious sacrifice can be seen as a 'total social fact', which means it is part of an ensemble of practices or phenomena, which reveal the essence of society.[68] Thus, Mauss considers the potlatch as a 'rational', real and unified (the gift should be reciprocated, and its non-reciprocation is seen as irrational and contradictory with the essence of the potlatch) form of exchange, the study of which permits us to comprehend the 'social' in its entirety—as an understanding of society can only be achieved through the study of what is 'concrete, which is of the order of the complete'.[69] In other words, within the potlatch, society may find its own 'condensed' representation, which allows a rational understanding of it (the sacrifice, although it seems to be in contradiction with the economic laws of society, actually permit the maintaining of the social ties and the sacred-profane relationship's stability, which constitute a society). Hence, for Mauss the potlatch, as a 'total social fact', as a 'rational', real and unified element, which sustains the social ties, is an essential topic of study for an objective sociology. A positive sociology whose aim is to comprehend what binds the different elements of a society (as a collective or group) together; what are its 'collectives representations'; a positive sociology which aims, then, to provide a framework of rational knowledge for society from which the latter can learn and progress toward more just and equitable ideals.

Bataille retains from Mauss' study of the potlatch, two things: first, its frenzy or put differently, the possibility that the potlatch might get out of control. One of the potential outcomes of the potlatch (through the squandering of goods, riches and lives) can be the complete ruin of both opponents. Bataille is interested in this potential outcome because he sees in this expenditure in pure loss, a definitive dismissal of the guiding principle of classical political economy (scarcity and

[64]. Alfred Métraux, 'Rencontres avec les ethnologues', in Critique, 195-6, 1963, p.678.

[65]. Georges Bataille, La Part Maudite, in OC VII, Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p.71

[66]. Marcel Mauss, 'Essai sur le don' in Mauss, Sociologie et Anthropologie, Paris, PUF, 1985, p.152.

[67]. Ibid. p.164-67.

[68]. Ibid. p.274.

[69]. Ibid. p.276.

accumulation), that 'flat and unbearable conception of existence'.[70] Then, Bataille is also fascinated by something that Mauss acknowledged as possible, but that he dismissed as in contradiction with the essence of the potlatch, the possibility of the non-reciprocity of the gift. Bataille sees in the attitude of the one who gives without having the certainty of getting back something material in return, a will to (self-) transgression. Hence, Bataille borrows from Mauss' study on the potlatch only those elements which demonstrate it to be an irrational, anti-economic and transgressive practice. Already, simply through his borrowings, Bataille is at odds with Mauss' interests and intentions.

Furthermore, Bataille's understanding of some other tenets of Mauss' framework, while these are seminal to the development of his thought, differs considerably from Durkheim's nephew conception.

First, Bataille does not interpret the potlatch-sacrifice as a simple means of communication between the sacred and the profane, as being a simple in-between. For him the sacrifice (as mentioned above) is also a (self-) transgression, that is, at the level of society, a transgression of the homogeneous bourgeois economic order and laws (the profane), visible in the squandering of riches opposed to accumulation, and at the level of the individual, a transgression of the homogeneous being (the profane being), visible in the auto-mutilation of being, as in the example of Vincent Van Gogh's slashed ear. Transgression leads to the release or rejection of what was appropriated,[71] and this rejection is what constitutes the sacred. Hence, the foundation of religion (as the sacred) is not so much the taboo, but rather transgression (of which it is not the negation but the necessary complement).[72] This makes sense if one looks at how Christianity was founded, through the squandering of the Christ's body and life. Of course religion, which for Bataille is an example of the 'high' sacred, reinforces or creates new taboos for the profane world. But those new taboos are just a demand for transgression and the emergence of new forms of 'sacred'. The potlatch-sacrifice-transgression somehow allows a form of communication between the sacred and the profane, yet it is not an in-between but rather a disruption, a wound that arises from within the profane.

Moreover, Bataille does not think that the principle of the sacrifice (the desire for transgression), is only the foundation of religion, but more importantly the foundation of social ties. Indeed, the principle which has command over the sacrifice-potlatch is, for Bataille, a principle inscribed in human nature: 'Life is in its essence an excess [...] Without any limit, it squanders its forces and resources; without limit it annihilates what it has created'.[73] Men, although they wish consciously to appropriate goods and riches, must squander the excess. And this is precisely the function of the potlatch for Bataille: a collective sacrifice, during which men can expend in pure loss, their personal (individual) excess.

Then, as for Mauss, the potlatch-sacrifice is for Bataille a 'total social fact'. But this 'fact' or rather its principle is in total contradiction to Mauss' understanding and use of the notion. While Mauss sees in the 'total social fact' of the potlatch-sacrifice, a rational, unified, real yet condensed representation of society, Bataille perceives in it an irrational will to self-transgression, a squandering and annihilation of the excess. They are interested in the same 'fact', the potlatch, yet Mauss studies it from above, from the point of view of the 'collective' as a representation of it, while Bataille (although he is also interested in determining what the 'collective' being is) looks at it from underneath, from the point of view of the deep, mystic, unconscious and irrational instinct (of transgression), that governs the mind of being. Both look at the same element but in reverse directions.

Finally, the last discrepancy between Mauss and Bataille's thought concerns the role of 'sociology' in relation to its object of study, the 'social'. Bataille's understanding of the gift, the potlatch-sacrifice, as a transgression and as an irrational 'total social fact' does not obviously, lead to a positive sociology showing the way of progress to a society demanding more justice and equity, like the one Mauss was praising. Instead, Bataille's sacred sociology (his sociology of the

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[70]. Georges Bataille, *La Notion de Dépense,* in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p.303,

[71]. Georges Bataille, 'La mutilation sacrificielle et l'oreille coupée de Vincent Van Gogh', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p.269,

[72]. Ibid. p.270.

[73]. Georges Bataille, *L'Erotisme*, in OC X, Gallimard, Paris, 1987. p.96.

sacred) is a revolutionary attempt to take down the hypocrital bourgeois order. It proposes to give back to the expenditure of riches in pure loss, the position it truly deserves within the social order.[74]

In a way Bataille borrows from Métraux's professor only in order to attack the bourgeois productive economic order, but in so doing, he also reverses the positive sociology of Marcel Mauss and Emile Durkheim: while Durkheim and Mauss attempt to comprehend contemporary society and to think the social, by looking at their 'collective representations', in order to improve the bourgeois order – that is sociology is for them a means of enlightened development – Bataille with his 'sacred sociology' attempts to reveal the irrationality at the heart of being (the will to transgression) and affirms the 'necessity' of the return to the archaic forms of expenditure in pure loss, in order to rupture (one can say to squander) the bourgeois order and society—that is, sociology is for him not even a means to revolution but it is an end in itself: sociology as revolution. In his borrowings, in his interpretations and their directions, and in the shifting function (from means to end) he gives to 'his' sociology, Bataille's approach is a radical reversing (and thus transgression) of Mauss'.[75]

III.2.3. Beyond/below Nietzsche after Shestov

In 1922, besides the thinking of Mauss, Bataille also encountered an oeuvre, which became, without any doubt, his most important influence: the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Back from Spain, in august 1922, Bataille borrowed *Untimely Meditations* and *Beyond Good and Evil* from the Bibliothèque Nationale. These books, or more precisely the ideas of Nietzsche as a whole had a decisive effect on the intellectual development of Bataille. Yet, according to Michel Surya, Bataille had not 'entered' and 'comprehended' Nietzsche's world alone. As with Mauss, Bataille's discovery of Nietzsche was mediated, this time, by an eminent scholar in the field: the Russian émigré, Lev Shestov.[76]

Lev Shestov (born in Kiev, as Lev Izaakovic Schwatzmann) was a prominent Russian intellectual who had to flee the Soviet Union after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, due to his upper-class background and his refusal to conform to Marxist theory. At the time Bataille met Shestov in 1922 the Russian émigré had settled in Paris and was a well-published philosophical essayist, already well known for his writing about Dostoevsky or Nietzsche. Bataille then began a friendly relationship with Shestov that would last till 1925, a friendship essentially based on philosophical conversation, during which he became familiar with the thoughts of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche of course, but also Tolstoy and Pascal. Shestov's thought is, in a way similar to Nietzsche's, one of tragedy and death, death being the compelling fact of life. Idealistic thought, in which Shestov includes and equates scientific rationalism and religious moral systems, is only a deceptive and incoherent attempt at eluding that fact, man must confront his tragedy, that is, his death. Hence the philosopher's task is not to propose 'ideal' solution or processes, opening the path toward salvation, but rather to destroy all 'idealistic illusions'.[77]

Out of this very brief account of Lev Shestov's thought, one can understand why he developed a strong affinity for Nietzsche's thought. However, his reading of the German philosopher was profoundly biased and selective. Indeed, Shestov's understanding was depending as much on Pascal's, Tertullian, Heraclitus and Plotinus' thought as it was on Nietzsche's oeuvres.[78] Notwithstanding the bias through which his philosophical knowledge, in general, and of Nietzsche in particular, came to him, Bataille, in a later homage to Shestov, stated:

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[74]. Georges Bataille, *La Notion de Dépense*, in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p.314,

[75]. Nevertheless, it is also interesting to note that Mauss never took part in Bataille's 'College of Sociology' (of which I should say more later) while two of his students Leiris, and Caillois were among its founders and active members, nor he ever commented on Bataille's work (he could have commented on the 'College' or on Bataille's 'Notion of Expenditure' and *Accursed Share* during his lifetime). Perhaps the whole relationship (influence-transgression) between Bataille and Mauss, (or its absence), can be seen as a kind of potlatch: Mauss's thought would have provided the first gift, and Bataille's the counter-gift, to which Mauss never answered (breaking as such the 'institution' of the 'Give-receive-return'. Hence, who won prestige over the other? And thus, who lost everything?

[76]. See Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille- An Intellectual Biography*, London, Verso, 2002, p. 52.

[77]. See, Nathalie Baranoff-Shestov, *La Vie de Leon Shestov*.

[78]. See, Leon Shestov, *La philosophie de la tragédie: Nietzsche et Dostoeivski*.

> *'I owe to [Shestov] the foundation of my philosophical knowledge which, without having the qualifications it is conventional to expect under that name, in the long run nonetheless, became a real one. [...] what he knew to say to me about Plato was what I needed to hear [...]'.*[79]

But beyond simply educating (philosophically) Bataille, it appears that Shestov also helped Bataille to 'shape' his thought. And, as that thought is definitively entangled with his life's experience, Shestov seems also to have softened (at least in appearance), Bataille's personality. Indeed, while Bataille said that around this time a 'fundamental violence' affected him — a violence which allowed him to express himself only within a kind of 'sad delirium'[80] , Shestov helped Bataille to contain his violence by releasing it within his thinking. According to Bataille, himself, he learned from Shestov that 'the violence of human thought is nothing if it is not its fulfilment'.[81] As another proof of Bataille's debt and admiration for Shestov, it is worthy to mention that in 1924, Bataille co-translated Shestov's book *The Good in the Teaching of Tolstoy and Nietzsche* with the author's daughter, Teresa Beresovski-Shestov, and anticipated writing a study of Shestov's works.[82] The translation was published by Éditions du Siècle in 1925, but the proposed study was abandoned.[83] In a posthumously published note, written thirty years after the fact, Bataille claimed that he drifted away from Shestov's influence when he 'had to turn towards Marxism.'[84]

Hence, Bataille, entered 'philosophy' and more particularily the thought of Nietzsche through the mediation of Leon Shestov. But how does Nietzsche's thought exactly influence Bataille's? The depth and scope of the impact Nietzsche's thinking had on Bataille appears clearly in Bataille's own testimony of this oeuvre's importance: 'Why continue to think, why envision writing, since my thought, all of my thought, has been so deeply, so admirably expressed'?[85] However respectful this assertion may be, it might also be read as quite ambiguous if not paradoxical. Is Nietzsche's oeuvre simply a thought anterior to Bataille's, a thought, which had already expressed all that Bataille had to say? Or worse, is it that Bataille's thinking is simply a rehearsal of Nietzsche's? Although to answer those questions demands more 'space' than I have here, the embryo of an answer might be found somewhere else in Bataille's oeuvre. More precisely in *Guilty*, where Bataille admits:

> *'To me, nothing is more alien than a personal mode of thought. [...]; I bring into play, when I utter a word, the thought of other people, hazardously gleaned from human substance surrounding me'.*[86]

Bataille thus acknowledges here, that his thought is (if we accept his claim) nothing more than a rehearsal (of Nietzsche, of Mauss, of Bergson, and also, as we shall see of Hegel and Sade). But, the question then is: to what extent a rehearsal or a copy, are identical to the 'original'. Obviously and tautologically a copy and a rehearsal do not share with the original a very essential feature, its condition of originality. Hence, one can contend that although Bataille's thought might be 'conceived' as a rehearsal, it is nevertheless highly valuable for the very reason that it is (willingly) not identical to its influences. Bataille relies on the thoughts of his 'authorities', but he does not simply repeat them, rather he writes through them, challenges them and carries them into unexpected territories, to unexpected uses and conclusions. He writes from within, through and beyond, while being at the same time respectful and subversive of his influences. In other words, Bataille's writing (ecriture) exceeds its acknowledged influences.

If I return to Nietzsche, for example, one can obviously perceive his influence in the trilogy that forms Bataille's *Summa Atheologica*. Indeed, the title of the last opus of the trilogy *On Nietzsche* states this clearly. However, the 'On,' should not be understood as meaning only 'about'. Indeed, after a preface of 14 pages, Bataille just dedicates a few pages to 'Mr. Nietzsche'. Then,

[79]. Georges Bataille, *Notes sur les conférence 1951-1953*, in O.C. VIII. Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p.563.

[80]. Ibid.

[81]. Ibid.

[82]. See Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille- An Intellectual Biography*, London, Verso, 2002, pp. 62-63.

[83]. Ibid.

[84]. Georges Bataille, *Notes sur les conférences 1951-1953*, in O.C. VIII. Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p. 563.

[85]. Georges Bataille, *Notes sur les conférences 1951-1953*, in O.C. VIII. Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p.562.

[86]. Georges Bataille, *Le coupable*, in O.C. V. Gallimard, Paris, 1973. p.353.

the rest of the book (about 160 pages) consists of a diary, or at least what seems to be a diary, recording Bataille's thoughts and anguish during the dark years of the Second World War.[87] Thus, the title of *On Nietzsche* appears already quite ironic.

Besides, Bataille's relationship with the figure of Nietzsche has been quite ambiguous — one might say Nietzschean — all through his life. Indeed, Bataille dedicated to Nietzsche, besides his book *On Nietzsche*, in total 11 articles. In some of them he attempted to recuperate Nietzsche's thought from the reductive appropriation made by Nazi ideologists.[88] While in others, he expressed his serious doubts concerning Nietzsche's thought, for example, in his late 1920s pamphlet against Surrealism: 'The "Old Mole" and the Prefix "Sur" [over/on] in the Words "Surhomme" [Superman] and Surrealist'. In this, short yet impressive essay, Bataille criticizes Surrealism and Nietzsche for, among other things, being the clearest example of an 'Icarian' thought, a thought which forgets the muddy base on which it is grounded.[89] Henceforth, Bataille's use of the 'on' ('sur') prefix (in the title of *On Nietzsche*), whether one translates it here as 'on', 'about' or 'over', is doubly ironical. Bataille does not write a book on or about Nietzsche, nor attempt to be simply over Nietzsche (as this means to simply reproduce the 'Icarian' tendency he dismissed). Rather this 'on' expresses the will of the author to exceed Nietzsche's thought by becoming more Nietzschean than Nietzsche himself. It is the sign of Bataille's attempt to think from within Nietzsche, and to focus on the elements, which are abandoned, *below* the German philosopher's thought, for finally exceeding him. The movement followed by the transgression is itself a transgression, the 'on' leads 'below'. The method for exceeding Nietzsche demands that one goes 'underneath' him in order to be 'on' him.

Furthermore, the sub-header of the book, *On Nietzsche*, 'The Will to Chance', seems to naively echo Nietzsche's, 'The Will to Power', but it actually announces this movement, which exceeds Nietzsche's thought. Indeed in *On Nietzsche*, Bataille's notion of 'Chance' reaches beyond Nietzsche's 'Power', for Bataille, the uprooting of moral values and their induced hierarchical positioning (superior and inferior) sought by Nietzsche's 'will to power' is not implemented. Unfortunately, the Nietzschean 'Will to Power' only reaffirms the 'power' at the summit of the hierarchy. 'Power', as a quality or condition of the 'superior', becomes an immobile and transcendental value: the ideal object of the 'will'. Thus 'power' is just an idea analogous to the will of God. Hence, the uprooting and reversal of moral values ends up reinforcing what it pretended to take down. Aware of that fact, Bataille's 'Will to Chance' proposes to accomplish what 'The Will to Power' failed to achieve, the collapse of the opposite moral values that is not their negation, but their impossible conjoining. The summit of the experience of 'chance', for Bataille, is the place where occurs 'a rare equilibrium between intelligence and non-reasonable life'.[90] In other words, it is: 'the impossible conjoining of movements, which are mutually destructive'.[91] Yet, this equilibrium at the pinnacle of experience of the 'will to chance' is not static but consists of an oscillation, a constant hesitation between reason (intelligence, meaning) and non-reason (non-knowledge, non-meaning). Thus, this equilibrium is not stabilized but rather precarious, not unified. Consequently, it can't become the 'new' value, which takes over the others and as such establishes itself at the summit of a new hierarchy. It has no more value than the simple act of play or laughter. Reason's and meaning's supremacies are played out, where 'the will to power' is still producing (or preserving) useful values; Bataille's 'will to chance' is a non-useful consumption of all moral and useful values. Bataille writes through Nietzsche's matrix in order to go beyond, that is, below him.

III.2.4. Releasing de Sade's use-value among the Surrealists

As, I have already mentioned, Bataille became acquainted with the surrealists of the 'rue Blomet's' group, through the mediation of Michel Leiris, and he quickly became a regular at Andre Masson's and Joan Miro's studios (both of which were located at the 45 rue Blomet which thus gave its name to the group). There, Bataille met other members, including Georges Limbour, Roland Tual, Jean Dubuffet, Max Jacob and Antonin Artaud. The surrealists of the 'rue Blomet' loved Dostoevsky and

[87]. See, Georges Bataille, *Sur Nietzsche*, in OC VI, Gallimard, Paris, 1973. pp.6-182.

[88]. See for example, Georges Bataille, 'Nietzsche et les fascistes', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p.447.

[89]. See, Georges Bataille, La Vieille Taupe et le préfixe sur dans les mots Surhomme et Surréalisme', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p.93-109.

[90]. Georges Bataille, *L'expérience intérieure*, in OC V, Gallimard, Paris, 1973. p.40.

[91]. Georges Bataille, *La Souveraineté* in OC. VIII. Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p.379.

Nietzsche, opium and alcohol, free sexuality and debauchery, all of which were forbidden or dismissed by Andre Breton, the 'pope' of the rue Fontaine. Thus, Bataille felt at home with them. Moreover, this surrealist group, at the time Bataille entered it, was discovering the, then only recently published, works of the Marquis de Sade, works that would have an influence on Bataille, every bit as powerful as that of Nietzsche, Mauss and Hegel. Hence, the surrealists of the rue Blomet (Like Métraux did it with Mauss, and Shestov did it with Nietzsche) mediated Bataille's introduction to the writings of the Marquis de Sade.[52]

Sade appears and reappears at different moments during Bataille's career, in his theoretical works in particular *Eroticism, The Accursed Share* and *The Tears of Eros*, as an argument sustaining his claims, but also the influence shows in his novellas, his more 'fictional' work (if one dares to call it such) in particular *Story of the Eye, Madame Edwarda*, or *The Blue of Noon*, sharing the same obsession for deviant behaviours. Indeed in those literary works there is, as in de Sade's, several encounters with processes and practices that are situated at the limit of decency, a great deal of scatology, sex scenes in churches, blasphemy, humiliation, rape, torture, and necrophilia. Furthermore, in terms of theoretical commonality, it seems that Bataille and De Sade share some concepts or notions, for example, sexuality and eroticism, or the idea of freedom and sovereignty, or the development of an anti-ethic as the way to transgress a religious ethic (God's moral). Bataille found in De Sade a kindred soul who affirmed his belief, that civilization and morals have softened man.[53] Yet, their target is probably not the same 'civilization', for while Bataille attacks the 'flattening' of life induced by the bourgeois order, Sade targets the ancient regime's rules and ethic. Bataille also states, in *Eroticism*, that Sade took the mentality of the aristocracy to its limit under the *pretence* of criticizing it.[54] This somehow echoes Bataille's vision of his writing practice as a transgression from within as a means of critique. But while for Bataille, the existence of the limit is a necessity (for it allows transgression to take place), Sade's aim is to disrupt and then to annihilate all limits. Sade and Bataille are both radical, but while the former is a kind of complete nihilist of the law (who denies death), the latter is a positivist of the excess (who affirms death).

Those discrepancies of thought between De Sade and Bataille make it necessary to question the exact nature of Sade's influence on Bataille. As a result of his own bias, did Bataille, 'construct' a version of De Sade, distant, if not completely remote from the reality of De Sade's text, while much closer to Bataille's own agenda. This question does matter, as several important thinkers assume that there is a natural intellectual affinity, and perhaps even strong similarities between De Sade's work and that of Bataille, for example, Michel Foucault.[55] I do not have the space here, to discuss at length whether or not Bataille misread de Sade.[56] However important this misreading could be, it shouldn't be forgotten that it might be an example of Bataille's attitude toward his influences (as I have shown so far with Bergson, Mauss, and Nietzsche), an attempt at writing through them, in order to exceed, transgress or reverse their thought. However, rather than discuss this matter, I consider it to be more interesting to discuss, what Bataille perceived, as being in excess, within De Sade's work, of the surrealists' reading of it, as it was produced at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s.

In his essay 'The Use-Value of D.A.F. De Sade (An open letter to my current comrades)', probably written in 1930, Bataille discusses (besides introducing his science of the 'sacred,' which he names 'heterology') what, for him, is De Sade's 'true' use-value, that is, he has none, it has no 'conventional' (Marxist) use-value, its use value resides accurately in it having no usefulness (for useful purpose), and also no value (as being below value). Consequently, Bataille denounces all the attempts to see in De Sade some kind of useful, spiritual, exchange or conceptual value (including Andre Breton's interpretation), as well as all the attitudes which reject De Sade for his lack of value. This seems paradoxical, and it is Bataille's point, nevertheless it demands some explanation.

In his essay, Bataille's discusses first the way De Sade is 'read' according to a dualist mode of rejection/excretion and appropriation; then he shows the movements of irruption and limitation

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[52]. See Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille- An Intellectual Biography*, London, Verso, 2002, pp. 71-81.

[53]. See, for example, Donatien Alphonse François Marquis de Sade, *Juliette*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse, Grove, New York, 1988, p. 776.

[54]. See, Georges Bataille, *L'Erotisme*, in OC X, Gallimard, Paris, 1987, p. 166.

[55]. See, Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les Choses*, 1966, et, *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, 1961.

[56]. On this question see, Annie le Brun, *Soudain un bloc d'abîme: Sade*, Gallimard, 1993.

that he himself reads in De Sade; finally he attempts to join (1ˢᵗ paradox) De Sade's revolutionary use-value (that is, he has none), with the necessary usefulness (in the 1930s) of a Marxist revolution. (In brief De Sade's use-value, would find its momentum, after the 'end of history' [2ⁿᵈ paradox], when a socialist society would have prevailed).

Bataille considers that there are usually two readings of De Sade: one which rejects him and his oeuvre as the work of a mad man; and another by those who admire him and attempt to appropriate his thought. For Bataille the second reading is the greatest threat. 25 years later in *Eroticism* he even stated:

> *'Those people who used to rate De Sade as a scoundrel responded better to his intention than his admirers do in our own day: De Sade calls for a revolted indignation and protest, and without that, the paradox of pleasure would be nothing but a poetic fancy'.*[97]

Hence, those who reject De Sade are not betraying or misconstruing him (they simply refuse him), while his admirers because they render De Sade acceptable are actually truly betraying him. They misconstrue De Sade by refusing to acknowledge and thus, to practice, his use-value. They do not affirm the peculiar impact that De Sade must have on the way we think and behave within the world, but simply consider his text as a 'thoroughly literary enterprise'.[98]

Thus, the surrealists, or more precisely the surrealists of the rue Fontaine, the closest circle of Andre Breton, according to Bataille, because they misunderstand Sade, 'worship' him in the manner of 'primitive subjects in relation to their king, whom they adore and loathe, and whom they cover with honours and narrowly confine'.[99] This means that when Breton and his circle praised De Sade as one of their precursors (with Lautréamont), they were not only establishing a fraudulent genealogy for their avant-garde, but by 'appropriating' him, they also framed his work as mere literature, as something above reality: they softened De Sade's radicalism by not 'truly' acknowledging its peculiar 'use-value' for the 'real'.

Nevertheless, for Bataille the two gestures of rejection and appropriation, despite the fact that they appear as opposites, are yet similar in their effects. Whether de Sade is rejected or admired, he is finally treated in the same way: he and his 'true' use-value are expelled.

When one rejects De Sade, he is immediately expelled, while when he is appropriated, he is first assimilated and then expelled. The surrealists do not think that De Sade's work has a place anywhere other than in 'fiction', it is 'above the real' and thus they amputate De Sade's operativeness from his social, 'real', fold. They finally expel the 'true' De Sade, hence the result is the same in both cases. Both processes treat De Sade as a 'foreign Body', which must be expelled to maintain a sort of purity.[100] However, Bataille contends that those gestures, either appropriation/ingestion or rejection/excretion can never completely come to terms with that 'foreign body'. There is always something of this excess that remains within, after rejection, and outside, after appropriation. The two gestures attempt to excrete De Sade, but he offers a body of work which is at home within the excrement. Besides defending the originality of De Sade and lambasting the surrealists, Bataille also, here, opens the way to his vision of the heterogeneous, his science of what are 'non-assimilable elements', which can neither be totally rejected or completely appropriated: 'heterology'.[101]

After discussing the dualism of the reception of De Sade's text, Bataille moves on to discuss the dualism at the heart of this text. Indeed, for Bataille, De Sade's text unfolds according to a dual mode: first an 'irruption of excremental forces' and then 'a corresponding limitation'.[102] These two modes are obviously in conflict: the excremental forces are challenging the limitations that arise from their eruption. Finally, Bataille adds a very important subtlety to his account of the use value of De Sade. Within the dualist mode of de Sade's text, it is the 'irruption' that prevails, as the transgression of all the limitations. Hence, Bataille's point is rather clear: as the dual mode within De Sade's text is also somehow visible in the dualist reading of it (De Sade's writings can be seen as an eruption, and their reception, or readings, can also be viewed as the limitation rejecting

[97]. See, Georges Bataille, *L'Erotisme* in OC X, Gallimard, Paris, 1987, p.179.
[98]. Georges Bataille, 'La valeur d'usage de D.A.F. de Sade', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p.56-57
[99]. Ibid., p.56.
[100]. Ibid.
[101]. Ibid. p.65.
[102]. Ibid. p.56.

or confining this eruption), one needs to release the excess of De Sade's thought, to make it erupt again, this time against the surrealist's (Breton) limitative reading of it. It is precisely this 'task' that Bataille gives to his essay, to release De Sade's use value (a use value which is just an excess without use and without value) among the surrealists.

Hence, De Sade is definitively an influence of Bataille, but he does not exceed it, (as it is the case with Nietzsche) or reverse it (as he does with Mauss's); rather he releases it, he makes it erupt as an ungraspable excess.

III.2.5. Following Koyré and Kojève for being in excess of Hegel

In 1931-32, Bataille with his friend Raymond Queneau (whom he met among the surrealists) began attending Alexandre Koyré's lecture at the *École Pratique des Hautes etudes* on the 'coinciding of contradictions and the learned ignorance' in the thought of Nicholas De Cuse. In 1932-33, Koyré also taught another seminar in which he then discussed the 'religious' philosophy of Hegel, which led Bataille and Queneau to write their, 'Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic'.[103] Among the other members in the audience, at that time, three would have a direct influence (material or intellectual) on Bataille's production, Henri Corbin, Charles-Henri Puech and the most known, Alexandre Kojève. In 1933, Koyré, Corbin and Puech founded the review *Recherches Philosophiques*, in which they allowed Bataille to publish, in 1936, one of his major pieces, 'The labyrinth'.[104] Alexandre Kojève's influence would be more intellectual, yet without doubt much more seminal: The same year that Koyré founded his review, he requested Kojève (who attended the seminar on De Cuse in 1932-33), to take over his lectures on Hegel at the *École Pratique*, from the opening of the 1934 seminar on.[105] Bataille subsequently followed the seminar of Kojève in which he read *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is thus, through Kojève's fundamental but also peculiar reading of Hegel, that Bataille articulated his thought with the one of Hegel.

Alexandre Kojève was born, Kojevnikov, in Moscow in 1902. Although he came from a bourgeois family, he felt a strong sympathy for the Bolshevik revolution, and remained a communist until the Second World War. Nevertheless, he was imprisoned by the socialist state for selling goods on the black market in 1918. He then fled the Soviet Union, not as a consequence of this detention but because his social origins prevented him from gaining access to the university. He subsequently settled in Germany at Heidelberg University, where he studied philosophy under Karl Jaspers, (hence dismissing Husserl's course) and taught himself several oriental languages: Chinese, Sanskrit and Tibetan. In 1928 he moved again, to Paris where he took the French nationality and changed his name to Kojève. He began following the course of Koyré in 1932 and became friends with his fellow Russian exile.[106]

In preparation for his lecture Kojève reread Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Besides the personality of the lecturer, and the focus of the lecture on this precise book (at the time not translated in French), it is the context, intellectual as well as political, of this reading which would lead to this singular yet highly influential explanation of Hegel's philosophy.

Indeed, Kojève's Hegel is born out of the light that shed on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the not yet translated, 'philosophy of death' of Martin Heidegger. For Kojève, Heidegger's thought, and more specifically his analysis of 'death', permits the possibility of going beyond Hegel's closed system. Heidegger's philosophy brought, for Kojève, a kind of intellectual renewal. In Kojève's view the first volume of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* is a 'correction' of the phenomenological anthropology of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*— it attempts to render it more 'existential' — while the second volume proposed an ontology replacing the fraudulent one of Hegel's *Logik*. Hence Kojève, due to the recent release of Heidegger's thought, 'read' and lectured on, an 'existentialist' Hegel, opposed to the 'systematic' and 'immobile' Hegel; an Hegel anti-Hegelian.

The political context of the 1930s also played an important role in Kojève's interpretation of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Indeed, Kojève's Hegel is, from the beginning of his seminar, the Hegel of the 'end of history': that is, a Hegel who had recognized the moment when thought and action have exhausted their possibilities and all that remains is repetition. At that moment, (1934)

[103]. Georges Bataille, 'La critique des fondements de la dialectique hegelienne', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p.277.

[104]. Georges Bataille, 'Le Labyrinthe', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p.433.

[105]. See Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille- An Intellectual Biography*, Verso, London, 2002, pp. 187-90.

[106]. For more on Kojève, see, Dominique Auffret, *Alexandre Kojève, l'Etat, la fin de l'histoire*, Grasset, Paris, 1990.

Kojève approved Hegel's dating of this 'end of History', the man on the horse, the synthesis of the world or spirit of the world which appears at the end of history is none other than Napoleon, thus the end of history is in the past: around 1806. But, rereading *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in the mid-1930s, while Stalin consolidated his power and the Nazis tightened their grip on Germany, and while the rest of the world stood watching impotently, overwhelmed him. The true spirit of the world, the man who would 'close' history was not Napoleon, but by the end of Kojève's seminar, Stalin.

In more practical terms, Kojève's lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit* were held every week of the academic year. They consisted, as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* was not yet available in French, (the first translation by Jean Hyppolite, would appear, independently of Kojève, only around 1939) of Kojève's translation of a part of it, which he then explained, without notes, to its audience. It is also important to remark the signification of these 'lectures' in the context of French intellectualism. Kojève's words were absorbed by a bunch of known and less known, at the time, French intellectuals who would, for the most part, become leading figures after the war, for example, Jacques Lacan, Raymond Aron, Roger Caillois, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Eric Weil and occasionally André Breton. However, Kojève never published his lectures himself, as he never edited them. If we came to know their content, it is due to Raymond Queneau who kept such assiduous notes that they could be published in 1947 under Kojève's name.[107]

But what did Bataille do with all this? How did he articulate his thoughts in conjunction with Hegel in general, and Kojève's Hegel in particular? First, simply speaking of the lectures themselves, Bataille claimed, that Kojève's reading was 'equal to the book', and that he was suffocated, transfixed by it: 'Kojève's course exhausted me, crushed me, killed me ten times'.[108] In view of this claim, it is rather ironic that Queneau for his part, said that Bataille sometimes fell asleep during class.[109]

However, Kojève's lectures were in fact decisive for Bataille, although the lectures of Koyré, which preceded them, were equally important, a fact that is quite often forgotten. Indeed, it was around the time of Koyré's lectures that Bataille wrote with Queneau, 'The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic'. In this critique, which they qualify as being 'a positive one', they attempt to undermine what they consider to be the will to 'totality and closure' of the Hegelian system, by discussing its foundation: the reality of the material ground of dialectical materialism. They observe that the process at the centre of Hegel's dialectic does not apply to nature, (a problem with which Engels struggled for years, as the preface to his *Anti-Duhring* reveals). Thus, the idea of the dialectic as a natural process is a fraud. Furthermore as Marxism is also fuelled by the Hegelian dialectic, it needed to find another ground for sustaining its historical materialism. For the authors the solution was to apply a dialectical process only to the social struggle, which is symbolised within Hegel's philosophy by the contest for recognition of the master and the slave. Beyond challenging Hegelian and Marxist thoughts and processes, this article announces what will be Bataille's problem with Hegel, there being something (here, the realm of nature) in excess of Hegel's 'total' thought.[110]

Thus Kojève's lectures, and the more 'existentialist' Hegel they constructed, this 'Hegel, secretly anti-Hegelian', probably led Bataille to adopt a more tolerant attitude towards Hegel's thought. Nevertheless, the conclusion of Kojève's seminar, on the 'end of history', and his affirmation of the absence of value for a negativity finding itself unemployed at that moment of history, and thus of its necessary disappearance, was rather disturbing for Bataille. In a 'letter to X, lecturer on Hegel', written after Kojève presented Hegel's thinking to the College of Sociology (a lecture during which Kojève stated again the 'end of history' and affirmed that its figure was Stalin) Bataille confronted Kojève's definition and function of the unemployed negativity.[111] For Bataille, the question of whether an unemployed negativity should disappear with the end of history or if it should be able to sustain itself without being simply superseded in the dialectical process, became seminal: 'If action ("doing") is —as Hegel says — negativity, the question arises as to whether the

[107]. *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel: leçons sur La phénoménologie de l'esprit, professées de 1933 à 1939 à l'École des hautes-études,* edited and published by Raymond Queneau, Gallimard, Paris, 1947.

[108]. Georges Bataille, notes *Sur Nietzsche,* in OC VI, Gallimard, Paris, 1973. p.416.

[109]. Raymond Queneau, 'Première confrontations avec Hegel', in *Critique* 195-6, Aug.-Sept. 1963.

[110]. Georges Bataille, 'La critique des fondements de la dialectique hegelienne', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p.277.

[111]. Georges Bataille, 'Letter to X, lecturer on Hegel', in OC V, Gallimard, Paris, 1973. pp.369-71

negativity of one who has "nothing more to do" disappears or remains in a state of "unemployed negativity'".[112]

For Kojève, (who affirms this while speaking in the name of Hegel) at the end of history, the intellectual is an 'unemployed negativity'; he has no other choice, than A) to impose his beliefs, in order to have them recognized (and thus to become a mere citizen: Napoleon-Stalin) — that is, to become an 'objectified', superseded negativity; or B) to simply 'express' his convictions without fighting with anyone (by recreating a world for himself, in which he is acknowledged by a few, which means, also, that he is not recognized by the greatest number, that is, his expression is nothing more than a lie, in which he will disappear and die) — that is, the negativity of the intellectual (unemployed) must, in this case, vanish.

To this, Bataille first, opposed the possibility for this unemployed negativity to sustain itself by being recognized as simply unemployed, thus, not to be objectified, but rather to continue to be in excess of Hegel's closed system, as a negativity whose task is to have none, which is a contradiction of Hegel's principle negation=action. Later, it seems he changed his mind, and then the only possibility for this unemployed negativity, to sustain its negativity without being superseded, was precisely to refuse to be recognized, to avoid the 'recognition' which renders it 'positive.' In being acknowledged the unemployed negativity betrays itself. The desire for recognition of the negation being an essential part of Hegel's system (Kojeve's Hegel), all negative being recognized enters this system. Hence an unemployed negativity, at the end of history preserves its radicalism by staying unemployed and not demanding or working to be recognized.[113]

Hence, it is through the mediation of Kojève and Koyré that Bataille discovered Hegel's thought. Very disturbed by this system, which proposed itself as a homogeneous and absolute reading of the world, Bataille proposed that he was the living negation of that thought, as a being heterogeneous to it. While Hegel's philosophy is useful, meaningful, a serious work, which supersedes all forms of negativity, Bataille's work is a useless play, an ungraspable unemployed negativity, in excess of the Hegelian system. It recognizes this system (Bataille's thought plays through Hegel's system, and thus a few are satisfied to consider him as a Hegelian), while it does not demand to be recognized in turn (the gift is not reciprocated): it is thus 'truly' in excess of it. Bataille: 'Hegel did not know to which extent he was right'.[114]

III.3. Bataille's Groups and Reviews

III.3.1. *Documents*

In the late1920s Bataille lived a double life. While he worked during the day as a librarian in the Cabinet des Médailles at the Bibliothéque Nationale, he was also writing his erotic novellas and 'heterological' pieces at night, 'The Solar Anus' , 'the Pineal Eye' and the *Story of the Eye*. Nevertheless, circumstances soon provided him with the possibility to conjoin these two 'lives', first in an article written on the occasion of a major Parisian exhibition, then in a review, *Documents*.

Two of his colleagues and superiors at the Bibliothéque Nationale, Pierre D'Espezel and Jean Babelon were the editors of *Aréthuse*, a journal of art and archaeology published three times a year, and in 1926 they invited their younger colleague to contribute reviews and articles in his current field of professional specialization, numismatics. Two years later, in 1928, D'Espezel who was also directing the *Cahiers de la république des lettres, des sciences et des arts* again made a call on Bataille's skills for an article to be published as a contribution to the review's issue dedicated to the first major European exhibition of pre-Columbian artefacts: 'Extinct America'.

Bataille's friend Alfred Métraux, by then a specialist in ethnography of Latin America, contributed to the *Cahiers de la république des lettres, des sciences et des arts* special issue as

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[112]. Ibid. p369.

[113]. There are two version of this 'Letter to X'. The first was sent to Kojève in 1937. At that time Bataille believes that the unemployed negativity must 'employ' itself to become acknowledged. In 1944, Bataille's publish it partially in *Guilty*. He then erases the part explaining how this unemployed negativity can be acknowledged, assuming that it is through its acknowledgement that this negativity becomes superseded and thus loses its peculiar 'quality' of unemployment. See, Denis Hollier, Le Collège de Sociologie, Paris, Gallimard, p.79.

[114]. Georges Bataille, quoted in Jacques Derrida, 'From Restricted to General Economy', in *Writing and Difference*, London, Routledge, 1985, p.251.

he was also participating in the organisation of the show itself. According to him, the scientific perspective of Bataille's article (in which he proposed to study the pre-Columbian cultures in question, on the basis of their hierarchies of social values), far from being inconsistent was a forerunner of ethnographic development.[115] Bataille did not seek to introduce new facts rather he brought accepted facts into play, in order to deliver new interpretations which exceeded the 'conventional' ones.

Although it is a rather serious piece, 'Extinct America' allowed Bataille to demonstrate his singular vision. The article contrasts the flatness of the bureaucratic Inca state with the monstrous excesses of the Aztecs. Bataille of course, seems to side with the bloody madness of the Aztecs, against the boredom of Inca society, as he compares them to one of his influences the Marquis De Sade:

'Continual crimes committed in broad daylight solely for the satisfaction of deified nightmares, terrifying phantasms! The priest's cannibal meals, the corpse ceremonies flowing with blood, more than an historical event, evoke the blinding debauchery described by the illustrious Marquis De Sade'.[116]

After *Aréthuse* ceased publication in 1929, Pierre D'Espezel (confident of the seriousness of Bataille in the writing of articles for the review and the exhibition), managed to convince Georges Wildenstein, the publisher of the prestigious *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, to finance a new publication in which Bataille would have a greater editorial role; a publication, he saw as an extension of his former review. Bataille proposed a title, very simple but also quite vague, *Documents*.[117] In order to define its content in a slightly less loose way, a subtitle was added, 'Doctrines, Archaeology, Fine Arts, Ethnography'. At the beginning of the second year of publication, an additional heading appeared, 'Varieties' (Miscellanea and/or Illustrated magazine), an indication of the direction the review was taking, under the influence of Bataille. Indeed, although Bataille's title was 'general secretary of publication', and the art historian Carl Einstein was its 'editor in chief', it was Bataille who imposed his vision – leading to obvious tensions with Einstein.

However, tension was not only visible between Bataille and Einstein. The original contributors to *Documents* included experts from the fields it discussed, such as ('Doctrines, Archaeology, Fine Arts, Ethnography') – Jean Babelon and Pierre D'Espezel, Georges Henri-Riviére (who was by then assistant director of the Trocadero Ethnographic Museum, in Paris), Paul Rivet, Marcel Griaule, André Schaeffner and also (in one issue, writing under the pseudonym of G. Monnet), the young Claude Lévi Strauss. However, Bataille gradually opened the pages of *Documents* (in an attempt to bind together the two side of his personality) to another group of writers and photographers who were also his friends, the dissident surrealists who had been excluded and attacked in the *Second Surrealist Manifesto* of 1929. But, while Pierre D'Espezel and Jean Babelon were his colleagues by day, the others were his fellow night birds, his companions in debauchery from André Masson's rue Blomet studio, Michel Leiris, Jacques André Boiffard, Georges Limbour, Roger Vitract, Robert Desnos. Hence, the contributors of *Documents* brought together the irremediably opposite worlds of Bataille's days and nights, an impossible conjoining which could only lead to severe disputes concerning the content of the review.

With such a disparate set of contributors, the content of the journal ranged even more widely than its various sub-titles promised: exercises in art history from the painted caves to the present; methodological meditations in ethnography and art history; forays into yet critically unexplored territory, like jazz music; as well as the increasingly unclassifiable pieces for which the journal is famous. While the more 'professional' side of the cast wished to find a solution to the crisis of methodology and legitimacy that the different fields of interests in the review were undergoing in the late 1920s, the other side, which included Bataille, simply aimed at challenging the fine arts tradition with ethnography, and ethnography with art history, which only served to increase the crisis.

Among the different unclassifiable pieces published in *Documents*, one particularly marked itself out from the others: the 'Critical Dictionary'. Initiated in *Documents'* second issue, this

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[115]. See, Alfred Métraux, 'Rencontres avec les ethnologues', in *Critique* 195-6, 1963. p.628.

[116]. Georges Bataille, *L'Amerique Disparue*, in O.C.I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 152.

[117]. On *Documents'* content, see, for example, Georges Didi-Hubermann, *La ressemblance Informe ou le gai-savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille*, Paris, Macula, 1994.

dictionary was written by various contributors, though primarily by Bataille and Michel Leiris. Leiris had already undertaken a similar project, publishing 'Glossary: My Glosses' Ossuary', in the first issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, in 1925: roughly put, it consisted of Leiris's personal and poetic interpretations of seventy-five words.[118] Bataille intuited in his definition for the word 'formless' what *Documents'* 'Critical Dictionary' was about: 'a dictionary would start when it no longer gives the meaning of the words, but their *job*'.[119] The 'Critical Dictionary', then, is an inquiry into the meaning of words, in order to show how there is within them a 'materiality' that exceeds their definition. In this dictionary, some articles discuss what is usually excluded by a dictionary, what is formless, thus extending the scope of a 'conventional' dictionary. While some other articles and the whole form given to this peculiar dictionary are also a kind of practice releasing this 'formless', the dictionary, did not appear in alphabetic order nor did it appear with any regularity, and, as is the case with the article 'formless' (which defines what a dictionary should be), the definition given does not correspond to the term announced (the link between signifier and meaning is disrupted). Hence, the dictionary attempts to transgress the very idea and function of a dictionary. It is discursively pointing at what is in excess of the words while it practices this excess. It exemplifies the dualism of Bataille's writing of/on the excess.

Furthermore, the aims and means of this dictionary appear as the founding   principle (if one can use such a word) employed in Bataille's contributions to *Documents*. Indeed, his contributions, whether in or outside the frame of the dictionary, coalesce around what appear to be his two primary aims: first, a defence of radical materialism against the surrealist and Marxist (dialectical materialism) appropriation of the term; and, bound to this first aim, a radical critique of idealism and reason. Matter for Bataille escapes reason and is a threat to idealism. 'The universe', he says, 'resembles nothing and is only formless'.[120] Thus matter:

[...] can only be defined as the non-logical difference that represents in relation to the economy of the universe what crime represents in relation to the law.[121]

Such a take on matter culminates for Bataille, in a field of study that he calls Heterology. Heterology, as the science of heterogeneous materials, desires, 'jobs of the word' and behaviours, has nothing to do with a 'conventional' science, in the sense that it does not seek to recuperate or objectify the objects of its study. Rather it studies their effects and it follows their courses through the universe without pretending to have come to terms with them. Heterology is thus as opposed to the closure of philosophical systems as it is to the closure of science. It precisely focuses on and practises what science and philosophy discard, dismiss and reject: the excess.[122]

All of this seems to have been too much for the more conservative minds of the cast (the different professionals in Ethnography, Archaeology and Fine Arts). Scheduled to appear ten times per year, *Documents* did not last for more than a year and half. After only fifteen issues, in January 1931, Pierre D'Espezel exasperated by Bataille's vision and instrumentalism within the review, demanded, in the name of his other 'collaborators', that Georges Wildenstsein stop his financial support, which signalled the death of *Documents*. Thus, Bataille managed to push his very first review to the limit, and his excursion into the realm of the excess provoked without any doubt its definitive loss.[123]

III.3.2. The Democratic Communist Circle, and *La Critique Sociale*

In October 1931, Bataille reviewed Krafft-Ebing's book, *Psychopatia sexualis* for the bi-monthly journal of books and ideas *La Critique Sociale*, a journal that would become his main publishing venue for the next three years.

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[118]. The glossary is reprinted in Michel Leiris, *Mots sans mémoire*, Paris, 1969.

[119]. Georges Bataille, 'Informe', in O C I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 217.

[120]. Georges Bataille, 'Informe', in O C I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 217.

[121]. Georges Bataille, 'La Notion de Dépense', in O C I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 319.

[122]. I will come back to Bataille's 'definition' of heterology and to several articles which represent attempts to illustrate this field of inquiry in the next chapter on Bataille's writing on/of the excess.

[123]. See, Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille- An Intellectual Biography*, London, Verso, 2002, pp. 116-125.

Edited by Boris Souvarine, *La Critique Sociale* was affiliated to the Democratic Communist Circle, a group for the discussion of Marxist theory and politics. While to be a member of the group did not require or imply any participation in the journal (and vice-versa) Bataille joined the Circle along with Raymond Queneau, Michel Leiris, and Dr Dausse, (who had analysed Bataille). In this group he became acquainted with several members who would form the core of his later collaborators in *Contre Attaque* and *Acéphale*: Colette Peignot, Pierre Kaan, Patrick Waldberg, Georges Ambrosino.

The central figure of both the Democratic Communist Circle and *La Critique sociale*, Boris Souvarine, was a Russian Communist refugee who had been a member of several 'committees' within the Soviet Comintern in the early 1920s. As he had supported Trotsky at the 1924 Bolshevik party's Congress, he was excommunicated and had to flee Moscow for Paris. *La Critique Sociale* was for Souvarine a vehicle for anti-Stalinist criticism, though without adhering exactly to Trotsky's doctrine. Souvarine's adherence was to Marxist philosophy rather than to one or another of the contemporary embodiments of that philosophy. His ambition was to rejuvenate Marxist thought and political action, by simultaneously returning to the classical texts, and supplementing Marxism with insights derived from French sociology, psychoanalysis, contemporary economic theory and historical studies. A project, which due to its unorthodox nature, was forbidden by Stalinist dogma.

The content of *La Critique Sociale* included long essays, archival materials and a substantial number of reviews of books and other journals. It had much in common with *Documents* several shared contributors, a willingness to rethink the very basis of any given field and to take all sciences, facts, documents and modes of thought seriously. Where *Documents* allowed ethnography and the aesthetic to encounter one another, *La Critique Sociale* set about revitalizing Marxism through very similar encounters, adding to the list of topics and 'sciences', sociology and psychoanalysis.

Bataille used *La Critique Sociale* for publishing several remarkable essays which show how he became more politically inclined and how his ideas developed in relation to Marxism, Hegelian thought, economic issues and Fascism. From the year 1932 till 1934, *La Critique Sociale* opened its pages to; 'The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic', [124] 'The Notion of Expenditure', [125] 'The Problem of the State', [126] and 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism'. [127]

However, the political context in France at that time, as well as the nature and ambiguous political stance of Bataille's essays, led to important tensions within the Circle. In 1934 intense political turmoil was spreading through the whole of Europe. In Germany, Hitler had been Chancellor for a year and he had already started the cleansing of the 'nation'. In the Soviet Union, Stalin increased the purging of 'undesirables' after Trotsky had left the country in 1933 and worldwide the results of the economic crash of 1929 were being felt at their peak. A climate of revolution was spreading in Europe, including France, where the month of February 1934 was one of riots launched by the ultra-right (the 'leagues'), and strikes, organised by the extreme left. It seems that Bataille participated in the riots on the side of the left, with Michel Leiris and Roland Tual. A fact which proves, that despite certain accusations he did not suddenly become a fascist at that time.

Nevertheless, the essay Bataille published in *La Critique Sociale*: 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism' in November 1933, increased the tensions and difficulties that were already present between the different members of The Democratic Communist Circle. In his article Bataille states quite clearly his pessimistic doubts about the idea of a proletarian revolution. Bataille did not think that the working class was, in those dark years, attracted by a potential Marxist revolution, but that Fascism's seductive power was much more appealing to the lowest elements of society. Bataille understood and explained clearly, the fascination that fascism exerted on the mass. However, he did it so clearly, or with so much enthusiasm, that a few members of the Circle misunderstood him and thought he was embracing it. This misunderstanding appears in a letter of Simone Weil, who was, at that time, still a member of the Circle:

> *'The revolution is for [Bataille] the triumph of the irrational, for me of the rational; for him a catastrophe, for me a methodical action in which one must strive to limit damage; for him the*

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[124]. Georges Bataille, 'La Critique des fondements de la dialectique hégélienne', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 277.

[125]. Georges Bataille, 'La notion de dépense', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 302.

[126]. Georges Bataille, 'Le problème de l'état', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 332

[127]. Georges Bataille, 'La structure psychologique du fascisme', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 339.

liberation of the instincts, and notably those that are generally considered pathological, for me a superior morality. What is there in common? [...] How is it possible to coexist in the same revolutionary organisation when one side and the other one understand to mean revolution two such contrary things? [128]

However, in the last issue of *La Critique Sociale*, in March 1934, Bataille managed to publish the second part of 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism'. But, the continuation of the political turmoil in France, and the dissension within the Circle around the question of the attitude to adopt in front of Fascism, led to its break-up and *La Critique Sociale* ceased publication. Bataille, again, had been part of a group and a review, whose rationale were pushed to their limits by his articles. The questions he raised with 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism' were beyond the scope of the Communist Democratic Circle. This group disbanded certainly not due to the sole influence of Bataille (the political context was probably much more seminal), but also because he demonstrated that there are certain issues which are in excess of the Marxist frame.

III.3.3. Contre-Attaque and *Les Cahiers de Contre Attaque*

In April 1935, Bataille sent a card to various friends and comrades which asked simply: 'What to do? / About Fascism/ Given the insufficiency of Communism'. [129] The card proposed an initial meeting a few days later, in the same café where the *Democratic Communist Circle* held its meetings. Contre Attaque grew out of this initial invitation of Bataille and it can, therefore be viewed as a direct continuation of Bataille's intentions within the Circle. But in many respects, Contre Attaque was very different from the *Circle*, as it gathered, ex-members from among those who had, for the most part, published in *La Critique Sociale*, but also, and surprisingly, new members from the surrealist movement. Indeed, it seems that by that time, or at least for a while, Bataille and André Breton had settled their dispute. However Breton, who by then had become critical of 'Stalinist orthodoxy', probably joined the group also because it offered the surrealists a platform for political action that was revolutionary and on the left, yet critical of Communism (in all its forms: soviet or dissident). It is in this second aspect of Contre Attaque, this distance from communism as a whole, in which lies its greatest difference from The Communist Democratic Circle. Contre Attaque's programme, written by Bataille, begins as such:

'Violently hostile to all tendencies, whatever form they take, yoking the Revolution to the benefit of nationalistic or patrimonial ideas, we address ourselves to all of those who, by every means and without reserve, are resolved to tear down the capitalist authority and its political institutions'. [130]

Contre Attaque was thus an anti-capitalist, anti-parliamentarian, anti-democratic, but also an anti-clerical and anti-communist movement hoping to structure itself as a dam against fascism. It wished to take the side of the workers and their violent instincts instead of compromising itself with the bourgeoisie or the Communist, and the pseudo-revolutionary intelligentsia. Bataille wrote:

'We must contribute to the popular masses' awareness of strength; we are convinced that force results less from strategy than from collective exaltation and exaltation can only come from words that do not touch reason but rather the passions of the masses'. [131]

As Bataille showed, in his ''The Psychological Structure of Fascism', the extreme right was able to put to use men's primary and violent instincts, as well as their fanaticism to the benefit of one man: the fascist leader. Hence, Contre Attaque would attempt to divert this flow of violence and exaltation, and put it to the service of the 'universal interest of men'. [132] Contre Attaque was still a political movement but a peculiar one. While till now political activity was synonymous with a reflexion on the infrastructure, Contre Attaque learned from fascism that the battle field had been

[128]. Simone Pétrement, *La Vie de Simone Weil*, Fayard, Paris, 1973. p.306.
[129]. See, Marina Galetti, *L'apprenti Sorcier*, Paris, 1999. p.124.
[130]. Georges Bataille,, 'Contre-Attaque', in O C I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p.379.
[131]. Georges Bataille, 'Front populaire dans la rue', in O C I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p.411.
[132]. Georges Bataille, 'Contre-Attaque', in O C I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p.382.

transposed to the supra-structural plane. The revolution had to be, from the onset, not social, but first 'moral' or even 'mystic' and then social. Marx was thus abandoned as the social consciousness underlying the revolutionary endeavour and was replaced (in a strange return concerning Bataille) by Nietzsche for his willingness to 'liquidate all moral servitude'. [133] Contre Attaque's greatest achievement, resides in its acknowledgement of the necessity to move the political topography. This Bataille had already revealed (and thus, he can be seen as the major precursor of the understanding of Fascism's psychological aspects) in his articles for *La Critique Sociale*: the aforementioned, 'Psychological Structure of Fascism' but also 'The Problem of the State' and 'The Notion of expenditure'. Hence, if Contre Attaque can still be seen as a political movement, it is because one agrees with the fact that the political chessboard is not only a matter of parties and dogmas but also a matter of morals, religions, instincts and exaltations.

However, the front against totalitarian regimes didn't hold for long. While severe tensions and conflicts were already threatening to tear the group apart during the Contre Attaque's meeting of the Autumn 1935 and January 1936, the publication in March 1936, of a tract written by Jean Dautry (and signed by the majority of its members, including Bataille) led to the group's implosion. The text, 'Sous le feu des canons Français...' claimed that the members of *Contre Attaque* preferred 'Hitler's style of "anti-diplomatic brutality" to the "drooling agitation of diplomats and politicians"', a statement that was a step too far for Breton and his church.[134] By May 1936 when the first and only issue of the *Cahiers de Contre Attaque* finally appeared, the movement had dissolved. The Surrealists disavowed the group and *Les Cahiers de Contre-Attaque*, and in a collective note to the press, which accused Contre Attaque of 'over-fascist tendencies', Bataille was described as 'Sur-fascist'.[135] Perhaps Bataille truly did behave as such at that moment. However, it is clear that for the surrealists Bataille went again too far; far beyond the limit of what they could handle.

III.3.4. Acéphale and *Acéphale*

One month after the publication of Dautry's tract, Bataille drafted a 'program' note (it is dated from 4th of April 1936), which was probably destined to be published in *Les Cahiers de Contre Attaque*. This note is an outline of what would become Acéphale. Indeed, while tensions started to surface in the rows of Contre Attaque, Bataille had already begun to envision a new group's form. A group that would have more the sense of a community than of a political party, a movement not simply oriented by classical political motives (socialist, communist, Marxist, fascist, liberal, conservator etc.) but rather devoted to religious, mystic and 'moral' concerns. In Bataille's 'program', the word, Acéphale, appears as an adjective for the universe: an acephalic universe is characterized by risk and chance rather than responsibility and rationality – everything that can be opposed to the word 'state' (be it political, physical, or scientific).[136]

Bataille soon resigned from his position as General Secretary of *Contre Attaque* and wrote a piece for his new journal, eponym to his new group *Acéphale*. The piece in question, which was entitled, 'The Sacred Conspiracy', was discussed at great length by Bataille, with André Masson. Resulting from his discussion with Bataille, Masson then sketched a figure, a headless man, with a human skull in place of a sex, a labyrinth in his belly, stars on his chest, a knife in one hand, a flaming heart in the other. This was to become the sacred and monstrous figure of Acéphale.

'Beyond what I am, I meet a being who makes me laugh because he is headless; he fills me with dread because he is made of innocence and crime; he holds a steel weapon in his left hand, flames like those of a Sacred Heart in his right. He reunites in the same eruption birth and death. He is not a man. He is not a god either. He is not me but he is more than me; his belly is the labyrinth in which he has lost himself, loses me with him, and in which I find myself being him, this is to say monster'.[137]

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[133]. Georges Bataille, *Les Cahiers de 'Contre-Attaque'*, in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 392.

[134]. Jean Dautry, '*Sous le Feu des Canons Francais*', in Bataille Georges, OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 398.

[135]. The Surrealist Group, '*Chez les Surrealistes*', in Bataille Georges, OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 640-1.

[136]. Georges Bataille, '*Programme*', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 273.

[137]. Georges Bataille, '*La Conjuration Sacrée*', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 445.

Bataille published 'The Sacred Conspiracy' in June 1936, as the inaugural essay of the journal *Acéphale*, the piece was, of course, accompanied by Masson's drawing and by another short essay by Pierre Klossowski on Sade. 'The sacred conspiracy' illustrated what the mystic, exalted and 'fiercely' religious community, Bataille had imagined, could become. Yet, he demanded the reader to believe that this vision was not coming from his sole imagination: 'What I have thought or represented, I have not thought or represented alone'.[138]

Bataille held the first meeting of the nascent *Acéphale's* group (the group around the journal) in July 1936. That first meeting was organized around plans for a second issue of the journal, an issue devoted to the reclamation of Nietzsche from the Nazis. When it appeared six months later, the issue included essays by Bataille, Klossowski, Jean Rollin, Jean Wahl and Nietzsche (on Heraclitus), as well as new drawings by Masson. The third issue of the Journal, on Dionysus and published a year after the first, in June 1937, included contributions by Roger Caillois and Jules Monnerot who were also the founders with Bataille of his 'side' project, *Le Collége de Sociologie*.

Acéphale, the journal, although it bears the same name as Acéphale, the secret society, was almost unrelated to it. Indeed, as Acéphale was conceived as a secret society, it would have been difficult for it to clearly expose its functioning and intentions. *Acéphale*, the journal, thus, stood apart, as a collection of texts and images which were perhaps an influence for the group though not authored by its members. Other than Bataille, only Pierre Klossowski and Georges Ambrosino contributed to *Acéphale* and participated in the group. André Masson, who was by then living in Spain, did not participate in the group meetings. Roger Caillois laughed at Bataille's project of creating a virulent and destructive creative myth (Acéphale, the secret society), he only contributed to the journal and not to the group, and Bataille's old friend, Michel Leiris, like Caillois, was hardly in favour of an exercise in creative mythology.

Acéphale (the secret society) met every month at the time of the full moon in the Marly forest, beyond Saint-Germain en Laye. Members were instructed by short notes, when and how to arrive, which trains to take, and at what times.[139] They all arrived in silence, while the new initiates, were guided in silence by Georges Ambrosino. The meeting took place in the middle of the forest beside a tree struck by lightning. Bataille then played, of course, the role of the priest, in front of the oak as in front of an altar (a horses's skull adorned the tree). The swearing of blood oaths was a common feature of each meeting. Then, the 'adepts' were not allowed to speak of what they had seen, felt, done or submitted to, with each other and with anyone.

In the Marly forest, Bataille (in his role of the priest) often disserted on the notion of 'joy before death',[140] and on the possibility of 'finding and/or rediscovering the totality of being'.[141] Acéphale thus attempted to create a new sort of community composed of 'total' beings: beings who would 'refuse boredom and live only for what is fascinating',[142] beings who would celebrate life in its totality, life until death as the expression 'joy before death' announced it. For Bataille this was extremely serious: the 'practice of joy before death' was the 'only intellectually honest route in the search for ecstasy'.[143]

Bataille pushed this intellectual route as far as he could, and in October 1939, still in the Marly forest, during what should have been the final meeting of Acéphale, Bataille asked the three members in attendance to take his life. This wilful sacrifice would be the culmination of his practice of 'joy before death'. It would seal the myth of Acéphale and serve as the original and sacred crime allowing the secret group to erect a true 'religion'. Ironically, the other adepts refused to carry out his wishes. A few days later, he wrote to the different members, telling them he had disbanded the secret society. Acéphale ceased to exist.[144]

III.3.5. Le Collége de Sociologie

[138]. Ibid.

[139]. See, Georges Bataille, 'Instruction pour la "rencontre" en forêt', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 277.

[140]. See, Georges Bataille, 'La Pratique de la Joie devant la Mort', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 552.

[141]. See, Marina Galetti, *L'apprenti Sorcier*, Paris, 1999. p. 375.

[142]. Georges Bataille, 'La Conjuration Sacrée', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 445.

[143]. Georges Bataille, 'La Pratique de la Joie devant la Mort', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 554.

[144]. See Patrick Waldberg, 'Acéphalogramme' reprinted in Marina Galetti,, *L'apprenti Sorcier*, Paris, 1999. p. 584-97.

Acéphale and the eponymous journal, was not the only occupation of Bataille during the years 1937-39. He also took part in the founding of two other work groups: *Le Collége de Sociologie* and *La Societe de Psychologie Collective*.

The Society for Collective Psychology was an organization independent from the College and Acéphale, and although Bataille was vice-president, it seems he did not consider it to be as important as the College. The Society was established, in April 1937, and stated as its primary aims the study of 'the role, in social events, of psychological factors, particularly of the unconscious kind, and to bring together research undertaken until now in isolation within diverse disciplines'.[145] The theme of the first year's lectures of The Society for Collective Psychology was 'Attitudes toward Death'. Bataille delivered the introductory lecture, in January 1938. Then, other lectures followed on a monthly basis, but the society finally dispersed itself after a single season. The only members of the Society who took part in the College (besides Bataille) were Michel Leiris and Georges Duthuit. With regard to Acephale (the secret group), Bataille was its sole representative within the Society.

The other group *Le Collége de Sociologie* occupied a much more important place in Bataille's agenda. Indeed, Bataille considered it as the 'external activity' of Acéphale.[146] The college should not be understood as an institute delivering to its participants a degree or diploma, or in which scholars were developing university-like research. Rather, it consisted of a two year long series of lectures, wherein a group of intellectuals interested in sociology gathered in order to exchange ideas on particular topics. Through those topics, the ties of the college with Acéphale are visible. During the two years of its existence, different speakers lectured on the 'sacred', the importance of myths, tragedy, shamanism, the structure of the army, fascism, the means and ends of attraction and repulsion etc. Overall, it appears clearly that the main concern of the College was with what Bataille called 'sacred sociology' and its primary aim was, if not to define that 'concept', at least to explore it.

The first meeting of the College was held in March 1937, but the lecture series properly speaking did not begin until November.[147] At the original lecture on the 20 November 1937, Roger Caillois outlined the basic methodological assumptions of the French school of sociology, while Bataille explained his vision of society as a 'composite being', and attempted to illustrate his notion of 'sacred sociology'.[148] On the 19 December 1937 Caillois spoke on animal societies, and Michel Leiris was invited to speak in front of the College (only on the 8 January 1938) on 'The sacred in everyday life'. Those two lectures when compared with the introductory one given by Bataille (with Caillois) show, already, the difference of understanding that the three main figures of the College (Bataille, Leiris, Caillois) had of the notion of 'sacred'. This difference would prove to be seminal in the disbanding of the College. For Caillois, the 'sacred', as what appears through sacrifice and expenditure in pure loss is also present within animal societies.[149] For Leiris the 'sacred' is what separates individuals, what makes them 'isolated' beings, this 'sacred' disappeared or is disappearing from (his) contemporary society.[150] While for Bataille the 'sacred' is principally what distinguish the human realm from the animal's one, most importantly it is beyond the individual as what creates the community in which the 'person' (different from the individual) is negated. Furthermore, for Bataille, the 'sacred' is still present, although hidden, within modern society.

Although those differences were to lead to some important dissention, the College carried on its activities for two years until the summer 1939. But, due to the poor health of Roger Caillois, Bataille had to assume responsibility for most of the first year's lectures: He gave in total seven of the eleven lectures planned for the first year. The others, besides the one of Caillois on 'Animal societies', were given by Kojeve (on Hegel), by Leiris (as mentioned, on 'The sacred in everyday life'), and by Pierre Klossowsky (the final lecture of the first year, on tragedy and Kierkegaard). The second year's lecture series started in November 1938. The College, by then, had benefited from a wider range of speakers, for example, Jean Paulhan, Hans Mayer and Denis de Rougemont gave speeches, while its value also began to be increasingly acknowledged, as a few well-known guests, such as Water Benjamin, began to attend its meetings. Due to the context of the years 1938-39

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[145]. See, Georges Bataille, OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 444.

[146]. Georges Bataille, 'Notice autobiographique', in OC VII, Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p. 461.

[147]. See Denis Hollier, *Le Collége de Sociologie*, Gallimard, Paris, 1995. p. 17.

[148]. Ibid. pp. 31-35.

[149]. Ibid. pp. 83-87.

[150]. Ibid. pp. 94-102.

(the crisis of the Sudetes, the dawn of the Second World War) the content of the lectures became more and more political. The topics were, then, (for example) the appeal of Fascism or the aims and ends of the individual exaltation within a social revolution.[151]

In June 1939, Bataille spoke at the Collége on the notion of 'Joy Before Death'. This lecture proved to be too much for some of the members of the Collége and most importantly for its co-founder, Caillois. Caillois and Leiris should have lectured, with Bataille, at the meeting concluding the second year of existence of the College, a meeting during which Bataille wished to make quite clear their differences and to affirm that the 'originality' of the College, and its 'Sacred sociology' were to be found in this conjoining of irreducible positions.

However, as Caillois profoundly disagreed with Bataille's last lecture and with what he perceived as Bataille's mysticism, he did not give his scheduled lecture in July, and left Europe for Argentina where he awaited the outbreak of War. It can be said that Caillois shared with Bataille his interests but not his approach and perspective. For Caillois the goal of 'sacred sociology' is, so to speak, what is kept secret by societies, a sociology of the sacred, while for Bataille, secrets are to be preserved, and his 'sacred sociology' is more a means to access the sacred. Michel Leiris, one of Bataille's oldest friends also abandoned him at the same time. He wrote a typed letter to Bataille (Leiris never typed the letter he usually addressed to Bataille) in an attempt to explain his reasons for refusing to speak at what would become the last meeting of the Collége.[152] Briefly Leiris explained that he was worried that the College had moved to far away from the methods of the French school of sociology, to which it pretended to adhere. Furthermore, for him the focus on the 'sacred' and thus on 'sacred sociology' was opposed to the basis of sociology which was the study of society as a 'total phenomenon' (Durkheim, Mauss), without privileging one element (the 'sacred') over any other.

Bataille became quite angry with Leiris and felt somehow betrayed by his old friend. He believed on the one hand that it was now necessary to give a more defensive lecture the following day, in order to address the conflicts that had arisen within the group, and on the other hand that those conflicts illustrated fairly well his position on the 'sacred' and 'sacred sociology'. For him the College, sad it might appear to be, became a true community through these conflicts, that is, on the verge of its disbanding. Community for Bataille is born in communication, but this communication has nothing peaceful in it. For him, communication only happens in a rupturing of the unity of the individual:

> '[In communication], two beings are lost in a convulsion that binds them together, but they communicate only by losing a portion of themselves. Communication binds them only through wounds where their unity, their integrity disperses in fever'.[153]

Through their disagreement the figures of the College found what was heterogeneous to their (divergent) commitment, that is, what was 'sacred' to them. The 'sacred sociology' of the College, at least in the way Bataille understood it, had succeeded, the College had accessed its 'sacred' and the community of the College 'truly' emerged through, paradoxically, its own disbanding. Once again, Bataille found himself on the margins of the group he had generated, as in excess of the principle, which seemed to ensure its cohesion, by pushing this principle to its very limit, and thus (successfully) leading that group to implode.

III.3.6. The Birth of *Critique*

On the 1st of September 1939, war broke out and two days later Britain and France joined the struggle. Bataille had to go through another war. He spent the next five years wandering through France, oscillating between the free (till 1942) and occupied zones. He did not take part in any significant grouping or movement during those years.[154] Yet his 'intellectual fever' did not abandon

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[151]. Ibid. pp. 364-65.

[152]. Ibid. p. 819.

[153]. Ibid. p. 806.

[154]. In December 1941, after the publication *Madame Edwarda*, Bataille and Maurice Blanchot, whom he recently met, decided to organize an informal discussion group of ideas. They chose to call the group the 'Socratic College'. This might be explained by the fact that although Socrates' thought was distant from Bataille's by far, at least his two maxims, 'know thyself' and 'I know but one thing, that I know nothing', constituted, for Bataille, the principles of inner

him. He dedicated most of his time to his 'writing', and published several books either deriving from his diaries' notes or written for the purpose in hand. The work includes *Madame Edwarda*, published in 1941,[155] *La limite de l'utile*,[156] written between 1939 and 1945 but only published in 1949 as *The Accursed Share*,[157] *The Inner Experience*, published in 1943 as the first volume of *La Somme Atheologique*,[158] *Le Petit*, published also in 1943,[159] *Guilty*, published in 1944,[160] *On Nietzsche*, published in 1945, as the last volume of *La Somme*.[161]

Shortly after Bataille published *On Nietzsche*, he was introduced to Maurice Girodias, the head of Editions Du Chéne. Girodias, impressed by Bataille's oeuvre so far and interested in his previous reviews quickly agreed to fund a new journal of which Bataille would have full editorial control: *Critique* was born.[162] The form of the journal was inspired by the seventeenth century *Journal des Savants* and aimed, in accordance with this 'model', at becoming an international review of publications across arts and letters, the social sciences but also the hard sciences. *Critique*, due to the range of fields it pretended to cover and the diversity of its contributors, editors and advisors, is also reminiscent of the heterogeneity of *Documents*.[163]

From the onset *Critique* took a polemical stance. In its first issue, which appeared in July 1946, it stoutly defended the recently translated writings of Henry Miller (which were published by Girodias), and which had been banned in France. Nevertheless, a polemical tone was not enough in order to be considered a major intellectual journal, as *Critique* had entered an arena already crowded with competitors and dominated by another 'intellectual' and 'leftist' publication, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes*. Published by Gallimard, from October 1945 on, with an editorial board composed of Raymond Aron, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Albert Ollivier, Jean Paulhan and Michel Leiris, *Les Temps Modernes* was *the* Journal of the intellectual left during the post-war years. Unable to compete within this context, *Critique* had to struggle with heavy financial difficulties. Subsequently, it lost its funding in September 1949, but, Bataille did not give up. He was by then a librarian in the city of Carpentras, in South France, and as his location made it difficult for him to find a publisher himself, he entrusted Jean Piel, in December 1949, with the task of finding financing for *Critique*. Piel approached a number of publishers not only in Paris but also abroad. Finally, in March 1950, Editions de Minuit, through the intervention of one of their board members, Jerome Lindon, assumed the responsibility for the publication. Bataille again enjoyed final editorial control and during the next ten years he was careful to make sure that *Critique* maintained its ties to the university system, while also keeping in touch with the last hypes. Bataille brought in new writers, like Roland Barthes and later Michel Foucault, but also new topics, like the *Nouveau Roman*, as they appeared.

Bataille died on the 9 July 1962. Nowadays *Critique* still exists, and although its editors have changed, it pursues the same aim. It attempts to bring to focus attention on the latest scholarly development as well as the more 'current' publications. It is, perhaps ironic (or even tautaulogic), but in my view quite significant, that the only review or group which Bataille co-founded, and which he did not carry beyond its limit to its disbanding, is the only one which survived him.

III.4. Bataille's polemics: in excess of Surrealism and Existentialism

Within the frame of Avant-guards groups, it is usual for members to oppose each other through dispute, debates, manifestos or polemics. However, in the case of Bataille's polemics, it is difficult to understand the debates launched as a way of gain power, at least with regard to the aim of Bataille's contribution. Rather Bataille's participation can be seen as the way to constantly posit him outside or beyond all systems of thought, as a means of appearing in excess of contemporary avant-guard movements. In order to further contextualise Bataille, in what follow, I will discuss Bataille's polemic with André Breton after the publication of *The Second Surrealist Manifesto* and his late debate with Sartre around the publication of *Inner Experience*. These polemics I suggest, constitute a significant strategy, allowing Bataille to situate himself in the margins, or somehow in excess of contemporary homogeneous movements of thought such as Surrealism and Existentialism.

III.4.1. The dispute with Breton: Bataille, the excremental philosopher

The differences between Bataille and André Breton were not purely idealistic, for both protagonists there was a more personal agenda involved. The dispute permitted Breton to attack, through Bataille, the rebel Surrealists who had abandoned him, and to cast a light on the movement's affiliation to the Communist party on the grounds of a dialectical materialism. For Bataille, the polemic allowed him to engage with the main hegemonic intellectual figure of his time, in order to become the embodiment of the notion of excess that he sought in his writing, in other words, with the aim of becoming the figure in excess of the surrealist movement.

In 1929, at the time of the publication of the *Second Surrealist Manisfesto*,[164] Andre Breton, Paul Èluard and Louis Aragon were no longer seen as a the leaders of a newly born Avant-guard, due to the strong reputations they had secured through their diverse publications. Nevertheless, the whole movement had entered a crisis a year earlier when those leaders attempted to join the Communist party. Indeed, several members who refused to follow their leaders were simply dismissed and/or publicly ostracized. Among those who were soon to become dissidents were Desnos, Ernst, Artaud and Miro. The *Second Surrealist Manifesto* was nothing more than a means of redirecting the movement towards Communist politics, but astonishingly, among the various personal attacks that constitute the Manifesto, the most violent, was directed against an almost unknown fellow, who furthermore, had never been a member of the surrealist's group or ever intended to do so, Georges Bataille. Notwithstanding, Breton closes his Manifesto with an infamous portrait of Bataille, of his thought, and of his early work.

Although this might look surprising, it is also not completely illogical. Indeed, this attack, besides displaying a singular aversion to Bataille, had actually two strategic aims. First, because Breton noticed that by then (late 1929), several former members of the Surrealist group were working with Bataille on *Documents*, in targeting Bataille, he could also attack the dissidents he had dismissed previously, Leiris, Masson, Limbour and Desnos. Breton somehow imagined that Bataille took the lead of a splinter group, and by striking the leader, he could actually reach his lieutenants. Then, as Breton's attack focused on Bataille's 'filthy' materialism, it was also a means of showing the devotion of the surrealist movement to the Communist party, and to its doctrine of dialectical materialism.

According to Breton, Bataille's materialism did not follow the rational principle of the Hegelian dialectic: Bataille opposed ideal and material realms but then refused the synthesis leading to the ideal negating the negation of the material. Breton's ambiguous attitude toward idealism was already perceptible in the *First Surrealist Manisfesto*. There, he seems to complain about the fact that we 'are still living under the reign of logic',[165] suggesting instead, that the rationalism of abstraction principle, needed to be challenged by the rather non-logic principle of the dreams and the unconscious. Nevertheless, in an awkward twist, he finally proposes using 'reason' for capturing and controlling these illogical forces.

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[164]. André Breton, *Second Manifeste du Surrealisme*, in *Manifestes du Surréalisme*, J.-J. Pauvert, Paris, 1969.

[165]. André Breton, *Premier Manifeste du Surrealisme*, in *Manifestes du Surréalisme*, J.-J. Pauvert, Paris, 1969, p.22.

'[...] if the depths of our minds are receptive to strange forces capable of augmenting those of the surface, or of fighting victoriously against them, it is in everyone's interest to capture them, first in order to submit them, later, if necessary, to the control of our reason'.[166]

The same ambiguous positioning towards idealism is present in the *Second Surrealist Manisfesto*. Indeed, there, while Breton maintains that it is necessary to 'do away with idealism per se',[167] and that Surrealism takes as its point of departure, 'the colossal abortion of the Hegelian system',[168] he also defines Surrealism's aim as the determination of an 'ideal point':

'Everything would lead one to believe that there exists a certain point in the mind where life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and the low cease to be perceived as contradictory. Now it would be vain to seek in Surrealist activity a motivation other than the hope of determining this point'.[169]

For Bataille, the focus on this 'ideal point' and its definition is indicative of the Surrealist movement's tendency towards idealism, and that it is thus precisely on this 'point' that Bataille would oppose Breton. Bataille saw this point as a 'blind spot' or more accurately, a 'blinding' spot. In contradiction to Breton's vision and will at determining this point, as the observer, safely resting beside or outside of it, might be able to do, Bataille contended – much latter, in *Inner Experience* – that one had to experience violently this point or spot, as a being torn by the chaos it brings along:

'To summon all of man's tendencies into a point, all of the 'possibles' of which he consists, to draw from them at the one and the same time the harmonies and violent oppositions, no longer to leave outside the laughter tearing apart the fabric of which man is made, on the contrary to know oneself to be assured of insignificance as long as thought is not itself this profound tearing of the fabric and its object – being itself – the fabric torn'.[170]

While Breton thus imagines and contemplates the culmination of being into that 'ideal' point, Bataille demands that one goes through the radical experience of beings tearing through this 'blind' spot. But the polemic between the two men was also fuelled by many other disagreements. It really took off after Bataille published his essay, 'The Language of Flowers'.[171] In this text, Bataille reminds the reader that:

'[...] even the most beautiful flowers are spoiled in their centres by hairy sexual organs. Thus the interior of a rose does not at all correspond to its exterior beauty; if one tears off all of the corolla's petals, all that remains is a rather sordid tuft. [...] But even more than the filth of its organs, the flower is betrayed by the fragility of its corolla: thus, far from answering the demands of human ideas, it is the sign of their failure. In fact, after a very short period of glory the marvellous corolla rots indecently in the sun, thus becoming, for the plant, a garish withering'.[172]

With 'The language of Flowers' Bataille attempts to decry the tendency to idealize an object by ignoring its base elements, while obviously Breton inclines towards the transcendence of the ideal, despite its abstraction from the base and the specific. Bataille's text which ends (originally) with a portrait of the Marquis de Sade plucking petals from a rose and throwing them into a ditch filled with excrement, opened the way for André Breton to attack him; an attack that the 'Pope' of surrealism launched at the end of the *Second Manisfesto* with these offensive comments: 'he [Bataille] must surely not be well [for] the rose, deprived of its petals, remains *the* rose';[173] Bataille's work is considered as 'philosophically vague', 'poetically empty', characterized by a 'delirious abuse of adjectives' and also obsessed by filth and decay. But, it seems that most shocking to

[166]. Ibid.p.23.
[167]. André Breton, *Second Manifeste du Surrealisme*, in *Manifestes du Surréalisme*, J-J. Pauvert, Paris, 1969, p.172.
[168]. Ibid.p.171.
[169]. Ibid.p.134.
[170]. Georges Bataille, *L'experience interieure*, in OC V, Gallimard, Paris 1973.p.96.
[171]. Georges Bataille, 'Le language des fleurs', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris 1970, pp. 173-78.
[172]. Ibid.p.176
[173]. André Breton, *Second Manifeste du Surrealisme*, in *Manifestes du Surréalisme*, J-J. Pauvert, Paris, 1969, p.219.

Breton, was Bataille's intertwining of an indulgence in the radically heterogeneous with the pretence to the use of reason. As if the attempt to think what is unthinkable or unreasonable, was just pathological:

> *'M. Bataille's misfortune is to reason: admittedly, he reasons like someone who "has a fly on his nose", which allies him more closely with the dead than with the living, but he does reason. He is trying, with the help of the tiny mechanism in him which is not completely out of order, to share his obsessions: this very fact proves that he cannot claim, no matter what he may say, to be opposed to any system, like an unthinking brute".* [174]

And indeed, as if it were just a matter for medical inquiry (and thus cure), Breton even had a 'diagnosis' for Bataille, the 'excremental philosopher' obsessed by the obscene: this man was the victim of 'a state of consciousness deficiency, in a form tending to become generalized, the doctors would say'. A disease Breton precisely qualifies as 'psychasthenia'. [175]

The way Bataille responded to Breton was clinical but also gradual. In the short term Bataille responded with a few very sharp and polemical essays and a pamphlet, while in the long run, he steadily and continuously wrote about and against surrealist's publications. Andre Breton would remain (although a momentary truce would be achieved, as during the Contre-Attaque's period) Bataille's privileged enemy, only to be joined by Sartre after the Second World War.

In order to rapidly answer Breton's assault, Bataille came up with a pamphlet denouncing the surrealist leader, 'A Corpse'. This pamphlet is a parody on the piece the Surrealists had written at the time of the death of Anatole France in 1924. Bataille solicited the contributions of several friends and surrealist dissidents. Jacques André Boiffard prepared a photo montage of Breton with a crown of thorns while Michel Leiris, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Roger Vitrac, Jacques Prévert, Max Morisse, Georges Limbour, Raymond Queneau and Robert Desnos, wrote several pieces castigating Breton. Bataille's contribution qualified Breton as a 'castrated lion', an 'ox', an 'old aesthete and false revolutionary with the head of the Christ', a 'priest.[176]

In the middle term, Bataille also responded to the attack with articles and essays which were perhaps less direct but not less polemic: 'The "Old Mole" and the Prefix *Sur* in the Words Surhomme [Superman] and Surrealist', [177] 'The Use Value of D.A.F. De Sade', [178] 'The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic', [179] and 'The Lugubrious Game'. [180] Bataille uses the opportunity to open the debate with Surrealism to other references, discourse and authors, Nietzsche, Sade and Hegel. For example, it is within 'The "Old Mole" and the Prefix *Sur*[on] in the Words Surhomme (Superman) and Surrealist', that Bataille qualifies Surrealism as 'a childhood disease of base materialism'. [181] For Bataille, Surrealism is only fired with passion by literature, poetic language without impact. The Surrealists are thus standing above the fray refusing to embrace the muddy reality of the world. Bataille, in 'The "Old Mole"', conflates, paradoxically — if one considers the fascination he had for Nietzsche just a few years earlier, at the time of his Nietzschean education with Shestov — the Icarian posture of the surrealists with the one of Nietzsche. If Nietzsche is here criticized, while Bataille would most of the time praise and defend him, it is probably due to Breton's hatred of the German philosopher. By conflating Breton's and Nietzsche's position, Bataille threw back in the face of the surrealists' leader his own pretentions.

Nevertheless, Bataille's dispute with Breton, even though it develops on some common ground, should not be seen as just another redundant argument between two avant-garde figures, battling to earn territorial dominance. This episode proved to be of more importance to Bataille than

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[174]. Ibid.p.184.
[175]. Ibid.p.185.
[176]. Georges Bataille,'Le Lion Chatré', in OC I, Gallimard,Paris,1970.p.218-19.
[177]. Georges Bataille,La Vieille Taupe et le préfixe sur dans Surhomme et Surréalisme', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris,1970. p.93-109.
[178]. Georges Bataille, 'La Valeur d'Usage de D.A.F. De Sade', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970.p.54-69.
[179]. Georges Bataille, 'La critique des fondements de la dialectique hégélienne', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970.p.277-90.
[180]. Georges Bataille,'Le Jeu Lugubre', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970.pp.211-16.
[181]. Georges Bataille,'La Vieille Taupe et le préfixe sur dans les mots Surhomme et Surréalisme', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970.p.93-109.

the wounds incurred in an intellectual dispute. The polemic with Breton permitted him to occupy a specific position in the field of art and literature. As instead of being recuperated by the Surrealist movement, or simply forgotten by it, the tension with Breton allowed Bataille to remain connected with it while still heterogeneous to it. Bataille, through the sustained polemic, began to embody the notion at the core of his writing: the excess.

III.4.2. The polemic with Sartre: 'A new Mystic'

Following the publication of the *Inner Experience* by Gallimard in 1943, Bataille became embroiled in a debate with Jean Paul Sartre, the leader of the brand new intellectual group at the centre of the Parisian literary circle, Existentialism. This polemic allowed Bataille to situate himself once again on the margin, in excess, of the renewed 'avant-garde'.

Jean Paul Sartre criticized the book in a three-part review entitled, 'Un nouveau mystique' and published in *Cahiers du Sud* from October to December 1943. Sartre was then in the ascent, the acknowledged author of *Being and Nothingness* and the *Flies*, and from this position of strength he felt free to use against Bataille, a very acid, dismissive and ironic tone. The two men had yet to meet, but Sartre, like Breton before him, felt free to offer a diagnosis of the author under review: he needed psycho-analysis.

Beyond, the style and the few insulting sentences of 'Un Nouveau Mystique', one notices that Sartre organizes his critique around two issues. In the first place, he seems to blame Bataille for his 'nostalgia', indeed, while he praises the prose of Bataille's book and the radical critique of Christian theology he sees at its heart, he find it extremely disturbing that Bataille expresses some regrets concerning the 'Death of God'. For Sartre, it is a paradox to celebrate on the one hand what Bataille calls the 'the ecstasies of inner experience', while on the other hand feeling sorry for the disappearance of the moral which forbad for so long such ecstasies and experiences. For Sartre the humanist-existentialist, the 'Death of God' opens the way for man's ascent, irrational Christian faith gives way to human rationality, which in its turn permits man to foresee the freedom of his will, and the mandatory responsibility of his acts. In contrast to this, for Bataille, ecstasy, as the experience of transgression, is totally bound with the limit and value embodied by the figure of God: without limit no transgression; and without God, as a value, no ecstasy.

Secondly, and most importantly, Sartre also accuses Bataille of presenting a 'totalitarian thought', one that is redundant or even tautological, one that refuses progression, linearity and development. As he writes:

> *'In contrast to the analytic processes of philosophers, one might say that Bataille's book presents itself as the result of a totalitarian thought, [that] does not construct itself, does not progressively enrich itself, but, indivisible and almost ineffable, it is levelled with the surface of each aphorism, such that each one of them presents us with the same complex and formidable meaning seen from a particular light'.*[182]

Hence, Sartre considers that Bataille's thought does not have a rationale, that it does not elaborate a system evolving from founding principles. He seems to disagree with the 'form' of Bataille's thought because it refuses to be 'progressive'. However, these critiques are not actually pointing to a lack, a mistake or a fault that Bataille was unable to solve or correct, but to a deliberate strategy of the *Inner Experience*'s author. Indeed, the 'movement' contained in the *Inner Experience* consists principally of a written attempt to exceed the very notion of project, its linearity, progression, construction, systematisation and foundations.

Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons, in her introduction to her compilation of essay entitled *On Bataille*, has shown quite convincingly — in my view — how Bataille's *Inner Experience* already answers to Sartre's main critiques.[183] Indeed, to Sartre's argument pointing at the lack of systematisation and foundations of Bataille's thought, one can oppose the passages of *Inner Experience* which target Descartes philosophy's final aim: to establish a ground or foundation for knowledge. Pages in which Bataille notes that Descartes' project begins perhaps with a will to 'contestation' but this last one soften rapidly under the assurance of the knowledge accumulated in order to support that project:

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[182]. Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Un Nouveau Mystique', *Situations I*, Paris: Gallimard, 1947, p. 149.

[183]. See, Leslie Ann Boldt-Irons, 'Introduction', *On Bataille*, Albany : SUNY, 1995, pp. 4-8.

> *'Without activity linked to project, Descartes would not have been able to maintain a deep assurance, which is lost as soon as one is no longer under the spell of project'.*[104]

Descartes, according to Bataille, does not tarry within the negative. The negative is simply 'put to work' in order to 'ground' a system of thought: Descartes' project.

> *'It is henceforth less a question of the well or poorly founded nature of accepted propositions than of deciding, once the best understood propositions are established, if the infinite need for knowledge implied in the initial intuition of Descartes could be satisfied'.*[105]

For Bataille, 'contestation' could not be a means to another end, it is an end in itself or an aim which does not go beyond itself. Hence, such contestation is in no way a foundation, and does not aim at being such, for any project. Then, Sartre is probably right when he points to the lack of progression of Bataille's thought, when he negatively describes it as, a thought which does not 'construct itself' or 'enrich itself', but that of course is essentially Bataille's point: the 'inner experience' is 'sovereign'.

> *'Inner experience not being able to have principles either in a dogma (a moral attitude) or in science (knowledge can be neither its goal nor its origin), or in a search for enriching states (an experimental, aesthetic attitude), it cannot have any other concern nor goal than itself'.*[106]

Furthermore, concerning Sartre's affirmation that Bataille's thought is thus simply 'totalitarian', one must truly wonder to what extent a 'writing', as a form of playful transgression and expenditure of its own meaning, can be seen as totalitarian. As a proof of Bataille's will to play (or chance), his statement taken from his *Discussion on the Sin* — a lecture he gave as a response, in Sartre's presence — appears quite sufficient: 'I set out with notions which were in the habit of closing off certain beings around me, and I played about with them'.[107] Conversely, in my view, it is Sartre's desire to define thought as only a linear, constructed, enriched, and foundational system that might look totalitarian.

Finally, Sartre 's criticism of Bataille, is also born out of the necessity for the existentialist 'guru' to defend his own 'concepts,' and more precisely his 'notion' of project. While Bataille asserted that the 'inner experience' is the 'opposite' of project, Sartre in his *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, gave to this notion of project a primordial role. Indeed, there, Sartre contends that 'man' is like a project, which arises from project:

> *'[…] man is first of all that which throws itself toward a future and which is conscious of projecting itself into the future. Man is first of all a project that is lived subjectively […] nothing exists prior to this project […] man will be first of all what he will have projected to be'.*[108]

This fragment should be thus contrasted with what I mentioned above, i.e. Bataille's statement from *Inner Experience*:

> *'I arrive at this position: inner experience is the opposite of action. Nothing more. Action is utterly dependent upon project […] Project is not only the mode of existence implied by action, necessary to action, it is a paradoxical way of being in time: it is the putting off of existence to a later point'.*[109]

Hence in contrast with Bataille, for whom the 'principle of inner experience [is] to escape through project from the realm of Project',[150] Sartre views project as constitutive of subjectivity, a condition from which one cannot escape even by means of project.

[104]. Georges Bataille, *L'experience interieure*, in OC V, Gallimard, Paris, 1973. p.125.

[105]. Ibid. pp. 124-25

[106]. Ibid. p. 18.

[107]. Georges Bataille, *Discussion sur le Péché*, OC VI, Gallimard, Paris, 1973, p.349.

[108]. Jean Paul Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, Nagel, Paris, 1946. p. 23

[109]. Georges Bataille, *L'experience interieure*, in OC V, Gallimard, Paris 1973. p.59.

Although it seems that Bataille, had already provided an answer to these critiques in the book Sartre was reviewing, he was undoubtedly wounded by the existentialist's remarks (which could genuinely be perceived as a hypocritical reading) and in the long run, Sartre would become a new version of 'Breton', in Bataille's mind. After this initial polemic, Bataille reviewed each new publication of Sartre, with the constant aim of noting what it was that divided himself and the 'existentialist'.

In the short term, Bataille's first response to Sartre's attack was very direct. He asked a friend, Marcel Moré, who, during the war, was in the habit of organising gatherings at his home, to organize such an event, a meeting between Sartre and Bataille and to include friends and followers of both. Hence, an impressive sample of the Parisian intellectual scene was convened and included, Blanchot, Paulhan, Klossowski, Leiris but also Sartre, Camus, Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the date was set for the 5ʰ of March 1944.[191] Surprisingly, Bataille did not talk about his latest published book *Guilty*, or return to the defence of the ideas which were the cause of the controversy and to be found in *Inner Experience*. Instead of this expected presentation, Bataille delivered his *Discussion on the Sin*, material that would be used in the second part of his next book *On Nietzsche*. Bataille spoke of sin as a means of communication between beings, as a violation of normality, a transgression, which could open beings to others, and which constitutes what binds society together.

In the middle term, Bataille responded to Sartre's criticism in two other ways, both in *On Nietzsche*. First, in the diary that constitutes the main part of *On Nietzsche*, Bataille gives an ironic account of a party held at Michel Leiris' apartment, during which he and Sartre got drunk and danced together 'in a potlatch of absurdity'.[192] He then included as an appendix, a direct response in which he admitted that he understood Sartre's criticism. Bataille believed that Sartre pointed to the 'naivety' of his thought only from the 'outside', which meant that Sartre had failed to understand the direction of Bataille's thought, a direction towards the excess, that Bataille, through the polemic with Sartre, as with the dispute with Breton, was not only 'writing' but also continuously embodied.[193]

III.4.3. Post-war positioning beyond Surrealism and Existentialism

After the Second World War, the old hegemony of Surrealism was challenged by Existentialism and other new intellectual trends that appeared during the conflict. In these post war years Bataille situated himself on the margins of every debate as a counterpoint, positioning his thought as permanently in excess of any hegemonic doctrine or avant-garde. Neither totally in favour of the Surrealists nor completely against the Existentialists, Bataille's position beyond movements led him to become more and more considered. In a letter to Bataille, René Char wrote that even his old enemy Breton, happened to consider him now, with respect:

> *'An entire and important region of human life today depends on you. Yesterday I said this to André Breton who shared my opinion. In a time in which treasures fall [...] it seems almost miraculous to me that you should exist.*[194]

During the ascendancy of Existentialism Bataille had often situated himself alongside his old enemy André Breton, as writing in defence of the Surrealists was a way for Bataille to oppose the Existentialists. Nevertheless he kept up his critical stance towards his ex-opponents, and while he praised Surrealism as far as saying: 'in terms of mankind's interrogation of itself, there is Surrealism and nothing'[195], he also described himself as Surrealism's 'old enemy from within',[196] and qualified his thought as 'beyond but alongside Surrealism'.[197] Furthermore, as Bataille was still suffering from Sartre's negative review of Inner Experience, he continued to oppose the

[190]. Ibid. p.60.
[191]. See, Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille- An Intellectual Biography*, London, Verso, 2002, pp. 329-36.
[192]. Georges Bataille, *Sur Nietzsche*, in OC VI, Gallimard, Paris, 1973. p. 90.
[193]. Georges Bataille, 'appendix IV' in *L'experience interieure*, in OC V, Gallimard, Paris 1973,. pp. 195-202.
[194]. Georges Bataille, *Choix de Lettres, 1917-1962*, Ed. Michel Surya, Paris, 1997. p.402.
[195]. Georges Bataille, 'A propos d'assoupissements' in OC XI, Gallimard, Paris, 1988. p. 32.
[196]. Georges Bataille, 'A propos d'assoupissements' in OC XI, Gallimard, Paris, 1988. p. 31.
[197]. Georges Bataille, *Methode de Meditation*, in OC V, Gallimard, Paris, 1973. p. 193.

Existentialist Guru. His primary criticism of Sartre concerned his interpretation of human freedom as bound with reason. Where Sartre affirmed the necessity of reason, Bataille continuously proposed the 'will to chance' as what exceeds reason.

III.5. Beyond Bataille: his legacy

A couple of months or years after Bataille's death (on the 9 July 1962), a few journals dedicated a special issue to Bataille and his oeuvre in order to defend and praise his thought. Through these issues, old friends as well as a whole new generation of thinkers acknowledged the profound influence of his writing on their own endeavours.

In 1963, Bataille's own review, *Critique*, was the first to propose a homage dedicating its summer issue to its founder. This one included several pertinent essays by friends and colleagues of Bataille, Pierre Klossowski, Michel Leiris, Alfred Metraux, Raymond Queneau, Andre Masson and Maurice Blanchot, as well as contributions from a new generation of intellectuals, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and Philippe Solers.[198] Four years later, the revue *L'Arc*, driven by the same goal, devoted an issue to Bataille's influence on contemporary thought, and included Jacques Derrida's seminal essay on Bataille's intellectual relationship with Hegel, 'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve'.[199]

Hence, following Bataille's death, beside his old friends, a whole new generation of thinkers acknowledged the radical impact of his work on their own. Furthermore, this influence is visible in the written work of these young supporters who were about to form a branch of literary, philosophical and social criticism, 'post-structuralism' or 'post-modernism': Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Lacan, and of course the members of the *Tel Quel's* group. A visible influence on the thought of those intellectuals, they may not completely accept, the tautological definition of Bataille as an exponent of 'post-structuralism before his time', but at least perceive him as a figure influencing this paradigm.

Of course, one could also discuss, how those thinkers, in their turn, 'exceed' Bataille. In other words, one could wonder in what way these intellectuals pay tribute to his 'writing'. Are they simply praising it (and thus negatively 'stabilizing' it) or by moving beyond it, are they really 'exceeding' it (and thus positively betraying it)? In other words, has Bataille become the victim of his admirers' reading, in a way fairly similar to the treatment the Surrealists meted out to De Sade? Such a discussion, although extremely interesting, is beyond the scope of this dissertation and this chapter. However, in this sub-part, even if briefly, I would like to show how Bataille has influenced the development of intellectual thinking in the second part of the twentieth century.

III.5.1. Foucault

Perhaps the most significant acknowledgement, made by Michel Foucault, of the importance of Bataille's work to his own, (besides his preface to Bataille's *Oeuvres Completes* first volume),[200] can be found in his homage to Bataille, and his praise of Bataille's 'transgression', which was published in the aforementioned special issue of *Critique*, in 1963. There Foucault proclaims:

> *'Perhaps one day, (transgression) will seem as decisive for our culture, as much a part of its soil, as the experience of contradiction was at an earlier time for dialectical thought. But in spite of so many scattered signs, the language in which transgression will find its space and the illumination of its being, lies almost entirely in the future. It is surely possible, however, to find in Bataille its calcinated roots, its promising ashes'.[201]*

In his article, Foucault demonstrates quite convincingly, how transgression reveals the limit of language, that is, how the literary transgression can't be a discourse. How it is actually the

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[198]. *Critique, Hommage à Georges Bataille,*, no. 195-196, summer 1963.
[199]. 'Georges Bataille', *L'Arc*, no. 32, 1967
[200]. See, Georges Bataille, *Oeuvre Completes* vol. I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970.
[201]. Michel Foucault, , 'Préface à la transgression', in *Critique, Hommage à Georges Bataille*, no. 195-196, summer 1963, p. 754

transgression of discourse itself. How it 'consumes' what is conventionally expected as a product of discourse, meaning. Indeed, Bataille, with Nietzsche, allowed Foucault to find 'an exit from philosophy', that is from a discursive, dialectical, Hegelian philosophy, an exit or 'turn' that would prove seminal for his own work.

This influence of Bataille on Foucault is obvious if one compares what Foucault says in his eulogy to Bataille, 'A Preface to Transgression', with some fragments he wrote afterwards. Indeed, Foucault seems to appropriate Bataille's practice of historical discontinuity for literally transgressing conventional (historical) mode of inquiry. Furthermore, he also acknowledges Bataille's unveiling of the fissuring of discursive thought, enacted by the 'unknowing' at the heart of experience.

Bataille's use of anthropological studies and references in a diachronic way for evoking profound cultural differences, (a peculiar use of the other's work which enables in its turn Bataille's 'writing' to fold back on its own suppositions), is also a peculiar feature of Foucault's work. Indeed, following Bataille's 'method', Foucault, already, in 'A Preface to Transgression', compares the modes of ecstasy, *jouissance* and enjoyment from the Christian mystics to Sade and Freud. And, subsequently, he notes that never has sexuality been expressed and understood with so much accuracy than:

> '[...] in the Christian world of fallen bodies and of sin. The proof is its whole tradition of (Christian) mysticism and spirituality which was incapable of dividing the continuous forms of desire, of rapture, of penetration, of ecstasy, of that outpouring which leaves us spent: all of these experiences seemed to lead, without interruption or limit, right to the heart of a divine love of which they were both the outpouring and the source returning upon itself'.[202]

For Foucault, these 'mystic' experiences of *Jouissance* are 'outside' of discourse, they cannot be recuperated by its form without being denatured. They are at its limit. He consequently points at the significant transformations that the relationship between language and its 'outside' undergoes during 'modernity'. That is, how a modern discourse on those extreme experiences ends up categorizing them and forming a hierarchy of them as mere discursive objects gathered under the rubric sexuality:

> 'What characterizes modern sexuality from Sade to Freud is not its having found the language of its logic or of its natural process, but rather, through the violence done by such languages, its having been denatured – cast into an empty zone where it achieves whatever meagre form is bestowed upon it by the establishment of its limits. Sexuality points to nothing beyond itself, no prolongation, except in a frenzy which disrupts it'.[203]

This critique of the inability of discourse to assess sexuality without denaturing it, although originating in Bataille's writing (at least for its method), constitutes the true premise of Foucault late masterpiece, *The History of Sexuality, the Will to Knowledge*.[204]

Another borrowing of Foucault from Bataille, connected to the first, resides in his acknowledgement of it being impossible for discursive thought to handle the 'unknowing' at the heart of experience, without betraying it or finding itself ruptured. Because extreme sexual experiences which lead to ecstasy are beyond meaning, they cannot be dissected without being misrepresented, they exceed discourse, they reveal the 'unknown' at the heart of experience, which marks the limit of rational thought and discourse.[205] Hence, 'unknowing', creates for Foucault a 'fissure', that is, an absence or a 'hole' within discourse, an opening onto an 'outside', the realm of 'true' or 'irreducible' sexuality which became, consequently, the problematic area for a whole range of medico-psychological[206] and politico-juridical[207] discourses:

> 'We have not in the least liberated sexuality, though we have, to be exact, carried it to its limits: the limit of consciousness, because it ultimately dictates the only possible reading of our unconscious; the limit of the law, since it seems the sole substance of universal taboos;

[202] Ibid.p.751.
[203]. Ibid.
[204]. See, Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, Penguin, London, 1981.
[205]. See, Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, Tavistock, London, 1985, p.50.
[206]. See, Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, Vintage, New York, 1988.
[207]. See, Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, Vintage, New York, 1995.

the limit of language, since it traces that line of foam showing just how far speech may advance on the sands of silence. Thus, it is not through sexuality that we communicate with the orderly and pleasingly profane world of animals; rather, sexuality is a fissure – not one which surrounds us as the basis of our isolation or individuality, but one which marks the limit within us and designates us as a limit'.[208]

III.5.2. Derrida

Jacques Derrida's work, too, is deeply indebted to Bataille's oeuvre: although he argues against a certain 'Metaphysic of presence' mainly through a reading of Martin Heidegger's critical set up, Bataille's text is also central to the development of his thought. Indeed it is also through a long digression within the work of Bataille, that Derrida finds himself able to de-construct the notion of 'presence' that sustain the order of western metaphysic. Derrida perceives in Bataille's reading of Hegel, two different modes of 'writing': one with a discursive form, producer of meaning, which must be 'acknowledged', and another which transgresses it and consists in a consumption of the other's meaning:

> *'Bataille's writing thus relates all semanthemes, that is philosophemes, to the sovereign operation, to the consummation, without return, of meaning. It draws upon, in order to exhaust it, the resource of meaning. With minute audacity, it will acknowledge the rule which constitutes that which it efficaciously, economically, must deconstitute'.*[209]

Bataille's influence on Derrida is also obvious in his notion of 'Différance'. Indeed, in his essay 'Différance', published in *Margin of Philosophy*, Derrida refers directly to his 'From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve': while attempting to 'explain' his notion 'Différance', he uses Bataille's vocabulary taken from his theory of 'general economy'. The 'a' in 'Différance' induces a deferral of value and meaning, and thus enacts an expenditure in pure loss (of meaning). Nevertheless, as such a 'definition' would be too 'stable', this does not lead to one, but two 'Différances' intertwined, yet never conflated:

> *'Here we are touching upon the point of greatest obscurity, on the very enigma of 'différance', on precisely that which divides its very concept by means of a strange cleavage [….] How are we to think simultaneously, on the one hand, différance as the economic detour which, in the element of the same, always aims at coming back to the pleasure or the presence that have been deferred by (conscious or unconscious) calculation, and, on the other hand, différance as the relation to an impossible presence, as expenditure without reserve, as the irreparable loss of presence, the irreversible usage of energy, that is, the death instinct, and as the entirely other relationship that apparently interrupts every economy?...I am speaking of a relationship between a différance that can make a profit on its investment and a différance that misses its profit, the investiture of a presence that is pure and without loss here being confused with absolute loss, with death'.*[210]

III.5.3. Baudrillard

Bataille's influence seems also to surface in Jean Baudrillard's seminal critique of Marxism and socialism's complicity with capital. Indeed, Baudrillard's 'symbolic exchange' finds its origin in Bataille's reading of Marcel Mauss' notion of potlatch and sacrifice.

Beginning with *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, from 1972 and continuing with *The Mirror of Production*, from 1973, Baudrillard attempts to think 'political economy' with the tools of sociology and semiology. This leads him to compare the sign and the

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[208]. Michel Foucault , 'Préface à la transgression', in *Critique, Hommage à Georges Bataille*. *Critique*, no. 195-196, summer 1963, p.p. 751.

[209]. Jacques Derrida, 'From restricted to general economy: a Hegelianism without reserve', in *Writing and Difference* (e-book) Routledge, London, 2005, p.341

[210]. Jacques Derrida, 'Différence', in *Margins of Philosophy*, Harvest press, Brighton, 1986, p. 19.

commodity and to affirm their equivalence, as the signifier (in capitalist society) endlessly defers the meaning it should signify, the exchange-value of the commodity endlessly defers the use-value it promises to represent. From there, Baudrillard suggests that production is sustained, within capitalism, by this promise of a use value, a process, he found also to be at the core of Marxist production system. Hence, he provocatively claims that Marxism is just a mirror of Bourgeois society.

In order to transgress this 'political economy of the sign', Baudrillard proposes 'symbolic exchange': an exchange where value is not imagined to be inherent in an object, or established in relation to an abstract system of exchangeable differences, but is purely 'symbolic', in the sense that 'value [is] inseparable from the concrete relation in which it is exchanged'.[211] Bataille's influence on Baudrillard is clearly visible there, as his examples of exchange (symbolic) are the gift, the potlatch, and the counter-gift, and, as his outline of a dual society organized on two antagonists systems, (a system of exchange-value and one of symbolic exchange), appears clearly as a reworking of Bataille's 'general economy'. Furthermore, Baudrillard acknowledges Bataille's importance to his struggle against political economy (capitalist and Marxist) in his essay, 'When Bataille Attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy', where he states that it is:

[the] sphere of sacrificial expenditure, of wealth and death [that] generalizes economy [that] refutes all the axioms of economy as it is usually understood (an economy which, in generalizing itself, overruns its boundaries and truly passes beyond political economy, something that the latter, and all Marxist thought, is powerless to do in accordance with the internal logic of value)'.[212]

In *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, from 1976, Baudrillard attempts to think the 'value' of the symbolic exchange within our contemporaneity. He proposes the fatal strategies of symbolic exchange as a general model for the vulnerability of modern systems to sudden reversals, catastrophe and collapse. He states that:

'[...]beyond the topologies and economics, both libidinal and political, gravitating around a materialist or desiring production on the stage of value, an outline of social relations emerges, based on the extermination of value'.[213]

This process of 'extermination' has significance, according to Baudrillard, beyond the simple semiologic plane. In our era of Globalization, all systems, due precisely to their near invulnerability, appear, paradoxically, to be extremely vulnerable: 'Every system that approaches perfect operativeness simultaneously approaches its downfall'.[214] The more a system seeks completion and homogeneity, the more it becomes hyper-stable, the more it becomes susceptible to complete collapse in a sudden reversal:

'This is the fatality of every system committed by its own logic to total perfection and therefore to a total defectiveness, to absolute fallibility and therefore irrevocable breakdown: the aim of all bound energies is to their own death'.[215]

Baudrillard's analysis of society through Bataille's frame, showing the pertinence of Bataille's notion of non-productive expenditure and pure loss, illustrates the catastrophic state (or absurd potlatch) of our contemporary system.

III.5.4. Lacan

In his impressive biography of Bataille, Michel Surya, in the final bibliography, gives the list of the secondary literature devoted to Bataille. Surya contends that there are references to Bataille in:

[211]. Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, Telos Press, St.Louis, 1981, p.64.
[212]. Jean Baudrillard, 'When Bataille Attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy', in *The Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, n°15, 1991, p.63.
[213]. Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Sage, London, 1993, p.1.
[214]. Ibid. p.4.
[215]. Ibid.

'Jacques Lacan, *Livre XX, Encore*, éditions du Seuil, 1975'.[216] Elisabeth Roudinesco in her *La Bataille de cent ans*, also mentions this seminar:

> *'This seminar is stupefying. It reveals the final return to the French scene of the great baroque Lacan, of his Roman maturity and failed visit to the pope. But it is also an act of homage to the Bataille of Madame Edwarda, to the figure of absolute hatred and love of God'.*[217]

Nevertheless, in this seminar, *Encore*, there is actually no direct mention or reference to Bataille or to *Madame Edwarda*. Rather, Bataille's reflection on the heterogeneity of the female's *jouissance* as it manifests itself crucially in the mystic experience, is visibly evoked, during the course of the seminar. Indeed, during the seminar of the year 1972-1973, Lacan, developing one of his monologues, makes very evocative references, although indirect, to two of Bataille's books which stage the encounter of the divine, with the orgasmic pleasure: *Madame Edwarda* and *Eroticism*:

> *'All you have to do is to go to Rome and look at the Bernini's statue to understand immediately, that she is in a sexual ecstasy, Saint Theresa, no doubt about it. And what is it she is being ravished by? It is plain that the essential testimony of the mystics is, precisely to say that they experience it, but know nothing about it. [...] And why shouldn't we interpret one face of the Other, God's face, as sustained by female orgasm'?*[218]

Thus, although Lacan does not refer to Bataille or his oeuvre, directly, in one of his texts, we might also see, as Michel Surya and Elisabeth Roudinesco both notice, a continuum within the field of psychoanalysis (and through a different focus than the one of Foucault, Derrida, or Baudrillard), of Bataille's reflection and writing.[219]

III.5.5. The *Tel Quel's* group

The *Tel Quel's* review, founded in 1960 (hence, two years before Bataille's death) proclaimed in its original 'Declaration', the 'sovereignty' of literature and its opposition to its co-option by moral and political propaganda, thus paying tribute to Bataille's post war position on literature, which he formulated in his book *Literature and Evil*.[220] After Bataille's death, the group which consisted of the various writers and philosophers, publishing within the review, (including, Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Joseph Goux, Roland Barthes and perhaps most importantly Denis Hollier), attempted to resurrect interest in Bataille's work, so that he might, after his death, be awarded the recognition which he had never been granted during his lifetime.

The group certainly appears as the most important achievement on a theoretical as well as practical level, of a literary experience of the limit, as Bataille understood it. Indeed, besides the work of Artaud, Joyce or Lautréamont, the members of the group read Bataille's 'writing', from a materialist and revolutionary perspective, for the transformations it operates within the realm of knowledge and practice. The interest that *Tel Quel* took in Bataille, culminated in the colloquium, held at Cérisy la Salle in July 1972, and entitled 'Towards a Cultural Revolution: Artaud/Bataille'. As suggested in the title, the aim of the conference was to discuss the relevance of Bataille (and subsequently Artaud) with regard to the launching of a Maoist 'Cultural Revolution' in the west.

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[216]. Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille- La mort à l'oeuvre*, Gallimard, Paris, 1992, p. 536. Unfortunately, the English edition does not preserve the bibliography of the French one.

[217]. See aslo, Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co: a history of psychoanalysis in France, 1925-1985*, p.524.

[218]. Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, the limits of Love and Knowledge, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, Encore*, NY: Norton and Co, 1999, p. 76.

[219]. This influence makes also sense, if three biographical facts are considered. First Bataille's first wife Sylvia Makles left him for Jacques Lacan. Second, when Bataille, in 1943, moved out of his apartment rue de Lille, in Paris, he let it to his neighbour and friend, the same Jacques Lacan, in which the psycho-analyst settled his praxis. Thus, most of Lacan's analysis was conducted in Bataille's ex-apartment. Finally, when Sylvia Bataille gave birth to Lacan's child Judith, she was given the name of Bataille, who was still Makles husband.

[220]. See, Patrick ffrench, *The time of Theory*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 28.

Moving from the general level of the group to the particularities of the interests of its members, one can see a lineage between Bataille's work and some aspects of the different 'texts' of the *Tel quel*'s protagonists.

Philippe Sollers who met Bataille in the early 1960s, never hid his complete admiration for the author of the *Inner Experience*, for the damned writer of an experience that reaches beyond the conventional summit of thought and discourse. In his text 'the Roof: Essay in Systematic Reading', Sollers proposes, in parallel with Bataille's experience of the limit, a 'roof', that does not constitute an authoritarian limit as a ceiling above thought, but an appealing limit, an incitement to transgress this limit. He praises an experience of and beyond the limit through the pleasure of transgression.[221]

Sollers's companion, Julia Kristeva, also fell under the influence of Bataille in her attempt to adapt a psychoanalytical approach to this form of societal and linguistic criticism soon to be called post-structuralism. In her essay submitted to the symposium organised by *Tel Quel*, mentioned above, 'Bataille, Experience, Practice', Kristeva opposes Hegel's desire for unity with Bataille's desire for its self-consummation, its annihilation. She proposes to replace, in her pledge for a radical political practice, the unified being of Hegel by Bataille's 'sovereign' subject, that is, for her, a subject 'in-process/trial', and, in a strange fashion, she links Bataille's notion of 'inner experience' to Mao Tse Tung's 'immediate experience', attempting thus, to give to Bataille's work a renewed revolutionary tone.[222]

Among the other members of the *Tel Quel* group, Denis Hollier is perhaps the one who did most to reinstate or more accurately, establish Bataille, as one of the most important pre and post-war thinkers. The different essays he wrote as part of the homage paid to Bataille by various publications, or for *Tel Quel*, 'The Dualist Materialism of Georges Bataille',[223] and 'From Beyond Hegel to Nietzsche's Absence',[224] constitutes a careful reflection on the movement and impact of Bataille's thought. Furthermore, I must acknowledge (although I have already expressed my doubts concerning its appropriation by the architectural community) that his seminal articulation of Bataille's writing on the relationship between architecture and the architectural metaphor present within discourse, entitled *La Prise de la Concorde*, and translated as *Against Architecture*, is, to this date, still, the major reference in what might be named 'Bataillian studies'.[225]

Of course beyond these famous authors and thinkers, who might be seen as constitutive of the first generation of Bataille's followers, and who were essentially responsible for disseminating Bataille's work, other, less renowned scholars and their perhaps less pioneering but nonetheless explorative and reflexive works, have also contributed through specific studies, special journal's issues and edited critical readers, to making known Bataille's thought pertinence and relevance. In an English speaking context I should name: Michele Richman, *Reading Georges Bataille*, (Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1982); Alan Stoekl's seminal compilation of Bataille's translated texts, *Visions Of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), his edition of the Yale French Studies, n. 78 'On Bataille' (1990), and his more recent and thus pertinent, *Bataille's Peak: Energy, Religion, and Post-sustainability*, (Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007), which affirms the relevance of Bataille's thinking in our time of energy crisis; the special issues of *October n.36: Georges Bataille — Writings on Laughter, Sacrifice, Nietzsche, Un-Knowing* (1986) edited by Rosalind Krauss, and also of *Stanford French review*, vol.12 (1988); Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons' edition, *On Bataille Critical Essays*, (SUNY Press, 1994); Carolyn Bailey Gill's edition of texts discussing Bataille's 'sacred' *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, (Routledge, 1994); Michael Richardson's study on Bataille's life and work, *Georges Bataille* (Routledge, 1994); Fred Botting and Scott Wilson's *Bataille A Critical Reader*, (Blackwell publishers, 1998); Paul Hegarty, *Georges Bataille: Core cultural Theorist*, (Sage, 2000); Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction* (Pluto Press 2000); Peter Tracey Connor, *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin*, (Johns

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[221]. Philippe Sollers, 'The Roof: Essay in Systematic Reading', in *Writing and the Experience of the Limits*, Columbia Press, NY, 1983, pp. 103-34.

[222]. Julia Kristeva, 'Bataille, Experience, Practice' in Leslie A. Boldt-Irons, *On Bataille Critical essays*, Suny Press, Albany, 1995, pp. 237-64.

[223]. Denis Hollier, 'The Dualist Materialism of Georges Bataille', in *Yale French Studies*, n°78, 1990, pp. 124-39.

[224]. see Denis Hollier, 'From Beyond Hegel to Nietzsche's Absence', in *On Bataille, Critical Essays*, ed. Leslie A. Boldt-Irons, Suny Press, Albany, 1995, p. 61.

[225]. Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, MIT press, London, 1989.

Hopkins Univ. Press, 2000); Dawn Ades and Simon Baker's reproduction of texts and iconography from *Documents*, *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents* (MIT Press, 2006); Patrick Ffrench's recent exploration of Bataille's compulsive attempt to communicate beyond communication, *After Bataille: Sacrifice, Exposure, Community*, (Legenda, 2007); Shannon Winnubst, *Reading Bataille Now* (indiana university Press 2007); and finally, Andrew Mitchell and Jason Kemp Winfree's collection of essay disserting on Bataille's communication and community, *The Obsessions of Georges Bataille: Community and Communication* (SUNY Press, 2009). Then, in a French speaking context, it is also worthy to mention: Francis Marmande, *Georges Bataille politique*, (PUL, 1985); Michel Surya's biography of Bataille, *Georges Bataille, La mort a l'oeuvre*, (Gallimard, 1992), his compilation of Bataille's correspondence, *Choix de Lettres, 1917-1962*, (Gallimard, 1997), and the special issue of his own review *Lignes 17, Nouvelles Lectures de Georges Bataille*, (Lignes et Manifestes, 2005); Georges Didi-Huberman's study of Bataille's texts in relation to the iconography displayed in *Documents*, *La resemblance informe ou le gai savoir visual selon Georges Bataille*, (Macula, 1995); and Marina Galetti's edition of Bataille's texts and letters from the first days of his participation to *La Critique Sociale* till the collapse of 'Acephale', *L'Apprenti Sorcier: textes, lettres, documents, 1932-1939*, (Editions de la Difference, 1999).

But besides those books, studies, journals and compilations of critical essays which praise (most of them) or at least positively review Bataille's 'writing', a few other scholars and thinkers have also opposed, sometimes violently, his 'thought', its impact and its legacy. For example Jurgen Habermas, in his 'The French Path to Postmodernity: Bataille between Eroticism and General Economics' (in New German Critique n.33, 1984), gives a rather reductive vision of Bataille's thought and its aims while he somehow also reduces 'French Postmodernity' to a single path: something which might sound funny to anyone interested in 'postmodernity' as a multiplicity; and, in a more violent or radical way (but finally of much less consequence), Guido Giacomo Preparata with his *The Ideology of Tyranny: Bataille, Foucault, and the Postmodern Corruption of Political Dissent* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) that attempts to demonstrate in what way Bataille and his followers are responsible for the paralysis of what he calls the 'critical'.

Nevertheless, however strongly biased, violent or ecstatic, these critiques might be, they only demonstrate, in my view, the fundamental contemporary relevance and pertinence of Bataille's challenging 'writing' on/of the excess.

CHAPTER IV

Bataille's 'Writing' on/of the excess

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A study of Bataille's experience, influences, groups, journals, polemics and legacy, permits to grasp the context of his development, and the impact it had on the development of essential intellectual figures after the Second World War. However, in order to fully comprehend his thought, a careful reading of Bataille's oeuvre is necessary. In contrast with the reductive reading (in the field of architectural criticism) of his work, which is based on a few articles (mainly 'formless' and 'architecture'), and consequently construes it as being merely against architecture or form – a reading which furthermore misrepresents, from the onset, Bataille's strain in a dialectical opposition to any kind of system (either philosophical, economic or social) and consequently, although unconsciously, intuits a potential supersession of Bataille's 'paradoxical philosophy' – this chapter discusses Bataille's 'writing' (*ecriture*) as a dualism: a theorizing of the excess, the different modes of expenditure *and* also a practice of these, which unfolds from within literary and philosophical systems.

This chapter argues that Bataille's oeuvre contends that there is always something in excess of all homogeneous systems (profane society, restricted economy, and 'idealist' philosophy). This heterogeneity is linked to those closed and rational structures, as it is either rejected as foreign (in order to be dismissed as insignificant and thus inoffensive) or re-appropriated (i.e. homogenized) by them. However, according to Bataille this excess is 'truly' other, and the failure of those different systems to acknowledge its 'impossible' heterogeneous nature and to grant it the space it deserves can lead to their apocalyptic fall. In other words, the appropriation/homogenization process is never fully completed and the rejection/dismissal is never totally successful: there remains always a form of excess which is un-appropriable and which preserves its radical 'load'. Taking a distance from those pessimistic predictions, this chapter demonstrates, that, Bataille's writing *on* the excess (his discourse on this heterogeneity) intuits that there is no system (not a cultural, a social, an economic or even an individual one) which is self-contained, self-regulating, closed, stable and rational. All systems have something in excess of them, which does not submit to their rules and which is a threat to their integrity or coherence. Hence, for Bataille, Man's universe can be charted as a dualism: the strange conjoining (a kind of aborted supersession) of a falsely stable, productive, formal and homogeneous realm with its own truly ungraspable, unemployed, formless and heterogeneous negativity.

However Bataille's 'writing' is not only disturbing in what it claims (its content or 'conclusions'), but also in the way it unfolds (the way it operates). Indeed this 'writing' is as much a writing *on* the excess, as it is a writing *of* the excess: paradoxically it practices against 'discourse', (yet from within it) the excess (heterogeneous), while it also theorizes, this excess, as if it was a discourse (homogeneous). Hence the strange conjoining that Bataille charts as organizing Man's universe, is also, significantly, the movement of his 'writing'.

The first segment of this chapter addresses the problem of writing *on* Bataille. Then from the second till the eleventh section, Bataille's 'writing' on/of the excess (i.e., the notions taken from his oeuvre which theorizes – the writing on – and/or release – the writing of – the excess) is discussed. The aim, there, is to demonstrate the centrality of the excess and the modes of expenditure within that oeuvre, but also to show that Bataille's writing consists of a theorizing of the excess and the modes of expenditure as well as a practice of those.

IV.1. 'Writing' (*ecriture*)

'One day this living world will pullulate in my dead mouth'.[1]

To write on Bataille brings to the fore, at least, two major problems. Problems which can be both put into the form of two questions: How to 'write' on Bataille's 'writing'? and, Where to begin writing? In other words: How is one supposed to produce a discourse on an oeuvre and thought which attempted, more than anything else, to transgress discourse itself?[2] and, On what one

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[1]. Georges Bataille, *L'histoire de l'erotisme*, in OC VIII, Gallimard, Paris, 1976, p. 70.

[2]. I borrow, here, the term 'discourse' from Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. If I may summarize, discourse is a composed of systems of thoughts themselves composed of ideas, processes, beliefs

should found this discourse, knowing that more often than not, Bataille's prose lead to the wreckage of all foundations on which rests each discourse?

Why is it problematic to write about Bataille? Denis Hollier contends, in his study on Bataille (already discussed), that to write *on* something, is:

'[...] almost always overseeing one's property, going around as the master who controls "his" subject, simultaneously sealing it off and deliberately skirting around it'.[3]

Furthermore, Hollier notes that Bataille had declared as early as 1930, in 'The "Old Mole" and the Prefix "On" [Sur] in the word "Superman" [Surhomme] and "surrealism"'[4] the illusoriness of such discourse and its assurance. Thus, it would appear that to write *on* any subject is definitively not an innocent gesture, but why, to write *on* Bataille, is even more problematic?

The simplest explanation, resides in the fact that Bataille not only acknowledged the authoritarian gesture of the discourse *on*, but 'wrote' against it. Indeed, Bataille's 'writing' (*écriture*), is not simply a discourse *on*, it is also a textual practice (a 'Text') that transgresses the control exercised by the discourse *on*, by, among other techniques, eluding the categories settled by discourse:

'[...] the Text does not stop at (good) Literature; it cannot be contained in a hierarchy, even in a simple division of genres. What constitutes the Text is, on the contrary (or precisely), its subversive force in respect of the old classifications. How do you classify a writer like Georges Bataille? Novelist, poet, essayist, economist, philosopher, mystic? The answer is so difficult that the literary manuals generally prefer to forget about Bataille who, in fact, wrote texts, perhaps continuously one single Text'.[5]

However, this 'writing', although it appears to be against discourse, does not emerge from the outside of discourse. Indeed, while Bataille's 'writing' contests and transgresses the boundaries, rules and styles of the discourse of several disciplines, it also addresses, with rigour and consistency, the concepts and notions at the heart of these: Bataille's 'writing' is unleashed from within discourse. In defence of this 'writing' which seems to be simply irrelevant and disordered, Jean Baudrillard contended that Bataille's work might be, although it attempts to go beyond knowledge's systems, 'a single mythic thought'.[6] Denis Hollier (him again) maintained that Bataille's 'writing' maintains *lack*, that it produces 'a hole where totality becomes incomplete'. Hence for him, Bataille's writing is

'the appearance in discourse form, of that in-completion that form used to reject, the indestructible but always repressed bond of desire and of "its" dissatisfaction. Perhaps Bataille's work gets its greatest strength in this refusal of the temptation of form'.[7]

Consequently for Hollier, to write *on* Bataille is an attempt to betray him, an authoritarian act, the attempt to fill in the hole, to complete the in-completion, to 'contain' or simply to categorize this matter that Roland Barthes called 'text'.

Nevertheless, Bataille, besides being, perhaps, a 'difficult' author, is also, and more essentially, a difficult object of study, for the very simple reason that his work eludes studies, categorizations or normalisations. Jean-Luc Nancy stated that this writing 'excribes' commentary,

and practices that systematically construct the subjects and their knowable environment. Foucault traced in those books how discourse is a medium through which power relations and truth, in different periods, are supported. Hence, and unfortunately, a good example of a feature of 'discourse' (what Foucault named a 'statement') would be this quote itself, as it attempts to clarify, to state, and thus to control what 'discourse' might mean.

[3]. Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, MIT press, London, 1989, p. 23.

[4]. Georges Bataille, 'La Vieille Taupe et le préfixe *sur* dans *Surhomme et Surréalisme*', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, pp. 93-109.

[5]. Roland Barthes, 'From work to text', in *Image Music Text*, Fontana, London, 1977, p. 157.

[6]. Jean Baudrillard, 'When Bataille Attacked the Metaphysical Principle of Economy', in *The Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* n°15, 1991, pp. 63-66.

[7]. Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, MIT press, London, 1989, p. 24.

that is, it does not lend itself so easily to be recuperated by a discourse *on*

> *'[...] what matters, what thinks (at the very limit of thought if necessary) is what does not lend itself wholly to univocal meaning and throws it off balance. Bataille never stops exposing this. Alongside all the themes he deals with, through all the questions and debates, 'Bataille' is nothing but a protest against the signification of his own discourse. If it is to be read, if reading rebels straight away against the commentary which it is, and against the understanding which it ought to be, we have to read in every line the work of the play of writing against meaning'.*[8]

Bataille's 'writing' unleashes an excess which rebels against its own message, an un-employed negativity rendering inefficient the production of meaning. This is a movement not of dialectical opposition (there is no *aufhebung*) but as Maurice Blanchot qualifies it, of *contestation*.[9] This writing is a struggle and ironically the name of Bataille (Bataille means battle in French) illustrates quite well the war raging within it. Jacques Derrida identified something similar to this struggle in his essay, 'From a restricted and general economy: a Hegelianism without reserve'. For him Bataille's 'writing' is dual, on the one hand it is a 'signifying discourse', producer of meaning and on the other hand it is a 'sovereign expenditure' consuming meaning:

> *'Bataille's writing thus relates all semanthemes, that is, philosophemes, to the sovereign operation, to the consummation, without return, of meaning. It draws upon, in order to exhaust it, the resource of meaning. With minute audacity, it will acknowledge the rule which constitutes that which it efficaciously, economically, must deconstitute'.*[10]

There is something in Bataille's 'writing' that exceeds what appears as meaningful, something that is in excess of its discursive form. This excess is a threat of transgression for discourse, as it consistently disrupts its exchange of meaning. Indeed, the primary aim of discourse is to define meaning and thus to allow that the latter be exchanged without loss. Bataille's 'writing' unleashes an excess that can't be returned. In a way similar to the 'general economy' about which Bataille wrote within the pages of *The Accursed Share*, (a book which epitomizes a 'writing' that I call his 'writing' *on* the excess), Bataille's 'writing' also turns out to be a 'writing' *of* the excess, in that it opens onto a 'general economy' within discourse: a potlatch of meaning; meaning is squandered in pure loss.

In view of the above, it is obviously difficult to speak of the work, or oeuvre, of Georges Bataille, one should rather talk of the transgression or 'un-working' or 'consumption in pure loss' performed by his 'writing' within and against all discourses: it is not an 'oeuvre' as a discourse *on*, but, paraphrasing Jean Luc Nancy, a *'désoeuvre'* of discourse.[11] In conclusion, I must reiterate, that if to write *on*, is to present a discourse *on* Bataille, it is also to cancel the transgression that is Bataille's 'writing'. As Denis Hollier himself *wrote*: 'To write *on* Bataille is thus to betray him. At the same time to miss him. To write *on* Bataille is not to *write* on Bataille'.[12]

In consequence, it should be clear for the reader, that any attempt to write a dissertation on Bataille, will face a strange paradox, a singular and ambiguous situation that probably Bataille would have termed not an impossibility but the 'impossible': to explain Bataille's oeuvre, to write a discourse *on* Bataille, while knowing the irrelevance of such a sterile, authoritarian act. However, as *writing* is a practice that takes place against, but also within discourse, perhaps the discourse *on* will be a discourse in appearance only. In Bataille's words:

> *'The plan of moral is the plan of the project. The contrary to project is sacrifice. Sacrifice*

[8]. Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Exscription', *Yale French Studies*, n°78, 1990, p.62.

[9]. Maurice Blanchot, 'Affirmation and Negative Thought', in The Infinite Conversation, Univ. Minnesota press, Minneapolis, 1993, pp.202-11.

[10]. Jacques Derrida, 'From restricted to general economy: a Hegelianism without reserve', in *Writing and Difference*, (ebook) Routledge, London, 2005, p.341

[11]. *'désoeuvre'* might means, in French, the destruction of an oeuvre, as well as, without purpose or idle. See, Jean Luc Nancy, *La Communauté Désoeuvrée*, Christian Bourgois, Paris, 1986.

[12]. Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, MIT press, London, 1989, p.25.

takes on the forms of project, but in appearance only.[13]

The second problem (nevertheless bound up with the first), mentioned above, concerns the 'foundations' of Bataille's 'writing', its origin, and begs the question, with what to start discussing Bataille's 'writing'. Denis Hollier showed with accuracy the importance of the origin for the Hegelian system, in his critique of Hegel's *Aesthetics*.[14] But, as I have suggested, Hollier himself did not avoid espousing the same dependency on the origin in his study of Bataille. Indeed, I hope to have shown how important it is for Hollier's thesis to have Bataille's praise of a certain architecture as the foundation of his negative thought: for Bataille, according to Hollier, wrote 'against architecture', against his very first text praising a cathedral, Notre Dame de Reims, and what it symbolises: 'the vast ideological system symbolised and maintained by architecture'.[15]

However, in my view, Bataille's writing is not 'against architecture'. His thought does not oppose or say 'no' to anything. Rather his 'writing' is a large 'yes' to everything beyond reason. Furthermore, Bataille seems to have carefully hidden and sometimes erased all the indices that might allow an easy mapping of the genealogy of his thought.[16] Bataille's thought appears as multipolar, indeed, his interests are plural (he was not only interested in literary matters, as for him there were no concerns which were simply literary), but also, and this is probably due to his 'writing' *of the excess*, without 'constructive' meaning (as it squanders its own meaningful discursive form), without 'true' and personal foundations (he often said that he put to play the thoughts of others), without 'foundations' or 'key words' or 'key notions' at all (as his 'writing' often wrecks the foundations and 'key' notions of others' thoughts).

It is also interesting to notice that Denis Hollier was very aware of the problem. As he wrote (dismissing the idea of Bataille's 'Labyrinth' as the seminal notion within his 'writing'):

[...], the labyrinth is not merely a word, it is especially not the "key" word (the one that would let us in on Bataille, or, to put it another way, one that lets us get to the end of this). It is not a theme either. It cannot be isolated.[17]

It is thus fascinating, and perhaps ironic, to see that although Hollier perceived so precisely what is at the heart of Bataille's 'writing', that is, that 'notions' cannot be isolated, he dared to 'isolate' one, architecture, against all the other (Bataille's writing as a whole). Bataille's notions are often so explosive, so non-compromised, that one can imagine them as solitary concepts, which could be carefully observed, disserted and explained. Those notions however, can't be 'isolated'.

Hence, the problem remains where to start and which origin should one give to this 'writing', without producing a reading betraying it? Perhaps, against this background, and as such issues or problems might appear to the reader as simply ironic or laughable, it is wise to begin by discussing the precise meaning of the term 'laughter': an extreme state of being which is grasped with difficulty by thought (as unreasonable) , if not simply dismissed by discourse (as irrelevant), and which, although Bataille considered it as essential, *cannot* be considered either as the 'foundation' or the 'key' or 'key word' of his writing.

IV.2. Laughter

'[...] If you laugh it is because you are afraid'.[18]

What is 'laughter' for Bataille? As I have already explained in the last chapter, Bataille came across 'laughter' through his meeting with the French philosopher Henri Bergson, during a study trip to London in 1920. In preparation for this meeting he had read Bergson's short essay on 'laughter',

[13]. Georges Bataille, *L'Experience interieure*, in OC V, Gallimard, Paris, 1973, p.158.
[14]. See, the prologue of this dissertation.
[15]. Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, MIT press, London, 1989, p.23.
[16]. I refer here, to the numerous pseudonym under he published his books, but also the equally numerous contradiction that the uninformed reader might believe he perceives at the surface of his prose.
[17]. Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, MIT press, London, 1989, p.60.
[18]. Georges Bataille, *Madame Edwarda*, in OC III, Gallimard, Paris, 1971, p.15.

Le Rire. Although Bataille was very disappointed by the philosopher and his book, 'laughter' became, (according to Bataille, in a note probably written in 1958, thus almost 40 years after the event), 'without doubt, the foundation'[19] (this is problematic but it is also precisely the point). At least in my view, it became essential (with a few other experiences) for the development of Bataille's 'writing' and indeed, his interest in 'Laughter' lasted for his whole life. More than twenty years after this meeting Bataille was still discussing 'laughter': in the 'preface' to *Madame Edwarda* (published in 1941),[20] in relation to Nietzsche in *The laughter of Nietzsche* (published in 1942),[21] in *Guilty* (published in 1944, in which he dedicated to it a whole chapter: 'The divinity of Laughter'),[22] and finally in one of his most pertinent conference 'Non-knowledge, Laughter and Tears' (given in 1953).[23]

But what precisely is 'laughter', for Bataille? The different philosophical strains which discuss 'laughter' appear to Bataille as unable to truly 'know' what laughter is. They either focus on how to stimulate laughter, or on one single aspect of the realm of laughter (as with Bergson's comical). But 'laughter' itself remains unknown. Then, Bataille, in some kind of twist, reverses the problem by contending that, if 'laughter' remains unknown, it is because it is the 'unknowable':

'Laughter could simply be the unknowable. In other words, the feature remaining unknown within laughter would not be accidental but essential. We would be laughing, not for a reason that we could not manage to know, due to a lack of information or to a lack of insight, but because the unknown makes one laugh'.[24]

For Bataille the world and being itself are not completely in the range of knowledge. They can't be totally grasped by thought and science. There is something, which remains in excess of our understanding of being and its world:

'There is, within us and in the world, something which emerges that knowledge did not give us, and which is uniquely situated as unable to be reached by knowledge'.[25]

Laughter occurs (we laugh), when we move from the realm of the known to the unknown, a move, which can also be felt as a loss. Thus, laughter is not an isolated reaction to this transfer: the 'sudden invasion of the unknown' might also have other *effects* besides laughter, perhaps tears, cries etc...Laughter is only one effect among many others which may result from the appearance of the unknown. Consequently it is 'impossible' to address laughter through a study frame that would have as its object only laughter: one can speak of laughter only 'within the frame of a philosophy that goes beyond the sole laughter'. This one has a name for Bataille: 'non-knowledge'.[26]

However, this philosophy, which focuses on 'non-knowledge', does not abandon its effects. Although Bataille demands that 'non-knowledge' goes beyond 'the sole laughter' it is not an abstract thought, it is deeply grounded, as its study isn't independent from the one of its effects. While those effects are studied 'together', they are not isolated, and furthermore, non-knowledge is not interested in the notion or concept of 'laughter' but in its experience: 'it is never independently from this experience that my philosophical reflexion is carried on'.[27] Hence, Bataille states: 'what I call non-knowledge, is principally an experience'.[28] One does not laugh at the fact he knows nothing, laughter is not a reaction to not knowing, it is the effect of perceiving suddenly that what one did know can actually be disrupted or squandered, by something exceeding this 'knowledge', by the unknown.[29] Non-knowledge's laugh is directed at knowledge.

[19]. Georges Bataille, *Notes sur les conference 1951-1953*, in O.C. VIII. Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p.562.

[20]. Georges Bataille, 'Preface' to *Madame Edwarda*, in O.C., III, Gallimard, Paris, 1971, pp. 9-14.

[21]. Georges Bataille, *Le Rire de Nietzsche*, in O.C. VI. Gallimard, Paris, 1973. pp. 307-14.

[22]. Georges Bataille, *Le coupable*, in O.C. V. Gallimard, Paris, 1973. pp. 331-66.

[23]. Georges Bataille, *Non-savoir, rire et larmes* in O.C. VIII. Gallimard, Paris, 1976. pp. 214-33.

[24]. Ibid. p. 216.

[25]. Ibid.

[26]. Ibid. p. 218.

[27]. Ibid. p. 220.

[28]. Ibid. p. 223.

[29]. Ibid. p. 226.

To summarize, laughter for Bataille is thus the effect of the unknown, of what is in excess of the known, non-knowledge. But his 'philosophy' should not be understood as being simply *over* laughter, his 'writing' is not only *on* this effect of the excess that is 'laughter', it is also a philosophy *of* Laughter, philosophy as 'non-knowledge': a 'writing' *of* the excess and its effect. It is not only a writing *on*, an experience (whether it is the experience of laughter or else), but a writing as an experience. Bataille is quite clear about it:

> *'Insofar as I am doing philosophical work, my philosophy is a philosophy of laughter. It is a philosophy founded on the experience of laughter, and which pretends to not even go further. It is a philosophy that lets down the problems other than those that have been given to me in this precise experience'.*[30]

Yet, when one reads the above quote, paradoxical as it might seem 'laughter' is not the 'key notion' or 'key word' or foundation, for this philosophy. As Bataille writes somewhere else:

> *'I insist in the sense that [...] what is important to me, is the complete absence of presupposition. I'd like to see the philosophy I bring to the fore as absolutely deprived of presupposition'.*[31]

And further:

> *'No, there is no foundation, as for instance, there is no possible presupposition, there is only a possible experience'.*[32]

Hence, 'laughter' cannot be the 'key word' of Bataille's philosophy or worse its foundation, as it has is no foundation, no presupposition. Yet, reading those lines, one wonders why such quote should be believed and another one shouldn't. One could simply conclude that Bataille contradicts himself, but in my view he does not. Indeed the words displayed above are already part of this 'writing' of the excess, of 'laughter'. What the reader encounters, through those quotes (but it might be better for him to go through the 'text' as a whole) is the emergence or eruption of non-knowledge. Within those three quotes the 'writing' of the excess is displayed. The 'laughter' that might erupt in front of the pseudo-contradiction is the effect of non-knowledge. Bataille's 'writing' discusses the excess here, through addressing 'laughter' (an effect of the excess, non-knowledge), it is a writing *on*. But it is also a 'writing' *of* the excess; laughter, non-knowledge and thus excess are all experienced through it.

IV.3. Heterology and the Sacred

What non-knowledge is to knowledge, 'heterology' is to science. Bataille's 'definition' of what might be 'heterology' is given in an essay, unpublished during his lifetime and not precisely dated, but without doubt written at the time of his polemic with Andre Breton in 1929-30: 'The Use Value of D.A.F. De Sade'.[33] Heterology is thus:

> *'The science of what is wholly other. The term agiology would perhaps be more precise, but one would have to catch the double meaning of agios (analogous to the double meaning of sacer), soiled as well as holy. But it is above all the term scatology (the science of excrement) that retains in the present circumstances (the specialization of the sacred) an incontestable expressive value as the doublet of an abstract term such as heterology'.*[34]

For Bataille the division of social facts between religious facts (prohibitions, obligations and realisation of sacred activities) and profane ones (civic, political, juridical, industrial and commercial

[30]. Georges Bataille, *Conférence: Non-savoir, rire et larmes*, in OC VIII, Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p. 220.
[31]. Ibid. p. 222.
[32]. Ibid. p. 229.
[33]. Georges Bataille, 'La valeur d'usage de D.A.F. De Sade', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, pp. 54-69.
[34]. Ibid. pp. 61-2

organization) allows us to see that human actions are also divided between two impulses, excretion and appropriation. Within the movement of excretion, what is rejected is a 'foreign body': the object of certain practices, attitudes, terrors and taboos (perverse sexuality, attitude in front of death, similarity of attitudes in front of shit and god, anthropophagy, laughter, tears, religious ecstasy, women's make up, gambling, expenditure in pure loss, shitting one's pants etc...), all of which (although some might appear at first sight, to be opposed to each other), Bataille groups under the banner of the 'heterogeneous':

'The notion of (heterogeneous) foreign body permits one to note the elementary subjective identity between types of excrement (sperm, menstrual blood, urine, faecal matter) and everything that can be seen as sacred, divine, or marvellous'.[35]

The heterogeneous is thus a realm in which the most 'holy' (god etc...) co-exists with the most 'soiled' (shit etc...). Hence Bataille's use of the term 'sacred', is not idealistic in itself: the divine is as much sacred as shit. Bataille's sacred is not a superior entity, reachable only by being elevated, it is evoked by something excreted and rejected, in excess.[36]

Bataille also contends that the second human impulse, i.e. appropriation, is first taken within a composed process of excretion (that is appropriation is only a means to excretion); then, the elementary form of appropriation is consumption — whether physiological consumption as in eating, or a commercial one as in buying lands or goods; and finally, while excretion is the result of the presence of heterogeneity, the process of appropriation leads to homogeneity.[37]

Furthermore, according to Bataille, besides those non-abstract consumptions and homogenizations, there exists another, very abstract one, an intellectual appropriation, which is the result of philosophy and science. Philosophy and science rationalize the object of their study, discarding the fact that some events, substances and things remain beyond its scope. Hence, the heterogeneous is objectified, that is, homogenized by science and philosophy (the fact that they dismiss it as irrelevant, is also an attempt to objectify it: the heterogeneous becomes a category, the irrelevant).

Only an intellectual reflection in its religious form can pay respect to the peculiar nature of the heterogeneous and the sacred without appropriating (objectifying) them. However, religions:

'operate within the realm of the sacred a profound separation, dividing it between a 'high' world (celestial and divine) and a 'low' world (demoniac, world of the rot); but such a divide lead necessarily to the progressive homogeneity of the superior realm (the sole inferior realm resisting all efforts of appropriation)'.[38]

Hence, due to religions there is a 'celestial' sacred and 'infamous' sacred. But the 'celestial' sacred quickly becomes the figure that insures the 'moral' order of the profane and homogeneous world, as the figure of God might exemplify it (a mere dead and thus heterogeneous body, which

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[35]. Ibid. p. 59.

[36]. In an essay published in 1933-4, 'La structure psychologique du fascisme', Bataille exposed in particularly clear terms the distinction between homogeneous and heterogeneous realms, sacred and profane worlds, and also between the 'pure' sacred and the 'impure' sacred, as well as between the imperative (superior) and miserable (inferior) form of heterogeneity. In short, society is composed of two realms: an homogeneous one, based on production and accumulation (p. 340), and opposite to this, a heterogeneous domain composed of elements that can't be assimilated (homogenized) from a social or scientific point of view (p. 344). The sacred world is a subpart of the heterogeneous, concerned with religious, mystic and magic elements (p. 345) all of which are separated due to their taboo nature from the profane (homogeneous) world. However, the 'sacred' is itself a dualism: the religious leader or the monarch is sacred (pure), while the lowest social strata appear also as 'untouchable', hence sacred (impure). This dualism of the sacred is, actually, exemplifying the dualism of the heterogeneous realm: there is a 'high', imperative and superior heterogeneous – the fascist leader – and a 'low', miserable and inferior heterogeneous – the subversive lumpen-proletariat (p. 349-50). See, Georges Bataille, 'La structure psychologique du fascisme', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 339-71.

[37]. Georges Bataille, 'La valeur d'usage de D.A.F. De Sade', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 60. Hence, consumption/appropriation is not simply opposed to excretion/rejection as a different impulsion: their function (or quality) differs. Consumption/appropriation is a means (to homogenization) while excretion/rejection is an end in itself (triggered by the presence of the heterogeneous).

[38]. Ibid. p. 61.

becomes the sign of respect, of moral and the law, reinforcing, if necessary the homogeneity of the profane), or the figure of the Fascist leader (rising from the undifferentiated heterogeneous mass for oppressing certain elements heterogeneous to the homogeneous realm).[39]

It is in this sense that religion differs considerably from 'heterology', as it does not 'answer to the need of human nature for unlimited projection (excretion or expulsion)', but is 'the whole of prohibitions, of obligations, of partial allowance which canalise and regulate socially this projection'.[40] Religious intellectual reflection, only partially pays respect to the heterogeneous, it also ends up homogenizing a part of it for controlling it as whole, in a more productive, i.e. homogeneous way. Moreover, heterology (although Bataille defined it as a science), is also quite different from science itself:

'When we say that heterology scientifically addresses the questions relative to heterogeneity, we do not want to say that heterology is, in the usual sense of such a formula, the science of the heterogeneous. The heterogeneous is even resolutely situated beyond the reach of scientific knowledge, which, by definition, can only be applied to homogeneous elements'.[41]

Heterology is opposed to the conventional representation of the world as homogeneous. That is, it is opposed to science and philosophy, both of which are always attempting to appropriate the excess to rationalize it and homogenize it. However, it is precisely those 'intellectual' processes (science and philosophy), which limit themselves in producing their own excess and in freeing it in a disordered way as heterogeneous to their profane realm. Hence, the 'task' of heterology (if it can be said to operate along such a 'productive' line), is to 'consciously and resolutely continue this terminal process which had been, till now, seen as the abortion and the shame of human thought'.[42] Hence, heterology:

'[...] reverses completely the philosophical process which, from the appropriation's instrument that it was, now serves the excretion principle and introduces the claim of violent satisfactions induced by social existence'.[43]

What is important for Bataille, is that heterology is a 'real' science, more practical than abstract, – as a 'real' science is. It affirms the dead end in which science is, and, from there it attempts to increase the release of the heterogeneous. It must thus, first, identify the limits of science, philosophy and thought, then reveal what is rejected beyond them (the heterogeneous-sacred), and finally not objectify but preserve the heterogeneous' radicalism; that is, it must become heterogeneous to science itself.

Bataille's heterology as the 'science' of the sacred, is a dualism, on the one hand it is interested in identifying the different aspects of the heterogeneous, the sacred and the excess. It seems to theorize them and, on the other hand, it practises them against science itself. Heterology illustrates how the excess (sacred-heterogeneous) appears and in which mode it performs, in as much as it appears itself as sacred and performs. It thus constantly oscillates between a theory of the excess and its rupture, its practise. In other words, Bataille's heterology is the theorizing of the excess that exceeds science, knowledge and idealism, but also the science that exceeds itself, the science of the excess, which is in excess of science.

This practical tendency is visible within Bataille's texts of the same period, i.e. the *Documents* texts (indeed, articles such as 'The Language of Flowers',[44] 'Dust',[45] 'The Big Toe',[46] and 'Mouth',[47] all have the same goal, that is, to focus on heterogeneous elements rejected by science and philosophy as objects of study, elements for reversing and transgressing those

[39]. Bataille explains at length those processes in 'La structure psychologique du fascisme'. See, Georges Bataille, 'La structure psychologique du fascisme', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, pp. 339-71.

[40]. Georges Bataille, 'La valeur d'usage de D.A.F. De Sade', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 61.

[41]. Ibid. p. 62.

[42]. Ibid. p. 63.

[43]. Ibid.

[44]. Georges Bataille, 'Le language des fleurs', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, pp. 173-78.

[45]. Georges Bataille, 'Poussiere', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 197.

[46]. Georges Bataille, 'Le gros orteil', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, pp. 200-4.

[47]. Georges Bataille, 'Bouche', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, pp. 237-38.

disciplines. Heterology does not make sense — as science does — it shows the world as meaningless for Man. This tendency is visible as well as in the 'form' of the review itself. *Documents* appears itself heterogeneous to conventional scientific or aesthetic reviews, as it gathered a whole range of topics, coming across different fields of inquiry almost all heterogeneous to each other: anthropology, archaeology, fine arts, ethnography and the most 'weird' miscellanea. Finally this tendency appears also in earlier essays, for example, in the set of texts, which remained unpublished during Bataille's lifetime, (this detail is of importance) and which have as their subject the 'pituitary gland' and as title 'The Pineal eye',[48] or 'The Jesuve'.[49]

What is a 'pineal eye'? I will here quote extensively from Denis Hollier, who gave a brief but complete and precise summary of its peculiar, nature, function and history:

> *'The pineal — or pituitary — gland — or eye — is a region of the brain that, ever since Descartes gave it the heavy responsibility of uniting soul and body, has never stopped presenting anatomists with problems of identifications. A mysterious, enigmatic excrescence, science has often projected on it fantasies that owe very little to scientific procedures themselves. A mystery is how Descartes spoke of the union of body and soul that this gland was supposed to "explain." To which is added the mystery inherent in anything that, in an entity organized like the human body where every element corresponds to a finality inscribed more or less obviously in its structure, does not have a specific function connected to it: the mystery of the non-functional appendage, the useless organ. Into this picture yet a third element must be added, the mystery of the vanishing object, because the pineal gland would not (or almost not) survive the union of soul and body that it guaranteed. It is, therefore, observable only in the moments immediately following death; if one begins to look too late it is already gone. [...] These days anatomy distinguishes between the pineal gland (or epiphysis) proper and the pineal eye, which is only encountered among the lower reptiles. It does, indeed, seem that this eye constitutes a vestigial organ, but its connection to the ocular system, suggested by the name given it, remains for many extremely iffy. Nonetheless, not long ago it was commonly seen as the trace of a "third" eye, if not as an organ of the "sixth" sense'.[50]*

Hence, at the time of Bataille, to put it more roughly than Hollier, science (for which it was a useless organ) and philosophy (for which it was the mysterious sit of 'the union of body and soul') 'knew shit' about the pineal eye.

It is precisely because science and philosophy can't explain the pineal eye, because it is beyond their reach, because it is heterogeneous, that Bataille takes it as the topic of his different essays 'The pineal eye' (there are five essays in total; four of which bear the title of 'The pineal eye' and the last one 'The Jesuve').

But in what exactly consists this essay on the 'pineal eye'? I will pass on the scatological, erotic and perverse details of this fantasy or tale and focus instead on the movement it intuits (although this procedure is itself problematic as it discards the heterogeneous elements for somehow homogenizing the text). 'The pineal eye' is a fantasy or parody of man's evolution: the different essays describe the erection of man as linked to an erotic force proceeding from a defecating ape's anus to a man's skull. The process which leads (in the essay) to an ape, convulsively shitting towards the sky, is shared with human's evolution; as the process of this evolution leads toward the standing posture of man, and consequently toward the superior position of his head, as the member of his body, closest to the sky. Then, Bataille makes a supposition concerning the pineal eye: the 'true' outcome of human erection, at least in this parody of evolution, is the blast through the top of Man's skull, of a final and deadly erection: the 'Pineal Eye'. The third eye, which is lethal for man, throws itself outside of his head in the direction of the sky. But this 'organ' appears only to immediately vanish, it looks at the burning sun, and consequently blinds itself. Thus, this heterogeneous object has suddenly acquired a function, but this function makes no sense for Man or for science (as for itself, its only process is one of dying).

With 'The pineal eye' Bataille gave an explosive example of what is heterology (a focus on the heterogeneous elements which affirms their meaninglessness but paradoxically their

[48]. Georges Bataille, 'L'Oeil Pineal', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, pp. 21-47.
[49]. Georges Bataille, 'Le Jesuve', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, pp. 13-20.
[50]. Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, MIT press, London, 1989, pp. 115-16.

importance, in a meaningless world) and how it proceeds. First, it focuses on a heterogeneous element (heterogeneous to science, reason, and philosophy), then it pushes the 'logic' of science, reason and/or philosophy as far as it can go and finally, this leads to a meaningless and laughable outcome. Hence, when using parody, science, reason and philosophy are pushed to the extreme: in a parodying way, the world is shown to be what it is, meaningless.

My account is obviously very reductive. Why? Because it disserts on 'heterology' and 'the pineal eye', thus it homogenizes, renders rational what Bataille wrote. From this perspective, the detail I mentioned above becomes extremely pertinent: the fact that Bataille wrote five essays on the 'pineal eye' but published none. Furthermore, the 'Use Value of D.A.F. De Sade' was also not published during his life-time. In my view, this shows, in an exemplary way, how Bataille was conscious of his enterprise and its difficulties and also in what consists this enterprise. I contend that he did not publish these pieces for the simple reason, that although they are *about* radically heterogeneous elements, by writing *on* them, he homogenized them, objectified them. Hence those pieces were still not the most radical heterogeneous pieces in themselves. Bataille was thus, in 1930, (and although within the pages of *Story of the Eye* [1928], one can, in my view, already experience it) still striving for a 'writing' *on* the excess that won't 'stabilize' it: a 'writing' *of* the excess. (Is it so? Or am I just homogenizing the whole thing?).

IV.4. Formless

Thus, the problem seems to be about the 'appearance', which the writing *of* the excess should have. Or, is it rather about the 'process' or 'operation' at the 'core' of the 'writing'? The article in which the term 'formless' (informe) is discussed, sheds some light on this issue.

Bataille coins the term 'formless' in the 'Critical Dictionary' published from 1929 to 1930 in *Documents*. More precisely, the article 'formless' appears in the seventh issue of the first year of publication of *Documents* in December 1929.[51] The text of the article is rather short:

> *'Formless: A dictionary would start from the moment in which it no longer gives the meaning but the impact of the words, their job. Formless is thus not merely an adjective having a given meaning but a term for lowering status with its implied requirement that everything has a form. Whatever it designates lacks entitlement in every sense and is crushed on the spot, like a spider or an earthworm. For academics to be content, the universe would have to assume a form. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of fitting what is there into a formal coat, a mathematical overcoat. On the other hand to assert that the universe resembles nothing else and is only formless comes down to stating that the universe is something like a spider or a spit.'[52]*

Hence, Bataille presents the 'formless' as having not just a meaning (that is 'being' without form), but also as a term which brings into play something in excess of this meaning: it operates or proceeds. This process is 'precisely' to 'lower the status' of the object it qualifies: it operates a loss of classification [déclasser], or hierarchy. It is not best grasped through its definition but rather through the reactions it provokes: 'what it designates [...] gets squashed everywhere'. On the one hand, it permits that one identifies, rationally (even discursively) what is low, foreign and heterogeneous to the categories set in place, on the other hand, it is not as neutral as a concept or a theme or a quality might be: it performs. It initiates a reaction of attraction or repulsion for the object it is associated with, in other words, this term 'formless' unveils *and* releases what is 'formless'. Due to the reaction which accompanies it, it would seem that what is 'formless' shares some fair similarities with the heterogeneous components which are present, but concealed within or rejected outside stable constructs (philosophy, science, discourse, etc...).

But how to address such a 'notion/operation' without objectifying or stabilizing it, that is without rendering it homogeneous? The article 'formless' does not appear anywhere in *Documents*, it is 'released' in its 'critical dictionary', the 'definition' of which is specifically given in the article on 'formless'. Bataille demands that the dictionary does not give the meaning, but the 'job' (or impact) of the words, that which exceeds their 'senses'. In other words, while a dictionary usually regulates

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[51]. Georges Bataille, 'Informe, in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 217.
[52]. Ibid.

the lexicon of language and discourse by framing what words mean, Bataille expects it to transgress its primary task. The 'critical dictionary' should be a transgression of all dictionary: it should focus on what exceeds meaning, as in the case of the term 'formless' which operates, besides having a certain meaning.

Should the 'job' of the words be simply *qualified* as being 'formless' (that is 'formless' would be a simple adjective of the 'job')? Perhaps. But one has to acknowledge that by doing so, one defines and thus stabilizes the 'formless' but also the 'job' of the words. It is 'wiser' to state, as 'dictionary' and 'formless' are also not 'defined' within the same space in pure coincidence, that the 'job' (impact) of the words *operates* or *proceeds* as 'formless' — that is 'formless' ['informe'] is a paradoxical substitute for the 'job' — and this 'job' is, thus, heterogeneous to the homogeneous realm of meaning.

The 'dictionary' performs thus through two different but linked modes: it attempts to reveal the 'job' or, perhaps, *materiality* of the words (that is, it operates 'formless') and in the same movement, it also maps, without alphabetical order (indeed, the dictionary had none) the terms which are not sublimated, which are heterogeneous to 'academic' discursive practices; in other words, which present literally their materiality, which are 'formless' like for example the term 'spit'. It homogenizes as much as it unleashes the heterogeneous.

In conclusion, it appears that the article 'formless', short it may be, is a radical example of the 'writing' of/on the excess. Within these few lines, Bataille defines the 'formless' and his 'dictionary' as well as he traces their tasks, while he also somehow performs them. The 'formless' is practised: the dictionary loses its status (it does not rule discourse anymore), while this same 'dictionary' transgressing itself, exceeding its primary tasks also 'defines' the 'job' of the words, what operates 'formless' from within them. This might seem paradoxical to the rational mind, but it is precisely the point of the 'writing' of/on the excess.

IV.5. Base Materialism

I have maintained that Bataille's critical dictionary attempts to reveal and to release the materiality of the words. But what precisely is this materiality or, in other words, what kind of materialism does Bataille defend?

Through several articles written for *Documents*, (articles such as 'Materialism',[53] and 'Base materialism'[54]) or during the same period (the unpublished, due to a socio-economic censure, 'The "Old Mole" and the Prefix "On" [Sur] in the word "Superman" [Surhomme] and "surrealism"'[55]), as well as one written later for *La Critique Sociale*, ('The notion of expenditure'),[56] Bataille indicated what he wished to release as a radical materialism against the homogenizing understanding (the ontological materialism of Feuerbach, the dialectical-historical materialism of Engels, and the 'idealist' materialism of the surrealists) that was constructed on it. Of course, as we should see, this 'materialism' is not simply limited to a linguistic or a lexical field as the 'formless' article might intuit. Bataille's 'materialism' partakes of a radical socio-political critique of fascism, idealism and, thus, of all sorts of totalitarianism.

In 'Materialism' Bataille criticizes classical materialists for having been unable to consider 'dead' matter in any other way than through a simple hierarchical categorization:

> *'Most materialists, despite wanting to eliminate all spiritual entities, ended up describing an order of things whose hierarchical relations mark it as specifically idealist. They have situated dead matter at the summit of a conventional hierarchy of diverse types of facts, without realizing that in this way they have submitted to an obsession with an ideal form of matter, with a form which approaches closer than any other to that which matter should be'.[57]*

For Bataille, 'classical' materialists are guilty of idealism: the abstraction through which thought and

[53]. Georges Bataille, 'Materialisme', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, pp.179-80.
[54]. Georges Bataille, 'Le bas materialisme et la gnose', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, pp.220-26.
[55]. Georges Bataille, 'La vieille taupe et le préfixe sur dans surhomme et surréalisme', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, pp.93-109. This essay had been written for the review *Bifur*. But this last one lost its funding before its publication. André Breton qualified this review as a trash-bin.
[56]. Georges Bataille, 'La notion de dépense', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p.302-20.
[57]. Georges Bataille, 'Materialisme', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p.179..

categorized matter is the most singular example of the primacy, for those materialists, of the idea over matter. Matter, for Bataille, does not only demand that one addresses it, it also requests (in order to avoid being 'reduced' to an abstract concept, to what it 'should be', or said otherwise, in order to avoid having its most heterogeneous features rejected as foreign and thus dismissed as irrelevant) that one wonders how to address it: how to write *on* it. One should address 'materialism' directly by questioning socio- psychological facts:

'Materialism will be seen as a senile idealism to the extent that it is not immediately based on psychological or social facts, instead of on artificially isolated physical phenomena'.[58]

Furthermore, in 'Base Materialism and Gnosticism' Bataille also argues against the 'dialectical materialism', of Engels (his famous historical materialism), contending that although it pretends to avoid the usual ontological 'abstraction', it is still grounded within an idealist endeavour:

'It is nevertheless remarkable that the only kind of materialism that up to now in its development has escaped systematic abstraction, namely dialectical materialism, had as its starting point, at least as much as ontological materialism, absolute idealism in its Hegelian form'.[59]

Finally, Bataille also undermines, through his critique of materialism, the surrealist's enterprise. More specifically, at the beginning of his essay 'The "Old Mole" and the Prefix "On" [Sur] in the word "Superman" [Surhomme] and "surrealism"', Bataille states:

'If we were to identify under the heading of materialism, a crude liberation of human life from the imprisonment and masked pathology of ethics, an appeal to all that is offensive, indestructible, and even despicable, to all that overthrows, perverts, and ridicules spirit, we could at the same time identify surrealism as a childhood disease of this base materialism: it is through this latter identification that the current prerequisites for a consistent development may be specified forcefully and in such a manner as to preclude any return to pretentious idealistic aberrations'.[60]

According Bataille, Breton and his followers are interested in matter only in an idealist (above reality) perspective. They consider matter's value in order to have it replace bourgeois values. Thus, they wish to determine what is above the current order. The revolution and, here, the recourse to matter, is only the means of achieving a new authoritarian order. Matter for Bataille should be an end in itself.

But how does Bataille specifically define this matter and his 'materialism' that he also named a 'base materialism' and what would be the function and value (if it has some) of such an anti-idealist, not dialectical, and not ontological materialism?

'The time has come, when employing the word materialism, to assign to it the meaning of a direct interpretation, excluding all idealism, of raw phenomena, and not of a system founded on the fragmentary elements of an ideological analysis elaborated under the sign of religious ties'.[61]

Bataille's materialism is interested in a base matter —a matter that is base, 'a raw phenomenon' — that resists thinking, and its subsequent 'putting to form' (the homogenization/formalisation of discourse). As this type of base matter demands that one should 'exclude all idealism', it is what we have no idea of: what makes no sense. This matter is, (although I homogenize it as such) literally shit or laughter or an obscene word or madness. A seductive waste, it is whatever is in excess of the order of idealist materialism; what does not lend itself to be 'conceptualised' or rendered abstract. But how to give an example of what one can have no idea of? How to represent

[58]. Ibid.

[59]. Georges Bataille, 'Le bas materialisme et la gnose', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 220.

[60]. Georges Bataille, 'La Vieille Taupe et le préfixe sur dans Surhomme et Surréalisme', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 93.

[61]. Georges Bataille, 'Materialisme', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 180.

it? Or said differently, where to find, perhaps not a model or an example of it, but, at least something as close as possible to it? Where to find a base on which to 'construct' such a materialism, 'a materialism not implying an ontology, not implying that matter is the thing in itself [sic]'?[62] How to find a support which will 'teach' one how to submit one's being and one's reason 'to what is lower, to what can never serve in any case to ape a given authority'?[63]

The Gnostics' dualist philosophy, the Manichaean division of everything into two linked polarities, one high and the other low, provided Bataille with the 'support' that he sought. For Bataille, the Gnostics have a rather particular conception of matter:

> *'as an active principle having its own eternal autonomous existence as darkness (which would not simply be the absence of light, but the monstrous archontes revealed by this absence), and as evil (which would not be the absence of good, but a creative action)'.*[64]

In Bataille's view, this matter is thus neither immanent (present) nor transcendent (absent), neither good nor evil: it cannot be thought of with reference to the category set in place by moral and reason. Rather it is something 'monstrous' (in the sense of totally other), in excess of these rational oppositions, beyond their stable dichotomy. Base matter does not simply find its 'essence' in relative opposition to a high and praised matter; it is not its rational and logic negation; it is something as positive as this one but *also* wholly other: it is positively evil. Bataille's base materialism is not a new order for matter, but what appears when one has noticed the absence of order. Hence, it is a very real threat (as it is impossible to homogenize it) to all materialist and idealist systems (as they appear hopeless in front of such 'other'):

> *'(…) base matter is external and foreign to ideal human aspirations, and it refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines resulting from these aspirations. But the psychological process brought to light by Gnosticism had the same impact: it was a question of disconcerting the human spirit and idealism before something base, to the extent that one recognised the helplessness of superior principles'.*[65].

As for giving an example, or rather, something as close as possible to this base matter, a figure for this 'base materialism', Bataille invokes the Gnostics 'monstrous' gods (the archontes) which he studied at the Bibliotheque Nationale, in Paris, at the office for medals and coins where he was a librarian: Gods who were half man and half something else (they either had a duck-head, or no head at all, or even as in the precise example he mentions, a donkey's head):

> *'The severed ass's head of the acephalic personification of the sun undoubtedly represents, even if imperfectly, one of materialism's most virulent manifestations'.*[66]

It might appear to be quite funny, even laughable, that, at the summit of the idealists' aspirations concerning 'matter' and materialism, there would only be an ugly and headless donkey whose contribution to any philosophical discussions would consist of braying. But this is precisely Bataille's point, heterology releases a base materialism that opens the realm of non-knowledge, one cannot see this opening but, paradoxically, one can hear it through one's own laughter. Hence, there is no ideal-materialist summit, just an absence; and in front of this absence, just a good (yet tragic) laugh.

Base materialism has thus an impact beyond the mere lexical or linguistic field. But it is also more than a philosophical problem as it is equally radical, for Bataille, from a political perspective. Indeed, in 'The "Old Mole" and the Prefix "On" [Sur] in the word "Superman" [Surhomme] and "surrealism"', Bataille exposes what impact an irreducible base matter might have in the context of political revolution.

According to Bataille, revolutionaries subvert the existing noble or bourgeois values and orders only with the aim to settle new, 'higher' values. However, the subversion is only temporary, it

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[62]. Georges Bataille, 'Le bas matérialisme et la gnose', in O C I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 225.
[63]. Ibid.
[64]. Ibid. p. 223.
[65]. Ibid. p. 225.
[66]. Ibid. p. 221.

cannot be a means in itself (which lasts), but only a means to end, a new order. Revolution, from this perspective, demands an authority (the idea) which excuses the unleashing of violence and base elements that it brings along. Idealism is what founds, supports and also legitimizes all systems (fascist, utopian socialist, surrealism, and even Nietzsche's thought).[67] This idealist-revolutionary tendency is only the sign of an 'Icarian' revolt, an enterprise doomed from birth. In opposition to this 'Icarian' posture, Bataille who places himself 'under' the authority of Karl Marx and his 'Old Mole' (as the title of the essay indicates; a detail which shows Bataille's obvious 'Marxist' orientation during that period), demands, as Marx did in the *Communist Manifesto*, that revolution commences 'in the bowels of the earth, as in the materialist bowels of the proletarians',[68] and furthermore, that it stays there, within the base:

> *'By excavating the fetid ditch of bourgeois culture, perhaps we will see open up in the depths of the earth immense and even sinister caves where force and human liberty will establishes themselves, sheltered from the call to order of a heaven that today demands the most idiotic elevation of any man's spirit'.*[69]

Four years later, in his 'The notion of expenditure',[70] Bataille would show to which extent his 'base materialism' and his defence of a 'base' matter were radical. Indeed, this essay published in a 'reformist' yet highly Marxist review, *La Critique Sociale*, is nothing but a critique of the productive perspective of the Marxist dogma.[71] In short, here, Bataille contends that the excess (of which base matter is a radical example) and the means of its expenditure in pure loss, are much more seminal to the human community than the hypocritical means of production and the fear of scarcity which conceal them within bourgeois capitalist, as well as social-Marxist societies. Base matter and base materialism were too evil for the Marxist edifice and its productivity tenet. Nevertheless, in 1933 as much as in 1929-30, base matter still escapes and is a serious threat to idealism, reason and philosophy. 'The universe' more than ever 'resembles nothing and is only formless'.[72] Hence 'matter':

> *'can only be defined as the non-logical difference that represents in relation to the economy of the universe, what crime represents in relation to the law'.*[73]

IV.6. Un-employed Negativity

If matter, or Bataille's 'base matter', is a 'non-logical difference', it might have some rather peculiar consequences for the Hegelian dialectic, if one understand it as a logical process leading to the synthesis of differences, as a means of appropriation and homogenizing. Bataille had a rather complex but *not* antithetical attitude toward Hegel's thought. Bataille's notions (and a fortiori his writing on/of the excess) appear as foreign to the homogeneous Hegelian system. But, his 'writing' and these notions are not simply opposing this system (this would simply set up a new dialectical process), rather they are unfolding from within the Hegelian philosophy in order to disrupt it. They

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[67]. It is important to note that here (in 1929-30), Nietzsche is dismissed as a reactionary. However in the late 1930s, he will be reinstalled as a major precursor: the victim of Fascist misrepresentation. This undoubtedly shows the fundamentally instable terminology of Bataille, and thus of his 'writing'. Yet, if one wishes to homogenize, it is possible to explain Bataille's disdain for Nietzsche, here, as a way to reach Breton. Indeed, Bataille conflates the surrealist's leader attitude with the one of the German philosopher, while he was aware of Breton's loath of Nietzsche. But also without contextualising this essay, it is possible to just follow the line of argument of Bataille. Nietzsche being a bourgeois himself, he could not have experienced truly the 'base' without willing to sublimate it in order to reach a higher 'value' than the bourgeois order. For Bataille the bourgeois is unable to truly lead the mass to revolution, as he is unable to perceive in revolution and end in itself and not a means. For Bataille reinstallation of Nietzsche, see, for example: Georges Bataille, 'Nietzsche and the Fascists', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970 pp. 447-65.

[68]. Georges Bataille, 'La Vieille Taupe et le préfixe *sur* dans *Surhomme* et *Surréalisme*', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 97.

[69]. Ibid. p. 109.

[70]. Georges Bataille, 'La notion de dépense', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p. 302-20.

[71]. I will go back to this essay very soon.

[72]. Georges Bataille, 'Informe', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 217.

[73]. Georges Bataille, 'La Notion de Dépense', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 319.

push the logic of that system to its very limit, till it implodes and shows the irrationality of its conclusions and the paradoxical nature of its 'real' outcome.

All this might seem rather confusing, so explanations are necessary. As I argued in the previous chapter, Bataille acquired a deeper knowledge of Hegel's philosophy through his attendance, first at the seminar of Alexandre Koyre (in 1931-33), then at Alexandre Kojeve's (in 1934-39) lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Out of these, Bataille developed a complex or one might say ambiguous attitude towards the thought of the German philosopher, sometimes violently critical of it, and at some other periods conversely impressed by its achievements. Indeed, in articles such as 'The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic',[74] which Bataille wrote with Raymond Queneau for *La Critique Sociale* in 1932, his will to undermine the Hegelian 'edifice' by targeting its foundations is obvious; while he also left among his notes a few but clear statements which show how impressed he was by this philosophy: 'Kojève's course [on Hegel] exhausted me, crushed me, killed me ten times'.[75]

Two texts, both written by Bataille a few years before his death, 'Hegel Death and Sacrifice',[76] (1955 published in *Deucalion*) and 'Hegel, Man and History',[77] (1956 published in *Monde nouveau-Paru*) permit us to understand how Bataille's 'writing' positions itself with reference to Hegel. Although these texts might appear as coming after the fact (thus with some bias imposed by the chronological distance), they constitute, in my view, the best clarification of that issue, as they also elucidate, besides explaining Bataille's position *vis a vis* Hegel, Bataille's position *vis a vis* Kojeve, and thus, they bear witness to the influence of the Russian born philosopher on Bataille's grasp of Hegel's dialectic of 'spirit'.

According to Bataille, the 'central and final idea of Hegel's philosophy', or more accurately, of Kojeve's reading of Hegel's philosophy is:

> *'the idea that the foundation and the origin of objective reality (Wirklichkeit) and of human's empirical existence (Dasein) are Nothingness which manifests itself as creative or negative Action, free and conscious of itself'.[78]*

Furthermore, for Kojeve, the dialectical or anthropological philosophy of Hegel is in its last resort a 'philosophy of death', that is, for this philosophy the privileged manifestation of negativity is death. Death is what negates human beings, what annihilates them. Yet, it is also in death (in facing up to this negativity) that Man constitutes himself as Man, as Human. Man is 'self-conscious' of his own death, and consequently of his difference from the animal's condition. Man negates 'nature', the animal within himself (the animal part within the human-animal) in order to become 'purely' human: the 'pure and personal I'.[79] But this negation of 'nature' is not only emerging within an abstract, and by definition interiorized, consciousness; it expresses itself also out there, in the world: Man's negativity truly changes 'nature'. Man fights, works and struggles in order to transform the given: Nature. He creates by destroying 'nature', a certain world, which would not exist without Man's negation. Hence, on the one hand Man's negativity is 'Action' (Man is central to the creation of the 'real') and on the other hand, Man is 'Death living a human life' (the consciousness of being 'truly' different from Nothingness only for a while, to have to return to Nothingness very soon). On the one hand Hegel's philosophy is 'a philosophy of death' and on the other hand it is a philosophy of 'class fight and work'.[80]

Before explaining the second polarity of Hegel's philosophy, (or once again of Kojeve's reading of Hegel's thought), that is, its concern for 'class fight and work', it is important to note the paradox Bataille perceives within its first pole: the 'philosophy of death', and the conclusion he draws from it.

Bataille remarks that for Hegel, it is necessary for Man, in order to reach authentic 'wisdom' or 'absolute' knowledge, to face the 'negative' (death) and to tarry or linger within it. He quotes

[74]. Georges Bataille, 'La critique des fondements de la dialectique hegelienne', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970, p.277.

[75]. Georges Bataille, notes *Sur Nietzsche*, in OC VI, Gallimard, Paris, 1973, p.416.

[76]. Georges Bataille, 'Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice', in OC XII, Gallimard, Paris, 1988, pp.326-45.

[77]. Georges Bataille, 'Hegel, l'homme et l'histoire', in OC XII, Gallimard, Paris, 1988, pp.349-69.

[78]. Bataille quoting Alexandre Kojeve in Georges Bataille, 'Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice', in OC XII, Gallimard, Paris, 1988, p.327.

[79]. Georges Bataille, 'Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice', in OC XII, Gallimard, Paris, 1988, p.327.

[80]. Ibid. p.334.

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Hegel at length:

'Death – if we wish to name that unreality – is the most terrible thing there is and to uphold the work of death is the task which demands the greatest strength. Impotent beauty hates this awareness, because understanding makes this demand of beauty, a requirement which beauty cannot fulfil. Now, the life of Spirit is not that life which is frightened of death, and spares itself destruction, but that life which assumes death and lives with it. Spirit attains its truth only by finding itself absolutely 'shattered' [in absolute dismemberment]. It is not that (prodigious) power by being the Positive that turns away from the Negative, as when we say of something: this is nothing or (this is) false and, having (thus) disposed of it, pass from there to something else; no, Spirit is that power only to the degree in which it contemplates the Negative face to face (and) dwells with it. This prolonged sojourn is the magical force which transposes the negative into the given-being'.[51]

But, how can one face up to this 'Negative'? How does Hegel do so? Bataille contends that Hegel attempts to do so through the mediation of knowledge, understanding, language and discourse. Man understands the 'totality' (the world, nature) within which he is immersed, and this understanding consists in precisely separating the elements constitutive of this 'totality', (language, understanding, knowledge and discourse, in their turn also constitute themselves on the model of this 'separation'; they are self-founded on defined and separated entities: words, concepts, ideas). Of course, Man appears, (as he is the subject who acts out this separation), as 'the' element separated from the whole, from nature, hence, Man negates 'nature' but also, as he cannot exists outside of this one (he is first of all an animal), negates himself as the human-animal. Man's negativity is its own negativity. Bataille subsequently notes the paradox: man (the human-animal) disappears when Man (absolute spirit) appears (when he separates and forms himself).[82] This is not in itself, a paradox. It becomes one, if we consider that in order to be 'conscious' of his 'Negativity', Man must 'kill' the animal-human in him but, if he kills this animal within himself, that is the support of Man, Man ceases also to be. 'The revelation of Man to himself never happens'.[83] In order to be revealed to himself man should be dead while he is living and the only way out of the paradox for Bataille, is a subterfuge, a comedy. This comedy, Hegel did not address it in those terms, according to Bataille, due to his lack of humour, or to the fact that humour is a difficult topic for seriousness and (serious) work.[84]

Bataille perceives this 'comedy' in the sacrifice, which answers to the necessity of the spectacle or representation without which men would remain ignorant of the negativity of death. In sacrifice, for Bataille, the sacrificer identifies himself with the sacrificed, the animal which dies, and, through this representation Man dies while looking to 'himself' dying. By comparing Hegel's thought to sacrifice, Bataille does not want to undermine it, rather he wishes to show that Hegel's attitude towards death is not an isolated, 'whimsical' one, but the fundamental human reaction. It is not the sole fact of Hegel, but of the whole of humanity to attempt, through a representation or digression, to grasp what death at the same time gave and took to/from itself.[85] (Indeed, for Bataille 'the' question is: 'why humanity has generally sacrificed?')

However, Bataille contends, that there is a profound difference between the human who faces death within the sacrifice, and Hegel who faces death through his 'conscious' understanding. The sacrificer does not address with his understanding and rationality the negativity which surfaces in the sacrifice, he has only a 'sensible' experience of it, while Hegel situates the negative, with lucidity and consciousness, at a certain point within his 'coherent discourse' which reveals it (to itself).[86] Hence, it appears, that while Hegel's attitude towards the negativity of death is mediated by discourse, reason and knowledge, the naïve humanity has in sacrifice a rather 'wholly' and direct encounter with it.

Yet, Bataille sustains that this naïve 'attitude' is powerless to 'maintain' itself without having

[51]. Bataille quoting Hegel in Georges Bataille, 'Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice', in OC XII, Gallimard, Paris, 1988. p. 331.
[82]. Georges Bataille, 'Hegel, la mort et le sacrifice', in OC XII, Gallimard, Paris, 1988. p. 332.
[83]. Ibid. p. 336.
[84]. Ibid. p. 330.
[85]. Ibid. pp. 336-7
[86]. Ibid. p. 338.

recourse to discourse.[27] Indeed, who would *know, understand and comprehend* sacrifice in those terms (an attitude for facing up to death-negativity), if no one was discursively addressing it, for giving it a 'meaning'. Sacrifice for Bataille is 'sovereign' if it serves no purpose, if it is only a form of expenditure (of life) in pure loss: only as such, can sacrifice be this negativity of death (un-useful, unproductive), that man must face for becoming it. But discourse, knowledge and reason give sense, and thus usefulness, to the sacrifice, they betray it. From being an end, sacrifice becomes a means. Bataille is clear: 'Sacrifice is only a way of being sovereign, autonomous, only to the extent that it is uninformed by meaningful discourse',[28] (which is somehow what Bataille does by giving an account of sacrifice)

Neither is Hegel's attitude more sovereign. But, it is not simply due to the fact that Hegel's prose is a discourse, which, conceals or annihilates the sovereign moment (through useful mediation). Rather, Hegel's discourse reveals what sovereignty is. Yet, it is not its final destination (its final aim), but an unwilled dead end. What Hegel's discourse wishes to reveal, finally, is the absolute spirit of Man (his wisdom) conscious of his negativity as death, an absolute spirit, which should be represented by and revealed in Hegel, the figure and the revelation (through his discourse) of the wise man. Only absolute wisdom can be sovereign (for Hegel). But sovereignty, for Bataille can be neither a means nor an aim towards certain ends, as it should be revealed in itself as an end (or at least as a means without further ends). Thus the project to seek an absolute and sovereign spirit (wisdom), cannot lead to sovereignty nor be sovereign itself as it either takes sovereignty as an aim, or is itself useful to other ends.

But Bataille, it seems paradoxically, still contends that there is a sovereign 'moment' in Hegel's discourse. Indeed, Hegel wrote that: 'Spirit attains its truth only by finding itself absolutely 'shattered' [in absolute dismemberment]'. Hegel, it seems, truly finds this 'absolute dismemberment'. But this 'absolute dismemberment' does not lead to the expected truth, 'wisdom', as no one can find it (as it will demand to be a living-dead: to face this negativity of death till one given-being become this negativity). Rather, this 'dismemberment' marks the 'accidental' encounter of another negativity that no one can grasp, understand, face or know: an ungraspable, unknowable, non-understandable, un-re-appropriable (by the dialectics) negativity.[29] This negativity is truly sovereign, in that it is non-useful and non-mediated. It does not serve reason or 'wisdom'. Hence, Bataille does not (he is not willing to) really discuss it (as I do?). This negativity only appears in the shadow of the failure of Hegel. A failure for which Hegel should not be condemned but highly praised (and this shows quite clearly how far Bataille's attitude towards Hegel is ambiguous):

> '*Do I intend to minimize Hegel's attitude? But the contrary is true! I want to show the incomparable scope of his approach. To that end I cannot veil the very minimal (and even inevitable) part of failure*'.[90]

Hegel attempted to know how man becomes truly Man, what it meant for the world surrounding him, and how to reach the absolute spirit. However, this attempt, according to Bataille, did not lead to a facing up to the negativity of death, then to become this negativity and finally to reach the summit of 'wisdom'. There is nothing beyond the stage of 'absolute dismemberment', at least nothing that reason, discourse and knowledge can grasp. Hegel preferred to '[be] the Positive that turns away from the Negative, as when we say of something: this is nothing or (this is) false and, having (thus) disposed of it, pass from there to something else [...]'. He mystically believed in the negativity of Man as a means towards absolute wisdom or spirit. Somehow he contended involuntarily that what is said was true: 'Death [...] is the most terrible thing there is and to uphold the work of death is the task which demands the greatest strength', a strength that even he himself, the 'wise Man', did not have. Nevertheless, as Bataille said, in what might be seen (in a typical Bataillan fashion) as the most extreme irreverence or the greatest homage:

> '*Hegel did not know to which extent he was right*'.[91]

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[27]. Ibid. p.342.
[28]. Ibid.
[29]. Ibid. p.344.
[90]. Ibid.
[91]. Ibid. p.339.

The second polarity of Hegel's philosophy, (of Kojeve's reading of Hegel's thought), that is, its concern for 'class fight and work', is also discussed by Bataille in 'Hegel, Man and History'.[92] There, he more or less accepts Kojeve's prophecy, yet he shows a rather different, from the Russian philosopher, understanding, not of what this so-called 'end of history' is, but of which 'history' this 'end' is, and of what it means for Man (humanity) and its Negativity (the death that Man should be).

For Kojeve, the negation of nature, is not only given within the 'consciousness' of death (of its negativity), but it is also exteriorized: it changes what is given (nature) through work. Man acts in the world and transforms this one, by fighting/working against nature. Hence the negativity of death (interiorized) is bound with the negativity of work (exteriorized).[93]

'Action' appears, in first instance, in the struggle of the 'Master' for recognition (a purely prestigious struggle). His struggle is a fight until death without any useful purpose. The master, as he accepts the risk of death without any 'biological' reasons (without having to fight for survival), is also sovereign. His fight aims at being recognized as the sovereign master, in front of which the other men are brought to their knees. But, within the struggle, recognition is the most important part: if the master were to kill his opponent, he would have no one to recognize him as master. Hence, he must reduce the other men to slavery.[94]

The slave, for Kojeve's Hegel, is the one who preferred life to death, whereas the Master preferred death to slavery. It is its 'free choice'. Slaves recognize the Master as the Master and work for him. The Master consumes without purpose the goods produced by the slaves. But in working, the Slave discovers its own negativity, he works against nature, he transforms it for the Master. The Slave becomes, as such, the Master of Nature and thus through his work frees himself from his 'natural' status (he is no more bound to the servile nature that he mastered) and consequently frees himself from the Master.[95]

The freedom of the Slaves would coincide with 'the end of history'. That is, Man having freed himself of all Masters his Action-negation disappears and himself with it. Man, as a living negation, disappears and with him philosophy (Hegelian discourse itself). Nothing new would happen, nothing truly new. Only play, art and love would last, as ineffective attitudes (ineffective in the perspective of historical development, as history is dead). Against this background Bataille's position (in 1956) is rather clear:

'Despite the prevailing way of thinking, I assume from now on, the end of history as an average truth, as an established truth'.[96]

Hence, Bataille agrees with the end of history, but this does not mean he agrees on the 'history' itself and its consequences for the Negative, for what is Man. Indeed, for Bataille, it is not simply a history of recognition and struggle for prestige, but the history of this history taken in the larger 'economy' (a general economy) of production and consumption, of accumulation and expenditure, of greed and squandering.

The end of history, for Bataille, as he perceives it in 1956, means the passage from a society of differences, of heterogeneous classes and attitudes, to a homogeneous society, within which differences are flattened.[97] It is for Man 'a reversal of the movement which carried him until now'.[98] Each man can see in himself Man, as he is now defined by his similarity to everyone else, whereas before, Man was defined by his difference to everyone else. Man returns to the animal he was, an animal who refuses to be different from its kind, who refuses to be the Hegelian Man, but who will dominate nature without negating it, as he will be completely integrated within it.

However, the history as described by Kojeve's Hegel, is somehow not dismissed but reframed by a larger historical construction. This is a historical frame, within which Man works and acts, negating nature or his kind, but more importantly, producing, through his work, always more

[92]. Georges Bataille, 'Hegel, l'homme et l'histoire', in OC XII, Gallimard, Paris, 1988. pp.349-69.
[93]. Ibid. p.350.
[94]. Ibid. p.351.
[95]. Ibid. p.354.
[96]. Ibid. p.363.
[97]. Ibid.
[98]. Ibid. p.364.

than is necessary for his subsistence, (somehow there is a surplus of Negativity: Negativity is not completely exhausted in biological subsistence).[99] For Bataille the central feature of history is not a struggle for recognition, but an oscillation around the outcome of production between growth (accumulation and reinvestment) on the one hand and on the other hand expenditure in pure loss or conspicuous consumption:

'[…] what matters economically is to maintain an oscillation between growth and conspicuous consumption, which has no proportionated growth as effect'.[100]

Hence, the Master not only chooses unproductive consumption through his struggle for prestige, there is 'a double movement',[101] the Master commands the slaves, thus the actions of the slaves are those, indirectly, of the Master, thus, the Master hypocritically produces. In the same way, the slave not only chooses to the accumulative production and slavery, he is also involved in the double movement: becoming his own master, he would also consume unproductively. The ex-slave who becomes bourgeois, in turn squanders a part of the production under the form of unproductive activity, such as expensive cars, jewels etc...

What happens now (in 1956), at the 'end of history', is the transformation of this squandering, of the excess of production (the surplus, unproductive) from a visible an unequal (heterogeneous) one, to a homogeneous (and hypocritical) one, allowing an increase in the level of the comfort of the workers: 'Luxury is suppressed and sublimated under the form of the commodity'.[102]

The desire for recognition, which animated the master as well as probably Hegel, is far beyond us. However, for Bataille there is nothing to regret, rather, one should be aware of the critical phase which is unfolding. Bataille seems to push the Hegelian dialectical process to its limit, by reversing its central equation (Death is negativity, man becomes Man when he becomes Negativity that is when he becomes Death). If history is dead (or dying) Man must also be dead, (or dying). Hence, he might (Man) look, finally, at this negativity (of death) in the eyes, he might tarry within the negative (as Hegel wished) in order to feel truly what he is: this strength of negativity. A negativity that is not recuperated (or addressed), negativity for itself, something absurd (laughable) to Hegelian reason (dialectics):

'Man is perhaps, nowadays, at the point of being abandoned by the movement which brought him to the fore; perhaps he is already abandoned. And it is for this precise reason that he [Man] could feel, as he never felt it before, what it is to be Man: this strength of Negativity, suspending for a moment the course of the world, reflecting it, because for an instant, he suspends it, but reflecting only its impuissance to suspend it. If it appeared to him that he truly suspends it, he would reflect only an illusion, because he does not suspend it. Man in truth does reflect the world only in being struck by death. At this moment he is sovereign, but this sovereignty escapes him (he also knows that, if he would maintain it, it would cease to be what it is…). He says, what the world is, but his words cannot disturb the silence, which spread all over. And he knows nothing only to the extent that the meaning of the knowledge he has, escapes him'.[103]

This strength of negativity, which is 'Man', is what Bataille sought all his life, but he was 'strong' enough to accept that he, as a simple man, could never find it, but could merely 'reflect' it through his writing on/of the excess. Hence, he did not oppose Hegel, as the 'Slave' should have done, by working towards becoming a productive negativity (a negativity suspending the course of the world). Bataille, as his critique and praise of Hegel indicates, worked from within the Hegelian system, pushing it to its limit, by praising positively (and ironically) its failure. Bataille demonstrated thus, how at the summit of the dialectical process there is no wise Man, no absolute knowledge or spirit, but only an unreachable, useless and without purpose, sovereignty; a sovereignty one can only glimpse momentarily in 'absolute dismemberment'. Doing so, he also contended that the 'end

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[99]. Ibid. p. 365.
[100]. Ibid. p. 366.
[101]. Ibid. p. 367.
[102]. Ibid. p. 369.
[103]. Ibid. p. 369.

of history' is not the end of Man and negativity, just the end of purpose of the Hegelian Negativity (negativity-action) and the end of Man's pretention (absolute spirit), which is, nevertheless, in some aspects, truly the end of history (history in Hegel's vision: the struggle of the negative towards the absolute spirit). A negativity survives the 'end of history', a negativity which is truly what Man is; a negativity one can perceive in Man's urge to squander, to destruction and to expend in pure loss. This negativity in excess of the Hegelian system, heterogeneous to the dialectical process, Bataille named, just at the dawn of the Second World War, in a critical letter addressed to Kojeve (1937): 'unemployed negativity'.

> *'If action ("doing") is, as Hegel says, negativity, the question arises as to whether the negativity of one who has "nothing more to do" disappears or remains in a state of "unemployed negativity"'.* [104]

Bataille's writing is nothing more than an attempt through a discourse *on* the negative (as what is in excess) to get a glimpse of this 'unemployed negativity': Bataille writing on/of the excess discusses what negativity is, while it releases its ungraspable aspect: this 'unemployed negativity'.

IV.7. Acephalic Community and Sacred Sociology

In the years leading up to the Second World War, Bataille furthered his interest in the questions raised by the unemployed negativity, the excess, the heterogeneous and the sacred mainly through two different, not directly linked, yet articulated organs (or groups): Acéphale and Le Collége de Sociologie. The two groups were not directly linked in the sense that the members of Acéphale did not take part in the College's Lectures (apart from Bataille only Pierre Klossowski did). Yet, both groups shared similar concerns: first, for finding a path for action outside science, art, conventional politics and philosophy, then for certain topics of reflection, the excess, the sacred and the heterogeneous.

As I already mentioned in the precededing chapter, Bataille declared in his 'Notice autobiographic' (which he wrote in the 1950s) that he considered the College as the 'external activity' of Acéphale. [105] Considering this quote, one might consider the hypothesis that Bataille's dualist and paradoxical thought, his discourse *on* the excess and his practice *of* the excess materialised in the pre-war years (1936-1939) through those articulated yet opposed groups: the College with his 'serious' name could be taken for the more academic and theoretical setting in which Bataille reflected and *wrote on the excess* (sacred/heterogeneous), while Acéphale with his pretension of conspiracy, and Bataille's 'weird' instructions for arriving at its secret meetings in the Marly Forest, [106] could be seen as the most singular example of an excessive collective behaviour, the sign of an 'interior experience': a means through which Bataille *practised the excess* (outside of writing, of course). This hypothesis is seductive, yet it is incomplete. Probably, as Bataille acknowledged it, Acéphale and the College were articulated, yet it is perhaps not as simple as it might seem. Acéphale had its own journal, *Acéphale*, which, although its contributors were in the great majority not members of the group, discussed topics related to their practices and influenced them. *Acéphale* (the journal) produced a *discourse on* the excess, which intellectually fed the members of Acéphale (the group) interested in the *practice of* this excess. The College (although its name might lead one to believe it) was not an academic institute. For Bataille the College was busy with what he named, a 'Sacred Sociology'. Obviously, the sacred and the heterogeneous were discussed there. Yet, sociology was not, within the College's wall, put to use (at least by Bataille) as a conventional scientific method or perspective allowing him to 'dissert' on those topics. For Bataille, the aim of the College was not simply to define what this methodology might have been, that is to define this notion of 'Sacred Sociology', but to 'practise' it, 'Sacred Sociology' not as an aim, but as an end. In the following segment I hope to show that Bataille's writing on/of the excess, the dualism at the core of his thought, did not materialize simply through Acéphale (practice) against the College (discourse), but is, paradoxically, displayed within both enterprises.

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[104]. Georges Bataille, 'Lettre a X, chargé d'un cours sur Hegel', in OC V, Gallimard, Paris, 1973. pp.369-71

[105]. Georges Bataille, 'Notice autobiographique', in OC VII, Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p. 461.

[106]. See, Georges Bataille, 'Instruction pour la "rencontre" en forêt', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 277.

Bataille wrote in April 1936, a note entitled 'Programme', in which he outlines what Acéphale, the group and its aims, should be: Acéphale had to be a community (in itself) establishing certain values which should in their turn create a social cohesion. However the values in question have nothing to do with the usual values of a homogeneous community: Bataille demands that 'Man' affirms 'the function of destruction and decomposition but like an achievement and not like a negation of being'. [107] Thus, certain heterogeneous practices, habits in excess of the profane world, such as crime and perversion should not be excluded but taken as integral parts of 'Man's' condition. 'Man' can only reach the totality of being by becoming conscious of his true nature and condition as a whole. Then, as social cohesion is not achieved through the suppression of heterogeneous behaviour, but paradoxically, through their affirmation, it will not be sustained by reason and the law. 'Man' will finally perceive the universe as it truly is: 'acephalic, play and not state or obligation'.[108] Consequently and obviously, this 'acephalic and universal community', of the self-conscious 'Man', would lead to the decomposition and exclusion of any other community such as 'nationalists, socialists, and communists communities or churches'.[109]

Hence, Bataille proposes within his 'Programme' to embrace the excess in order to form a community that would decompose all existing communities (bourgeois, nationalist, capitalist and Marxist-socialist) but would allow 'Man', first, to become fully conscious of his nature and, subsequently, to free him, or better said, to release him as a 'total being'. This was the plan, but, how to achieve it? Although Bataille already states in his 'Programme' what Man should do or what he should become conscious of in order to establish this 'acephalic and universal community', the question remained as to how this 'community', made up of heterogeneous elements, could avoid simply becoming a fascist state (as Bataille foresaw, in his 'Psychological structure of Fascism')?

Bataille gives the beginning of an answer to this problem in the piece he wrote, in June 1936, for the first issue of *Acéphale* (the journal): 'The Sacred Conspiracy'.[110] Bataille, there explains that his take on the excess and the sacred should not lead to political activity, even less to the formation of a political party or doctrine, but to the bringing forth, if not of a religion, at least of a religious, mystic and aggressive movement:

> *'It is necessary to produce and to eat: many things are necessary that are still nothing, and so it is with political agitation. [...] If nothing can be found beyond political activity, human avidity will meet nothing but a void. WE ARE FEROCIOUSLY RELIGIOUS and, to the extent that our existence is the condemnation of everything that is recognized today, an inner exigency demands that we be equally imperious'.[111]*

The realm of political debates and struggle is still a useful realm. It is just as 'necessary' as work, production and assimilation. Furthermore, as work and production are always dependent on their ends (what is produced), for Bataille they are servile. Politics too, as they are a means to a certain end, as they are useful and necessary, are servile. But, as Bataille demands that 'Man' free himself from all servitude, if there is a path towards that freedom, it must itself be non-servile: it must stand as an activity beyond all usefulness and necessity: it must be in excess (heterogeneous) of the profane world (homogeneous) of work, production and political action and debate. Hence, to follow this 'path' demands an abandonment of conventional 'politics'. But what was this 'path', exactly?

It appears that Bataille claimed that he and his companions were 'ferociously religious'. This would reasonably lead the reader to understand, that in consequence, the acephalic universal community, that Bataille sought to instigate, being neither a political party nor a revolutionary group, was simply a 'mystic' community. But in what way could this 'mystic' or religious community avoid becoming also a kind of totalitarian movement? Said differently, what is the difference between a fascist state and an extremist religious regime?

Bataille contends that 'Man', within the profane world, is servile because 'He' is necessary to the profane vision of the universe. 'Man' is the reason and the 'head' commanding/giving sense

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[107]. Georges Bataille, 'Programme', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 273.
[108]. Ibid.
[109]. Ibid.
[110]. Georges Bataille, 'La Conjuration Sacrée', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 442-6.
[111]. Ibid. pp. 442-3.

to the universe (understood in a profane perspective).[112] God, who is made according to its own image, is just a prior substitute to this enlightened 'Man' (a reason/head for the universe prior to enlightenment theory). Hence, 'Man' would become free if 'He' truly abandons his role as the one who 'keeps the rest of things from being absurd'.[113] The free 'Man' will escape his position as the 'head/reason' of the universe, which would also mean that 'He':

'[…] has escaped from his head just as the condemned man has escaped from his prison. He has found beyond himself not God, who prohibits crime, but a being who is unaware of prohibition. Beyond what I am, I meet a being who makes me laugh because he is headless; he fills me with dread because he is made of innocence and crime; he holds a steel weapon in his left hand, flames like those of a Sacred Heart in his right. He reunites in the same eruption birth and death. He is not a man. He is not a god either. He is not me but he is more than me; his belly is the labyrinth in which he has lost himself, loses me with him, and in which I find myself being him, this is to say monster'.[114]

Thus, when Bataille writes that he is 'ferociously religious', he does not mean that he wishes to go back, literally, to the Catholicism of his youth. His religion is other. Catholicism is useful, as it promises a life after death to the believer who lives outside of sin. What 'Man' would find after his death is an eternal and immutable God, an ideal human, promising him salvation, but what Bataille's religion or mysticism proposes to 'Man' is not the insurance of life after death, (of salvation). What 'Man' will find 'beyond himself' is not God but the figure of Acephale: a being without a head. Bataille's religion is a feverish movement towards death; a death in which neither God, a head and reason will be found, nor nothing, but rather something present which marks the absence of those (a-cephale).

Bataille's acephalic universal community is thus constituted of acephalic beings: beings who escaped their heads while they are paradoxically heading joyfully towards their deaths. Beings for whom religion and mysticism is to be found in knowing (or attempting to know), what can't be known: the absence of head/reason in the universe, the absence of God. Hence, this religious or mystic community does not lead to a fascist state or an extremist clerical regime but to a community attempting to constantly slaughter any summit/head/reason which tries to control it, that is to homogenize it: a community of playful and ungraspable excesses. But, must not a religion, even the religion marking the absence of God, have, if not an aim (useful) and a doctrine, at least some way to proceed (towards non-useful ends)?

In the fifth and last issue of *Acéphale* (the journal), Bataille wrote (anonymously) an essay, 'The practice of joy before death', which can be read as an attempt to unveil how 'Man' could be this 'acephalic being', henceforth forming this religious or mystic community without a head. The essay is interesting in many ways: first, because it pretends, at first sight (as its title indicated) to dissert on this 'practice' (of the joy before death); secondly, because it does not really do so; finally, because it expresses fairly well the tension within Bataille's writing on/of the excess.

The essay is composed of a three pages introduction and of six following segments which are spread on the same number of pages. The segments are a collection of aphorisms, such as 'I abandon myself to peace, to the point of annihilation', 'I myself am war',[115] which seems to refer to what might be this 'Practice of joy before death'. Those segments taken away from their introduction might be seen as Bataille's method of religious practice, as his method of meditation; hence for a *discourse on* how to reach a certain religious ecstasy (the joy before death), how to be the acephalic being, therefore how to form the religious community of Acephale. Yet, this is not the case. Bataille's introduction warns the reader:

'The texts that follow cannot alone constitute an initiation into the exercise of a mysticism of "joy before death". While admitting that a method of initiation might exist, they do not represent even a part of it. Since oral initiation is itself difficult, it is impossible to give in a few pages more than a vague representation of that which by nature cannot be grasped. On the

[112]. Ibid. p. 445.
[113]. Ibid.
[114]. Ibid.
[115]. Georges Bataille, 'La Pratique de la Joie devant la Mort', in O C I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 555-6.

whole, these writings represent, not exercises strictly speaking, more simple descriptions of a contemplative state or of an ecstatic contemplation'.[116]

For Bataille, the aphorisms are just descriptions, written after the fact, of what is this 'joy before death'. They cannot constitute a real 'initiation' into it. This seems logical, as no one would find this 'joy' by simply reading those aphorisms outside of their context. But what Bataille tries to write is also more complex. The 'practice of Joy before death' is what allows Man to 'escape his head': that is to escape reason, logic and thus discourse. Hence, the problem is (again) how to write *on*, how to produce a discourse *on* what escapes discourse? There is something in excess of reason, discourse, logic and thought that could free Man. But, as this excess is by definition ungraspable by those, a discourse can't be written *on* it. This excess can only be experienced (in a textual form) through his own writing *of* the writing *of* the excess, which can (perhaps paradoxically) only be released, within/through the writing *on*. The practice of 'joy before death' is not really controlled/discussed by the eponymous essay; rather, it is released as excess, in which the self might be lost, through this essay. The essay pretends to produce a discourse/method on the 'practice of joy before death', but it can't, as this one escapes discourse. Yet, it releases this excess by failing to live up to its own pretensions. The absence of a 'real' method for the 'practice' leads the reader to be overwhelmed by a feeling (perhaps laughter) fairly similar to the paradoxical joy (not simple happiness but also dread) in front of the absence of the reality of death and God: the 'practice of joy before death'. (Is it so? Or did I miss the point by disserting on it?).

Thus, when one regards 'Acéphale' as an enterprise in its wholeness – if one considers Acéphale, the group and *Acéphale*, the journal, as different (due to their constitutive members) yet bound (due to their interests) organs – it appears that the tension of Bataille's writing on/of the excess materialized clearly within it. Between Acéphale (the group) – the acephalic society attempting to form a mystic-religious community of beings affirming a communal practice of the excess – and *Acéphale* (the journal) – in which Bataille theorized a discourse on the excess, by writing essays directly concerned with the nature and modus operandi of the acephalic community (such as 'The Sacred Conspiracy') or discussing the work of Nietzsche as a major precursor ('Nietzsche and the fascists',[117] 'Nietzschean Chronicle',[118] and 'Nietzsche's madness'[119]) – the duality of the excess' practice and theorization at the heart of Bataille's thought manifests itself physically. But, it is also more than that as the practice of the excess was not limited to the habits of the Acéphale group (the meetings in the Marly forest). With the 'Practice of joy before death' (the essay), Bataille gave us a singular example of his writing on/of the excess in that the essay attempts to theorize what escapes his discursive form. Consequently, the essay, through the failure of the discourse *on*, that is, through his failure as a discursive form, releases this excess: the writing of the excess took the form of the writing *on*, in appearance only.

Besides Bataille's claim –which appears in his autobiographical note (written in 1955) – that Acéphale and the College were somehow articulated, an essay written in 1937, clearly indicated how far both enterprises were intertwined: 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice'.[120]

In this essay, Bataille contends that science, politics and art (fiction) cannot permit to Man to access the plenitude of his full existence (and thus the totality of being). The three are subordinated means to particular ends. They lead the individual taking part in them to be subordinated to those ends too, and thus not free: he is not able to live his full life through them because he precisely lives it through them toward their ends. The only way which remains available to Man to reach his full or total existence is, 'Myth':

'Myth remains at the disposal of one who cannot be satisfied by art, science, or politics. [...] For myth is not only the divine figure of destiny and the world where this figure moves, it cannot be separated from the community to which it belongs and which ritually assumes its dominion. It would be fiction if the accord that people manifest in the agitation of festivals did not make it a vital human reality. Myth is perhaps fable, but this fable is placed in opposition

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[116]. Ibid. p. 553.
[117]. Georges Bataille, 'Nietzsche et les fascistes', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 447-65.
[118]. Georges Bataille, 'Chronique nietzschéenne, in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 477-90.
[119]. Georges Bataille, 'La folie de Nietzsche', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 545-9.
[120]. Georges Bataille, 'L'apprenti sorcier', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 523-37.

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to fiction if one looks at the people who dance it, who act it, and for whom it is living truth. [...] A myth thus cannot be assimilated to the scattered fragments of a dissociated group. It is solidarity with total existence, of which it is the tangible expression'.[121]

This essay shows clearly how far Acéphale and the College of Sociology were intertwined. First it is published in a supplement to the July 1938 issue of the *Nouvelle Revue Francaise* (NRF) entitled 'FOR A COLLEGE OF SOCIOLOGY' which contains only texts written by Bataille, Caillois, and Leiris, the three main protagonists of the College,[122] then, a footnote on the first page, referring directly to the title, makes it very clear that this essay proposes a very specific take on sociology as a 'science'. The footnote reads:

'This text does not exactly constitute a sociological study, but the definition of a point of view through which the results of sociology can appear as responses to the most virile concerns, and not to a specialized scientific preoccupation. Sociology itself in fact, has difficulty avoiding a critique of pure science to the extent that it is a phenomenon of dissociation. If the social fact represents by itself the totality of existence, and if science is only a fragmentary activity, then the science that envisages the social fact cannot attain its object if that object, to the extent that it is attained, becomes the negation of science's principles'.[123]

This quote announces what is, for Bataille, the problem of science and sociology and consequently intuits the peculiar nature of his 'Sacred sociology'. Finally, a last proof of the ties between the College and Acéphale can be found in the last segment of the text. There Bataille articulates a set of terms proper to Acéphale — 'secret society', 'Myth' — with the central object of 'study' of the 'sociology' of the College — the 'sacred':

'The requirements of mythological invention are only more rigorous. They do not refer — as a rudimentary conception would have it — to obscure faculties of collective invention. But they would refuse to see any value in figures whose share of willed arrangement has not been set apart with the rigor proper to 'sacred' feeling. [...] Secrecy, in the domain where [the sorcerer's apprentice] advances, is no less necessary to his strange procedures [...]. The secret society is precisely the name of the social reality constituted by these procedures. Myth is born in ritual acts hidden from the static vulgarity of disintegrated society, but the violent dynamism that belongs to it has no other object than the return to lost totality'.[124]

For Bataille, as 'myth' is deeply intertwined with the 'sacred', its 'rebirth' should be 'sacred' itself. As the 'sacred' is heterogeneous to the homogeneous and profane realm, the 'sorcerer's apprentice' (and its 'acephalic' society) on his way to re-create a 'myth' must act with an obscure secrecy. That is, he must act in a way heterogeneous to the clarity (and fragmentation) of science, art and political action. This also helps to explain the nature of the 'Sacred Sociology' of the College (or rather of Bataille): perhaps a science, in appearance, but one with a secret agenda (to unveil/implement a sacred 'myth' as the fundamental core of all communities and societies); hence a science in appearance only.

In a note published in the third issue of *Acéphale* (the journal), and entitled 'Note on the foundation of a College of Sociology' Bataille presents his new enterprise, its object but also, and perhaps most importantly the problem it wishes to tackle, what might be called its 'aim'.

The 'College of Sociology', as mentioned in the preceding chapter, was not an institute awarding its students degrees and diplomas, nor was it a research institute for university level scholars, rather it offered the facility of a two year lectures-series through which a group of intellectuals interested in sociology could gather to exchange ideas around a particular topic. This topic, the object of the College, Bataille named 'sacred sociology'.[125] The college was, at least for Bataille, a 'moral community' different from the one which usually unites scholars due to the

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[121]. Ibid. pp. 535-6
[122]. See, notes in Georges Bataille, OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 649.
[123]. Georges Bataille, 'L'apprenti sorcier', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 523.
[124]. Ibid. p. 537.
[125]. Georges Bataille, 'Note sur la fondation d'un Collège de Sociologie', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 492.

virulence of its object of inquiry as well as the consequences of its finding. For the 'sacred sociology' (according to Bataille) was not really the object of a 'scientific study' but of an activity.[126] Bataille contends that the then recent scientific discoveries in the studies of social structures were promising but also incomplete —due to their epistemological limitation (French sociology focused, at that time, essentially on past and primitive societies, not on modern ones)—and rather 'shy' – as those results/discoveries have not profoundly changed the 'postulates and spirit of research'.[127] Why was it so, at least in 1937? According to Bataille, the findings (results) of a sociology interested in contemporary societies would be 'necessarily' contagious and 'active',[128] leading, to a certain collective consciousness and, perhaps, to some societal changes. Hence, Bataille proposed that from its birth, the College should not simply study its 'object' but that it should renders it 'active', sociology being from the outset, not simply perceived as a quiet and reflexive science but as a disturbing and radical 'activity'. The college, although a semi-public group, shared with Acéphale an obvious radicalism, but what precisely was this 'sacred sociology'?

In the inaugural lecture of the College, Bataille gave a brief definition of 'sacred sociology': it should not be confounded with a 'religious sociology' (a sociology only studying the religious functions), and it was not a sub-part of the sociological science. It perhaps studied different institutions and their impact on society (such as the religious ones), yet, it focused more specifically on something in excess of the parts/institutions of society; what Bataille called the ' movement of communion' of society, that which 'creates unity' within society:

> *'Sacred sociology is not for us simply a part of sociology as, for example, religious sociology is [...]. Sacred sociology can be considered as the study not only of the religious institutions, but of the entire movement of communion of society'.*[129]

This 'movement of communion' in excess of society (as the simple sum of its part) is, for Bataille, 'sacred' as much as everything within human existence, which is relative to communion.[130] But Bataille also contends that before attempting to fully grasp the meaning of this 'sacred sociology', one should do certain groundwork; one should first answer the following question: what is society?

Society, for Bataille, is more than simply the sum of its part.[131] It can be considered as a being in itself, or more precisely a 'composed being'. It is different from the 'mass' of 'organisms', which it contains. This difference consists precisely in its presentation of something in excess of this mass, a movement of communion between its parts. Furthermore between the individual and society there should be, according to Bataille, an intermediate entity also founded on a movement of communion, the community. However, there can be two forms of community: the traditional one (to which, ipso-facto everyone belongs, and in which the 'communal movement' is disappearing or weakening) and other ones which Bataille names the 'elective communities' (which are recently born out of a renewed movement of communion, and which are challenging the 'traditional community') as for example with secret societies (here, obviously, one can think of Acephale).[132] This movement of communion which forms a community, this 'something' which leads a community (or society) to be more than the simple sum of its part (as a composed being), actually appears through what Bataille calls 'communication'.

During the last meeting of the College, Bataille delivered a lecture which clarifies what this communication is, and which expounds on its importance for community/society, as well as for the College of Sociology (as itself a community or society). This last meeting should have been the occasion for the organisers (Bataille, Caillois and Leiris) of the College, to discuss its development, to reformulate its aim, and perhaps, to assess its findings or, at least, to debate the divergences among its different speakers. However, as mentioned in the preceding chapter, due to profound (although diverse) disagreements with him, both Caillois and Leiris abandoned Bataille, leaving him alone in front of the audience to conclude the second year of activity of the College, a second

[126]. Ibid.
[127]. Ibid.p.491.
[128]. Ibid.
[129]. Georges Bataille and Roger Caillois, 'La sociologie sacrée et les rapports entre "société", "organisme" et "être", in *Le Collège de Sociologie*, ed. Denis Hollier, Gallimard, Paris, 1995. p.36.
[130]. Ibid.p.37.
[131]. Ibid.p.39.
[132]. Ibid.pp.52-4.

year which would also become, due to the Second World War, the last one. Instead of silencing the 'crisis' the College was undergoing (the crisis between him, Caillois and Leiris), Bataille took it as the point of departure for his last lecture:

> *'Thus I have every reason to introduce today, as one of the expressions of a state of crisis, an effort at elucidation. I will therefore try to show how the development of the College of Sociology carried within itself the necessity of the present crisis, only too happy to have gone to the bases of my thought, not in the calm of solitary reflection but in the disorder of dispute'.*[133]

Then, Bataille goes on to explain the path 'his' position or thought has taken. His starting point is 'being's absence of unity'.[134] Being is itself composed of other beings. For example an individual is composed of organs and cells, but also, what he is truly, his being, is composed through his relation with other individuals. In the same way a community is composed of a certain number of individuals but it is also a movement of composition with other communities, in order to create a greater community, society. Thus, 'Being' cannot be grasped without the dismemberment of another being, hence a wound. Said differently, the defence of an identity (of being), is contrary to the bringing forth of unity: it is the rupture or disequilibrium of a larger or smaller entity (itself ungraspable without dismemberment); being, paradoxically, is the transgression of being.

Building on 'his' examples of eroticism and the collective sacrifice (as in ceremony or carnival), Bataille arrives at the following conclusion:

> *'I propose to admit, as a law, that human beings are only united with each other through dismemberments or wounds; this notion has, in itself, a certain logical force. If elements are put together to form a whole, this can easily happen when each one loses, through a rip in its integrity, a part of its own being, which goes to benefit the communal being'.*[135]

Two individuals unite, for example, at the peak of eroticism: through an orgasm. They become one, but they also lose, at this moment and thus ephemerally, their integrity, as the expression the 'little death' illustrates it. In collective sacrifices and fests, a group of individuals squander their goods (as in a potlatch), or even their values and identities (as in carnival where the one who wears a mask loses a part of its identity and allows himself to take part in practices contrary to his morals or ethics, which is the essence of this masquerade).

Furthermore, this loss of integrity, of a part of its own being, is for Bataille not simply a wound, but a wound through which a sum of 'forces' or 'energies', in excess, is released. These constitute the 'sacred' as much as the practices through which they are released are 'sacred'. Hence, Bataille states:

> *'Thus, I can say that the "sacred" is communication between beings, and thereby the formation of beings'.*[136]

If the communication, (as a wound in the integrity of being) which leads to the foundation of a 'movement of communion', itself necessary to the formation of society as a 'composed being' (a being which is more than the sum of its parts), is 'sacred', then, it makes perfect sense, that the sociology in charge of, perhaps, studying this society, but more essentially, of unveiling, that is of 'communicating' on it, has to be 'sacred' itself: 'sacred sociology'.

Moreover, if a community is only formed by human beings *'which are only united with each other through dismemberments or wounds'*, then, it could be said, that the 'College' as itself a 'community' of individuals discussing the excess, the heterogeneous and the sacred, never appeared more unified than at the moment of its disbanding. Indeed, if one follows Bataille, the College of Sociology only 'became' truly a 'community' reaching its object of 'activity' (the society/community animated by the sacred) at the very moment where the individuals having

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[133]. Georges Bataille, 'Le Collège de Sociologie' in *Le Collège de Sociologie*, ed. Denis Hollier, Gallimard, Paris, 1995. p.803.
[134]. Ibid. p.804.
[135]. Ibid. p.808.
[136]. Ibid. p.809.

formed it (Bataille, Caillois and Leiris) had to lose, partially the integrity of their being, of their beliefs on sociology, the sacred, community and society.

The problem seems to have been again how to write the excess? How to write what exceeds (among other things) writing as a discourse *on*, or written through the terms I just discussed, how to communicate on such a 'communication'? Can an expenditure or a release of energy, a wound in the ephemeral unity of being, be written or uttered as anything other than an 'active' wound? Perhaps the College succeeded in solving those questions? Or is it Bataille who succeeded in it, alone? This last question does matter, as it is linked to what Bataille called the 'final question of man, and further as the final question of being'. That is:

'[...] it is difficult to know to what extent the community is but the favourable occasion for a festival and a sacrifice, or to what extent the festival and the sacrifice bear witness to the love individuals give to the community'.[137]

To this 'last' question, which Bataille never definitively answered, but with which he, with strength and modesty, permanently attempted to grapple, I of course, don't have an answer. Rather, against what has preceded, I wish to note what appears to be obvious, that the College was not simply (at least in Bataille's mind) attempting to formulate a discourse on the 'sacred/ heterogeneous/ excess' through the lens of the then recent discoveries of the French branch of sociology. Within the different lectures Bataille wrote for the College, one can perceive an evident writing *on* the excess (as the sacred is discussed) but also, and most importantly, conjoined with this discourse, a writing *of* the excess (as the 'sacred sociology' of Bataille led to the formation of a community of intellectuals through the release of the 'sacred' as the 'violence' of its 'communication'). Did I communicate too much, or not enough on it? Do you feel wounded? Do we share something? Are we lost?

IV.8. Inner Experience

Hence, two (or is it the same one?) fundamental and paradoxical questions emerge clearly from Bataille's thoughts. First (is it?), the ethical-theoretical one: is the excess or release of excess (squander, sacrifice, eroticism, word-play, drunkenness, gambling, unemployed negativity etc...) a means to the stability of a system (society, being, science, philosophy etc...)? Or are those systems simple frames in which 'Man's' orgiastic need to exceed and expend finds an adequate playground: a means for the individual practice of the excess? Then, the second question would be the ethical-practical one: how is one to write about what *per se* escapes, exceeds or is in excess of writing itself? (If I repeat myself: how one should write a discourse *on* the excess without betraying the object of this discourse?). And, how could one write this excess, (perhaps through a writing *of* the excess, a writing releasing and not concealing this excess), but without simply isolating oneself in a pure word-formal-play?

A notion, which is also the title of a very important book for Bataille, if not answering or taking sides in those questions/debates, at least renders them not simply 'seminal and essential' but rather 'final and useless': the 'Inner Experience'. *The Inner Experience* is a book of which Bataille wrote the 'essential' part during the Second World War and composed the 'rest' with fragments published and/or written before. Its first part consists of a 'Sketch of an Introduction to *Inner Experience*' in which Bataille attempts to separate this 'experience' from others, whether mystical, dogmatic or religious. Part two, 'The Torment' presents itself as a kind of journal recording the emergence of a peculiar way of 'thinking'. Part three consists of collected essays and texts written before the war (some already published), while part four offers further philosophical excursus on the nature of the experience recounted in 'the Torment'. Finally, the last part consists of five pages of short poetries. The book as a whole was meant to be a 'part' within a greater (composed) whole; a trilogy of books (with *Guilty* and On *Nietzsche*) entitled, in a parody of Saint Thomas Aquinas' *Summa*, *The Atheologic Sum*.

The 'inner experience', the notion that this book, *The Inner Experience*, would logically discuss, is neither an experience as an 'event' through which the subject went: a past 'experience' of which its origin can be recalled, its unfolding simply described and thus recorded/homogenized

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[137]. Ibid. pp. 809-10.

as such; nor it is an experience as an 'experimentation' towards certain aims: the 'inner experience' is its own authority as 'contestation',[138] it has no productive goal or end outside of itself;[139] nor it is concerned with giving an account of the 'interior' condition of the self (the subject or being) going through an experience (as the term 'inner' might lead one to think). If this experience has an 'interior' or is 'inner' it is because, having no other end than itself, it consequently has no reference or object 'outside' itself (neither knowledge, nor God, nor the relaxed state of the yoga-addict); but also because those terms ('inner' and 'interior') indicate the coordinates from where this peculiar 'experience' is unleashed:

> *'Inner experience responds to the necessity in which I find myself – human existence with me – of challenging everything (to question) without permissible rest. […] I say at once that it leads to no harbour (but to a place of bewilderment, of nonsense). I wanted non-knowledge to be its principle […]. But this experience born of non-knowledge remains there decidedly. It is not beyond expression, one does not betray it if one speaks of it, but it steals from the mind the answers it still had to the questions of knowledge. Experience reveals nothing and cannot found belief nor set out from it. Experience is, in fever and anguish, the putting into question (to the test) of that which a man knows of being'.[140]*

This 'inner experience' is a practice, which actually attempts, restlessly, to unveil the limits of experience itself, and consequently what lies beyond: what is in excess of it. But, as for Bataille, experience is what 'Man' goes through, but also what discloses what 'Man' is truly (a being in 'process' without purpose) – Man's being can only appear, as what it is, through 'experience'—the play at the limits of 'experience' is also the play at the limits of 'being', unveiling what exceeds it. Hence, the 'inner experience' critical 'moment' is when a certain continuity/unity – which is what renders 'being' unified, but, also what, interestingly enough, supports the narration of an 'experience'—breaks and thus finds its 'proper' limit or 'end' and what lies beyond. Bataille:

> *'I call experience a voyage to the end of man'.[141]*

Hence, the very 'finality' of the 'inner experience' – which is not outside of itself as it unveils 'Man's' being – is to question this 'being' (its limits). Moreover, as Bataille contends that 'being' appears nowhere,[142] (there is no unitary being, only what might, with precaution, be called a 'relational' being) the 'experience' leads, actually, to the squandering of 'being' as a philosophically defined unity; But also, as it is the test of 'that which man knows of being', it leads to the contestation, and finally, squandering (or at least neutralization) of knowledge itself. Conventional 'being' is squandered but no new 'being' can be found, as knowledge – what allows one to know what being is, that is to define its limits – is rendered useless, as it defines only a 'restricted' (isolated) being. The individual, abandoning itself to the 'inner experience', is taken in a certain 'anguish' or 'dread' toward non-knowledge, as its own 'being', or at least his 'rational', bound to knowledge, belief in his unified 'being' appears as 'impossible'. Then, his quest, 'defining' him, that is this 'inner experience', appears as a useless jump into 'non-knowledge':

> *'[…] the sole truth of man, glimpsed at last, is to be a supplication without response'.[143]*

Thus, for Bataille at the 'summit' of subjectivity, at the moment when Man, interrogating (through the 'inner experience') himself (being), discovers his truth (being is nowhere), he perceives in dread what he somehow has just accomplished. But, this is also more complex. It is not just that the 'summit' of subjectivity *is* its own absence or that it *is* not present. But, when one reaches the 'summit' of subjectivity there *is* something instead of the presence or absence of being: actually there is nothing at the 'summit', but there was something all along the way leading to the summit –

[138]. Georges Bataille, *L'expérience intérieure*, in OC V, Gallimard, Paris, 1973. p.24.
[139]. Ibid. p.18.
[140]. Ibid. pp.15-6.
[141]. Ibid. p.19
[142]. Ibid. p.98.
[143]. Ibid. p.25.

the experience of an individual taken by dread — something which escapes discourse and knowledge but also 'being' (as unified/limited), something in excess of them, something which is the (non-) truth of 'being', that is not nothing, i.e. more than simply absent or present, something *other* which means that 'there is no more limited existence'.[144] But is this 'practice' or path towards the summit of subjectivity, this contestation a lonely one?

As Bataille contends that 'being is nowhere' and a 'limited existence' is impossible through the 'inner experience', it seems logical that the 'self' can't 'live' this experience alone. Indeed, as being is 'lost', how can it be going 'alone' through that experience? For Bataille the 'inner experience' opens 'being' onto a greater 'being', the community which, is in itself unbound by limits. Contestation (which is nothing more than 'inner experience') opens onto a kind of communication, which forms the community. But communication and community should not (as was the case with Bataille's understanding of the terms at the time of the College/Acephale), be understood as what we usually call communication and community. Communication is not like an exchange of information, rather, for Bataille, it is a 'flow' that animates the world outside of the falsely unified self. Thus, communication is not what 'supports' the self, but a 'flow' in which, 'being' loses itself or 'drowns'. In Bataille's communication, 'being' releases himself from his false unity and opens onto a community (this world animated by the flow of communication), itself not limited (the flow reaches beyond its proper boundaries).[145]

Hence, *The Inner Experience* somehow clarifies (although it is paradoxical to say that about such a book), the question of whether sacrifice, expenditure and practice of the excess are the means to achieve stability for a community, or the community the simple frame of the individual practice of the excess. Bataille does not answer to this question with that book, but rather reaffirms it in a non-interrogative, yet paradoxical, way. The 'inner experience' is an individual practice of the excess, a contestation without purpose for the 'collective' (at first sight), a personal jump into non-knowledge, but, *also* the way to ensure temporarily, the emergence of a community, *until*, it itself opens onto an 'inner experience' questioning its very 'being'. There is no choice to be made. There is only an oscillation between two irreducible processes, which cannot be dialectically resolved. But how did Bataille himself communicate this?

Bataille specifies that 'inner experience' is 'contestation', perhaps for its own sake, but most importantly of 'the law of language'[146] and which, a little earlier in the text he referred to as 'discourse'. Indeed, 'inner experience' as it also releases 'being' from its discursive (philosophy, science) definitions, appears obviously as an attempt to transgress the limits imposed by 'discourse'. But 'as a matter of fact, contestation would remain powerless within us if it limited itself to discourse [...]'.[147] Hence, contestation should, in itself depart from discourse: but how?

The second question with which I introduced this section on 'inner experience', re-surfaces here: how is one to write in a discursive form about something that escapes discourse, without homogenizing/betraying it? Bataille does not give a method (or a discourse on a method) but rather the example of a word, which, although it is also defined, somehow escapes its definition; a word which is 'slippery': the word *silence*.[148] This word is not outside of discourse, yet it is not completely 'under' discourse's control. Indeed, the consciousness that one has of the experience of it (the experience of silence), is never completely mirrored within the word's definition. There is something of the 'experience' of silence that remains outside, as in excess of discourse. The utterance of such a word, as it breaks the stability, limits and control of discourse, is a means for the 'contestation' to proceed.

Hence, what Bataille (following Blanchot), calls 'contestation' is very similar to what I call the writing *of* the excess: a writing which unfolds itself within a discursive form but which also transgresses discourse, by releasing something in excess of it. Within the pages of *The Inner Experience*, this 'slippery' contestation is not only visible in Bataille's example of 'silence', indeed, although I attempted (did I?) to discursively define what the 'inner experience' is, the expression in itself ('inner experience') brings a lot of confusions: it is also a 'slippery word'. Furthermore, the book as a whole is 'slippery'. One can only give a very precarious definition of it. Is it a journal, a theoretical essay, a philosophical study, a long introduction to a few pages of poetry? *The Inner*

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[144]. Ibid.p.40.
[145]. See Ibid.pp. 110-5
[146]. Ibid.p.27.
[147]. Ibid.p.26.
[148]. Ibid.p.28.

Experience, as a book, attempts to dissert on an 'experience' leading towards an excess, beyond knowledge, science, philosophy, being and 'experience' itself. All of this in a discursive form which does not allow itself to keep its grip on what exceeds it. If I homogenize, and thus betray the 'silence' of this book — or there would always be a piece of 'silence', which remains heterogeneous? — I would say that *The Inner Experience*, the book, *is* Bataille's writing on/of the excess.

IV.9. Eroticism

A lot of Bataille's books and texts — to name but a few, *Madame Edwarda*, *The story of the Eye*, *The Pineal Eye* or *The Blue of Noon* — are conventionally seen as examples of an 'erotic' or even 'pornographic' literary genre. However, if one looks to what Bataille calls 'eroticism' and, in parallel, carefully investigate the way he writes about it, it becomes clear that if Bataille's oeuvre is 'erotic' it is definitively not so in any conventional sense. Of course, as I just said, some of his writings describe certain 'erotic' encounters while some others theoretically discuss 'eroticism', but there is more. The oeuvre in itself is part of an erotic endeavour, Bataille's prose, (what might be called, for the sake of homogeneous clarity, its content, its form, and most importantly, their conjoining), is a means of leading towards an 'erotic' experience. In other words, Bataille's writing on/of the excess is in itself 'erotic'.

Bataille published a book in 1957 entitled *Eroticism* in which he attempted to theorize his take on this subject. This book is, actually, a reworked version of his unpublished (during his life time) second volume of *The Accursed Share: The History of Eroticism* from 1950-51, a volume already rewritten, at the time of his *Sovereignty* (which should have been the third volume of *The Accursed Share*), in 1953-54. Moreover, according to the editors of his *Oeuvres Completes* the first trace of this 'attempt' can be found as early as the late 1930s and is marked by his draft for an unfinished *Erotic Phenomenology* (1939).[149]

Bataille never 'truly' defines what 'eroticism' is or can be. Rather he proposes a formula, which gives the 'sense' of it. He writes:

> *'Of eroticism it is possible to say that it is assenting to life up to the point of death'.*[150]

This is obviously very obscure, and of course it demands some further explanation. For Bataille, eroticism is not a simple, separate problem, although science, philosophy or reason would like to treat it as such. To treat eroticism as if it were a problem, is, in a way, to consider 'Man' as something other than an animal:

> *'Eroticism is the problem of problems. In that he is an erotic animal, man is a problem for himself. Eroticism is the problematic part of ourselves.'*[151]

Eroticism is a peculiar form of sexual activity. But animals too have a sexual activity. However, it seems, only human beings have a sexual activity, which can be erotic. Eroticism is what distinguishes man from other animals because it demands from the one who practises it a certain consciousness of what he does as, if not opposed, at least 'independent' of reproduction as an end:

> *'[…] what differentiates eroticism from simple sexual activity, is its being a psychological quest, independent of the natural end provided by reproduction and a concern for children'.*[152]

This 'psychological quest', which is 'independent' of the 'natural end provided by reproduction' (and although erotic activity is first of all an 'exuberance of life') is not 'foreign to death'.[153] Furthermore,

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[149]. See notes to *L'histoire de l'érotisme*, in Georges Bataille, OC VIII, Gallimard, Paris, 1976. pp. 523-4.

[150]. Georges Bataille, *L'Érotisme*, in OC X, Gallimard, Paris, 1987. p. 17.

[151]. Ibid. p. 267.

[152]. Ibid. p. 17.

[153]. Ibid.

although Bataille contends that 'erotic joy' is independent of 'reproduction as an end', he nonetheless sees the fundamental meaning of reproduction as the 'key to eroticism'.[154]

For Bataille, reproduction puts at play distinct individuals. Individuals who attempt to reproduce are distinct from each other, and the product of their reproduction is also distinct from themselves. Between two beings there is at least a spatial void and even if those beings somehow 'unite' (temporarily) in order to reproduce, their offspring will also be distinct from them. From this point of view, individuals are consequently distinct beings or in Bataille's words 'discontinuous' beings.[155] But there is more, at the very moment when two discontinuous being unit in sexual reproduction, just before a new discontinuous being is 'generated', there is an instant of 'continuity'. This instant is also the moment at which the two beings who are united, die. Of course the parents do not die (at least among complex beings such as mammals), but their gametes (a spermatozoid and an ovule) merge and consequently vanish/die. In reproduction, there is a passage from discontinuity towards a moment of continuity, which is also the instant when the discontinuous beings encounter death, and from there, a return to discontinuity (the newly born distinct individual).[156] Hence, the 'fundamental meaning of reproduction', which is the 'key to eroticism', for Bataille, clearly appears to fail: 'reproduction' is a failure, an egoistic attempt to reach an ungraspable continuity, which only leads to the return of the discontinuous. Bataille:

> 'We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity'.[157]

From this perspective, eroticism is thus simply an attempt to avoid the return of the discontinuous 'being', or, at least, an attempt to substitute for being's discontinuity, a 'feeling of profound continuity'.[158] But in what way does this 'eroticism' proceed, and in what way is it acquainted with death?

Bataille contends that eroticism is characterized by a violation bordering on death or even murder. It is the dissolution of the integrity of two (discontinuous) individuals in sexual games. Although both partners are attaining the same degree of dissolution and thus cease 'together' to be 'discontinuous', Bataille contends, that one has an active role (usually the male) and the other a passive one (the female). Nevertheless, both physically violate each other's individuality in their very need for continuity. Hence, eroticism proceeds as such:

> 'The whole business of eroticism has as its principle the destruction of being's self-contained structure, a being who is normally a partner at play'.[159]

More practically, the dissolution of the self begins with the appearance of the naked body, the flesh. Nakedness is a 'state of communication,' which reveals the 'quest' for a possible continuity beyond the simple self. In showing off his/her body, the individual, according to Bataille, joyfully indulges in obscenity, and it is this obscenity which shakes off the individual's composure, through which his individuality and thus discontinuity, is affirmed. Bataille also notes that in ancient civilizations, the state of nakedness was associated with death, as 'a simulacra or at least an equivalent, without prejudice, of the putting to death'.[160] However, this does not mean, that for Bataille, the violent death of the 'erotic partner', his total dissolution, is a means of reaching the final plenitude of eroticism: 'total' and finite continuity. Indeed, here Bataille disagrees with De Sade:

> 'What is at stake in eroticism is always a dissolution of the forms constituted. I repeat it: of those forms of regular social life, which found the discontinuous order of the defined individuality that we are. But in eroticism, even less than in reproduction, in spite of De Sade, discontinuous life is not condemned to disappear: it is only questioned. It must be disoriented, disturbed to the maximum. There is a research of continuity, but only in principle,

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[154]. Ibid.p.18.
[155]. Ibid.p.19.
[156]. Ibid.p.20.
[157]. Ibid.p.21.
[158]. Ibid.
[159]. Ibid.p.23.
[160]. Ibid.

if continuity, which only the death of discontinuous beings would definitively establish, does not win over. It is a matter of bringing within a world founded on discontinuity, all the continuity such a world can sustain'.[161]

Hence, eroticism is not a total condemnation of the discontinuous. Absolute continuity is not the aim of eroticism, only an ephemeral continuity, or a simulacra of it, or the possibility of temporarily perceiving the nature of this ungraspable continuity. Thus, Bataille's eroticism is not simply an ecstatic descent into obscenity, which would find its climax in a murderous perversion (as De Sade's might be), rather it is 'assenting to life up to the point of death': the research of continuity, of life, beyond the simple individual, the simple distinct being, in a movement towards death, through a simulacra leading to the dissolution of the sealed off, discontinuous, being, but not *in* death, just to *the point of* death, *until this very limit* that is death. Bataille clearly affirms this when, rejecting De Sade's aberrant extremism, he links eroticism, excess and death:

'[...] for the general run of normal men, [De Sade's aberrant and] irrevocable acts only indicate the extremes of practices, in the first stages within which everyone must to some extent indulge. The stirring within us has its own fearful excess; this excess sheds some light on the direction towards which this movement would take us. But, [this excess] is only an atrocious sign, which reminds us constantly that death, the rupture of the discontinuous individuality to which we cleave in terror, stands there before us more real than life itself'.[162]

In eroticism lies the possibility of reaching the 'climax' of horror, that is murder: the erotic movement shows already to which kind of excess it might lead. But, if we believe Bataille, normally constituted men do not go that far. Rather, this excess is perceived by them as a metaphor, and also a remainder, of this anguishing limit to their own being's discontinuous life, a limit which opens onto an unknown realm of continuity: this limit is their own death. Hence, being's continuity is affirmed —Bataille says that it is manifested *in* death — by the death of the discontinuous being. [163] In dying the self joins the community of the dead, returning to a non-differentiated continuous matter. Beyond the limit of death, there lies the domain of the continuous, but, and although 'Man' is 'yearning for his lost continuity', this limit, as it is also the lethal rupture of the discontinuous being, frightens him. 'Man' considers death far more real than life itself. Death appears as a challenge to 'Man'.

Bataille's eroticism does not propose a solution to this challenge but rather a counter-challenge or a reversed challenge. If death challenges 'Man's' life, then one has to challenge death with(in) 'life'. What Bataille's eroticism proposes, is not the possibility of life after death, as the hypothesis of this life after death always concerns the discontinuous being, the individual.[164] Rather it is the opposite, the possibility of death before life's end, of grasping for a moment the continuity that death opens but this time during one's life, before it ends, and thus 'assenting to life' until death. Finding 'continuous existence' — which is logically beyond death — metaphorically through a simulacra, already before one dies — before death:

'Assenting to life even in death is a challenge to death [...] a challenge, through indifference to death. Life is the way to access 'being' [continuous existence]: life might be doomed but being's continuity is not. The nearness of this continuity, the heady quality of this continuity prevails over the thought of death [...] power is given to us to look death in the face and to perceive in it finally the opening towards incomprehensible and unknowable continuity—an opening which is the secret of eroticism and which eroticism alone can reveal'.[165]

Eroticism attempts to open up the self to the realm of the unknown, of what Bataille already termed 'non-knowledge'; a realm in excess of homogeneous life. Eroticism is a means to its own end, which nevertheless carries the 'self' into an 'inner experience': an experience of the limit of the self (discontinuous) in which it attempts to grasp 'their' beyond (of the self and experience), that is an

[161]. Ibid.p.24.
[162]. Ibid.p.25.
[163]. Ibid.p.27
[164]. Ibid.
[165]. Ibid.p.29.

ungraspable excess (continuity).

Hence, Bataille's theoretical books on 'eroticism' (*Eroticism* but also *The Accursed Share II: The History of Eroticism*) appear clearly as a discourse on 'eroticism', an attempt at disserting on a movement or direction leading towards the excess, but also allowing us to briefly grasp what it is: a writing *on* the excess. But, what about the part of his oeuvre for which Bataille is most famous? What about the so-called 'erotic' fictions (*Madame Edwarda*, *The story of the Eye*, *The Pineal Eye* or *The Blue of Noon*)?

Denis Hollier proposes a very interesting hypothesis, to which I must acknowledge I totally subscribe:

> *'Bataille's [erotic] narratives must be considered as obscene inscriptions (obscene by being inscriptions). From the outset they are obscene because they do not respect the rules of distribution. They juxtapose fiction and theory in a way that destroys the basis of the system of sublimation: the separation of knowledge and sexual pleasure'.*[166]

If Bataille's prose appears as 'erotic', or tied to 'eroticism', it is not because it simply discusses or describes some obscene scenes or events. No, its 'erotic' quality comes not from what it tells but from what it does, that is, to 'juxtapose', to link, to tie, to attempt to render 'continuous', genres, which are by definition distinct and thus 'discontinuous'. As Hollier wrote, theory (knowledge) is no more separated from ecstatic practice (sexual pleasure), both are conjoined, rendered almost continuous, a movement which is concordant with Bataille's comprehension of the movement of eroticism, a movement which opens discontinuous beings to a beyond, in excess of the homogeneous realm: the continuous existence.

Actually, Bataille himself, in the 'project' of a preface to *Madame Edwarda*, unveils the ties between his more 'theoretical' and 'erotic-fictional' writings:

> *'I wrote this slim volume in September and October 1941, just before* "Le Supplice" ["The Torment"], *which makes up the second part of* "L'Experience Intérieure". *To my mind the two texts are closely inter-dependant and one cannot be understood without the other. [...] I could not have written* "Le Supplice" *if I had not first provided its lewd key'.*[167]

Of course as Hollier notes it, it is difficult to consider 'the Torment' as an average theoretical text, as it is the second and central part of *The Inner Experience*, itself a rather peculiar theoretical book (as I hope to have shown). Nevertheless, it is a text within a book, which, although he does so unconventionally, attempts to discuss the peculiar nature of an experience: the 'inner experience'. Hence, it is a theoretical text (composed of aphorisms) central to a discourse *on* 'inner experience'; but it is also a discourse which never comes to grips with its subject and which never manages to achieve a comprehensive understanding of this subject through a (its) discursive form.

Bataille contends that his so-called 'erotic' writings are 'interrelated' with his more theoretical pieces. Furthermore, the perception of Bataille's oeuvre as perhaps complex and diverse, yet 'continuous' is reinforced if we look at the way he constantly edited and re-edited his books, trilogies and collections as well as the way he published bits of texts within other books which might at first sight appear to belong to other genres or orders. Indeed, besides *Madame Edwarda* and *The Inner Experience*, numerous examples of continuity can be noticed within Bataille books; continuity from one piece of writing to another but also from pieces of writing towards 'real' life (and vice versa). For example, *The story of the Eye* and *The Pineal Eye* were produced during Bataille's analysis with Dr Borel, as a kind of 'cure'; This analysis began due to the 'obscene' character of Bataille's very first novel *WC*, which was subsequently destroyed, but of which a part was preserved and finally published as 'Dirty' in *The Blue of Noon*; This latter novel bearing the title of a sub-part of *The Inner Experience*; a subpart printed just after (within the book) 'The Labyrinth'; itself, a slightly reviewed version of an essay from 1936, originally published in *the review Recherches Philosophiques*.

Bataille's oeuvre seems to operate a continuity between the two discontinuous genres of theory and practice, of reflexion and fiction. It opens those genres and their limits onto a continuity

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[166]. Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: the writings of Georges Bataille*, MIT press, London, 1989. p. 150.
[167]. George Bataille, Notes to *Mme Edwarda*, in OC III, Gallimard, Paris, 1971, p.491.

which is very disturbing in itself. How come that the key to serious problems (theory) might be found in obscene and low matters (pornographic novellas)? The opening of this realm beyond the stability ensured by the discontinuity of genres leads Bataille's oeuvre to 'be', not simply erotic, but to follow an erotic 'movement', which opens towards the continuity of non-knowledge in excess of knowledge.

Consequently, with regard to this 'notion' of eroticism, Bataille's oeuvre (as a whole) appears neither as simply narrating erotic events, nor as a simple discourse on eroticism, but as the 'impossible' conjoining of both, in an erotic movement (from Bataille's perspective), opening them to a continuity in excess of the convention and limits of discourse(s) and narration(s). Bataille's writing *on* a topic (which is nevertheless not a simple topic – eroticism) opens the way towards something in excess – this constitutes the writing *on* the excess – but his oeuvre is also the writing *of* this excess (opening onto this excess, releasing it) as, in itself, it proceeds according to the means it unveils.

IV.10. General Economy, Expenditure and Consumption

What Bataille's eroticism is to reproduction and sexual activity, Bataille's notion of expenditure in pure loss is to productive consumption and 'conventional' economic theories. Bataille's eroticism is a movement which opens the sphere of sexual activity limited to the production of discontinuity toward a realm of continuity; then, Bataille's notion of expenditure in pure loss is also a movement which opens the realm of economy as restricted by the need for accumulation and the fear of scarcity on an individual level, towards a 'general economy' focusing on orgiastic squandering on a universal scale.

Bataille's 'general economy' is distinct from the 'restricted' dimension of most economic theories, in a few important ways: first, the scale of the 'economic fact' it wishes to study. Bataille criticizes the usual and traditional economic theories for considering the means of production and consumption as isolated from their broader context:

> *[...] the economy taken as a whole is usually studied as if it were a matter of an isolatable system of operations. Production and consumption are linked together, but considered jointly it does not seem difficult to study them as one might study an elementary operation relatively independent of that which it is not. This method is legitimate, and science never proceeds differently. However, economic science does not give results of the same order as physics, studying, first, a precise phenomenon, then all studied phenomena as a coordinated whole. Economic phenomena are not easy to isolate, and their general coordination is not easy to establish. So it is possible to raise this question concerning them: Shouldn't productive activity as a whole be considered in terms of the modifications it receives from its surroundings or brings about in its surroundings? In other words, isn't there a need to study the system of human production and consumption within a much larger framework?'* [168]

In contrast with the 'usual' scale of economic inquiries, Bataille proposes, through his critique, to enlarge the study-frame of the economic fact to a general and even cosmic dimension: in its 'totality'. Hence, in his consideration of the distribution and consumption of energy – that is, his study of a 'general economy' – he is not interested in some peculiar economic facts from which he could extrapolate and define a 'general economic theory'. Rather, he wishes to reveal the movement, which animates the 'whole', the 'totality'. Thus, in *The Accursed Share*, his study covers a broad spectrum of topics from the movements and transformation of energies within the biosphere, to the relationship that different societies (The Aztec's, the Tlingit's) religions (Protestantism, Islam, Lamaism) and ideological systems (Stalinist Marxism, Bourgeois Capitalism, American Imperialism) throughout history, have maintained with energy, goods and luxury, as well as their modes of production and consumption.

But, the 'general economy' differs from the restricted one, in a more 'fundamental' aspect. The 'enlargement' of the study frame is not so much a change of scale as it is a decentring of the place from which (and for who) the study is carried out. Instead of proposing a 'restricted economy' in which the universe is seen only within the context of its usefulness to 'Man', (if the universe is

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[168]. Georges Bataille, *La Part maudite: la consumation*, in OC VII, Gallimard, Paris, 1976, pp. 27-28.

coherent or rendered economically coherent it is in the last resort for 'Man'; a non-coherent universe is never non-coherent in itself, it is so according to 'Man's reasoning'), Bataille's 'general economy' attempts to 'think' the economic facts at the 'scale' of the universe, not for 'Man' but for the 'universe' itself (to which, obviously, 'Man' belongs). This leads, consequently to a 'general' revision of perspective, and furthermore of perception, of the energetic and economic problem(s):

'As for the present historical situation, it is characterized by the fact that judgements concerning the general situation proceed from a particular point of view. As a rule, particular existence always risks succumbing, through lack of resources. It contrasts with a general existence whose resources are in excess and for which death has no meaning. From this particular point of view, problems are posed in the first instance by a deficiency of resources. They are posed in the first instance by an excess of resources, if one starts from the general point of view'.[169]

Hence, Bataille's 'general economy' besides broadening the study frame of the economic fact, and beyond 'decentring' the origin and finality of the 'study', reverses the conventional principles of economy: it does not focus on the scarcity of resources but on their, paradoxical, abundance or even excess. Bataille expands on the basis for his theory in a sub-part of the theoretical introduction to *The Accursed Share*, 'The Sense of General Economy':

'I will begin with a basic fact: the living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life: the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g., an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically'.[170]

For Bataille, because the sun is in state of superfluity, there is always an abundance of (solar) energy on earth. Systems and organisms appropriate this energy, and use it for growth, to a certain extent, that is, till they reach their own limits. Then, energy is still abundant but appears as a 'left over' and as this energy cannot be appropriated by the system or organism which left it as a 'surplus', it is, thus, non-useful and non-ordered.

But, as this energy-matter remains, as an excess, it quickly becomes more than a potential fuel for development/growth. As systems or organisms find their coherence on appropriation (theorisation or ingestion), something in excess of appropriation is by definition something that escapes coherency and is thus a real threat to them. Hence, this excess (of energy) which is neither servile nor productive nor appropriable and which somehow might result in the destruction of the systems and/or organisms, becomes the 'cursed' share of energy: the part which must be squandered out of any productive, rational or developmental purposes.

Thus, Bataille's *The Accursed Share*, suggests that there are no individual, cultural or economic systems and/or organisms, which are self-contained, closed, and self-regulating. All systems wishing to state their limits have by definition, something, which is in excess of them. While productive activity, whether social, cultural or economic, might attempt to appropriate most of this available, yet left over energy, this excess energy will always, for Bataille, remain unproductive, ungraspable, useless: it is heterogeneous to the stable and homogeneous society.[171]
For example, in the social domain, societies survive by excluding the useless, destructive 'anti-social' elements (while sometimes attempting to eradicate them) as much as by the utilitarian production and assimilation of accepted bodies and goods. Similarly, within the realm of 'thought' and 'reason', systems follow rules and principles which allow them to comprehend and discard, to assimilates and reject, in short, to homogenize and to 'heterogenize'.

The problem that Bataille's book discusses then, is the following: what to do with this excess? Of course, it may be squandered: but how? Does one do that consciously, for whom and for which purpose? *The Accursed Share*, is not only problematizing this issue, it is also a rather

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[169]. Ibid.p.45
[170]. Ibid.p.29..
[171]. See, Georges Bataille, 'La Notion de dépense', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970,pp.302-20

serious historical inquiry into the way different cultures, religions, societies or even civilizations have squandered this excess. Indeed, through the course of the book, Bataille goes on to discuss the sacrifices and insane squandering of the ancient Mexicans (Aztecs),[172] the gift of rivalry or Potlatch (which he borrows from Marcel Mauss) of the Northern America's Indians as way to dilapidate the excess,[173] the importance of war for Islamic societies as means to reinvest the excess into military expansion,[174] or in opposition to this, the Tibetan peaceful devotion of a huge amount of wealth and energy to some useless activity (in terms of production),[175] the 'hypocritical' use of excessive wealth by Protestantism[176] and the bourgeoisie,[177] and finally the 'present data' (as of 1949) the situation in Stalin's Soviet Union[178] and in the rest of the western world with the hypothetical outcome of the Marshal Plan[179].

What appears clear at the end of this book, is that Bataille's thinking on economics – as paradoxical it may seem for a 'theory' praising the reckless squandering of riches and the evil expenditure of values, instead of their morally correct accumulations and preservations – actually involves a profoundly (and challenging), ethical theory.

Indeed, in the last part of *The Accursed Share*, Bataille warns the reader that the reinvestment of the, then (1949), excess wealth of American and Soviet super-powers into a military build-up might lead to this excess' return with lethal consequence for 'Man': the re-appropriation of the wealth or energy in excess, instead of its squandering in pure loss, might lead to a nuclear holocaust (in 1949).[180]

Hence, the excess must be squandered but in a particular way (the military build-up leading to a civilization's holocaust might also be seen as a sort of squandering: a squandering of wealth – through a stupid accumulation – and finally the squandering of humanity). There is an ethical way to squander and a non-ethical way. There is the *expenditure in pure loss* of goods, riches and values (including the self, being), and the hypocritical *'productive' consumption*, which consumes goods in order to consciously increase production and to enlarge either the span of the homogeneous society (without acknowledging its limits, hence without perceiving the imminent apocalypse) or the power and aura of the self (being). Suddenly, Bataille's anti-rational, even anti-humanist (as it proposes a decentring of 'Man') 'perspective' on the excess, becomes, 'involuntarily', the one that is able to save humanity. But in order to 'function' Bataille's ethic must be a 'non-ethic' in the sense that it remains 'unknown' to the subject following it. [181]

Bataille's book *The Accursed Share* (but this is also the case with his previous drafts: 'The Limit of Usefulness' and 'The notion of Expenditure') is a careful, scientific, and almost academic study (Bataille hoped it would win him the Nobel prize for literature) *on* the excess. It maps, unveils, and produces a discourse *on* the excess. At first sight, within the core of the text the 'writing *of* the excess' seems to be absent. But, the writing *on* the excess does only lead to the perception of a universe in which the expenditure in pure loss of energies, riches and values is the sole way to 'preserve' an economic system based on accumulation and profit (for the self). *The Accursed Share* argues the existence of a universe in which, paradoxically, what negates its principles actually sustains it (and them through it): a meaningless or at least a paradoxical universe, in excess of reason and thus of 'discourse'. In other words the discourse *on* the excess

[172]. Georges Bataille, *La Part maudite: la consumation*, in OC VII, Gallimard, Paris, 1976, pp. 51-65.

[173]. Ibid. pp. 66-79

[174]. Ibid. pp. 83-92

[175]. Ibid. pp. 93-108

[176]. Ibid. pp. 111-22.

[177]. Ibid. pp. 123-35.

[178]. Ibid. pp. 139-58.

[179]. Ibid. pp. 159-79

[180]. Ibid. p. 159.

[181]. Here, it is extremely important to note what could be for some readers a deep contradiction while for some others just a reinforcing paradox: the urge to squander as well as the excess are not 'servile' for Bataille, hence they are not means to peculiar ends, but ends in themselves. The fact that, out of the squandering of the excess, a society or an organism or a system, might find a way towards their survival, is seen by Bataille, not as a wilful consequence, but as an involuntary 'aftereffect' (as production is the after-effect of expenditure). Hence, how this theory can be ethical? If 'Man' squanders without purpose the excess, 'He' can't be 'conscious' of his actions as if they follow a certain 'ethic' (which implies an aim). Otherwise, if 'Man' is 'conscious', this would mean that 'He' purposively squanders and thus that his expenditure is servile, a simple means. Bataille's ethic must remain a 'non-ethic' as 'non-knowledge' is the other of knowledge.

releases its own excess: within *The Accursed Share* the discourse on the excess is a discourse, making sense, in appearance only.

IV.11. Sovereignty

The Accursed Share was meant to be the title of a book in three volumes. A paradoxical trilogy forming a rather coherent whole – in that it proposed a discourse on the excess and the different means of its expenditure in pure loss – while revealing the lack of a 'rational' coherence of the ensemble –in that it also released (as a writing *of* the excess) itself as an excess (reason and rationality leading smoothly to the discovery of the meaninglessness of the world). Unfortunately Bataille only published the first volume, sub-titled, 'consumation' [Burn off], during his lifetime. And it is to this volume that, most of the time, commentators refer when they discuss *The Accursed Share*. Nevertheless, *The Accursed Share* is also composed of a second volume discussing, as already mentioned, 'eroticism': *The History of Eroticism*, and of a final volume, published after Bataille's death, in which he attempts to illustrate an attitude, or an ungraspable 'state' that could be found to be, hypothetically, the fulfilment of the practice of an expenditure in pure loss of riches and goods (the subject-matter of the first volume of the trilogy) and of a restless experience of 'eroticism' (the subject of the second volume): *Sovereignty.*

At the beginning of this final volume of *The Accursed Share* Bataille contends that his 'sovereignty' is different from its usage in the political realm where it describes the sovereignty of states. Rather, he means by sovereignty 'an aspect that is opposed, within human existence, to the servile or subordinate aspect'.[182] Hence, the 'sovereign' for Bataille is, by extension also opposed to work. The sovereign is the one who consumes in pure loss the excess of production (under certain forms), without working in order to produce what he consumes. Sovereignty is this realm which offers itself to the sovereign; a life beyond the limit of usefulness, servility and work, within a realm in excess of these:

> *'What distinguishes sovereignty is the consumption of wealth, as against work and servitude, which produce wealth without consuming it. The sovereign individual consumes and doesn't work, whereas at the antipodes of sovereignty, the slave and the man without means, work and reduce their consumption to the necessities, to the products without which they could neither subsists nor work. In theory, a man compelled to work consumes the products without which production would not be possible, while the sovereign consumes the surplus of production.[...] Let us say that the sovereign (or sovereign life), begins when, with the necessities ensured, the possibility of life opens up without limit. Conversely, we may call sovereign the enjoyment of possibilities that utility doesn't justify (utility being that whose end is productive activity). Beyond utility, there is the domain of sovereignty.[183]*

According to Bataille this distinction between a 'sovereign' existence and a productive/servile one is not only spatial (sovereignty is *beyond* utility) but also temporal. It is, in Bataille's view, servile to consider duration first. That is, to use the present time for the sake of the future, and, it is precisely what one does when one works: one consumes time, now, as an investment for the future, in order to get a salary, and thus to continue simply surviving. There is no sovereignty within this life, 'spent' for it's always deferred (potential) sovereignty, as this life is never 'sovereign' within the present:

> *'What is sovereign in fact, is to enjoy the present time without having anything else in view, but this present time'.[184]*

Bataille also ties this 'sovereignty', through this reflexion on its 'temporality', to knowledge. Knowledge is never sovereign as it is also a form of work. It demands that a certain amount of time be spent towards an end situated in the future. Knowledge is never only in the instant, only in the present:

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[182]. Georges Bataille, *La Part maudite III: la Souveraineté*, in OC VIII, Gallimard, Paris, 1976, p. 247.
[183]. Ibid. p. 248.
[184]. Ibid.

'To know is always to strive, to work; it is always a servile operation, indefinitely resumed, indefinitely repeated. Knowledge is never sovereign: to be sovereign it would have to occur in a moment. But the moment remains outside, short of or beyond, all knowledge. [...] We know nothing absolutely, of the moment. In short we know nothing about what ultimately concerns us, what is important to us as sovereign. The operation of knowledge stops as soon as sovereignty is its object'. [185]

But, how to know (how to be conscious) of the sovereign moment when it appears? Should we be aware of it? Can we be? For Bataille, as knowledge is always 'slipping-away' from the instant, as it wishes to discuss the instant as an object with a duration, the only way to 'know' the instant or moment of 'sovereignty' (which is independent or, in other words, totally other from/to duration) would have to be sovereign itself. That is, the 'method' for knowing should be sovereign, it should 'neutralize' all operations of knowledge: Bataille names this attempt/method 'non-knowledge':

'Consciousness of the moment is not truly such, is not sovereign, except in non-knowledge. Only by canceling, or at least neutralizing, each operation of knowledge within ourselves is it possible to be in the moment, without fleeing it. This is possible in the grip of emotions that shut off, interrupt or override the flow of thought'. [186]

Further, Bataille gives a few examples of these emotions, which 'can override' the operations of knowledge: when we cry, sob or laugh till we gasp. It is not the burst of laughter or the tears, which stop the operations of knowledge, but their object. This object creates a 'vacuum' within knowledge or thought, and the fact that our mind can't explain rationally what this 'vacuum' is about, leads one to laugh or cry about it. At this 'instant', knowledge can't resolve anything: it is truly neutralized. Through this neutralization the one who laughs or cries gets rid of his servility; he is no longer bound to the useful activity of knowledge.

Hence, sovereignty and the sovereign instant are very difficult for the mind to grasp as objects, because, if they were objects, they could only exist as a vacuum in the mind, the moment at which thought 'dissolves itself as thought'. [187] But they are also difficult to 'expect' as an end. What truly counts as a 'sovereign instant' for Bataille, is when one expects knowledge and reason to give a result, but that 'nothing' actually results from it. [188] Thought has to be non-thought, and knowledge non-knowledge, in order not to grasp, but to reach 'sovereignty'; to the extent that 'true' sovereignty *is* only in 'non-knowledge'. Sovereignty is *not out-there* in the world waiting to be found, *nor is it not existing* as pure chimeric vision, rather it is the *other* of thought, the *other* of knowledge, what is in excess of them: 'only non-knowledge is sovereign'. [189]

Moreover, Bataille also recalls that, through the curse of history, individuals in their striving for 'sovereignty' (the sovereignty of the subject) have mistakenly acknowledged (recognized or identified) their potential, yet not graspable, sovereignty, in the 'person' (an object which became subject) of the sovereign: the king. [190] Hence, the 'sovereign' as most of us would understand it (that is the monarch or king) is simply for Bataille, a 'parody' of the intimate sovereignty of the subject. This sovereignty granted by the subject (or the mass composed of subjects yearning for sovereignty) to their 'master', leads, paradoxically, to their oppression. But Bataille notes a further paradox: the revolt of the oppressed (or revolution) does not give back to the subject its proper 'sovereignty' (which he lent to the 'king'): his revolt is directed against his (lent) 'sovereignty', thus to the true 'self' which paradoxically expresses himself in 'revolt'. Revolt is the negation of revolt, (as De Sade might have discovered it, according to Bataille). [191] For Bataille, sovereignty can't be found in an object, or in a thing, or in an individual who temporarily misrepresents it, thus, it can't be opposed. Furthermore, the 'past' (or 'history') which represents 'sovereignty' as a 'thing', is lying. However, those lies are significant as somehow they mark a kind of 'truth'. The only 'truth,

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[185]. Ibid. p.253.
[186]. Ibid. p.254.
[187]. Ibid.
[188]. Ibid. p.261.
[189]. Ibid. p.258.
[190]. Ibid. p.283-95
[191]. Ibid. p.296-98.

which counts' in Bataille's eyes: 'sovereignty is NOTHING [...]'.[192] And any attempt to speak for the 'sovereign' in order to change the world, paradoxically alienates sovereignty to the servility of the profane. Sovereignty would become a means to an end. But as sovereignty is not a thing, hence not a means, it is ungraspable by thought and knowledge, something radically in excess.[193]

    With *The Accursed Share III: Sovereignty* Bataille discusses, that is, he writes *on*, an ungraspable state or attitude which is in excess of thought, knowledge and, one can say by extension, of discourse. Yet, he does not say what this sovereignty is in 'reality': Bataille unveils its movement and the realm within which it might unfold (the realm of useless expenditure and eroticism) but does not qualify, an 'object', as sovereign. He does not say what this sovereignty is, because he can't say it. And he can't say it because it escapes discourse. The best way to help the reader grasp what is this 'sovereignty' would be to declare it as 'NOTHING' — as what escapes categories, NOTHING is actually more than the nothingness of homogeneous discourse, it is in excess of it — and then, in releasing within the text this NOTHING, that is this sovereignty: something not absent but ungraspable. Bataille's writing *of* the excess, releases sovereignty as an excess: to the point that Bataille's writing *of* the excess is 'sovereign'.

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[192]. Ibid. p. 300.

[193]. After those preliminary, yet essential, considerations on sovereignty, Bataille goes on to discuss this notion in relation with the political and economic context at the time that this final volume of *The Accursed Share* was written (1953-54). He attempts to show how 'Communism', although it is the most radical opponent to the feudal 'sovereignty', necessarily (in Bataille's view) demands that a certain, peculiar or even paradoxical form of sovereignty be inscribed within its development. In short, Bataille tries to show the importance of his notion for his contemporary political economy. Those last parts of the *The Accursed Share III: Sovereignty* constitute a less known yet interesting and very shocking piece, at least in one very peculiar aspect: there, Bataille seems to write an apology of Stalin (who just died) and of his variable understanding of Communism, Socialism, revolution, economy and production. This is rather shocking, indeed, as the reader focusing only on the second and third part of *The Accursed Share III: Sovereignty* might have the impression that Bataille was a Stalinist not 'avant la lettre' but after everyone or, better said, at the time everyone was rightly disgusted by Stalin's horrors. This might have been a provocative strategy from Bataille. A strategy, which did not lead where Bataille expected it to – *Sovereignty* was never published as such, during Bataille's lifetime – rendering, thus, this third volume truly 'sovereign'. Hence, one could see also the 'writing *of* the excess' being released there. However, as it is not my aim to dissert on the reality of Bataille's Stalinism in the late 1950s but rather to discuss his notion of sovereignty, I will end up here my 'homogenization' of Bataille's sovereignty.

CHAPTER V

Bataille's Take on 'Architecture'

Chapter V. Bataille's take on 'Architecture'

Introduction

Bataille's writing on/of the excess addresses several terms as topics of investigation. Some of them appear to be of minor importance others essential to the movement of his oeuvre. However, as I argued in the fourth chapter of this dissertation none of them should be considered the 'key' one. Hence, 'architecture' should not be considered the central term through one can 'enter' Bataille's labyrinth. Yet, as this dissertation is primarily interested in 'architecture', I shall turn now to what could appear to be Bataille's discourse on architecture, although it will be more accurate to call it Bataille's 'take' on the subject.

In consequence, this chapter focuses on Bataille's 'take' on 'architecture', more accurately it addresses the different articles he issued, which are related to the built environment. This chapter thus demonstrates that there is indeed within his oeuvre an assessment of the architectural, but that this 'assessment' is different (or *wholly other*) from the restricted understanding reached by 'architectural readers' (Hays/Leach), architects (Tschumi) and architectural theoretician (Benjamin).

First of all, this chapter demonstrates that Bataille's *discourse on* architecture (if one may call it such) is not primarily interested in a naïve criticism of architecture's form but in the assessment of its societal (or even political) function. Architecture for Bataille is a means of exchange or communication, between what he reveals to be the homogeneous and heterogeneous realms. Then, I contend that, as Bataille's heterogeneous realm is formed on the base of a dualism, architecture can also operate on a dual mode: either imperative as a means of implementation of the authority of the 'high' heterogeneous, or impure, as a means of release of the disruptive 'low' heterogeneous. Moreover, in this chapter I also show how, for Bataille, architecture, from this simple status of a 'means', becomes, to a certain extent, what it expresses: from being a means of expression, hence an index of the excess, it becomes precisely this excess, a leakage of the 'high' heterogeneous back into the homogeneous realm.

Furthermore, this chapter also exposes how Bataille affirms that architecture's very function — if not hypocritically employed — leads it to being, merely an expenditure in pure loss; and subsequently it explains the rather peculiar economic function — intuited by Bataille — of the architectural (if not homogenized) for an homogeneous society.

Finally, this chapter briefly concludes on the subsequent 'value' and 'impact' of this 'take' on architecture, of the corollary 'assessment' of the architectural it brings to the fore, and of the function it confers on the architectural 'assessor', with regard to the discipline. There, I contend, that the re-affirmation of such 'writing' — without betraying it — could only be a parody of 'writing', which would ecstatically embrace the fall it reveals. Not a framework ready to be employed to other ends or agendas but, a parody of 'writing' as the radical fall of all other agendas. Hence, a parody of 'writing' having the sole function of a non-hypocritical self-expenditure of architectural criticism and theory.

In order to attempt to achieve all of these aims, articles, references, and reflections on 'architecture', unravelled from Bataille's labyrinthine written corpus are appropriately discussed in what follows. As architecture is often considered as — at least — being able to materialise a space, Bataille's 'grasp' of that word will provide us with a convenient beginning; i.e. I shall start with the article 'Space'.

V.1. 'Space'

Bataille's article 'Space' appeared originally in the first issue of *Documents*' second year of publication (1930), more specifically within the 'Critical Dictionary'. It is, actually, the 'first' part (bearing the heading 'Questions of etiquettes') of a collective article (on space), the second part of which, was written by Arnaud Dandieu (a piece entitled 'The foundations of the duality of space'), and was released in the same *Documents*' issue. Bataille's part is rather short and begins as such:

> *'SPACE.* — 1. Questions of Etiquette. — *It is not surprising that the mere utterance of the word* space *should introduce philosophical protocol. Philosophers, being the masters of ceremony of the abstract universe, have pointed out how* space *should behave under all*

circumstances'.[1]

Space, or rather the definition of what it is, of its identity, is the task of the professor-philosophers. But, according to Bataille, those do not simply reveal what space is, rather they point out 'how space should behave': they impose their view on space, they idealise what space is. If I refer to what Bataille considered, at that moment (1930), to be the primary aim of science and philosophy, as for example in his unpublished essay 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade', I can say that for Bataille, philosophers 'homogenize' space, by appropriating it.[2]

This is of importance, because Bataille, within those first lines, does not say precisely what kind of 'behaviour' the philosophers expect from space. Hence, it appears that Bataille does not wish to tackle so much the content of the philosophers' theory, more their attitude: philosophers know better. That is, there is nothing that lies beyond or beside or underneath the 'idealist', 'classical', infinite and homogenized space, and certainly not *some other* space. However, and this is precisely the problem for Bataille, concrete space — space taken as a non-abstract reality — does not, actually, 'behave' correctly.

> *'Unfortunately space continues to be a troublemaker and it is difficult to enumerate what it engenders. It is discontinuous in the same way as one is a scoundrel, to the great despair of its philosopher-daddy'.*[3]

Here, Bataille does not yet affirm how the philosophers want space to behave, but at least, he tells us in what way space truly 'behaves', and that, 'to the great despair of its philosopher-daddy': it is 'hypocritically' (as a 'scoundrel') discontinuous. Now, at that point of the article, we can deduct, easily, what the philosophers 'expect' from space: they wish it to be 'continuous'. Indeed, as continuity or the avoidance of physical breaks can be seen as a form of homogeneity, it makes sense that philosophers do not simply homogenize space by appropriating (defining) it, but also by imposing it as 'homogeneous' (in the sense of continuous). Yet, space does not fulfil 'daddy's' expectations and somehow remains a 'rogue': to use again Bataille's terminology, 'space' appears as 'heterogeneous' to his 'homogeneous' philosophic-idealist definition. Hence, it appears, very early in this article, that Bataille's 'theory' on space is based on a dualism: there is the concept of the space of the philosopher, which would ideally render space homogeneous-continuous, and the heterogeneous-discontinuous concrete space.

Obviously, at this point, we might wish to get, not only some precise idea of the nature of the relationship that these dual polarities espouse, but also how this relationship materializes. In other words what happens, and how does it happen, between those 'two' spaces?

In order to clarify these questions, and before going further with this short article, it is worth paying attention to evidence within those first lines: the use of a not very academic vocabulary for qualifying this concrete-discontinuous-heterogeneous space. Bataille writes, that space 'is discontinuous in the same way as one is a scoundrel'. This use of a rather irreverent vocabulary fits very well within the overall tone of the article and of the review in which it is published (as *Documents* was an attempt to tear down conventional, politically correct, values). Yet, beyond its pseudo-triviality the vocabulary exposes 'concrete space' as it is in relation to the philosophers' idealist concept of space: due to the terms which qualify it, 'concrete space' is a kind of 'lumpen' space, a 'lower' space, non-idealised. If it is discontinuous it is so in a radical way. It is not simply the rational opposite of the continuous space of the 'philosopher-daddy': it is not the logically different space formed, for example, by a sum of compartment-like (sealed off from each other)

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[1]. Georges Bataille, 'Espace', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 227.
[2]. As I discussed it in the precedent chapter, two of Bataille's essays are seminal for understanding his definition of the heterogeneous and homogeneous realms as well as their interactions: the first, unpublished during Bataille's lifetime, but probably written at the time of *Documents*, 'The Use Value of DAF de Sade' claims that science has the obsessional will to homogenize the 'real' and thus to reject what does not fit within its 'vision' or what does not lend itself to be appropriated (i.e. the heterogeneous); the second one, published four years later in *La Critique Sociale*, 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism' while it defines the heterogeneous itself as a dualism (high and low), illustrates how heterogeneous and homogeneous realms are interrelated beyond the simple movement of exclusion/inclusion and, most importantly, it contends how certain high heterogeneous forces (imperative) insure and control the status of the homogeneous world through the violent repression/extermination of their low (impure) counter-part.
[3]. Georges Bataille, 'Espace', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 227.

cavities, that would stand beside the 'homogeneous-continuous' space. In the same way as the criminal or the burglar is not simply the opposite of the law, but the one who transgresses it, the 'concrete discontinuous space', of Bataille, is the one which the idealist discourse of the philosopher cannot homogenize, the one which only (and temporarily) reveals itself through a transgression. This is precisely what Bataille claims while also wishing to introduce a few examples of how 'concrete space' might be/is 'subversive':

> *'Moreover, I would be angry at myself if I were not to refresh the memory of persons who interest themselves, professionally or for the want of something better to do, out of confusion or for a laugh, in the behaviour of that incorrigible misfit, at odds with society: for instance, how, under our decently averted eyes, space disrupts the ruling continuity'.*[4]

If Bataille's concrete, discontinuous and heterogeneous space transgresses anything, it is not so much the concept of 'continuous (homogeneous) space', but rather continuity (homogeneity) as a rule. That is, the means through which philosophers impose the idea of space as continuous: continuity is the law of the philosophic-idealist discourse (an objective and serene thought) which tries to impose abstract-ideas over physical reality (subjective perception) as a way to homogenize it, to render it continuous; a discourse which attempts to limit and thus to control what space is truly. Space is the final bastion that idealist discourse must overcome, as it wishes to intellectually master the entire universe, it must impose, finally, its continuity on that of which the universe principally consists: space.

Hence, concrete space transgresses the philosopher's discourse (which is in itself an abstract space). Furthermore, I must add that it is only in this respect that Bataille's concrete space is 'truly' discontinuous: it is 'transgressive' and heterogeneous, only to the extent that it 'performs' this discontinuity. Where it appears, it 'disrupts' the continuity of the idealist discourse of the 'philosopher-papa'. But how does this transgression proceed precisely?

First of all, this transgression-disruption, which is the transgression of the philosophic-idealist affirmation of space as continuous (but before anything, of continuity in general), does not, paradoxically, consist in the segmentation/partition of the so called 'continuous space', i.e. it does not lead to the formation of limits, to the creation of a multitude of fragmentary spaces. Rather, it consists in the rupture of the limit that the philosophic-idealist demand for spatial continuity and homogenization constitutes. In its homogenizing of the entire universe, the idealist discourse rejects certain events, phenomena, situations and activities as improper, 'incongruous', 'disappointing' or incredible for a rational, serious, objective, serene, honourable and rigorous intellectual appropriation/reflection. And, it is precisely by pointing at those ridiculous events, phenomena, situations and activities, as objects of study, that Bataille proposes to transgress the seriousness, dignity and rigour of the classical-idealist discourse on space and by the same token to disrupt 'its' continuity.

By proposing 'silly' or incongruous 'documents' as the objects of a reflection on space, Bataille hopes that the reader will briefly grasp the idea of this concrete, discontinuous and heterogeneous space as it really is: laughable (in the Bataillan sense), disappointing, incongruous, without dignity, but also impossibly controllable. The three examples, with which Bataille proposes to remind the reader of the 'behaviour of that incorrigible misfit, at odds with society', testify clearly to this:

> *'Without being able to say why, it doesn't seem that an ape dressed as a woman is no more than a division of space. In reality, the dignity of space is so well established and associated with that of the stars that it is incongruous to affirm that space might become a fish swallowing another. Space will be still more disappointing when one will say that it takes the form of an ignoble initiation ritual practiced by some negroes, desperately absurd, etc...'.*[5]

Concrete, discontinuous, and heterogeneous space disrupts the 'ruling continuity', which wished to establish its 'dignity', to render it "homogeneous-continuous". Indeed, Bataille attempts to 'perform'

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[4].Ibid.
[5].Ibid.

this (in order to allow the reader to briefly grasp how space is a 'scoundrel') by giving examples which are not precisely philosophic or scientific: a chimpanzee wearing some traditional woman's clothes, a fish, in a bowl, attempting to 'swallow' another, and finally a tribe from central Tanganyika in the middle of an 'ignoble' initiation ritual.[6] Those examples are trivial if one considers the question at stake (what is space?), and this triviality might induce a burst of laughter from the reader. But, it is precisely within this laughter that the reader might find the 'other' of knowledge, 'non-knowledge' (as I discussed in the previous chapter) and subsequently grasp the 'other' of the idealist space of the philosopher: Bataille's 'scoundrel' space (or in other words, borrowed from Bataille's terminology, the concrete-discontinuous-*heterogeneous* space).

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Bataille's 'scoundrel' or heterogeneous space cannot be discursively explained, cannot be controlled, mapped or charted. It remains beyond the scope of thought and discourse, yet, it can be, and it is, experienced every day. However, this experience does not lead this space to become autonomous either.

Bataille's 'scoundrel' space, his discontinuous-heterogeneous space being the 'other' of the homogeneous-continuous discourse on space, the space which, through its eruption, transgresses the limit of the idealist discourse — its space and its 'ruling continuity' — only surfaces at the moment it opens the limit of this continuous 'other'. Hence, this heterogeneous space does not materialize outside of the transgression it performs. Most importantly, it is not graspable without the conscious acknowledgement of its homogeneous 'other' and its limit.

Within Bataille's dualist theory on space, the homogeneous and heterogeneous spaces are thus definitively interrelated: first, because the heterogeneous space only reveals itself through a transgression of the homogeneous one, and secondly, because the homogeneous' primary function is not to directly reject its 'other' but first to attempt to reduce it to its homogeneity. It must succeed in its task in order to prevail. Hence, it seems that the homogenization of 'space' demands the participation of a 'servile' heterogeneous space; a space with a sense of 'duty'; a heterogeneous space accepting rationally, to be homogenized. Bataille writes:

> Of course it would be far better, for Space, to do its duty *and to fabricate the philosophical idea within the professors' apartments*'.[7]

But the homogeneous never manages to render space completely servile and reasonable. Concrete space still remains heterogeneous to all form of 'duty', to reason and the mind. Bataille's last sentence is quite significant with regard to the way concrete-heterogeneous space might be grasped (briefly) and how this process remains foreign to reason's site, the 'head':

> 'Obviously, it would never enter anybody's head to lock the professors up in prison to teach them what it is that space *(the day when, for example, the walls would collapse in front of their cells' bars)*'.[8]

The experience of the concreteness and heterogeneity of space is perhaps incongruous, improper, disordered but essentially a violent one. It is a matter, not for the mind or reason, as 'it would never

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[6]. Each example was illustrated in the original publication with a picture whose caption was directly taken from Bataille's text. For a reprint, translated in English, of the original text with illustration, see *Encyclopedia Acephalica*, Alastair Brotchie Ed., Atlas Press, London, 1995, pp. 75-77.

[7]. Georges Bataille, 'Espace', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 227.

A remark in passing: here it seems Bataille intuits that his 'take' on space is not based on a simple dualism. Indeed, if his 'space' his dual it is in a complex way, as there is the 'Space' which is a scoundrel (the heterogeneous one) and which should better 'do its duty', but also the philosophical idea, in other words the concept of homogeneous space, the 'fabrication' of which is precisely the duty of the former, and finally the 'space' where all this should happen: the 'philosophers apartments'. Hence, one might perceive here, that there is not two but three space: the concrete heterogeneous space, the conceptual continuous space (that is the ideal space), and the space of the 'philosophers' which does not share the features of the other, or at least does not share all them. This, in my view, announces, beyond the dualism of homogeneous and heterogeneous, the dualism within the heterogeneous realm (high and low) that Bataille discussed already in 'The D.A.F. de Sade' in 1930, and later in 1934 in 'The psychological structure of Fascism'.

[8]. Ibid..

enter anybody's head', but for the one who attempts to escape its head: an Acephale being?

V.2. 'Dust'

The article 'Dust', although not exactly about space nor precisely about architecture, already displays, (it was published in *Documents* a few month before 'Space' – in the fifth issue of the review's first year of publication, in October 1929 to be precise), the same strategic pattern that Bataille used in the article 'Space', to reveal – against the philosophers' discourse and all of sort of idealism and abstraction – the reality, baseness and/or concreteness of space (and by extension the function of architecture).In 'Space', Bataille attempts to reveal the heterogeneity of space in front of the homogenizing of the philosophers' discourse on space (space as continuous-homogeneous) by performing it, here, in the 'Dust' article Bataille brings within the ideal the base, within the holy, the filthy, within the fairy tale, the nightmare, within the pure, the dirt (or in this case the 'dust'):

> '*DUST. – The storytellers have not imagined that the Sleeping Beauty would have awoken covered in a thick layer of dust; nor have they envisaged the sinister spider's webs that the first movement of her red hair would have torn apart. Meanwhile gloomy sheets of dust constantly invade earthly habitations and uniformly defile them, as if it were a matter of setting up attics and old bedrooms for the imminent entrance of the obsessive fear, phantoms, larvae that the rotten odour of old dust nourishes and intoxicates'.[9]*

A fairy tale is usually narrated as progressing from an uncomfortable situation towards a happy ending. In other words its narration is an ascent. In the case of the 'Sleeping Beauty' the happy ending consists precisely in the awakening of the 'beauty' in question, an awakening that put an end to a sort of semi-death. The 'Sleeping Beauty' was not completely dead as she awakens. But also, she was not dead because she awakens without any stigmata of her 'past' death. She is pure, clean, fresh still, in a word, a beauty. Dust, on the contrary, is a marker of death. It is constituted of lost hairs, skin appendages and other dead bits of organisms (insects etc…). Hence, its presence points out that death is processing or has processed: it is, at least, an index of decay.

Death, as what disrupts and stands beyond life – as what stands radically beyond what one may know – is what exceeds knowledge, what is in excess of it. The task of the fairy tale is to play with the fear of death – the fear of not knowing what there is after death – in order perhaps to entertain, but also to overcome this fear. Death at the end is neither *the* end nor it is postponed but simply superseded. Thus, there is no need to fear: death is only a passing incident, a momentary death. In his sleep or through imagination, one can dream or think of him as dead, but when he wakes up or gets back to reality he knows he is not, and his fears and worries – of not knowing – vanish with what was just a fiction or a dream.

Bataille introduces 'dust' in the fairy tale in order to soil it. That is in order to bring it back to the real. Dust brings back the decay within the story. Dust reminds the reader, that death is no fairy tale. That there is no way to escape it: one should face it. One should not imagine or believe in a life after death or even, in this case, in a life within death, but rather one should live this death – as Bataille would state much later about eroticism: '*assenting to life up to the point of death*'.[10] In the same way as dust conquers spaces ('habitations', 'attics', 'bedrooms') and soils them in order to make them suitably (un-) tidy for receiving 'fear, ghost and worms' – all of which indulge in its smell – Bataille makes dust invade the realm of the fairy tale. With dust, it is an irreducible, non-superseded death (with its fear, the ghosts etc…) which reappears, the fairy tale's task is short-circuited, it can never fulfil its 'duty'. The reader is brought back in front of death. Because Perrault, the Grimm's brothers or Basile (whoever is truly at the origin of the 'Sleeping Beauty' tale) have 'imagined' their story, Bataille unleashes within the space of imagination and fiction the reality of death through what reveals its action: dust. Hence, the space of the marvellous, the fairy tale, the fiction, the imagination is disrupted by what it should have superseded.

In 'space', the philosophers' idealism and their will to homogenization was transgressed by the eruption of the heterogeneous-discontinuous space; here, it is the story-tellers' oversight of

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[9]. Georges Bataille, 'Poussiere', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 197.
[10]. Georges Bataille, *L'Erotisme*, in OC X, Gallimard, Paris, 1987. p.17.

dust and of what it marks, their attempt to get away with the fear of death and to forget dust, which opens the door for Bataille's disruption of 'their' space. For Bataille, scientific abstraction and philosophical idealism shares with imagination and fiction, a will and a task: to depurate the real, to render it safe, without fear, breaks, disruptions and transgression — in a word, marvellously homogeneous. In the next paragraph, Bataille ties both attitudes more precisely:

> *'When the chubby girls "maids of all work" arm themselves, each morning, with a large feather-duster, or even with an electric vacuum-cleaner, they are perhaps not absolutely unaware that they are contributing as much as the most positivist scientists to chase away the evil phantoms, that cleanliness and logic disgust'.*[11]

Here, the scientists are accused of 'chasing away', all the elements which abhor reason and depurated space. Before, it was the storytellers who were accused of forgetting 'dust', of not 'having imagined' the dirt (spider webs etc...), that would have concealed the 'Sleeping Beauty'. Now, Bataille claims their equivalence, or at least the similarity of their function, by comparing them with the 'chubby' maids who relentlessly, on a daily basis, attempt to 'clean' the dust'. For Bataille, thought, either scientific or philosophic, has one and only one aim, to homogenize, that is to purify the real. Philosophers tell 'how space should behave' in order to avoid disruptions, scientists 'chase away phantoms' from that space to keep it homogeneous, and story-tellers 'have not imagined' how one of those 'phantoms' would persist and point out the irreducibility of death. Philosophic idealism, positive scientism and storytelling are just a snobbish way to do the housework, to dust away the dirt. They must endlessly attempt to homogenize or constantly exclude what exceeds reason, logic and the marvellous. But their fight is lost in advance:

> *'One day or another, it is true, dust, given it persists, will probably begin to gain the upper hand over the maids, invading the immense rubble of abandoned buildings or deserted dockyards, and, at that distant epoch, there will remain nothing to dismiss night-terrors, for lack of which we have become such great accountants...'.*[12]

The maids (philosophers, scientists, story tellers), will be overwhelmed by the dust, the dirt and other indexes of decay. Then, if we believe Bataille there will be no hope: 'night-terrors' will be back. One will have no other choice than to face the reality of death. There will be no way to escape. Death will remains an 'impossibility', yet everyone will be, if not rationally conscious, at least ecstatically aware of its nature. The 'nightmares', no doubt quite real this time, will impose themselves on everyone. However, Bataille's tone intimates that he somehow welcomes them: men will be forced to abandon their homogenizing/cleaning/controlling practices. They will have to learn how 'to love the ignorance that touches upon the future'.[13] They will have to stop being 'great accountants' (no more calculated risks, no more plans). Perhaps they will become great expenders/disrupters without purpose?

V.3. 'Architecture'

Scientists, philosophers and even storytellers, attempt to clean 'space', to render it homogeneous, or to exclude from its core the fears, dirt and spectres that would disrupt its continuity. For Bataille this 'attitude' is the sign of a wish: to supersede this 'impossible' (to know, to rationalize) and final (there is nothing beyond, or at least nothing one can know) rupture-discontinuity-heterogeneity, which is death. The radical excess is either re-appropriated (homogenized) or rejected as an insignificant surplus — a no more threatening excess.

What about architecture in all this? It is common to say that architecture, as a construct, materializes a space: but what kind of space? Is architecture making common cause with the

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[11]. Georges Bataille, 'Poussière', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 197.

[12]. Ibid.

[13]. See. Georges Bataille, *Le coupable*, in OC V, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 260-61
Here, Bataille, quotes Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* : 'Ich liebe die Unwissenheit um die Zukunft'.
It is interesting to notice the 'tactile' touch that Bataille gave to his translation, 'I love the ignorance concerning the future' is translated as 'I love the ignorance that touches upon the future'. As if to get to (un)know/love what the ignorance of the future might be, was the 'job' of the body—and thus in no way the task of the mind.

homogeneous space of the philosophers? Is there such an architecture, of which the architect would be nothing more than a 'chubby girl – maid of all work'? In opposition to this, is architecture able to reveal the concrete-heterogeneous space, that Bataille, attempted to make erupt in his article 'Space'? Is there an architecture welcoming dust, spiders, phantoms and dirty obsession, an architecture that won't attempt to supersede any radical excess (and thus death)? Perhaps it is taking part in both enterprises – and thus claims for itself a dual and ambiguous function? Bataille's article on architecture provides the reader with the beginning of an answer to all those questions.

Bataille's article 'Architecture' was first published in the 'Critical Dictionary' of the second issue of *Documents*' first year of publication (1929) or more specifically, within the 'Critical Dictionary'. The article is composed of only three brief paragraphs and starts with a very affirmative tone:

> *'ARCHITECTURE. – Architecture is the expression of the true being of societies, as human physiognomy is the expression of the being of individuals. However, it is especially to the physiognomy of officials (prelates, magistrates, admirals) that this comparison pertains. In fact, only society's ideal being, the one that commands and prohibits with authority, expresses itself in architectural compositions, properly speaking. Thus great monuments rise up like dams, opposing all disturbing elements, with a logic of majesty and authority; it is in the form of cathedrals and palaces that Church and State address and impose silence upon the masses. It is obvious, indeed, that monuments inspire social wisdom and often even genuine fear. The storming of the Bastille is symbolic of this state of things: it is difficult to explain this mass movement, otherwise than by the people's animosity towards the monuments which are their veritable masters'.*[14]

Within this first paragraph, Bataille confidently states a few ideas worth repeating: first, architecture communicates ('expresses'), not what society really is (its 'true being'), but only what is it's 'ideal being'. This 'ideal being' is the one who 'commands and prohibits with authority'; in other words it is the political leadership who has power over society. Hence, the precision that Bataille highlights: his comparison 'pertains' more specifically, (it must be related above all), to the 'officials' (the heads of a societal order – either religious in the case of the 'prelates', or judicial in the case of the 'magistrates', or finally military as with the 'admirals') who constitute the political power. Furthermore, as architecture 'expresses' only a part of society – the ideal and authoritarian part – it opposes (due to what it expresses: a 'logic of majesty'), those segments of society, which are a threat to the good social 'wisdom'. Thus, the masses, which are by no means 'ideal', are oppressed and/or silenced to the extent that their only way out resides in the 'storming' of the architectures which they consider as what really overwhelm them (their 'veritable masters'). To summarize, *architecture appears, here, as the target of the 'masses' because it is a means of communication through which the 'ideal' part of society oppresses its unruly counterparts, which are precisely those 'masses'.*

Now, what are society and communication for Bataille? Although I have already mentioned, in the preceding chapter, Bataille's peculiar grasp of community, communication and society, I think it is necessary here to recall it.

At the time of the College of Sociology (thus, a few years after *Documents*), Bataille claimed that 'society' is more than simply the sum of its parts.[15] According to him, it is a 'composed being', different from the 'mass' of 'organisms' which it contains. This difference residing precisely in the presence within society of something in excess of this mass: a movement of communion between its parts. This movement of communion which forms communities and then, society – this 'something' which leads society to be more than the simple sum of its parts, in other words a composed being – exposes itself in different practices (festival, ritual initiations etc...) which Bataille considers to be 'moments of loss and communication'.[16] Hence, communication is what 'unites' a composed being. But as this communication is also a 'moment of loss', it is neither

[14]. Georges Bataille, 'Architecture', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 171-2.
[15]. Georges Bataille and Roger Caillois, 'La sociologie sacrée et les rapports entre "société", "organisme" et "être", in *Le Collège de Sociologie*, ed. Denis Hollier, Gallimard, Paris, 1995. p. 39.
[16]. Georges Bataille, 'Le Collège de Sociologie' in *Le Collège de Sociologie*, ed. Denis Hollier, Gallimard, Paris, 1995. p. 808.

neutral nor even a smooth process:

> *'[...] beings are only united with each other through dismemberments or wounds; [...] elements are put together to form a whole, [...] when each one loses, through a rip in its integrity, a part of its own being, which goes to the benefit of the communal being'.*[17]

Communication is thus, in Bataille's view, a 'wound', a violent way to create a (temporary and illusory) unity within society (or within a community), a destruction of the integrity of the singular beings who 'communicate' (either the ones who utter a word or the ones who hear it). Now, we know what communication does to society — or rather, to the parts which constitute society — but what about these parts?

Between the period of the College and the one of *Documents*, Bataille, more specifically in his 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', identified the different 'parts' or 'beings', which form 'society'.[18] In this essay Bataille claims that society is formed on a dualism: on the one hand there is the homogeneous part (he defines 'homogeneity' as 'the commensurability of elements and the awareness of this commensurability')[19] and, on the other hand, there is, what this homogeneous part excludes: the different heterogeneous elements which 'have an existence valid in themselves'.[20]

Homogeneous society is thus:

> *'[...] a productive society, namely useful society. Every useless element is excluded, not from society as a whole, but from its homogeneous part. In this part, each element must be useful to another without the homogeneous activity ever being able to attain the form of activity valid in itself. A useful activity has always a common denominator with another useful activity, but not with activity for its own sake, [...] thus, in the present order things, the homogeneous part of society is made up of those men who own the means of production or the money destined for their maintenance or purchase. It is in the so-called capitalist or bourgeois class, exactly in the middle segment of this class, that the reduction of human character into an abstract and interchangeable entity takes place, a reflection of the homogeneous objects possessed'.*[21]

Thus, the homogeneous part of society is constituted of the bourgeois, theirs habits and their properties (the means of production). But what about the workers who are at the heart of the production's system? Bataille clarifies their position as such:

> *'[...] the industrial proletariat remains for the most part irreducible. The position it occupies with regard to the homogeneous activity is double: the latter excludes it not from work, but from profit. As agents of production, the workers fall within the framework of the social organization, but the homogeneous reduction affects in principle only their wage-related activity; they are integrated into the psychological homogeneity with regard to their professional behaviour as workers, not generally as men. Outside of the factory, and even beyond its technical operations, to a homogeneous person (patron, bureaucrat, etc...) a worker is, a stranger, a man of another nature, of a non-reduced, non-servile nature'.*[22]

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[17]. Ibid.

[18]. Obviously, one can oppose here the connection I propose, as this essay and those lectures were written some years after the print, within *Documents*, of the article 'architecture' (five years later for "The Psychological Structure of Fascism' and seven or eight years for the College's lectures. However, I sustain that those pieces are seminal for understanding what Bataille claims for 'architecture'. Indeed, those texts can be read as a development of Bataille's reflection — by then, more focused on society, community and the rise of fascism — on the heterogeneous and the homogeneous; a reflection initiated, at least discursively, with Bataille's statements on 'heterology' in the 'The Use Value of DAF de Sade', an essay written (but unpublished during Bataille's lifetime) around the years 1929-30, i.e., precisely, the years of *Documents'* publication.

[19]. Georges Bataille, 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 340.

[20]. Ibid. p. 342.

[21]. Ibid. pp. 340-1.

[22]. Ibid. p. 341.

The worker is thus only a segment of the homogeneous part of society as long as he produces. From the moment he starts to simply be 'alive', to simply be a 'man', he is excluded, he enters the heterogeneous part of society:

> '[...] heterogeneous existence can be represented, when compared with everyday life [homogeneous part] as something 'wholly other', as incommensurate, by charging these words with the positive value they have in an effective lived experience'.[23]

The homogeneous part of society 'creates' the heterogeneous one by not being able to homogenize it — it remains 'incommensurate'. But, this leads the homogeneous society to be a rather 'precarious form'. Indeed, all the heterogeneous elements which are rejected outside of its realm, and which are not profiting from its productive processes can form a real threat to its existence. Hence, Bataille notes;

> '[...] the survival of the homogeneous society lies in its recourse to imperative elements that are capable of obliterating or reducing the various unruly forces'.[24]

Those imperative elements are themselves outside of the 'homogeneous' realm. They are thus heterogeneous but different in kind and/or function from the unruly elements, workers (when they don't work) and the 'masses' which threaten the homogeneous order, as they struggle against them. Hence, what appears clearly is that, for Bataille, not only society is founded on a dualism but also one of its part –the heterogeneous one — appears as formed on the base of a dualism: there are 'high' and 'imperative' heterogeneous elements which defend the homogeneous realm's stability by 'reducing' to 'nothingness' the 'low', 'impure' or 'miserable' heterogeneous segments. Bataille states this in rather transparent terms:

> '[...] there is, in a certain sense, an identity of opposites between glory and dejection, between elevated and imperative (higher) forms and impoverished (lower) forms. This opposition splits the whole of the heterogeneous world and joins the already defined characteristics of heterogeneity as a fundamental element'.[25]

One of those figures of the 'high' and 'imperative' heterogeneous, is, according to Bataille, the sovereign king, and indeed, the king has an existence which is valid in itself (which means it is purely useless within a productive-commensurate realm), he is above the rest of society, and in many ways he oppresses the 'masses' through his singular behaviour (his existence is valid in itself, but it is through this 'sovereign' existence, as he consumes without producing, that he oppresses the 'masses'. And it is precisely the outcome of this behaviour that the homogeneous elements, bourgeois or aristocrats, 'need' in order to ensure their survival). Hence, this form of 'sovereignty':

> '[...] fulfils the ideal of society and the course of things. [...] At the same time it is strict authority. Situated above homogeneous society, as well as above the impoverished populace or the aristocratic hierarchy that emanates from it, it requires the bloody repression of what is contrary to it'.[26]

To summarize, Bataille's 'Psychological Structure of Fascism' claims that society is a based on the dualism of its homogeneous (productive-commensurate) part and its heterogeneous (irreducible-valid in itself) segment. A heterogeneous part, which is itself formed on a dualism: there is a high and imperative heterogeneous and a low and impure one. The high heterogeneous forces (imperative) genuinely ensure the stability of the homogeneous world's order (of which they are the 'ideal') through the violent repression/extermination of the low (impure) heterogeneous elements.

This said, it somehow sheds some interesting light on the first paragraph of Bataille's article

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[23]. Ibid. p. 348.
[24]. Ibid. p. 342.
[25]. Ibid. p. 350.
[26]. Ibid. p. 355.

on 'Architecture'. Hence, I argue that within those first lines Bataille does not naively oppose architecture as a whole nor does he negatively criticize its (classical) 'form'.[27] Rather, what Bataille does is more complex. He assesses the political function of architecture in the process of society's formation: architecture is a means of communication (violent by definition) through which the 'ideal', the higher, imperative, and authoritarian form of heterogeneity — indeed the prelates, magistrates and admirals are all above society, impose a rule or a law, and find the validity of their existence within themselves — controls, oppresses and silences the 'masses' — the lower, impure, miserable form of heterogeneity — in order to ensure the survival and thus the existence of society, or at least of what seems in appearance its most fundamental section: its homogeneous part (the bourgeois).

With this first paragraph, Bataille states, what is, in his view, the political function of architecture: its role in the protection of the homogeneous part of society, what it does in this process. But, until now he did not discuss any other possibilities for the 'low' and 'impure' heterogeneous elements to escape architecture's operations, than to 'storm' it. The second and third paragraph of the 'architecture's' article helps to clarify this. Here is the second one:

> '*Hence, whenever* architectural composition *is found other than in monuments, whether it be in physiognomy, dress, music, or painting, can we infer a prevailing taste for human or divine* authority. *The famous compositions of certain painters express the will to constrain the spirit within an official ideal. The disappearance of academic constructions in painting is, conversely, an open path to the expression (and thereby the exaltation) of psychological processes the most incompatible with social stability. This explains in large part, the strong reactions provoked for over half a century, by the progressive transformation of painting, until then characterised by a sort of dissimulated architectural skeleton'.*[28]

Here, Bataille contends that 'architecture' can operate beyond its conventional realm. Architecture is a means (of communication) through which the 'high' heterogeneous elements of society (its ideal) oppress the 'low' heterogeneous elements, not only within the 'built' environment, but in other domains. Bataille mentions four examples but focuses only on one of them, painting. Architecture, or at least one of its features, its 'composition' infiltrates classical painting as a way to express with authority, or simply to impose (Bataille speaks of 'a will to constrain the spirit'), within this 'art' the 'official ideal', the elected taste of the 'higher' heterogeneous segments of society. Conversely, Bataille affirms that, within this 'art' or this 'realm' of painting, the suppression of this architectural composition (or construct), might lead to the communication (with an assumed violence) or using Bataille words, the 'expression and thereby exaltation' of actions ('processes') which might be a threat to 'social stability'. If painting is not structured anymore by the architectural composition, i.e. if it does not 'express' the ideal of society, the higher heterogeneous elements might lose their grip on it, thus a way will be open, through painting, for the 'low' heterogeneous elements to release their 'bad' (as opposed to the 'good' ideal) tastes and obsessions against the 'high' heterogeneous and homogeneous part of society. This way or 'path', in Bataille's view — at the time he wrote this article ('Architecture') in April 1929 — was cleared, over half a century before: a period which is usually considered by art historians as the one during which 'modern' painting was born.[29] Hence, it appears, that for Bataille (in April 1929) 'modern' painting (and its subsequent transformation) is an alternative way (other than the storming of 'architectures') for the 'masses' and their 'impure' heterogeneous obsessions to escape the 'architectural' oppression of the 'ideal' sections of society. Now, although it seems we know an alternative to architecture's 'storming', it is still unclear what this alternative does precisely, or how it operates. The last paragraph attempts an

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[27]. Indeed, due to Bataille's mention, already within this first paragraph, of the form of cathedrals and palaces', often readers (mainly interested in architecture and its form) who focus only on this article and more specifically on this excerpt, comprehend it as a critique of form.

[28]. Georges Bataille, 'Architecture', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 171-2.

[29]. For Bataille, like for the most of art historians, modern painting is born with Manet. Yet for Bataille the first 'modern' painting is not *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* from 1962 but *Olympia* from 1963 (exposed 1865). If the former painting created a scandal, the latter almost launched riots. A sign of the virulence of the 'psychological processes' expressed but also of the violent reaction the higher heterogeneous elements might have when their 'good' taste is soiled by an impure and low 'bad' taste.

answer:

> *'Furthermore it is obvious, that mathematical order imposed upon stone is none other than the culmination of the evolution of earthly forms, whose direction is given, within the biological order by the passage from the simian to the human form, the latter already displaying all the elements of architecture. Men represent apparently within the morphological process, merely an intermediary stage between monkeys and great edifices. Forms have become more and more static, more and more dominant. Thus, from the very onset the human order is solidary with the architectural order, which is only its development. In consequence, if one attacks architecture, whose monumental productions are by now the veritable master over the whole earth, grouping the servile multitudes under their shadow, demanding admiration and astonishment, order and constraint, one is, in a certain way, attacking Man. At the present moment, an entire earthly activity, and undoubtedly the most outstanding within the intellectual genre, tends in this direction, through the denunciation of human dominance: thus, however strange this may seem when a creature as elegant as the human being is involved, a path opens up – traced by painters – towards a bestial monstrosity, as if there was no other chance to escape the architectural prison'.[30]*

The argument is rather clear: at the summit of the evolutionary path one finds architecture ('mathematical order imposed upon stone'), as the final development of the human figure. The latter already possesses most of the 'elements of architecture', architecture is just 'more static' and, through this stability, 'more dominant'. Architecture is thus, for that reason (its being at the summit of the evolutionary path of 'earthly forms'), the most perfected figure that humans must become or resemble, a sort of 'prison' or obligation. Here, Bataille points out to something seminal for understanding how architecture, under the agency of the imperative elements of society, operates: it communicates the ideal of society to such an extent, that it becomes what it expresses. Indeed, Bataille states that human and architectural orders are so intertwined ('solidary') that somehow they conflate. Already, in the first paragraph, it was mentioned that the 'masses' took 'architecture', and not directly the ideal sections of society (high heterogeneous), as 'their real masters'. The reification is here total: the ideal 'Man' and architecture – as the 'culmination of the evolution of earthly forms' – have become one.

Hence, Bataille concludes, any actions that would appear as an assault on this prison which is architecture, is a way to 'attack Man', the ideal, high, pure heterogeneous Man. By trashing architecture, the impure and low 'masses' would first release themselves from their 'prison', then take down the 'expression' of the ideal, and finally threaten the stability of society which was until now preserved by its dominion. As an example of what might be a plan for escaping this architectural prison, Bataille ends his article by repeating his praise of 'modern' painting as it 'tends actually in this direction': it does not express/communicate the 'higher' heterogeneous, the 'ideal' being of society, but rather confronts it, with the 'bestial monstrosity' of the 'masses'. The direction of the evolutionary path is reverted, its 'hierarchy' implodes under the performance of 'modern' painters (the culmination of human development is then a fall back into the 'low'), and the 'high' heterogeneous is taking the 'hit', so to speak.

This said, it appears that within the article 'architecture' there is no 'architectural alternative' to the oppression of the 'masses' (of the 'low' heterogeneous). There is only a 'way opened up by painters', hence through the art of painting. [31] This seems quite logical: the masses perceiving

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[30]. Georges Bataille, 'Architecture', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 171-2. I here translate 'chiourme architectural' by 'architectural prison'. Often Bataille's translators have used the term 'architectural straitjacket'. 'Chiourme' is a synonym for 'bagne': the 'old' name of the 'penitentiary colony'. Nowadays in French the expression 'garde chiourme' [prison warder] is still in use.

[31]. Furthermore, Bataille gave up, a few months after he wrote this 'architecture' article, his belief in the possibility of the masses' emancipation through pictorial means. Indeed, the last piece he wrote for *Documents* (before the review lost its founding) 'The Modern Spirit and the Play of Transposition' is a confident denunciation of Modern art (and spirit) as just a 'transposition' of the deepest human motivations and obsessions, of its 'bestial monstrosity', a transposition without any radical impact, which rather leads to the homogenization of this 'bestial monstrosity'. This is of importance for the thesis that this dissertation wishes to demonstrate but also with regard to an artistic/architectural employment of Bataille's thought. Indeed, if art, as a whole, is dismissed by Bataille as just another inoffensive transposition: what about the work of any architect or artist who would like to 'transpose' Bataille writing's themes, notions and operations

architectures as their true masters, Bataille who did not think of himself as anything other than one of the lowest elements of society, could not here claim for architecture any other fate.[32] If he had, within this article, proposed an 'architectural alternative', he would not have been able to affirm that his reflection was 'base' or embedded deep, within the real.

However, instead of the potentiality of an architectural alternative, what matters now, is what this conflation of 'Man' with 'architecture' means for architecture, beyond its status of target: if 'architecture' and 'Man' are conflated, it makes senses that they share their features. 'Man' the ideal, imperative, high heterogeneous element, who oppresses the low heterogeneous masses and supports the homogeneous part of society, has, most importantly, an existence valid in itself: he is thus, per se, in excess of a commensurate society. Hence, if 'Man' is reified as 'architecture', the latter is nothing other, than an excess.

The article 'architecture' (read in light of, 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', and Bataille's lecture on community, society and communication), addresses the political function, in the process of society's formation and defence, of the art of building in a rather radical way: architecture is merely a means of communication – a violent one certainly – through which the 'ideal', the higher, imperative, and authoritarian form of heterogeneity, controls and oppresses the 'masses' (the lower, impure, miserable form of heterogeneity) in order to ensure the existence of the homogeneous society (bourgeois, patrons, bureaucrats etc...). But, from this simple status of a means, it becomes, to a certain extent, what it expressed: from being an index of the excess, it becomes this excess; a leakage of the 'high' heterogeneous back into the homogeneous realm.

But, one may ask, are these means of communication and this leakage, limited to be the proper tools of the sole 'high' heterogeneous, or can they also be the un-proper device of the impure form of heterogeneity?

V.4. 'Museum'

In the second paragraph of the article 'architecture', it is mentioned that 'architecture' operates beyond the 'built environment'. Bataille took the example of academic painting, in which could be read a certain 'architectural composition', a composition operating as architecture does, that is, as a means (of communication) through which the 'high' heterogeneous elements of society (its ideal) support the homogenizing of the profane part of society (the homogeneous-commensurable part of society), with the difference that this homogenizing is exercised not simply within the 'built' environment but in the pictorial discipline. In other words, it was intuited that architecture, metaphorically, permits the homogenizing of the profane by the ideal and the most 'high' also in the 'cultural' realm.

The article 'Museum', published in the fifth issue of *Documents'* second year of publication (1930), confirms this once again, but in a different way: it shows that Bataille does not consider that 'architecture' operates in the cultural realm only through one of its metaphors or features (architectural composition). Indeed, in this brief article (which was part of the dictionary) Bataille shows that architecture, here under the form of the 'museum', ensures a sort of 'cultural' hegemony, whose primary function is to sustain social stability (homogeneity). This has two consequences for architecture: first, it shows that architecture can (not only through one of its metaphors or features) have a direct impact in a field other than the political (here, the 'cultural'),

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to a physical practices (painting, design, architecture etc...). In my view there can't be a Bataillian architecture, or a Bataillian art, as much as there can't be (mastered by an artist or an architect) a 'formless' art or a 'formless' architecture without a transposition, hence without an homogenization of Bataille's thought. Nevertheless, a Bataillian critique of architecture, or better said, a Bataillian 'contestation' of the political function of architecture is in my view possible. See, Georges Bataille, 'L'esprit moderne et le jeu des transpositions', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 271-4.

[32]. Obviously one way to escape this fate, is 'opened' by certain scholars who wishes to stress the importance, within this last paragraph of the 'architecture' article, of the word 'form'; and, indeed, that word appears four time. They often conclude, or at least intuit, that the critique, expressed here, does not point to a political or social one (linked to the function of architecture) but simply to a formal issue (or even to a problem with Bataille's 'figurative limitation'). Hence, against a 'formal' architecture, they raise the possibility of a 'formless' one (yet, mastered by the architect). See, for example, the case of Andrew Benjamin that I discussed in the prologue of this dissertation. Andrew Benjamin, *Architectural Philosophy*, London and New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000.

then, this also means that architecture can be employed as a means of oppression, and not only through its appearance or presence. Architecture appears as a 'straightforward' means of homogenizing, when it expresses the dominant political power (the ideal), as the 'architecture' article contends, but it also preserves its function—without losing any efficiency—when it simply hosts processes of 'homogenizing' which pertain to domains that would seem foreign, but which are, actually, deeply intertwined with the political (here, again, the 'cultural').

> *'MUSEUM. —According to the Grande Encyclopédie, the first museum in the modern sense of the word (that is to say the first public collection) would seem to have been founded on the 27 July 1793, in France, by the convention. The origin of the modern museum would thus be linked to the development of the guillotine. However, the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, founded at the end of the 17th century, was already a public collection belonging to the University'.* [33]

Bataille begins this article in a pattern very similar to the one he uses in 'Dust' or 'Space', a pattern which is visible in most of the article of the *Documents'* dictionary. He begins by exposing what science, philosophy, or more precisely, the *'Encyclopédie'* – all of which are agents of homogenization (or at least of an intellectual one), – have to say about the topic he wishes to address. He then points out, how their take on the subject, or their conclusions, are, indeed, a matter for discussion. According to the source, which has authority (the *'Encyclopédie'*), the first museum should have been founded under the 'convention' (the political regime of post-revolutionary France) in 1793, but, Bataille mentions that in Oxford, one century earlier, at the University, the Ashmolean Museum had already the same function. Hence, academic sources are dismissed when it comes to deciding exactly what a museum is. This is the first transgression, the transgression of the academic authority which guarantees/defines what a museum is: the transgression causes it to fall from its status of confident superiority, to a position where its judgement might be questioned.

Then, Bataille also transgresses the definition itself. This is the moment when what was defined loses its neutrality and is attracted towards the low, the violent, the terror. If the Museum is founded at the time of (or just after) the French revolution, one might be tempted to relate it to the guillotine, the symbol of the bloody madness that occurred under the 'terror'. Suddenly, the museum – the place where 'culture', 'art' and 'knowledge' (concerning them) are preserved and are safeguarded from the assault of passing time – is tied to a certain violence, or at least to a very strong symbol of it. The guillotine was the means, by which so many lost their heads, in France, until recently.[34] Here, it is the pattern grasped in 'Architecture' which surfaces: architecture seemed to be the expression of the very being of society, but is finally and only the expression of its ideal, an ideal which, using architecture as a means, violently imposes itself on to the 'impure' and unruly elements. In both cases, a certain violence is revealed by Bataille, as being bound up with the architectural. But, without Bataille, this violence would be concealed; architecture would just express the very being of society (restrictive as it may be) and the 'museum' would be as far from the violence of the guillotine, as where its 'development' would lead it. The origin should be in accordance with the development:

> *'The development of museums has obviously surpassed the hopes – even the most optimistic – of the founders. Not only does the totality of the world's museums today represent a colossal accumulation of riches, but above all, the great number of visitors, without any doubt represents the most grandiose spectacle, of a humanity freed from material cares and dedicated to contemplation'.* [35]

Accumulation, for Bataille, is the aim and consequence of a homogeneous society (the profane world), its secured goal and only authorised outcome. Within the homogeneous part of society, the commensurability of people and goods, as well as the awareness and defence of this

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[33]. Georges Bataille, 'Musée', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 239-40 .

[34]. France was the last, in western Europe, country to abolish the death penalty on the 9th of October 1981 (some thirty years ago). This perhaps explains why France has so many museums....

[35]. Georges Bataille, 'Musée', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 239-40 .

commensurability, excludes all elements, which refuse to be simply appropriated. Those elements are silenced as they represent a form of loss. Commensurability does not allow a pure loss to exist, only productivity and expansion are accepted, and expenditures are never realised as pure losses but as necessary re-investments.

The museum, as a 'colossal accumulation' of goods and valuable items (in the sense that they have a commensurable value) throws back at the homogeneous society the images it wishes to see. As the museum collects the images, which fit the vision that the profane would like to have of itself, it becomes one of the most perfect images of a homogeneous society, obsessed by accumulation. The museum does not question, neither through its content nor through its function, the homogeneous society and its means of cohesion. It does not reveal what is to be found at the fringes or beyond the scope of the homogeneous: the excluded low heterogeneous elements and their disruptive 'bestial monstrosity'. Nor does it, in consequence, rupture the ruling homogeneity. Rather, the museum 'frees' the homogeneous elements from those issues (the problematic actions, behaviour and obsessions, which might reduce, perhaps until depletion, what is accumulated). The unruly elements who might disturb the social comfort (homogeneity) are erased (at least from the precinct of the museum), and, with them, the material concerns disappear.

The homogeneous elements of society, that is, the bourgeois or those elements of the 'masses' who agree to be homogenized, carelessly indulge in the images offered them by the museum, to such an extent, that they are 'dedicated to contemplation'. But, contemplation is as much a careful observation as it is a religious posture. Religious contemplation, feverish prayer, or anguished repentance should lead one, according to the 'book', towards salvation; and indeed, for Bataille, the museum might be a sort of confessional:

> 'We must take into account the fact that galleries and objects of art are no more than a container, the contents of which are created by the visitors: it is the contents which distinguish a museum from a private collection. A museum is like the lung of a great city: every Sunday the crowd flows into the museum, like blood, and leaves it fresh and purified. The pictures are only dead surfaces and it is within the crowd that the play, the flashes, the shimmering of light, technically described by the authorised critics takes place. On Sunday, at five o'clock, at the exit door of the Louvre, it is interesting to admire the torrent of visitors visibly animated with a desire to be totally similar to the celestial apparitions with which their eyes are still ravished'.[38]

The metaphor is eloquent: like the lung purifies the body's blood, the museum purifies the great city's crowd. It preserves the social homogeneity: the elements, which could be tempted to disassociate themselves from this homogeneity, are, after a visit to the museum, cured. But, the museum and the objects displayed within its precincts are only 'containers' or some 'dead surfaces'. Hence, their responsibility, in this process of self-homogenizing or purification is quite minor. Indeed, Bataille claims that it is 'within the crowd' that the effect of the 'authorised' art expert's discourse are realised. The museum and the paintings just do their 'duty'. They give back to the homogeneous folks what they came for: a ravishment; a ravishment due to seeing the image of what it is that they are aiming at, to perceiving what they desire to be, what they wish to become, that is, what is above them: their ideal (the 'celestial apparitions') to which they aspire.

The museum, which should be linked to the guillotine, instead of chopping off someone's head, helps to raise a 'head' (as what is above the homogeneous), when needed. Nevertheless, the museum is still a site of 'violence', but whereas the guillotine's violence was the violence of the low 'masses', directed against the 'high' head (the king, or whoever else came to occupy its distinctive and influential position after him: Robespierre, Danton, Saint-Just etc...), here it is the head as the 'ideal', residing above the homogeneous society which acts violently, yet invisibly (nothing is more violent than to silence someone's existence) against the 'masses' monstrosity.

But, this head, in a post-revolutionary society (after 1793) is not God, but a parody of God, the 'ideal' Man (contained in, at least its image, and reinforced, at least in its authority, by the museum). Hence, the museum perhaps purifies the 'crowd', but it is a parody of a church or of a confessional. This is not to say that Bataille suddenly became disappointed by religions' loss of grip on society, rather, in my view, here, he questions what happened after the death of God. What has

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[38]. Ibid.

come to replace God, and is, per se, as vain and empty (although perhaps logically necessary), as what preceded it? The next paragraph exposes it clearly:

> *'Grandville has schematised the relations between the container and the contained in museums by exaggerating (in appearance at the very least) the bonds that are temporarily established between the visited and the visitors. In the same way, when a native of the Ivory Coast places polished stone axes of the Neolithic period in a container filled with water, bathes in the container, and sacrifices chickens to what he believes to be the thunder stones (fallen from heaven in thunderclap), he is doing no more than prefiguring the attitude of enthusiasm and profound communion with objects which characterises the visitor to a modern museum'.*[37]

Major religions (and this obviously includes Christianity), often reduce the beliefs of the natives when they are conquered, to the mere sum of pagan rituals. Here, it is the religions, which are reduced to mere pagan rituals, rituals that lead ('prefiguring the attitude') to the behaviour of the homogeneous crowd in front of the museum's content. The museum is the site of a parody of religion; a return to a pagan ritual in which the icons representing God, the thunder stones 'fallen from heaven', or other stuff that would point to some superior entity, are replaced by simple art objects expressing the ideal 'Man'. One more difference: it is not the body of the Christ, (as an act of love meant to unify the masses) or something similar to it, a bunch of chickens (as a means of showing devotion to the gods of thunder) which are sacrificed, but the low, impure and heterogeneous elements of society which are erased as an act of social cohesion. Nevertheless, this parody of religion is well done, and the 'enthusiasm' and 'communion', it allows, are 'profound' and efficient:

> *The museum is a colossal mirror, in which man finally contemplates himself, in all his aspects, finds himself literally admirable and abandons himself to the ecstasy expressed in all art journals'.*[38]

The museum, an architectural object, as it accumulates what are the artistic standards of society, appears as a means through which a certain cultural hegemony is secured (the one of society 'officials' as Bataille wrote in his article 'architecture'). This cultural hegemony's primary concern and function is not to simply exhibit what society, and the individuals of which it is composed, consist, but rather to enforce on this society what its homogeneous part wilfully elected as its ideal. As the ideal is not an inoffensive aesthetic but what guarantees the social cohesion (homogeneity), this cultural hegemony is obviously not innocent of political agencies. Hence, the museum, as it secures the cultural hegemony and 'reflects' the 'ideal' of homogeneous society, is, first and foremost, a means of social homogenizing.

With this article, 'Museum', Bataille shows, that for him, 'architecture' still expresses, or here reflects, what the ideal, 'admirable' man is: the 'high' heterogeneous whose function is to preserve the homogeneity of society. Yet, this time, it is neither simply through its 'form' nor its 'mass' nor the 'dignity' of its monumentality that it does so, but through what it hosts and through the function that this content confers on it (accumulation of riches). Thus, Bataille's assessment of architecture is not uniquely concerned with its 'form' but rather — and this in a much more seminal way — with its function, the functions it hosts, and how they all proceed or, how they are proceeded.

V.5. 'Extinct America'

The articles, which I have just discussed, when put into context, would seem to imply that Bataille's take on architecture is a rather offensive one. Architecture, apparently being nothing more than a tool through which the ideal of homogeneous society, its 'sacralised' high heterogeneous, oppresses the 'low' heterogeneous elements, either by attempting to homogenize them or by simply rejecting and erasing them. Architecture's function would be nothing other than to express,

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[37]. Ibid.
[38]. Ibid.

or to allow some room for expression of what is not homogenized, but which nevertheless ensure and impose, precisely because of its status of 'exception' (as the 'high' heterogeneous), society's stability and order. Is architecture condemned to be a simple means? Is this predicament in which architecture seems to be embedded — architecture as the oppressive hand of the dominant segment of society — truly inescapable? Is, architecture, for Bataille, particularly with regard to those matters, everywhere the same, and, through history, never acting in any way other than out of 'duty'?

An article, 'Extinct America', published just a few months before Bataille's *Documents* first issue was released — an thus before Bataille wrote any piece concerned, closely or not, with architecture — if not answering completely those questions, at least gives the reader some hints about what Bataille's answers might have been.

'Extinct America' ['L'Amérique disparue', also translated as 'Vanished America'], was published in the special issue of the *Cahiers de la république des lettres, des sciences et des arts* which was dedicated to 'Pre-Columbian art, America before Christopher Columbus,' and which served as the catalogue of the 1929 first major European exhibition of pre-Columbian artefacts. As I mentioned in the third chapter of this dissertation, this review's special issue was edited by Pierre d'Espezel, a colleague of Bataille, at the Bibliothéque Nationale, who was also the editor (with Jean Babelon another of Bataille's colleagues) of *Aréthuse*, a journal of art and archaeology. This article is important, regarding the development of Bataille's thought, for two reasons: First, because it discusses (although briefly) peculiar architectures before any of the *Documents'* articles were written. Thus, in this text, one can see the original framework from which Bataille's later assessment of architecture derived. Then, this article is also essential regarding the elaboration of Bataille's thought because it is due to its acknowledged quality (as well as the seriousness displayed through the *Aréthuse's* articles), that Bataille obtained some financing for his, by then, first 'fully' controlled review: *Documents* (in which most of his articles discussing architecture were published, and on which, nowadays, most of the academics focus when they wish to discuss Bataille's thought).

With 'Extinct America' Bataille presents a quite brief survey of the different civilizations the Spanish Conquistadors came across when they discovered America. But, with this article Bataille does not simply document the different artefacts that those civilizations and their people left. Rather, he discusses those remains in relation to what he calls their 'bloody eccentricity'. An eccentricity that Bataille also perceived in one of his major influences, the Marquis de Sade, as he wrote it in these introductory lines:

> *'The life of the civilised people of pre-Columbian America seems to us not only prodigious due to the fact of their discovery and their instantaneous disappearance, but also because without any doubt never has greater bloody eccentricity, been conceived by human insanity: continual crimes committed in broad daylight solely for the satisfaction of deified Nightmares, terrifying phantasms! The cannibal meals consumed by the priests, the corpse ceremonies flowing with blood, more than any historical event, evoke the blinding debauchery described by the illustrious Marquis De Sade'.*[39]

Hence, Bataille seems to be interested in the pre-Columbian civilization of the Americas for their violence. But, he shortly specifies that such an interest 'pertains above all to Mexico'.[40] Often, commentators have stated that 'Extinct America' is primarily concerned with contrasting the Inca civilization with the Mexican one, with examining a dichotomy of attitudes towards violence among the pre-Columbian nations. Indeed, as we shall see, this article contrasts the flatness of the bureaucratic Inca state with the monstrous excesses of the Mexicans and, of course, Bataille, would seem to side with the bloody madness of the Mexicans against the boredom of Inca society. But, if there is a dichotomy or bi-polarity, it is in no way a simple one. This 'complex' bi-polarity is rather a triad: the Incas are opposed to the Mexican civilization, but within the latter there appears, according to Bataille, another opposition between the Mayas and the Aztecs. Then, what matters is the way Bataille inserts architecture into his survey. As a way to expose those contrasts, he significantly describes how architecture within those different civilizations operates: what it does,

[39]. Georges Bataille, 'L'Amerique Disparue', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 152.
[40]. Ibid.

how it is used and what kind of impact it has on its surroundings.

Concerning the Incas' empire, Bataille claims that contrary to the 'clichés' concerning the old Peruvian civilization, which would have it as 'a singular mirage, an incandescence of solar gold',[41] factual evidences unveil it as 'the most ordered and administrative state that men had ever constituted'.[42] In this empire:

> '[...] an entire people submitted to the order of functionaries as to the order of military officers. Work was dispatched, and marriages performed by the functionaries. The ground and the harvest were the property of the state. The festivals were the religious feasts of the state. Everything was planned in an existence where there was no air'.[43]

Then, for Bataille, the architecture of this suffocating society — the Inca's architecture — can be characterised by its homogeneity, its sadness, massiveness, heaviness, half-sordidness or, more simply, by its starkness:

> 'The capital of the Inca's empire, Cuzco [...] was characterized by a massive and ponderous grandeur. Tall houses built of huge stone blocks, with no outside widows, without ornament and thatched roofs, gave the streets an aspect half-sordid and sad. The temples overlooking the roofs were of an equally stark architecture [...] nothing managed to dispel the impression of mediocre brutality and above all of stupefying uniformity'.[44]

Nothing stands out, according to Bataille, in this civilization, not even its architecture (temples), which perhaps still dominated physically the urban tissue but which was nevertheless in every aspect similar to the mere domestic buildings (houses) it overlooked: even what should be above uniformity is uniformed or homogenized. Furthermore, Inca's architecture (or its lack) is not only uniform or homogeneous, it also permits the preservation of this homogeneity: the human sacrifices which were perpetrated as the rituals grounding this society, and which were undoubtedly the expression of a rupture within the course of this uniformed life (at least for the ones who were sacrificed), were simply hidden by architecture. Even the disruption that represents the sacrificial death is homogenized/silenced through architecture (or what replaces it). Bataille:

> 'Regarding those conditions, one will not be astonished by the fact that there are relatively few brilliant traits to report about the Inca's civilization. Even horrors are not much striking in Cuzco. Laces were used for strangling some rare victims within its temples, as for example the temple of the Sun [...]'.[45]

The Inca's empire, although its territory was large, nevertheless remained based within the boundaries of South America. Central America was the restricted domain of the two other civilizations in which Bataille was interested: the Mayas (or Maya-Qu'itche) from the Yucatan peninsula and the Aztecs from central Mexico.

Bataille claims that often the Mayas' civilization is perceived as the 'most brilliant and interesting of extinct America'. This perception is due to its 'productions' which are the closest to what archaeologists usually consider to be remarkable. Maya's art is:

> '[...] certainly more human than any other in America. The Maya's low-reliefs represent gods with a human figure, [...] very stylised, above all very uniform. One can consider them as very decorative. They were, indeed, displayed on quite prestigious architectural ensembles, which originally permitted a comparison between American civilizations and the great classical ones. In Chichen-Itza, in Uxmal, in Palenque, one continues to discover the remnants of imposing and sometimes lavishly crafted, temples and palaces'.[46]

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[41]. Ibid.
[42]. Ibid. p. 153.
[43]. Ibid.
[44]. Ibid. p. 152.
[45]. Ibid. p. 153.
[46]. Ibid. p. 154.

Although, he acknowledges such qualities in the Mayas' artwork and architectural objects, Bataille, nevertheless concludes his assessment of their productions with those rather negative words:

'[...] their art bears nevertheless something of a still born appearance, flatly hideous, despite the perfection and the richness of those works'.[47]

Maya's art and architecture are perhaps perfect, reflecting the image of an 'ideal' human but it is precisely because of those 'qualities' that Bataille dismisses them. They are somehow too good to be true. Something is missing. The non-dissimulated violence of the Aztecs:

'If one wants air and violence, poetry and humour, one would only find them with the people of central Mexico [...] the Aztec nation [is] the most alive, the most seductive, even with its insane violence, through its somnambulistic attitude'.[48].....

The Aztec' civilization represents for Bataille a society which does not silence, erase or oppress the disturbing violence of the elements, obsessions and rituals which constitute it. The Aztecs' 'ideal' appears as a reversed image of the Mayas': it is not a perfected human figure but rather (Bataille quotes the monk Torquemada) a monstrous and evil figure:

"The physiognomies of their gods [...] were similar to the one of their souls, due to the sinful life they indulged in without end".[49]

Here, of course, a passage from the article 'architecture' comes to mind. While, within the modern society of Bataille, 'architecture' expresses the 'ideal soul' of society (as a way to oppress the 'masses' and their unruly behaviour), with the Aztecs, it is those lowest attitudes, behaviours and obsessions, which come to be expressed within the figure of their gods. The 'bestial monstrosity' of the 'masses' (the impure, low heterogeneous) is not rejected or oppressed by the 'high' heterogeneous (through architecture) but it is rather celebrated, brought to the pinnacle – in a strange reversal – of society, to the extent that it overtakes the pure, the 'high'. Then, Bataille also exposes how, to those evil and monstrous gods, the Aztecs offered the lives of human victims through sacrifices:

'The priest kept a man suspended with his belly in the air, his back bent over a kind of big altar and opened his chest by striking him violently with a knife made out of a brilliant stone. The bones were cut as such, the heart was firmly grasped by hands through the opening immersed in blood and violently pulled out with such skill and speed that this bloody mass continued to organically palpitate for a few seconds, before the rejected cadaver heavily tumbled down the stairs'.[50]

Those stairs are the ones of the temples that stood in the middle of the city (Mexico), and on top of which, those sacrifices were conducted. Bataille would, much later, in *The Accursed Share* (1949), in a section dedicated to the Aztecs, recall the function of the Aztecs' architecture:

'The Aztecs, about whom I will speak first, are poles apart from us morally. [...] Their science of architecture enabled them to construct pyramids on top of which they immolated human beings'.[51]

Hence, noting the difference between civilizations, which hide the death on which they are grounded (the Incas'), which propose a perfected art and an architecture at the image of their ideal (the Mayas') or which implement a uniformed social context (the Incas' again), the Aztecs proudly exhibit, with the help of their architecture, the violence on which their society is constituted. Their architecture is certainly a means, but not for the oppression of the 'low' and heterogeneous

[47]. Ibid.
[48]. Ibid.
[49]. Ibid. p. 155.
[50]. Ibid. p. 157.
[51]. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, in OC VII, Gallimard, Paris, 1976. p. 52.

elements, which disrupt homogeneity and uniformity, but rather a means of expression/release of these elements. They don't contemplate a high and imperative 'ideal' but praise some kind of low and impure parody of divinities made according to the image of their 'sinful souls'. Their religious rituals are not directed toward an abstract 'ideal' entity flying above society, but are, in themselves, a concrete 'abyssal' movement attracting society towards the bottom: they do not believe in a fake erected god but in a true evil 'fall' which mirrors sincerely the course of their 'bestial monstrosity'.

Taking a bit of distance from the bloody madness that seems to be praised in this fascinating essay, I think it is important to underline what this text tells us about Bataille's take on architecture, not only what architecture is, according to him, but also how it operates, and where it must be situated in order to be properly grasped.

First, Bataille discusses the architecture of the Incas, the Mayas and the Aztecs, not in an abstract way, but by situating them within a context. This context would seem to be urban, as indeed, Bataille mentions the morphology of the city of Cuzco, and compares Mexico to Venice.[52] But, as this 'urban' context is only mentioned in order to truly portray a society, I would prefer to call it, their 'social' context. This shows, if it was needed, that Bataille's assessment of architecture is not a mere critique of its form, but rather an assessment of the political function of architecture within society. Architecture, for Bataille has an importance, not simply because of the way it looks, but because of its political implications (how it has an impact on society, and what kind of impact).

Moreover, in this article, 'Extinct America', it appears that to each civilization belong particular architectural expressions or forms which function according to their proper values. The Incas' architecture functions as a means of homogenizing (to the extent that itself appears as homogeneous or 'uniformed') and thus corresponds to the uniformity of that society. The Mayas' architecture is a 'perfection', which makes it conform to the 'perception' of this civilization as the most 'brilliant'. Then, the Aztecs' edifices allow them to shamelessly exhibit the violence at the core of their society. Nevertheless, this violence is also present at the heart of the Incas' society, yet it is hidden through architectural means. Thus, Bataille does not simply contrast the presence or lack of violence within different civilizations but rather the way this violence is repressed or exhibited through architectural means. Hence, it can be concluded that, for Bataille, architecture in itself is neither oppressive nor guilty: both Inca's and Aztec's civilizations had a sacrificing practice related to their architecture. What differs is the function (the oppression of disruption or its ecstatic expression), that is granted to architecture by a given society. Architecture is simply a means of expression (communication), perhaps violent in itself, but nevertheless not solely responsible for the hegemony of an oppressive system.[53]

Furthermore, by unveiling the differences between those three archaic civilizations of the Incas, the Mayas and the Aztecs, Bataille also elaborates a framework which shares some interesting similarities with his theoretical account of the constitution of society (and its different parts) that he would bring to the fore, a few years later (1933-4), in 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism'. Indeed, beyond the simple evidence, that Bataille perceives both the Pre-Columbian's American civilizations and Modern societies, as being formed on the pattern of the triad, one is struck by the correspondence of each of those civilizations with one of the parts of Modern societies (as Bataille conceived them). This is to say that apparently, here we have more than a simple structural similarity, a functional resemblance. For instance, the Incas' world, as it is shown by Bataille to be uniform and 'flat' — a world from which disturbing elements are silenced or hidden in order to preserve its uniformity— appears as some kind of precursor, of a homogeneous society — or of the homogeneous part of it — which fears the 'low' impure heterogeneous elements and which consequently seeks to erase them. Then, the Mayas' civilization, considered as 'the most brilliant' and the most 'human' with its 'perfected' forms of art and architecture which leads archaeologists to compare it with the 'model' of European civilizations — the classical model — shares more than a resemblance with the figure that occupies a dominant position above the homogeneous society but which also insures its preservation: the 'high' heterogeneous which acts as the 'ideal' authority and model of the homogeneous realm. Finally, and obviously, the Aztecs' world and their bloody madness exhibited without remorse through their architecture, illustrates fairly well what is, for Bataille, the subversive realm of the 'low' heterogeneous, its violence, and the threat it represents,

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[52]. See, Georges Bataille, 'L'Amerique Disparue', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 157.

[53]. It is thus difficult to accept the claim that Bataille simply wrote against architecture or its form.

for the homogeneous world's stability. Hence, although I do not pretend that Bataille claimed this straightforwardly, the three civilizations of 'Extinct America' appear as the precursors or as illustrative antecedents of what will become in Bataille's thinking the different realms or parts, which constitute Modern societies.

In consequence, as with 'Extinct America', Bataille exposes how architecture's political function, differs from one social context to another — i.e. the function which is granted to architecture, by the society in which it stands — but also that this function may vary from the oppression of homogeneity's disruptions to the ecstatic heterogeneous expression of the same, and as an obvious functional correspondence can be drawn between the three archaic civilizations that this essay surveys, and the different parts constitutive of Modern societies (which Bataille discusses in "The Psychological Structure of Fascism'), one may logically foresee the potentiality for architecture, in a 'Modern' setting, to not only conceal or to oppress the 'lowest', impure and heterogeneous elements but, in contrast —as a means of 'expression and thereby exaltation' — to release them. This means, in other words, that an architecture could radically expose, and thus not hide, what constitutes the ground on which society is formed (death, as with the Aztecs, or the 'masses' and their 'bestial monstrosity'); an architecture as a means of communication of the most non-avowable processes and obsessions; an architecture permitting a leakage back into the profane/homogeneous world, not of the 'high' idealised heterogeneous but of its radical 'other', the 'low' and impure form of heterogeneity.

V.6. 'Slaughterhouse'

Bataille thus proposes, with his article 'Extinct America', the possibility for architecture not only to serve the interests of the 'high' heterogeneous but also to permit the release of its 'low' counterpart. In other words, architecture appears, for Bataille — and that before he wrote any of the *Documents'* articles — as able to operate on a dual mode: on the one hand it could be 'imperative', enforcing the hegemony of the 'ideal' elements (high sacred) of society over the body of the homogeneous (profane) world, in order to preserve its commensurability and stability and on the other hand it could be 'impure' supporting the 'expression' and thereby the 'exaltation' of the 'bestial monstrosity' of the 'masses', disturbing as such the homogeneity of the profane, henceforth bringing down the high heterogeneous from its elected position. However, Bataille, in this article ('Extinct America') does not give a precise example nor does he even point to a place that could illustrate within 'Modern societies', what such an 'impure' architecture could be. But a short text published in the sixth issue of *Documents* (first year) in November 1929, circumvents this lack: the article 'Slaughterhouse'.

The article 'Slaughterhouse' begins, as often with Bataille's *Documents* articles, with a provocation. The slaughterhouse is not just a spot on the map of the food chain of our societies — the place where domesticated animals are butchered — rather it must be related to religion(s):

> *'SLAUGHTERHOUSE. — The slaughterhouse is linked to religion in so far as some temples of ancient days (not to mention those of the Hindus in our own day) had a double use, serving at the same time as a place of prayer and massacre. It resulted from this, without any doubt (one can appreciate this in the chaotic aspect of the present day slaughterhouses) a shattering convergence between mythological mysteries and the lugubrious grandeur which characterises those places in which blood flows'.*[54]

The slaughterhouse is indeed a place where some blood is shed. But, usually, temples and churches are not perceived as 'places in which blood flows'. If Bataille's remark makes some sense it is because he contends that 'some temples' in ancient times and probably of ancient beliefs have been the locus of violent and bloody sacrificial religious practices. Obviously, here, Bataille makes a clear reference to the human sacrifices which the Aztecs conducted at the summit of their architectural temples and which he briefly discussed in 'Extinct America'.

But beyond the obvious reference to the historical facts Bataille commented in 'Extinct America', his contention is also sustained — and in consequence rendered even more provocative

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[54]. Georges Bataille, 'Abattoir', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 205.

— by his comprehension of the term 'sacrifice'. For Bataille, 'sacrifice' should be grasped etymologically. 'Sacrifice' comes from the Latin '*sacrificium* or *sacer facere*': to produce or render something as 'sacred'. Hence, seen from this angle, (and it is indeed the 'effect' Bataille seeks) slaughterhouses can be connected not only with archaic faiths (or distant ones, as with the 'Hindus') but also with the temples (or churches) of contemporary religions: the slaughterhouse is a place in which, animals are slaughtered — as in a 'sacrifice' — while the church is, nowadays, an architectural edifice in which the 'sacred' (Gods) — as what is produced through 'sacrifice'— or at least the feverish contemplation of it, is (re)produced.

Nevertheless, it is clear that while the sacrifice enacted at the top of Aztecs' pyramids were bloody and dedicated to some — although evil — yet sacred gods, neither the modern slaughterhouses nor the contemporary temples seem to possess both this quality and that function. No slaughterhouse seems to be dedicated to a God and no church seems to be the locus of a real sacrifice (yet, sometimes they are the locus of a kind of sacrificial parody, the Eucharist). The slaughterhouse misses the 'sacred' while the church misses the 'blood'.

This 'lack' of blood is precisely what Bataille points at within the following paragraph of this article:

> '*It is curious that in America an abiding regret is expressed: W.B. Seabrook, observing that the orgiastic life has survived, but that the sacrificial blood is not part of the cocktail mix, finds the present attitudes insipid*'.[55]

William Buehler Seabrook, was an American journalist and writer, of the so called 'lost generation', who became famous for the accounts of his practices of occultism (mainly Haitian Voodoo and Satanism) as well as cannibalism which were published in his books *Jungle Ways* and *The Magic Island* this last being the one Bataille refers to in this passage. Seabrook's cannibal experience is what allows him to regret the 'insipidity' of the socialites' lives.

One can read Bataille's quotes of Seabrook's book as an attempt to link once again, this article to 'Extinct America'. Indeed, Bataille underlines that Seabrook's regret is uttered in 'America'. Hence, with this reference Bataille makes it clear for the reader that he is well aware of the disappearance of his 'bloody' Pre-Columbian America: the Aztecs's violent eccentricity has truly vanished from the land on which it was once displayed. But, more than just showing the coherence of Bataille's thought process, this reference introduces the problem of how, in Bataille's 'Modern' societies the 'sacrifice' has to be cleaned of the blood; how the orgiastic rituals are mere parodies; and how it is not only the church which misses the 'blood' but the entire homogeneous society which can't handle even the sight of it. Some 'orgiastic' rituals — no doubt some ersatz religious, or pagan ceremonies — might take place in contemporary society, but the 'sacrificial blood', which would confer on them the status of 'sacred rituals', is nowhere to be found. The homogeneous society can't face the reality of sacrifice (and the blood it sheds) on which it is, or was once, grounded. Consequently, it rejects or hides the places, such as the slaughterhouse, in which this 'sacrificial blood' seems to uncontrollably reappear:

> '*Meanwhile, in our day, the slaughterhouse is cursed and quarantined like a plague-ridden ship. However, the victims of this curse are neither the butchers nor the animals, but the decent folks, themselves, who are by now only able to handle their own ugliness, an ugliness opposing to, indeed, the pathological need of cleanliness, testy meanness, and boredom: the curse (which terrifies only those who utter it) leads them to vegetate as far as possible from the slaughterhouse, to exile themselves out of politeness to a flabby world, in which nothing horrible remains and in which, subjected to the indelible obsession of disgrace, they are reduced to eating cheese*'.[56]

In Paris, under the first Empire of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, it was decided that five large slaughterhouses would be built at (by then) the edges of the city and they were completed in 1818. However, due to the urban growth of Paris during the 19th century, Napoleon the third (the nephew of the former), decided in 1887, to further displace those edifices and functions by grouping them

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[55]. Ibid.

[56]. Georges Bataille, 'Abattoir', in O C I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 205.

all, again outside the city, on the territory of the newly annexed commune of La Villette. One century later, in 1974, the 'General Slaughterhouses of la Villette' were dismantled and shortly after, in 1982, Bernard Tschumi won the architectural competition for the design of the park, which nowadays occupies the area. It was on this architectural design that Denis Hollier commented, in his new introduction to the American translation/edition (1989) of *La prise de la Concorde* as *Against Architecture*.

Thus, it seems that – at least in the case of Paris but there are many others examples – the slaughterhouse is a rather recent invention (post French revolution), which is indeed, as Bataille contends, if not 'cursed' at least 'quarantined'. Each political regime, which took the decision to construct slaughterhouses – and thus acknowledged their 'urban' necessity – also found it necessary to keep those edifices and their function, well outside the urban region. Of course, there were valid reasons for doing so. Perhaps the quickest one to come to mind is that, moving it away from the urban centre, was/is still the best measure to take in order to avoid public hygiene and health issues. However, Bataille is not interested in this curse for its 'positive', but rather its negative connotations: if the slaughterhouse is quarantined it is because the 'decent folks' of society – no doubt they constitute its homogeneous part – cannot cope with what the slaughterhouse expresses. They can't handle the image that the slaughterhouse throws back at them, an impersonal 'ugliness'. Indeed, Bataille states that the victims of the quarantine are not the quarantined (butchers or animals), but those who run away from the horrors it contains and who are condemned to live in a 'flabby world', a homogeneous realm, in which only their own 'ugliness' can be supported.

As I have shown, in the eponym article, Bataille considers the 'Museum' as the site of a parody of religion; a return to a pagan ritual (or its consequent development) in which the icons representing God are replaced by simple art objects expressing the ideal 'Man'. Although it is intimated rather than clearly stated, in this article, a sacrifice takes place within the precincts of the museum: a sacrifice in the sense that some sacred 'high' elements –which Bataille calls the 'celestial apparitions' – are worshiped (hence produced as sacred). However, as I maintained, it is not the objects on which a sacred 'status' is conferred which are actually sacrificed, but rather the 'masses' bestial monstrosity' – the low, impure and heterogeneous elements of society – which are erased to such an extent that even their exclusion is silenced: the sacrifice, as the bringing forth of the sacred, is misused (or misconstrued) and leads, actually to the 'erasure' of the latter. The sacrifice practised in the museum is thus a hypocritical sacrifice, a parody of sacrifice for a hypocritical religion: something is sacrificed but those practicing the sacrifice refuse to grant and acknowledge its status as 'sacred'.

For Bataille, the slaughterhouse appears to be the opposite of the museum. At the slaughterhouse, sacrifices take place and sacred 'low' elements are not erased or silenced but are indeed produced and revealed. Nevertheless, it is now, not the 'low' sacred which is erased but the place of sacrifice itself, the slaughterhouse, which is rejected, and kept as far as possible from the centre of the homogeneous part of society. While the museum (like a church) is the place of a parody of sacrifice, producing a hypocritical 'high' sacred, for some 'decent' believers, the slaughterhouse is the locus of a 'true' sacrifice, producing and revealing a truly 'low' sacred without followers. This lack of followers is precisely due to the lowness of this 'sacred', the 'bestial monstrosity of the masses' (if I refer to Bataille's 'Architecture' article) and by extension the finitude of the animal-man in general. In the slaughterhouse's sacrifices, during which blood is shed, it is not the 'admirable' beauty of the high heterogeneous ideal which is revealed as 'sacred' (unlike in a museum) but the 'ugliness' of animal life's finality (death) which is finally exposed in the harsh light of truth: 'man' is nothing more than a potentially slaughtered animal; 'man' – for paraphrasing Bataille himself parodying Hegel – is just 'death living a human life'. The slaughterhouse is thus the place where, indeed, a 'low' sacred is revealed: not a superior entity or even an object of cult pointing towards it but rather a 'sacred' truth, which the homogeneous part of society cannot cope with and which 'decent folk' refuse to worship. Man is an animal –perhaps a peculiar one as he is conscious of the inevitability of his death, but nevertheless an animal – whose path does not lead him to become, at best the ideal heterogeneous element or at worst, a commensurate part of a homogeneous society but to embrace the low sacred and disruptive (for the homogeneous realm) truth of its irremediable fall into death.

Hence, the slaughterhouse is, in a 'Modern' setting, the descendent of the Aztecs' temple: a place through which the most 'low', impure, sacred and heterogeneous elements are not

concealed or oppressed but are released and produced. It is a means of expression and communication (in the sense that Bataille gave to this word) of man's bestial monstrosity. It permits the release, through sacrifices, of its radical baseness (man is animal), and most importantly, the slaughterhouse 'spits' at the face of the homogeneous subject and its heterogeneous ideal, the sacred truth that the sacrifices it hosts unleash. The truth of man is not to be found in the stability and commensurability of the homogeneous life nor in the contemplation of an heterogeneous ideal but in its inevitable fall, its death (man will die as an animal); man is nothing more than an expenditure in pure loss.

V.7. Architecture as expenditure ('The Notion of Expenditure')

The articles discussed so far, make obvious, certain characteristics of Bataille's 'take' on architecture, and they are worth repeating, before I go any further.

First of all, in his discourse on architecture (if one may call it that), Bataille is not primarily interested in a naïve criticism of architecture's form but in the assessment of its political function (the article 'Architecture'). Architecture for Bataille, is the means of a violent communication through which the 'high', 'ideal', imperative, and authoritarian form of heterogeneity controls and oppresses the 'masses' – as a 'low', 'base', impure, and irrational form of heterogeneity – in order to ensure or to preserve the existence of the homogeneous part of society – the bourgeois, patrons, bureaucrats who own the means of production – and of which it is in excess (due to its status of 'high' heterogeneous). From this simple status of a 'means', architecture becomes, to a certain extent, what it expresses and from being a means of expression, hence an index of the excess, it becomes precisely this excess; a leakage of the 'high' heterogeneous back into the homogeneous realm (the article 'Architecture' read under the light, of 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', and Bataille's lecture on community, society and communication). Moreover, architecture, for Bataille, certainly expresses the ideal 'high' heterogeneous of society, yet it does so neither simply through its 'form' nor its 'mass' nor the 'dignity' of its monumentality, but through what it hosts and through the function that this content confers on it. Bataille's assessment of architecture is concerned – more than with its 'form' – with its function, the functions it hosts, and how they are processed (the article 'Museum').

Furthermore, Bataille also intimates, the possibility that architecture not only expresses and enforces the dominion of the 'high' heterogeneous but also permits the release of its 'low' counterpart, the impure form of heterogeneity ('Extinct America'). Architecture could be impure in its function, supporting the 'expression' and thereby the 'exaltation' of the 'bestial monstrosity' of the 'masses', disturbing as such the homogeneous part of society – hence targeting the high heterogeneous and its authority – to such an extent that the places where this architecture stands would be 'cursed' and kept as far as possible, away from the centre of the 'homogeneous' life: as in excess from it ('Slaughterhouse').

Thus, architecture, according to Bataille's 'take' on the subject, appears to operate in a dual mode, either as an imperative or an impure excess. But, this dualism is more than a mere conceptual dichotomy and becomes truly problematic when confronted with one of the principles on which the homogeneous part of society is grounded, the principle of utility or usefulness. There is no doubt that Bataille perceives architecture as having some impact on society (the homogeneous). However, it is precisely because of the tension arising between that impact and the status (as in excess) Bataille unveiled for his object of study that architecture's function is presented as paradoxical.

Indeed, if architecture is an excess (whether it expresses the high or low heterogeneous, it is in excess of the 'profane' world) it disrupts the law of commensurability (each device or object is a means to an end exterior to itself or is at least rationally related to another object) on which homogeneity and it's principle of utility rest. Thus, architecture's usefulness (from the point of view of the 'profane' world) must be null.

However, in the case of an architecture operating as the expression of the 'high' and ideal heterogeneous of the profane society, its heterogeneity appears as corrupted by its utilitarian function: indeed, in such a setting, architecture supports and defends the homogeneous realm. Architecture is a means to an end exterior to itself and in this case, architecture would be, at best, a mere commensurate and useful means. Architecture could thus be considered hypocritical,

expressing the incommensurability of the 'ideal' while actually supporting the commensurate as its ideal.

Conversely, an architecture operating as the expression of the 'low' and impure heterogeneous elements of the 'profane' society, could, paradoxically, only maintain its heterogeneous status, as long as it remains in excess as a non-useful means. In other words, an impure architecture would not betray itself, as long as it could avoid making successful, the radical elements, it expresses and releases – in their revolutionary task – and, thus, hegemonic. In order to remain heterogeneous and useless, architecture must not only express the most 'low', it must also (and paradoxically) remain a failure as a 'useful' expression of it.

Hence, at first sight, Bataille's assessment of architecture as in excess, as a means of expression or communication of the heterogeneous, either 'low' or 'high', appears, from a rational point of view, rather, unproductive, or non-useful, as beyond the principle of utility. But is it truly so? What would be the most effective way to radically assault the homogeneous realm of the profane while discussing architecture? Should one rationally show the usefulness of such an endeavour and thus, somehow, involuntarily, support the principle of what one wishes to take down? Should one be taken involuntarily in this paradox, or rather consciously (although in reverse), embrace it? Is it that Bataille's assessment of architecture 'adopts', not the 'form', but the paradoxical function of the device it discusses, in order to radically target the very principle on which rests the homogeneous realm – utility – and thus to point to the irremediable fall of this part of society?

In the essay, published in 1933 in *La Critique Sociale*, entitled 'The Notion of Expenditure', Bataille addresses this issue in the most radical way. Indeed, while he attempts to demonstrate that the 'end' of all forms of economic exchange is not the accumulation of richness, the re-investment in the system of production nor mere utilitarian (as a way to insure the fulfilment of some elementary needs) consumption but the expenditure in pure loss of all kind of excess, he also contends that the principle of utility as it is understood within 'Modern' societies is insufficient. Interestingly enough, this brilliant essay allows him to come back to the 'architectural problematic' (and by extension to its assessment), in relation to the utilitarian principle and indeed, to expose architecture as an unproductive expenditure (or exchange) in pure loss.

The 'Notion of Expenditure' begins with a statement: when a discussion arrives at any kind of conclusion due to the utterance of the notion of utility (or usefulness), it is in fact, 'warped', as it avoids the fundamental question to which there is no 'positive' answer :

'In fact given the more or less divergent collection of present ideas, there is nothing that permits one to define what is useful to man'.[57]

According to Bataille, the simple fact that one has often recourse to principles beyond the 'useful' – such as God, the Spirit, the honour and the duty – within an argument, shows fairly well the veracity of his statement. However, in day to day activities, one does not question so easily the reality of this notion of 'utility', and what is useful is always qualified as such from a 'materialist' point of view: materially useful processes are limited to acquiring, producing, and conserving goods, but also, to the reproduction and conservation of human life. From this perspective, pleasure, especially in its most 'pathological' forms, is seen as a 'concession [...] whose role is subsidiary'. Hence, Bataille observes that the most enjoyable aspect of existence, pleasure, is thus reduced as a mere 'regrettable condition' of the productive social activity.[58] But, according to him, any normal person may notice this proper urge to squander and destroy goods, as well as his own person, without any reasonable explanation. Man:

'[...] is incapable of a utilitarian justification for his actions, and he cannot imagine that a human society might have, just as he does, an interest in considerable losses, in catastrophes that, while conforming to well-defined needs, provoke tumultuous depressions, crises of dread, and in the final analysis, a certain orgiastic state'.[59]

[57]. Georges Bataille, 'La notion de depense', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 302.
[58]. Ibid. p. 303.
[59]. Ibid.

Men allow themselves the right to acquire, to conserve or to consume rationally but refuse —at least in principle — all forms of unproductive expenditure. Nevertheless, Bataille also observes, this exclusion is purely formal as human kind, practically speaking, indulges itself in the satisfaction of its most 'wild needs' and 'it seems able to subsist only at the limits of horror'.[60]

In consequence, Bataille states, that human activity is not entirely reducible to processes of production and conservation. Moreover, consumption should be divided into two distinct attitudes: the first one consisting of 'the use of the minimum necessary for the conservation of life and the continuation of individuals' productive activity in a given society'.[61] This form of consumption is just the fundamental condition of the productive process. The second one,

> *[...] is represented by so-called unproductive expenditure: luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (that is to say deflected from genital finality) — all of these represent activities which, at least in primitives circumstances, have no end beyond themselves. Now, it is necessary to reserve the use of the word expenditure for the designation of these unproductive forms, excluding as such all the mode of consumption which serve as a means to the end of production'.[62]*

Although they are quite different in kind, all of those truly unproductive attitudes, those unproductive expenditures, share at least one criterion: they are all oriented towards a 'loss' which must be as large as possible in order for 'that activity to take on its true sense'. This principle of 'loss' which thus opposes the conventional, and sole rational, economic principle of 'balanced accounts' can be perceived in a great variety of examples, which Bataille coherently charts: the immense economic value squandered in the acquirement of, rationally speaking, 'useless' jewels; the religious cults which demand various sacrifices — as the production of the 'sacred' — either of men or animals and which are best exemplified by the central importance of the crucifixion of the son of God within Christendom; the diverse competitive games, such as for example the horse-racing bets by which means, within the time needed for a donkey to run a few meters, huge fortunes are squandered; the arts too, especially, theatre, literature and poetry, in which an unproductive expenditure might be symbolised but which can also have, in their less 'intellectualised forms', an impact on the life of the one who 'assumes' this function of representation (that is to say, the poet's life is engaged in the process of loss that his writing reveals).

Hence, for Bataille, the unproductive expenditure in pure loss should not be seen as a concession made by the realm of usefulness to some perverse needs, or at best a 'condition' (a mere regrettable but subsidiary loss) but rather as the essential 'function' of social life. Moreover, from this perspective, production and acquisition are not seen as essential functions anymore but become mere means subordinated to the expenditure (in pure loss).[63]

In order to demonstrate this, Bataille contends that the secondary 'character' of production and acquisition in relation to expenditure is most visible in primitive economic institutions in which the exchange takes the form of a 'sumptuary loss of ceded objects'. Thus, this exchange is, at its 'base', a process of expenditure from which, later on, a process of acquisition will parasitically emerge. An example of this form of archaic exchange can be found, according to Bataille, in the 'Potlatch' of the North western American Indians; an example which he borrows — as I have shown in chapter three — from the work of the French sociologist Marcel Mauss. The 'Potlatch', then, for

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[60]. Ibid. p. 304.
[61]. Ibid. p. 305.
[62]. Ibid.
[63]. Ibid. p. 308. Here, it is important to take note that Bataille publishes his 'essay' in *La Critique Sociale*. A journal which was, although directed by a Marxist dissident (Boris Souvarine), still defending a Marxist conception of the real and its critique. Hence, when Bataille lows down the status of ownership and production on the ladder of social analysis, and although he still assumes their value in order to understand the evolution of historical processes, he obviously dismisses the ability of Marxism and the dialectical critique of ideology to lead the masses towards a social emancipation. It is here intuited that Marxist criticism is not a 'radical' means (without useful/bourgeois ends) but rather a simple means to a very conventional end: the preservation of consumption and ownership, as central topics of analysis, leads to the pre-eminence of the principle of usefulness —hence, to the survival of the homogeneous-bourgeois society (and of course of its ideology) on which it is grounded.

Bataille, consists of:

> *'[...] a considerable gift of riches, offered openly and with the goal of humiliating, defying, and obligating a rival. The exchange value of the gift results from the fact that the recipient, in order to efface the humiliation and take up the challenge, must satisfy the obligation incurred by him at the time of acceptance, to respond later with a more valuable gift, in other words, to return with interest'.*[64]

For Bataille, the 'potlatch' gets its 'significant value' from the fact that it expresses the 'positive property of the loss'.[65] Out of this 'loss' honour, nobility and rank spring and are thus conferred on the 'donor'. The ideal would be for the donor (Bataille quotes Mauss): 'to give a potlatch and not have it returned'. In this case, the 'potlatch' wouldn't lead to an acquisition with its return and interest and the rank and nobility of the 'donor' would be preserved. But, of course, during this process, the recipient, for a brief moment (until he returns the gift with interest), acquires involuntarily an amount of riches, a certain wealth which, according to Bataille, is an unwanted, temporary and contradictory consequence:

> *'[...] since the 'benefits' of the potlatch are in some ways pledged in advance in a new potlatch, the archaic principle of wealth is displayed with none of the attenuations which result from the avarice developed at later stages: wealth appears as an acquisition to the extent that power is acquired by the man who is rich, but it is entirely directed towards loss in the sense that this power is characterised as power to lose. It is only through loss that glory and honour are linked to wealth'.*[66]

The 'potlatch' is a sort of game in total contradiction to the principle of conservation. During its process, fortunes could and must be willingly squandered. Hence, the processes, which permit the accumulation of fortunes or immense wealth — such as production, coherent consumption, which allows productive activity to continue, and acquisition — 'appear as of relative utility'.[67] They are only useful in the making of a fortune, which itself is doomed to be non-usefully squandered. Thus, indeed, production and acquisition are just subordinated to the unproductive expenditure in pure loss.

The problem, then, was, for Bataille, in the 1930s, that with the rise of the bourgeoisie — as the wealthy class — the sumptuary expenditure in pure loss or, at least, its expression have transformed or have simply vanished. According to Bataille, this is due to number of causes: First, the economic exchange is no more immediately subordinated to its human end — the need to squander: in an economy where the focus is placed on production (and not squander) the goods are, at least temporarily, taken away from the principle of loss. Consequently, the processes of exchange have 'an acquisitive sense'. It is only after fortunes have been accumulated and stabilized — hence after their survival is ensured even against considerable losses — that they can be submitted to the 'regime of unproductive expenditure'.[68] Furthermore, expenditure is still a means to acquire or maintain rank, but in principle the aim is no longer to cause another to lose this 'status'. Rather the goal is to sustain the current state of things, the cleavage between antagonistic social classes. Finally, the development of a persistent shame with regard to wealth, has led to a certain mean hypocrisy concerning unproductive expenditure:

> *'As the class which possesses the wealth, having received with wealth the obligation of functional expenditure, the modern bourgeoisie is characterized by the refusal in principle of this obligation. It has distinguished itself from the aristocracy through the fact that it has consented only to spend for itself, and within itself, in other words, by hiding its expenditure as much as possible from the eyes of the other classes. This particular form was originally due to the development of its wealth in the shadow of a more powerful noble class. To these humiliating conceptions of restrained expenditure, have responded the rationalist*

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[64]. Ibid. p. 309.
[65]. Ibid. p. 310.
[66]. Ibid. p. 310-11.
[67]. Ibid.
[68]. Ibid. p. 312.

conceptions – developed by the bourgeoisie from the seventeenth century on – which have no other meaning than to be a strictly economic representation of the world, economic in the vulgar sense, the bourgeois sense of the word. The hatred of expenditure is the 'raison d'être' of and the justification for the bourgeoisie: it is at the same time the principle of its horrifying hypocrisy'.[69]

Against, this bourgeois, rationalist and homogeneous existence and in opposition to its hypocritical economic modes of exchange, Bataille contends that the masses, in order to maintain a regime of unproductive expenditure – and its radicalism – must reaffirm it, not simply in the economic field but rather in the related arena of the 'social' field. In other words, the 'class struggle' becomes the last realm in which a true regime of sumptuary and unproductive squandering might be experienced.

If Bataille states this, it is not because he is then writing in an overtly Marxist review, but because he actually finds in the class struggle a pattern, very similar to the pattern of the 'potlatch' transaction. Indeed, in the potlatch, the wealthy use the goods that are provided by other miserable or impoverished men, in an attempt to rise above a rival who is rich like him. But, ultimately his 'elevation' has no other goal than to further his separation from those 'miserable' men. Hence, Bataille observes, the potlatch's expenditure, although it is a 'social function' leads to an agonistic act of separation, an act apparently anti-social. The wealthy consumes the loss of the impoverished man and in return only offers him abject degradation, a way towards slavery.

It would appear to be obvious then, that within contemporary society the proletarian class has inherited from the status of this category:

'The end of the workers' activity is to produce in order to live, but the bosses' activity is to produce in order to condemn the working producers to an awful degradation'.[70]

Of course, Bataille also acknowledges the numerous efforts made by the bourgeoisie to ameliorate the workers' conditions. However, he contends that such behaviours and their attempts are simply a sign of the bourgeoisie inability to carry out – that is, until it meets its own end of squandering in pure loss its object – without recoiling in anguish, the sumptuary process of expenditure. Why would the bourgeoisie be afraid of bringing this process to an end? Bataille states that once he has ensured the potential loss of the impoverished man, the wealthy man finds himself 'empty and neutralised' and becomes the victim of a sort of apathy. It is precisely, according to Bataille, because the wealthy wish to preserve their enjoyable and neutral apathetic state – despite the appearance of certain feelings which might be disturbing, such as sadism or pity – that he consents to compensate for a part of the expenditure which engendered the degradation of the proletariat, with a new expenditure which attenuates its results. Nevertheless, Bataille contends, that this 'mean' expenditure is only a subterfuge, which does not modify the fundamental division between wealthy, apathetic homogeneous men and the miserably impoverished. Furthermore this kind of attenuation of the radicalism of the expenditure, expounds in the clearest way, according to Bataille, 'the general atrophy of the ancient sumptuary processes that characterizes the Modern era'.[71]

Thus, even among the attitudes present within the class struggle, the principle of a radical expenditure in pure loss – as a social function of a 'free' society – seems to be, again, hypocritically betrayed by one class, the bourgeoisie. Thus, the only class able to return itself to – this end for 'man' – the expenditure in pure loss, without betraying it, appears as this part of the proletariat, of the working class, of the masses which would be ready for a social uprising:

'The class struggle, [...] becomes the grandest form of social expenditure when it is taken up again and developed, this time on the part of the workers, and on such a scale that it threatens the very existence of the masters'.[72]

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[69]. Ibid. p. 313-14.
[70]. Ibid. p. 315.
[71]. Ibid. p. 316.
[72]. Ibid.

The lowest impure social class might truly expend in pure loss their objects, they might let go their 'bestial monstrosity' in the slaughtering of their 'bourgeois' masters (in order to have some fun).

However, it is essential to take into account that Bataille is not interested in the outcome of the revolt or squandering but in the expenditure that a non-hypocritical revolution must be in 'itself' (a sort of non-revolution which does not lead one back to the coordinates from which he departed — as, etymologically speaking, the word 'revolution' means). In other words, Bataille is not joyfully welcoming a proletarian dictatorship as a new 'frame' for 'man'. For him, the class struggle is not a means to a 'rationally positive' end, but merely the appropriate setting — as an opposition of classes — in which 'society' is constrained:

> 'to use the exclusion of one class by another to realize a mode of expenditure as tragic and as free as possible, and at the same time to introduce sacred forms so human that the traditional forms become relatively contemptible'.[73]

The explosion of an unproductive expenditure in pure loss which is an end in and of itself, responds to 'man' greatest need: the need for the 'sacred'. However, according to Bataille this explosion of expenditure won't 'deliver' or 'bring to the forefront' the sacred as an object, but they will be the 'sacred' in themselves. Men are yearning for the sacred — as the insubordinate, radical and heterogeneous existence which is valid in itself — and the principle of expenditure in pure loss is not simply opening the way towards it, it is this way as a 'sacred form' of insubordination. Concluding that essential essay and while repeating his early hypothesis on the insufficiency of the principle of utility, Bataille states:

> 'Men ensure their own subsistence or avoid suffering, not because these functions themselves lead to a sufficient result, but in order to accede to the insubordinate function of free expenditure'.[74]

What about architecture in all this? In the second part of this essay, a part entitled 'The principle of loss', Bataille — as I mentioned — lists a few singular examples through which this principle of 'loss' — as opposed to the conventional and rational economic principle of 'balanced accounts' — can be demonstrated as operating within 'modern' societies. The last of these examples, of identifiable expenditure in pure loss, includes, the 'arts' in general, and more specifically poetry, literature and drama. All of these are considered as being part of a 'second category' of expenditure, the 'symbolic' expenditure. As for the first category — which Bataille qualifies as 'real' expenditure — it appears that it encompasses, interestingly enough, 'architecture'. Bataille:

> 'From the point of view of expenditure, artistic productions must be divided into two main categories, the first constituted by architectural construction, music and dance. This category is comprised of real expenditure. Nevertheless, sculpture and painting, not to mention the use of sites for ceremonies and spectacles, introduce, even into architecture, the principle of the second category, that of symbolic expenditure. For their part, music and dance can easily be charged with external significations'.[75]

Bataille's statement, which qualifies architecture as an expenditure in pure loss either real or symbolic — when 'ceremonies' introduce in it the 'principle of the second category' — does make some sense if read from the perspective that he revealed in 'Extinct America'. Indeed, as presented by Bataille in this essay, the Aztecs' temples can be seen as, in themselves, an expenditure in pure loss. They had no useful purpose from the point of view of an homogeneous — based on commensurability — society as they were simply used to exhibit, bloody madness of sacrifices — themselves an expenditure in pure loss of bodies — which formed the essential social function of the central Mexican civilization. Moreover, those sacrifices, as 'ceremonies' in which radical squandering occurred, do, in fact, 'introduce' within the architectural, the 'second category' of unproductive expenditure, 'symbolic' expenditure. The modern 'slaughterhouse' (a useless and

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[73]. Ibid. p. 318.
[74]. Ibid. p. 320.
[75]. Ibid. p. 307.

thus rejected place within which a 'symbolic expenditure' is carried out) might be seen in the same light.

In addition, this statement also elucidates on — without neutralizing its radicalism — the functional paradox, in which Bataille's architecture seems to be taken — a paradox that I noted earlier. Architecture's function appears paradoxical, not so much due to what it does — although this dualism of its operative modes confers on it the peculiar qualities of a neutral tool available to multiple agencies (which lead it to be very similar, indeed, to what Michel Foucault named a 'technique') — but, most importantly, in the contradiction between its nature or status (in excess, thus as an end in itself) and its useful impact (hence positing it as a means to other ends) which it seems to have in articles such as 'Architecture', 'Museum' , but also in some respects, 'Slaughterhouse'.

Indeed, in the case of an 'imperative' architecture operating as the expression of the 'high' and ideal heterogeneous of the 'homogeneous' society, there, architecture supports and defends the homogeneous realm. Architecture is thus a means to an end exterior to itself. It is in obvious contradiction with its excessive 'nature' of expenditure in pure loss and in excess of the principle of utility — as Bataille explains it (excess) in the 'Architecture' article and affirms it (expenditure) in his essay 'The notion of expenditure'. Earlier, I wrote, wishing then to qualify this predicament, that architecture appeared to be hypocritical, expressing the incommensurability of the 'ideal' while actually supporting the commensurate as one endorses an ideal. However, Bataille's affirmation of architecture as an unproductive expenditure and his explanation of its historical transformation linked to the rise of the bourgeoisie as the wealthy class which 'expends', clarify this issue of hypocrisy. Bataille's statement determines who is responsible for the hypocrisy and evidently, the bourgeois class appears as the one which betrays the true 'nature' of architecture as an expenditure in pure loss. The bourgeoisie does expend its wealth through the construction of monumental architecture, but it does so 'hypocritically', for and within itself, architecture becomes a means to oppress ('Architecture') and to 'silence' ('Museum') the lowest elements of society, but its final end is to support the homogeneous part of society — that is the bourgeois part. Hence, it is because architecture is truly a radical expenditure in pure loss, which targets the bourgeois order, as it is the transgression of the principle of utility on which this order is grounded, that the bourgeoisie attempts to hypocritically 'corrupt' this expenditure.

Then, from the perspective of the other 'impure' mode through which architecture might operate, the paradox of architecture having to remain a non-useful means and thus a failure as a 'useful' expression of the 'low' and 'impure' heterogeneous elements of the 'profane' society is elucidated on by Bataille, who views architecture as an expenditure in pure loss and its coextensive affirmation, that it is within this radical unproductive expenditure that the masses may find the response to their greatest urge. A radical architecture as a true expenditure expressing the bestial monstrosity of the masses has no end exterior to itself: it is an example of the 'sacred' forms the lowest elements of a society are yearning for — as a 'means' which insubordinately functions as a 'free' and 'valid in itself' expenditure. Such an architecture is thus, by definition, not leading beyond itself to a new world order in which the hegemony of the masses has to replace the bourgeois order (consequently betraying the heterogeneous status of architecture as a useless means). Society must free itself within a radical, non-hypocritical expenditure of itself, and indeed, as an, obviously involuntary, aftereffect, the bourgeoisie —as the class unable to escape its perverse urge towards self-sustainability and thus unable to lavishly expend — might be totally eradicated.

Hence, the question of the paradoxical function of Bataille's architecture seems to be elucidated on in this essay 'The notion of expenditure'. Architecture is a means of 'exchange' — either as a communication or as expenditure — between the heterogeneous and the homogeneous realm, however, it might operate on a dual mode, either an imperative one — in which the 'high' heterogeneous uses 'hypocritically' a corrupted architecture as an useful (and thus denatured) expenditure for its own end — or an impure one — in which the 'low' heterogeneous elements are truly unleashed through a radical architecture as an expenditure in pure loss which has no further end than itself. Bataille does not reject the paradox but embraces it, he reverses its perspective — architecture is beyond the principle of utility, as valid in itself, and that is its sole 'purpose'.

However, if Bataille contends that the paradox he unveiled at the heart of architecture's function is not a hindrance but the sign of its radicalism, then it would seem that this paradoxical 'nature' does not limit itself to this device and its function, but also contaminates Bataille's

assessment.

Indeed, if Bataille's discourse on architecture is the one I intended to expose, then — beyond the few paradoxical issues rising from what wrongly appeared as a discrepancy between architecture's status and effects that I have clarified above — the usefulness of such an architecture for the 'homogeneous' society still remains unclear, to say the least. By extension, through this persistent uselessness of architecture, as an expenditure in pure loss, it is Bataille's assessment of architecture as a whole, which might appear as useless to the 'profane', as mere unproductive expenditure. But after all, perhaps that is Bataille's point?

I contend that Bataille's discourse on architecture (if one can call it a discourse) is in itself, expenditure in pure loss. His assessment of architecture, actually, 'adopts' not the 'form' but the paradoxical function of the device it discusses in order to radically target the very principle on which rests the homogeneous realm — utility — hence to participate in the irremediable fall of this part of society. Le Corbusier famously entitled one of his books 'Architecture or Revolution' and opted, of course, for architecture. But Bataille does not choose one or the other, as he conflates both: architecture is revolution (and nothing beyond) — a purely useless, but for that reason radical, squandering.

This being said, consequences for the architectural discipline are raised. Indeed, from this point of view, it is obvious that Bataille's critique (for lack of a better word) of architecture — contrary to what theoreticians (Benjamin, Krauss and Bois) or architects (Tschumi) expect from it — does not offer a conceptual arsenal (as a blue print ready to be rendered operative) to architects, and even less some sort of structural method of analysis to architectural critics, historians and theoreticians, from whence they could complete their hidden disciplinary agenda. No, Bataille's assessment of architecture is in itself insubordinate, in itself expenditure in pure loss. The only agenda it permits is not its re-enactment but its parody. The re-affirmation, as a parody, of architecture as expenditure in pure loss, which (interestingly enough) would induce, logically, the radical fall of all other agendas and, by extension, the non-hypocritical self-expenditure of architectural criticism and theory.[76]

Those rather disturbing conclusions — and with them the essential question of the position and function of the architectural historian, critic and theoretician taken in such a predicament — are further addressed and detailed in two other texts by Bataille — which obviously share a concern for architecture — published at an interval of almost ten years: 'Factory Chimney' and 'The Obelisk'.

V.8. 'Factory Chimney'

The article 'Factory Chimney' was published in the sixth issue of *Documents*' first year of publication (in November 1929) — the same issue in which the article 'Slaughterhouse' was first released. Bataille begins this text in a fashion unusual for an article published in *Documents*. He does not begin with a summarizing statement, rehearsing how conventionally or rationally its 'subject matter' is 'defined' (by science philosophy or common sense), then followed by a direct and provocative claim undermining those pre-conceptions — for instance as with 'Dust' and 'Museum' — nor in the usual trivial tone that most of the *Documents*' articles exhibit — as for example in 'Space'. Rather, he begins by recalling what seems to be one of his personal memories:

> *'FACTORY CHIMNEY. —If I take into account my own memories, it seems that, out of the world's various objects, glimpsed during early childhood, for our generation, the most frightening architectural forms were not so much the churches, even the most monstrous of them, but the large factory chimneys, true channels of communication between the sinisterly dirty sky and the muddy, stinking earth of the textile and dye factories' neighbourhoods'.*[77]

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[76]. Hence, Bataille's take on architecture does not stand outside of the dualism –that I unveiled in chapter two – at the core of his 'writing': the 'writing' on/of the excess. Bataille's assessment of architecture exposes architecture as expenditure in pure loss but it is also in its radicalism an unproductive expenditure. This peculiar 'discourse' unveil that the true function of society, men and here architecture is beyond the realm of utility, in excess of it: the response to the urge to squander. And, beyond 'discursively' unveiling this state of things, Bataille's text becomes this excess: it is a meaningless expenditure.

[77]. Georges Bataille, 'Cheminée d'usine', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 206.

Two things are striking is this short paragraph: Bataille's allusion to the 'churches' of his childhood and then the expression he uses for qualifying the 'factory chimneys'.

First of all, something which might appear as a point of detail but which is actually quite telling: Bataille, here, dismisses the idea that the churches of his childhood were the 'most frightening architectural forms'. This makes some sense if one recalls the very first published text of Bataille, *Notre Dame de Rheims*, in which he feverishly praises that cathedral. The 'church' in 1918 was worshipped but in 1929 it is no longer so. Yet, although this does not mean one should not fear it, it is, for Bataille, *not* the 'most' frightening architectural form. This said, it somehow has consequences for Denis Hollier's whole argument, or at least for its point of departure.

Out of his reading of *Notre Dame de Rheims*, Denis Hollier contends that Bataille's 'writing' was unleashed 'against architecture'. That is to say, perhaps not simply against the architecture of the cathedral of Rheims but against the greater structure – which was, for instance, praised and also operating within *Notre dame de Rheims*, the essay– and which the architecture of the cathedral symbolised. In other words, for Hollier, Bataille's writing appeared as a reaction against an hegemonic architectural 'edifice' which spread through its metaphors, over the whole body of the cultural domain – including the literary 'discourse' – and by extension, against its reification, the Cathedral of Rheims, a rather large 'church'.

As I hope to have expounded upon, in the above, and in contrast with Hollier's thesis, Bataille's take on the subject, when read from 'within' his oeuvre (and thus not as a means of 'entering into' the latter), appears to be not simply 'against architecture', rather, it consists of an assessment of architecture's social function. Hence, I felt that Hollier's hypothesis – although extremely attractive – appears to be very reductive. Furthermore, here, with the article 'Factory Chimney', it is the very 'foundations' of this hypothesis, which appear to be made uncertain. Indeed, Bataille's recalling of the memories of his youth – at a time, if we follow Hollier, his peculiar 'writing' would have been already released (1929) – does not oppose any 'cathedrals' or 'churches', in fact, the most frightening 'architectural forms' are the 'large factory chimneys'. In consequence, and although some architectural forms still appear to be threatening, the very point of departure of Hollier's book, its 'origin' (or at least the second one)[78] is weakened.

Beyond the fact that Hollier's thesis is not left unharmed by its content, this first paragraph is also interesting from the perspective of the thesis I have defended so far. Indeed, at the end of this introductory paragraph, Bataille contends that 'factory chimneys' are somehow 'true channels of communication between the sinisterly dirty sky and the muddy, stinking earth of the textile and dye factories' neighbourhood'.

Thus, in accordance with what the articles 'Architecture', 'Museum', 'Extinct America' and 'Slaughterhouse' reveal, Bataille, here in the clearest way possible, states that architecture is a means of expression or 'communication'. However, it seems that here this communication is not taking place between one of the heterogeneous' realms and the homogeneous/profane one but directly between them. Indeed, in the light of what I have contended so far, 'the sinisterly dirty sky and the muddy, stinking earth' appear obviously to be disguised metaphors for the opposites (imperative-ideal-high and impure-base-low) forms of heterogeneity or the sacred. Yet, this brings to the fore the question of what happened, in this article, and from the perspective that Bataille set in his other contemporaneous texts, to the homogeneous realm as well as to the relationship between this segment of society and the heterogeneous one, a relationship which was until now, materialized through architecture as a means of exchange. The next paragraph of the article 'Factory Chimney' elucidates on this disappearance:

> *'Today, when really miserable aesthetes, seeking to show their fascination with iron, have contemptibly invented the "beauty" of the factories, the lugubrious filth of those enormous tentacles appears to me all the more disgusting, the rain puddles at their feet, in the empty lots, the black smoke half-beaten down by the wind, the piles of scoriae and clinker are truly the sole possible attributes of those gods of a sewer Olympus, and I was not hallucinating when I was a child and my fear made me discern in my giant scarecrows, which both attracted me to the point of anguish but also made me run away, the presence of a fearful anger, an anger which, could I doubt it, would later become my own, giving meaning to*

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[78]. The first one being Hegel's discourse on the arts and architecture.

everything that was getting soiled within my head, and at the same time to all that which, in civilised states, looms up like the rotting carcass in a nightmare. No doubt I am not unaware that most people, when they perceive factory chimneys, see in it merely the sign of mankind's labour, and never the atrocious projection of the nightmare which develops obscurely within mankind like a cancer: indeed, it is obvious that in principle, one does not consider that which appears as the revelation of a state of violence in which one takes part. This childish or unspoiled way of seeing, has been replaced by a knowing vision which allows one to take a factory chimney for a stone construction forming a pipe for the evacuation of smoke high into the air, which is to say, for an abstraction. Now the only possible aim for the present dictionary is precisely to show the mistake of that sort of definition'.[70]

For Bataille, the 'miserable aesthetes' — that is, without any doubt, the architectural historians, critics, theoreticians or at least commentators — who 'contemptibly', have imagined 'the beauty of factories' are the ideologues of the homogeneous part of society. In 'idealising' the beauty of the factories, they hijack this 'channel of communication' that is the 'Chimney'. They divert its direction and thus function. While the factory chimney is just — according to Bataille — a means of exchange through which the high and low heterogeneous, inconclusively and, obviously, unproductively compete, the 'miserable aesthetes' corrupt the lack of purpose and end of this architectural device and give to it the mere quality of being a productive means of exchange between the profane-homogeneous realm and the 'high' sacred-heterogeneous. The factories are 'idealised' as beautiful, thus they can be recorded as having an 'aesthetic value' which points towards the 'high' idealised heterogeneous. What had a double orientation — towards the high as much as towards the low — is reduced to a one-way device and, from here, the processes that Bataille revealed in articles such as 'Architecture' may derive. This architectural device becomes merely a means of communication between the high heterogeneous and the homogeneous parts of society, it permits a leakage of the 'high' back into the profane and finally can be conflated with what it permits the release of (the 'high'). In other words, the factories and their chimneys become the servile materialisation of an ideal, preserving the stability and homogeneity of the profane. Hence, from this perspective — the one of the miserable aesthetes — the factory chimney is nothing more than a commensurate and productive means of sustainability of the homogeneous. This operation of 'idealisation' is thus — although it is paradoxical — nothing more than a 'homogenization'.

Of course, Bataille opposes this 'homogenization', and stresses the importance — for him — and the signification of the other direction towards which the factory chimneys are pointing (when not homogenized). The factories are 'disgusting', their chimneys are just some lugubriously filthy 'tentacles', surrounded by 'puddles of rain' and 'empty lots', wrapped in 'black smoke' and colonized by 'clinkers' and 'scoriae', all attributes which, according to Bataille, confer on factories the status of 'gods'. But those 'gods' are the one of very 'low' sky: a 'sewer Olympus'. For Bataille the 'Factory Chimney' is also a means by which, the 'low' heterogeneous might erupt in the middle of the profane realm. Hence, it would seem that here, in 'Factory Chimney', like in 'Extinct America' architecture could operate on a 'dual' mode. But there is more, as Bataille contends that, while recalling that the 'giant scarecrows' (the chimneys) of his childhood, inspired in him ambivalent feelings ('attraction' and 'fear'), those factories and their chimneys also allowed him to grasp the 'presence of a fearful anger'. It is precisely this anger — as an attractive yet also frightening need to disrupt and to storm, as an urge to erupt and squander which does not go beyond itself — which would later became his own, that gives its signification to 'everything' that erupts within one's head (here for instance Bataille's) or disrupts ('looms up') 'civilized states' — i.e. homogenized behaviour and attitudes. In other words, the disgusting reality of the factory and its chimneys is not 'preferred' by Bataille because he indulges in the 'soiled' — and not because he wishes to replace a set of high values by a bunch of low non-values — but because it expresses the true nature of the processes which are functions of this world. Each time a state of homogeneous flatness seems to be ensured by the election of idealised 'high' values and bodies, the 'low', the impure form of heterogeneity 'returns' as a 'fearful anger' storming the profane, the homogeneous and thus the civilized. Hence, the factory chimneys should not be idealised as 'beautiful' but should remain 'grasped' as merely an unproductive means of communication between the high and the low heterogeneous: as mere

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[70]. Georges Bataille, 'Cheminée d'usine', in O C I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 206-7.

devices open to the sovereign use — as an end in themselves — of what is hypocritically supporting the profane and equally to what is violently squandering it.

Furthermore, Bataille contends that the 'miserable aesthetes' are quite successful in their task. Indeed, for the majority of 'people' the factory chimneys, perhaps, do not carry a breathless 'beauty', yet they are the mere index of 'Man's labour', thus a commensurate product, but unfortunately not the expression ('projection') of the disturbing movement, which inhabits human kind. In consequence, Bataille proposes to enter into the 'struggle' and opens the way for another kind of assessment, one which will not conceal the paradoxical 'nature' of the factory chimney, and by extension of architecture. An assessment during which the 'childish' and 'unspoiled' or non-civilized grasp of architecture that Bataille recalls won't be substituted by the flat and abstract understanding of it — as it actually wishes to expend it. The scholarly distancing of the 'miserable aesthetes' into the realm of abstraction is — for Bataille — a profound mistake that the *Documents'* dictionary should have revealed:

> *'It should be stressed, for example, that a chimney is only very temporarily belonging to a mechanical order. Hardly has it risen towards the first covering cloud, hardly has the smoke coiled round within its throat, than it has already become the oracle of the most violent events in our present-day world: as much, it is true, as each grimace of the pavement's mud or of the human face, as each part of an immense agitation whose order is that of a dream, or as the hairy and inexplicable snout of a dog. That is why it is more logical, when placing it in a dictionary, to call upon the little boy whom it terrifies, at the moment when he sees the birth, in a concrete way, of that image of the immense and sinister convulsions, in which his whole life will unfold, rather than the technician, who is necessarily blind'.*[80]

Beyond its aim, in this last paragraph, Bataille intimates, of what this 'architectural assessment' might consist. Nevertheless, as this assessment won't be a means to other ends but an end in itself, it can only be what it points to, the return of 'time'. Bataille states it very precisely: a 'chimney is only very temporarily belonging to a mechanical order' — that is to a homogeneous realm of commensurate objects. At the precise moment when the factory chimney has reached —within the homogeneous perspective of the 'miserable aesthetes' — its status of archetypal beauty of the mechanical order, it can only fall back from there, assaulted, through time, by the 'low' heterogeneous elements which somehow always come back to disturb, in the long term, the whole idealised 'picture'. Then, the factory chimney would express again its sole and paradoxical 'function' — as much as would the 'formless' mud on the paving, the deformations of human face, or the 'snout' of a dog. It is 'at times' the materialization of the imperative while it is also 'most of the time', the place of the eruption of the impure: in this dual, ambivalent and paradoxical function lies — for Bataille — the sole truth of 'our present day world'. To paraphrase Bataille's pompous answer to Breton (which dates from the same period as this article 'Factory Chimney'), 'The earth is base, the world or is world'.[81] Or simply here: 'an immense agitation whose order is that of a dream'.

Hence, it is indeed quite 'logical' to demand the help of someone who is not yet homogenized — thus not yet 'blind' — when one has to assess the architectural: here we have a child aware of its paradoxical function — as attractive as it is repulsive, as imperative as it is impure.

V.9. 'The Obelisk' (and 'The Labyrinth')

Published nine years after 'Factory Chimney' another of Bataille's texts — perhaps the most difficult but also the most telling concerning his 'take' on architecture — addresses those questions of the position and function of the architectural 'assessor' — as well as of his assessment — within the homogeneous realm: 'The Obelisk'.

'The Obelisk' was first published in the fourth volume's second issue of the review *Mesures* on the 15 April 1938. It consists of twelve parts in which Bataille traces through history the importance and function of this architectural object — the obelisk — in general, and more specifically of the one that still stands nowadays at the centre of the Concorde square in Paris: The Obelisk of

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[80]. Ibid. p. 207.

[81]. Georges Bataille, 'Cheminee d'usine', in OC II, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 108.

Luxor.

Bataille begins his essay with three sections, attempting to settle the problematic within which he will discuss the 'obelisk': 'The Mystery of the Death of God', 'The prophecy of Nietzsche' and 'The Mystery and the Public Square'. Those titles, obviously intimate that a certain Nietzschean perspective would prevail as, at least, a point of departure in discussing the 'obelisk's' function. The content of those introductory paragraphs indeed sets up a kind of Nietzschean frame of reflection:

The first contends that a 'mystery' cannot be posited 'in the empty region of spirit, where only words foreign to life subsist'.[82] For Bataille this 'empty region of spirit' is the site of reason where only 'abstractions' are allowed. In other words, Bataille intuits that a 'mystery' is not understandable through the use of reason, and that it remains foreign or 'obscure' — one might say heterogeneous — to the latter. Hence, a 'mystery' can't be posited at all — if one comprehends the act of positing as bound to reason — but rather it posits itself with the help of a 'madman' and its 'dream lantern'.

> *'The obscurity of a 'mystery' comes from images that a kind of lucid dream borrows from the realm of the crowd, sometimes bringing to light what the guilty conscience has pushed back into the shadows, sometimes giving a seminal sense to figures that are routinely ignored. From Louis XVI's guillotine to the obelisk, a spatial arrangement is formed on the PUBLIC SPHERE, that is to say, on all the public squares of the "civilised world" whose historical charm and monumental appearance prevail over the others. For it is nowhere but THERE that a man, in some ways bewitched, in some ways overtaken by frenzy, expressly presents himself as "Nietzsche's madman" and illuminates with his dream-lantern the mystery of the DEATH OF GOD'.[83]*

In order to show in the clearest way, to what he is referring, Bataille then quotes the aphorism 125 of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* third book — i.e. the aphorism entitled 'The Madman' — in which Nietzsche recounts the story of an insane being who lit his lantern at noon and asked while running, 'I am looking for God, I am looking for God'. A way of exposing the essential claim (for Nietzsche) of 'The Death of God', but also to point to the problematic and uncomfortable situation this 'death' brought along — especially regarding the persistence of moral and absolute values or truths: if human kind does not believe or recognize as valid the corner stone of the cosmic order, it must, logically, reject all the truths and values that this order sustained. Then, the mystery, for Nietzsche, can be put under the form of two questions: how did 'we' (human kind) achieve that (The Death of God) and how are we going to fill in the gap (i.e. to become gods). But for Bataille, the mystery or problem is not this one. Somehow Bataille attempts here to 'Out-Nietzsche Nietzsche'. The mystery for him is rather: how can we *not* become Gods? How can we avoid re-enacting the election of superior entities or values?

With the following section from 'The Obelisk' — 'The Mystery and the Public Square' — Bataille does not immediately propose a response to this issue. But, he apparently means that, in order to do so, one should start by wondering why human beings needed to believe in something which makes sense of their existences and also why they lost their faith in this 'sacred' object: simply put he asks what is 'human existence'.

> *'While the existence of human beings may have an importance within their own lives and within the limits of their personal destinies, it has none in the eyes of others. Beyond these limits — where human meaning begins — their existence matters to the extent that they are attractive and, apart from this attraction, they are less than particles of dust. And the attraction of an isolated human being is itself nothing but a shadow, a pitiful fleeting apparition. He is but the temporary incarnation of WHAT IS ONLY HUMAN LIFE, which has no name and which the agitation of countless multitudes obscurely demands and constructs, in spite of appearances to the contrary: who knows what of acrid and of sacred that this agitation exhales and which is horror, violence, hatred, sob, crime, disgust, laughter, and human love all together. Each individual is but one particle of dust that gravitates around this*

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[82]. Georges Bataille, 'L'obelisque', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p.501.
[83]. Ibid.

acrid existence'.[24]

Hence, according to Bataille, beings are circulating around an 'acrid' existence, and, against the more 'humanist' vision that would like to have those beings as particular examples of what 'human existence' is, Bataille contends that only this 'acrid' existence is truly 'human life' i.e. what gives sense to 'our' collective existence. But what is precisely this 'acrid' existence? In order to grasp what Bataille means —and before going any further with this complex text which is 'The Obelisk' — it is necessary to go back to another essay, published two years before 'The Obelisk', which answers that question, 'The Labyrinth'.

'The Labyrinth' was published in the fifth volume of *Recherches Philosophiques* in 1936.[25] It consists of five parts and maintains that men are the prisoners of a 'labyrinthine' existence: they are yearning to reach their condition of 'being', yet all of their attempts are doomed, in advance.

According to Bataille, at the basis of human life there is a principle of insufficiency. Although a man can consider himself as a 'being', he refuses to grant to another this dignity of 'being', that other appears as insufficient, as lacking the very difference that constitutes this man, in his own view, as himself.[26] Consequently, unable to share his 'being' with others, 'man' finds himself alone in an absurd and 'empty night' — the 'labyrinth,' which is truly his existence. However, there is something within 'man,' which demands that 'there is some "being" in the world, some "being" and not only the manifest insufficiency of human or non-human nature'.[27] Then, the desired, to the point of vital necessity, sufficiency of 'being', is projected through space, by men, into the divine or 'superior' one:

> *'Being in the world is so uncertain that I can project it where I want — outside of me. It is a clumsy man, still incapable of avoiding the intrigues of nature, who locks being in the 'me'. Being in fact is NOWHERE to be found, and it was an easy game for a sickly malice to discover it to be divine, at the summit of a pyramid formed by the multitude of beings out of the immensity of the simplest matter'.*[28]

Thus, Bataille uses the metaphor of the 'pyramid' to qualify the form that takes the aggregate of human lives. At the top of that pyramid, stands the 'divine being' or the high and ideal heterogeneous sacred. But, even this 'being' does not permanently fulfil men's desire:

> *'By degrees, a more and more complex movement of composition of ensembles raises to the point of universality human kind, but it seems that universality, at the summit, causes all existence to explode and decomposes it with violence. The universal God destroys rather than supports the human aggregates that raise his ghost. He himself is only death, whether a mythical delirium sets him up to be adored as a cadaver covered with wounds, or whether through his very universality he becomes, more than any other, incapable of stopping the loss of being with the cracked envelope of ipseity'.*[29]

Bataille characterizes this unreachable condition of 'being' as 'ipseity' — that is the features and aspects or qualities that differentiate an entity as particular, stable and incommensurate, as itself, as 'ipse'. But, the 'universal God' is no more a relevant projection of 'being', than the average 'man" and for two reasons at least. First God is 'only death' that is, for the believers, he is God precisely because he sacrificed his 'being' thus he can't be a sufficient projection of an existing 'being' — a 'being' who truly exists. Then, for the non-believers, per definition, he does not exist as a 'being'. Finally, and this time from the perspective of simple logic, if God is 'universal', he is no more 'particular' and if God is 'relating' to everything, he is no more incommensurate but rather supra-commensurate. Due to those 'reasons', the universal God's 'ipseity' is, at best, fissured, and

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[24]. Ibid. pp. 502-3

[25]. A reworked version of this text is also published in the third part of *The Inner Experience* (1943) under the heading of 'Le Labyrinthe (ou la composition des êtres)'

[26]. See Georges Bataille, 'Le Labyrinth', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. pp. 434-5

[27]. Ibid. p. 435.

[28]. Ibid.

[29]. Ibid. p.439.

most probably through time completely wrecked or annihilated. In conclusion, the very summit of the pyramid, formed by men yearning for 'being', is, as time goes on, collapsing or falling back into the 'labyrinth of existence' and with him it is the whole of human kind (forming the pyramid) which finds itself again wandering into the absurd and 'empty night' which is truly its existence.

Hence, 'Man', according to Bataille, in 'The Labyrinth', is condemned to this 'labyrinthine existence', to gravitating around this 'being' in his search for it. At times, he will believe in the construction of a pyramid on top of which he will install a higher form of heterogeneity — as a temporary projection of 'being'. But then, this very fake, fissured or dead 'being' at the top will fall back — bringing 'Man' down with him — into the 'immensity of the simplest matter', the 'low' heterogeneous — that is, the labyrinth. Man's yearning for 'being', his labyrinthine existence, is the 'acrid existence' that Bataille cannot 'name' in 'The Obelisk'.[90]

Back with 'The Obelisk', Bataille claims, in what seems to be the central segment of his essay, a paragraph entitled 'The Obelisk', that there is a need to repeat the 'Death of God' — as Nietzsche announced it — but this time in the middle of Paris, on the place de la Concorde:

> *'The Place de la Concorde is the space where the death of God must be announced and shouted about, precisely because the obelisk is its calmest negation. As far as the eye can see, a moving and empty human dust gravitates around it. But nothing answers so accurately the apparently disordered aspirations of this crowd as the measured and tranquil spaces commanded by its geometric simplicity.*
>
> *The Obelisk is without a doubt the purest image of the head and of the heavens. The Egyptians saw it as a sign of military power and glory, and just as they saw the rays of the setting sun in their funeral pyramids, so too they recognized the brilliance of the morning sun in the angles of their splendid monoliths: the obelisk was to the armed sovereignty of the pharaoh what the pyramid was to his dried-out corpse. It was the surest and most durable obstacle to the drifting away of all things. Even today, wherever its rigid image stands out against the sky, it seems that sovereign permanence is maintained across the unfortunate vicissitudes of civilizations.*
>
> *The old obelisk of Ramses II is thus, at the central point from which the avenues radiate, both a simpler and more important apparition than any other; is it not worthy of renewed astonishment that, from remote regions of the earth and from the dawn of the ages, this Egyptian image of the IMPERISHABLE, this petrified sunbeam, arrives at the centre of urban life'.[91]*

The obelisk is thus, for Bataille, similar, in its functioning, to a pyramid. It is a means of expression of the 'head', the 'heavens' and thus of the 'High' imperative heterogeneous. Through it the 'ideal' is represented here in the world and consequently supports the stability of the homogeneous part of it — as it is the 'surest and most durable obstacle to the drifting away of all things', i.e. the most perfected dam against the deleterious fall brought by the passage of 'time': it maintains the permanency of the order within the profane against all form of heterogeneous disturbances (the 'vicissitudes of civilizations'). As Bataille puts it (while talking about the Nil's pyramids): '[...] they transcend the intolerable void that time opens up under men's feet [...]: IT SEEMS THAT THEY

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[90]. The fact that Bataille names and exposes in 'The Labyrinth' what this 'acrid' existence is and not in 'The Obelisk' can be elucidated by a brief passage of 'The Labyrinth' that I did not mention. Indeed, in the second segment of this essay, Bataille contends that 'Being' is mediated through 'words' and thus by language. Thus, in Bataille's view, if one wishes to unveil what his 'being' is, one can only represent his whole experience through the use of words. Hence, 'being' is never 'an autonomous being' – which is what men are yearning for according to Bataille – but always 'a relative being'. Furthermore as language, at least through its syntactic function, is also a sort of labyrinth, this comes to say that, the 'labyrinthine existence' of man is doubled by (and perhaps a consequence of) the 'labyrinthine structure of language'. In conclusion, acrid or labyrinthine, man's existence, or 'what is only human life' cannot have a permanent name: to contend the opposite would means to 'construct' a pyramid and to believe in the 'being' that stand on top of it. Hence, from one text – 'The labyrinth' – to another – 'The Obelisk', Bataille does not name it anymore: from a 'pyramidal' confident affirmation of the 'labyrinthine existence' of man, the impossible search for 'being' fell back into a 'labyrinthine' vague allusion of its 'gravitation around an acrid existence'. See Ibid. pp.436-7

[91]. Georges Bataille, 'L'obelisque', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p.503-4.

MAINTAIN WHAT ESCAPES FROM THE DYING MAN'.[92]

Nowadays too, (at least at the time Bataille wrote this essay) a mass of 'particles of dust' – as described in 'The Labyrinth' – did indeed 'gravitate' around the obelisk of Luxor on the place de la Concorde, as if it still were a pyramid, on top of which a mighty 'God-being' could be found, a true 'projection' of the sacred 'being' for which man yearns. Thus, the obelisk seems to give permission, to the 'particles' circulating around it in frenzy, to find, here in the world, the presence – as projected – of the impossible aim at the core of their search: a (temporary) materialization (and thus a betrayal) of what constantly eludes the agitation of their 'acrid existence'. It fulfils the desire of those particles, of those men, to find 'being' here in the world – and to make it last beyond the death of their simple bodies. But it consequently betrays this 'being' as the latter only resides, according to Bataille, in its own search and its impossible fulfilment: 'Man's' being is its fall.

Hence, it would seem that Bataille demands that the prophecy of Nietzsche's Madman, be repeated, here on the Place de la Concorde in order to induce the 'fall' of the obelisk – as the 'negation of the death of God', as the 'tranquil' dam against the deleterious passage of time, as ensuring the existence of 'being' here in the world; in other words, with the aim of allowing all the 'particles' to perceive the vacuity at the heart of their existence, again.

However, things are not so simple. Indeed, Bataille also contends that somehow in the late 1930s, a change of perspective occurred. The rise of secularism within western civilization has perhaps freed men from the domination of their old 'high' and ideal heterogeneous figures (Gods or Pharaohs or Kings) which were represented within the profane realm through certain architecture but, doing so, it also erased the threatening signification which was carried by those markers: if there is nothing to praise there is also, it seems, nothing to fear anymore – and especially not what the 'high' heterogeneous was meant to protect us from, the deleterious passage of time (Bataille speaks of the 'sensation of time' here). Men have been so successful in the construction of their 'pyramids' that they somehow forgot for whom they built them, and they are thus no longer afraid of the threatening course of 'time': 'The earth has been so perfectly emptied of everything that made night terrifying [...]'.[93] As opposed to what was still preoccupying men at the time of the July Monarchy – during which the Concorde's obelisk was erected – or when Nietzsche contended the necessity to claim the 'Death of God', nowadays (1938) men seem to yearn, not for a stable and calm projection of 'being' – as a way to contain the wreckage that 'time' brings along – but rather, for what might deliver them from the 'established tranquillity':

'Everything happens as if it was impossible for man to live without the "sensation of time" that opened this world like a movement of breath-taking speed – but what he lived in the past as fear he can only live it by now as pride and glory'.[94]

Nevertheless, the obelisk is still standing in the middle of the square, and the dust particles are still continuously circulating around it. Thus, the obelisk still emerges above the horizon of the one who wishes to live this 'sensation of time', and it is precisely when 'he' will meet this obelisk that the finality of his attitude will be revealed to himself: 'he' his only 'being' in his yearning for his own fall. How would the obelisk 'communicate' such an unbearable truth?

Bataille states that architectural edifices – which have the same function as the obelisk – have become logically emptied of their signification as the 'signified' vanished within a secular society. But, it is precisely because they appear as irrelevant, as useless that they expose their real 'meaning' and the final truth of the 'being' they were meant, in the past, to betray. Bataille:

'From the very fact that [the architectures such as the obelisk] had become, for the mass of tranquilized lives, increasingly useless, empty, and fragile shadows, they remain standing only to be ready to collapse and thus to reveal, as such, far more thoroughly than in the fearful obsessions of the past, the despairing fall of lives. They are no longer obstacles to the obsessive "sensation of time" which vanished, but are instead the high places from which the breakneck speed of the fall is possible: and the high places themselves collapse, to ensure a total revelation. The planets stray away from their sun and the horizon is annihilated. And,

[92]. Ibid. p. 505.
[93]. Ibid. p. 506.
[94]. Ibid.

now, rising before the man who carries within himself the naïve uproar of conquest of the "death of God," the very stone that earlier had sought to fix the limits of the storms is nothing more than a milestone marking the immensity of an unstoppable catastrophe. A feeling of explosion and a vertiginous weightlessness arise in front of an imperious and heavy obelisk'.[95]

What Bataille contends, here, is, in my view, essential. The obelisk whose function was to allow a leakage of the 'high' and imperative heterogeneous into the profane as the way to protect it from the assault of the deleterious passage of time – the 'low' impure form of heterogeneity – reverses its function within a 'secular' society. From a means of communication or expression of the imperativeness of the 'high sacred' sustaining, as an aftereffect, the homogeneous part of society, by preserving its stability and protecting it from its fears, finally permits the release, within this homogeneous realm, of the 'low sacred' – the 'explosion' of time and the irremediable fall of 'being' as the sole truth of the impossible attempt at reaching it: the obelisk no longer conceals the void that time opens at the feet of 'Man' but rather reveals it.

Further, Bataille makes clear why he recalled the prophecy of Nietzsche's 'Madman' and thus intuits the function of his peculiar assessment of the architectural within an homogeneous society. As within a secular society:

'[...] total sovereignty and the guillotine-blade that put an end to it no longer occupied any place in the minds of men. The 'high' places respond in this deceitful and vague fashion to the insignificant lives that gravitate around them as far as the eye can see; and the spectacle changes, only when the lantern of a madman projects its absurd light on the stone.

At that moment, the obelisk ceases to belong to the present and empty world, and it is projected to the end of time. It rises, immutable – there – dominating time's desperate flight. But even while it is blinded by this domination, madness, which flits about its angles in the manner of an insect fascinated by a lamp, recognizes only endless time escaping in the noise of successive explosions. And there is no longer an image before it, but it hears this noise of successive explosions. To the extent that the obelisk is now, with all this dead grandeur, recognized, it no longer facilitates the flight of consciousness; it focuses the attention on the guillotine'.[96]

The place de la Concorde was the open area where Louis the XVI – the last representative of a 'Godly Head' for the French – was beheaded on the 21st of January 1793. Hence the obelisk function was somehow, historically speaking, to conceal the death of God (or of its representative) by standing at the very spot where the guillotine was once in action.

Then, Bataille – as himself the parody of Nietzsche's 'Madman', as the architectural assessor – by projecting his absurd light on the obelisk, by rehearsing the 'Death of God' – and indeed Bataille with the Acephale group were gathering each 21st of January to commemorate the beheading of Louis XVI – opens the eyes or rather, here, the ears of the 'Madness' (i.e. the 'dust particles') which gravitates around the monument. He forces them to recognize the 'dead grandeur' of the obelisk as the most radical signifier of their immanent 'fall', the fall which is their 'being'. The homogeneous individual finds himself unable to simply recoil in his flat and commensurate existence. Somehow, the guillotine looms up from underneath the obelisk's pedestal; it pushes up the obelisk and forces it to 'fall' with its summit now pointing 'downward', indicating the direction of 'being's' fall. Hence, Bataille – this time not the 'child' but the 'mad' architectural assessor – parodying Nietzsche, seems to say 'mind your head' but he actually urges us to – consciously and thus in dread – 'embrace your fall'. [97]

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[95]. Ibid. p. 506-7.

[96]. Ibid. p.512.

[97]. Hence, Bataille's advocacy of the need to claim once again the 'Death of God' – his parodying rehearsal of Nietzsche's claim – is paradoxically neither announcing the 'Death of God (it is also not announcing its return, of course) nor simply exposing the temporary dominating agency of the 'high' heterogeneous during which architecture was hypocritical used as a means towards rational ends. No, Bataille here attempts to 'Out-Nietzsche Nietzsche'. That is, while Nietzsche claimed the 'Death of God' and the 'Eternal Return of the same' as a way to unveil which values were truly surviving the irremediable loss of all absolute truths as a consequence of the spreading secularization of the (his) world – values, he contended, were to be forming a certain 'will to power' –

This said, it somehow endorses the consequences, for the architectural discipline, that I unveiled at the end of the seventh part of this chapter ('Architecture as expenditure'). Indeed, as already stated, Bataille's take on architecture, his 'works' which concentrate on the architectural object, its features and its societal function — contrary to what theoreticians (Benjamin, Krauss and Bois) or architects (Tschumi) expect from it — obviously does not offer a conceptual arsenal (as a blue print ready to be rendered operative) to architects and even less, some sort of structural method of analysis to architectural critics, historians and theoreticians from which they could complete their hidden disciplinary agendas. I defended this claim based on a reading of Bataille's 'The Notion of Expenditure', in which he induces that his assessment of architecture is in itself insubordinate, in itself expenditure in pure loss. Hence, the only 'agenda' it could permit — without having it betray its radicalism — would be not its re-enactment but its parody: a re-affirmation, as a parody, of architecture as a radical expenditure.

Now, having discussed 'Factory Chimney' and 'The Obelisk', an article and an essay which expose the position and function of the architectural assessor and its assessment — from a Bataillean perspective — I can only re-affirm that this 'writing', which would allow the subjects of a homogeneous society to 'recognize' architecture as the marker or as revelatory of the irremediable fall of 'Man' (as its 'true' function) — a 'writing' such as the lantern of the 'Madman' which discusses what exceeds and escapes from 'Man', but also somehow releases it — would ecstatically embrace — as an affirmation — the fall it reveals: it must 'be' its own 'fall'.

Hence, I argue that the re-affirmation of this architectural assessment, of this peculiar architectural 'writing', would lead to the radical fall of all other agendas and, by extension, it would induce the non-hypocritical self-expenditure of architectural criticism and theory. A 'writing' that I'd like to name (parodying Maurice Blanchot's characterization) — as one builds an obelisk just to inevitably experience the quick sands of time — *architectural contestation*.

Bataille, him, demands that one rehearses — as a parody — the 'Death of God', when no one believes in it anymore (or so), in order to exposes the irremediable and final fall of all values and truths. And this, obviously, includes the 'fall' which is 'being' and also, irreverently, the fall of the truth which the 'Eternal Return' attempted to be, and, of the values which formed around the 'will to power': if there is a return it is not the return of the same but the return of the fall, of the deleterious time. In my view, Bataille intuits clearly that he subverts Nietzsche's 'Return' in this passage: 'A "state of glory" is thus deftly linked to the feeling of an endless fall. It is true that a fall was already a part of human ecstasy, on which it conferred the intoxication of that which approximates the nature of time – but that fall was the original fall of man, whereas the fall of the "return" is FINAL'. Ibid. pp. 510-11.

CONCLUSION

The Practice of Architectural Contestation before Death

Conclusion. The Practice of Architectural Contestation before Death

> *'He alone is happy who, having experienced vertigo to the point of trembling in his bones, to the point of being incapable of measuring the extent of his fall, suddenly finds the unhoped-for strength to turn his agony into a joy capable of freezing and transfiguring those who meet it'.*[1]

This doctoral research started from the observation, that the architectural debate on the pertinence of criticism and theory which came to the forefront of the architectural scene at the dawn of the millennium, was not characterized by radically heterogeneous or antithetical positions, with regard to their function. The two strains, which gave form to this debate, were perhaps pretending to oppose each other, but were nevertheless both typified by a concomitant belief in the ideology of 'project'. At closer inspection, the debate at the turn of the millennium, although appearing to offer a confrontational arena between converse stances focusing on the aspects and aim or function of architectural criticism, ended up constituting a mere salon for a very flat or even homogeneous 'theory pageant'. Moreover, the debate seemed to be characterized by the obvious inability of the different actors who staged it, to acknowledge this 'shared territory' of 'project', thus, to perceive, in shame, the straw figure like appearance of their opposite stances, hence, the necessity to seek some *other* kind of architectural theory and criticism in which the notion of 'project' as a means to other ends would be simply absent, or at least, present *in appearance only*. Indeed, 'The Projective' as much as 'The Critical' seemed both to unfold along the lines of a disturbing belief in a 'productive apparatus' which was either considered as permitting a form of 'resistance' to 'culture' – without questioning the culturally fuelled idea of 'project' as such – or affirmed as a means to performance – without obviously evaluating the outcome of this performativity or even proposing a frame for its assessment. Furthermore, it became clear that both stances did not acknowledge the similarity of their assumed 'function', nor were they able to conceive any kind of radicalism and effect outside of the realm of project.

Faced with this disturbing background, I turned to the oeuvre of a writer who had attempted, already in the 1930s, to elaborate a radical 'criticism' – as a subversion in and of itself – of culture and society: Georges Bataille and his 'take' on architecture. In the work of Georges Bataille, I perceived an attempt at escaping through a 'project' – a peculiar writing [ecriture] – the realm of project. My hypothesis was that Bataille's 'project' seemed not to be based on the chimeric belief in the necessity of production, meaning or efficiency. On the contrary, as his book *The Inner Experience* exemplified it, Bataille's 'project consisted rather of an attempt to escape the very notion of 'project' and its productive aim: its function seemed to be not a means towards accumulation (of knowledge and performances) but rather appeared to be a means towards an unproductive end – an expenditure in and for itself (of meaning and goals). The intention of this doctoral research was to investigate my hypothesis concerning the 'radicalism' of the Bataillan 'project' and the way it unfolds, but also – most importantly – to study its relevance to the architectural discipline – in other words, in what precisely consists this 'take' on architecture – and then to unveil its peculiar 'function' with regard to architectural criticism and theory – that is, the consequences of such an approach for the discipline.

Several results emerged from the preceding chapters. First, it can be said that this research has 're-released', Bataille's 'use value'. Indeed, this dissertation, in revealing how Bataille's 'writing' proceeds (as much a 'writing' [ecriture] *on* than *of* the excess), and, in bringing to notice this author's contention that architecture is in itself in excess, a means of exchange, communication and/or expenditure either productive or in pure loss, has yielded Bataille's radicalism and intuited its pertinence to the architectural discipline – or more accurately to architectural criticism and theory.

The writing on/of the excess

In terms of what can appear to be a contextual re-framing of the work of Georges Bataille, this dissertation demonstrates that his 'take' on architecture is inextricably entangled with the contentions of his oeuvre and the movement of his thought. But before that, my investigation has elucidated on how those contentions and this movement are, in their turn, deeply involved in an

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[1]. Georges Bataille, 'La pratique de la joie devant la mort', in OC I, Gallimard, Paris, 1970. p. 553.

intricate relation with his personal experience. Throughout this dissertation I have made clear, that Bataille consistently tried with his 'writing' – considered as a 'practice' – not to distance himself from the 'experience' that this 'practice' brought to light, re-presented or engendered. Bataille's experience was largely shaped by several radical encounters with the excess, the limit and its beyond, which not only altered his personality, but probably also how he perceived things for the rest of his life. I have tried to demonstrate that certain aspects and events in Bataille's life, his discovery of a few major thinkers and their influences on him, his contentious positing in the margins of groups and review's editorial board – in which he participated – and on the fringe of contemporary 'avant-garde movements' – with which he refused to be conflated – created a very specific intellectual frame which had a major impact on the development of his thought and thus on his 'writing'. Looking at Bataille's oeuvre from this perspective has shed light on the 'centrality' of the 'excess' within this one. That is, this angle of investigation offered the possibility of withdrawing concepts and notions, such as heterology, formless, base materialism, unemployed negativity, eroticism, general economy and expenditure, out of the limited and purely operative context of architectural theory and criticism – which consciously or not misconstrued them as useful – and to repeat, as a parody, them, from within the labyrinthine oeuvre to which they belong.

Subsequently, my investigation of the connection between the work of Bataille and the notion of 'excess' has unveiled Bataille's prose as a 'writing' *on* the excess. It has shown that this writing o*n* the excess (Bataille's discourse *on* the heterogeneous as what remains beyond the scope of the homogeneous) induces that there is no system (neither a cultural nor a social nor an economic one nor even an individual), which is self-contained, self-regulating, closed, stable and rational. All systems have something in excess of them, which do not submit to their rules and which is a threat to their integrity or coherence. Hence, I have tried to show that for Bataille, Man's universe can be charted as a dualism: the strange conjoining (a kind of aborted supersession) of a falsely stable, productive, formal and homogeneous realm with its own truly ungraspable, unemployed, formless and heterogeneous negativity.

Furthermore, my research, and its 'scholarly' angle, have also demonstrated that Bataille's 'writing' is not only disturbing in what it claims (its content or 'conclusions') but also in the way it proceeds (the way it operates). Indeed, this dissertation has shown that this 'writing' is as much a writing *on* the excess as it is a writing *of* the excess: paradoxically it practices against 'discourse', (yet from within it) the excess (heterogeneous), while it also theorizes, this excess, as if it was a discourse (homogeneous). Hence, the strange conjoining, that Bataille charts as organizing Man's universe, is also, significantly, the movement of his 'writing'

In consequence, my investigation led me to contend that Bataille's oeuvre is dual: on the one hand it consists of a scientific *theorizing* (a discourse) of the excess and the modes of expenditure (i.e. the implementation of a 'writing' *on* the excess), while on the other hand it appears to be a playful *release* of this excess (a practice as an expenditure) through literary and philosophical discourses (i.e. the outburst of a writing *of* the excess).

Architecture as expenditure

Beyond unveiling how Bataille's 'writing' is deeply taken in an intricate relationship with the excess – either understood as what it releases or as its object of study – this dissertation has re-embedded Bataille's 'take' on architecture in this 'dual' work, which shows itself to be as much a *theorizing* of the excess, as a *practice* of the excess. The previous chapters have shown the importance of considering Bataille's oeuvre in its entirety – although this ensemble is disruptive and disrupted – in order to reveal its relevance and pertinence to the architectural discipline. With this in mind, I have attempted to demonstrate that Bataille's 'assessment' of architecture cannot be grasped outside of the scope of his 'paradoxical philosophy' or dualist thought. From this perspective, Bataille's texts on architecture, have been 'released' not as a mere critique of the architectural 'form' but as a discussion of the political, social and economic function of architecture. I have illustrated how, for Bataille, architecture is a means of 'exchange' or 'communication' between what he considers to be the heterogeneous and homogeneous realms. I have shown that, in Bataille's view, architecture allows a leaking of the sacred back into the profane. Within that frame, architecture appears as expenditure – either real or symbolic, and either productive or in pure loss – whose 'function' is dual. On the one hand architecture, as expenditure, can be perceived as 'imperative': unfolding according to this mode, it serves the hegemony of the 'high' heterogeneous elements while it structures and preserves the homogeneous realm and its order.

On the other hand, I have contended that, according to Bataille, this expenditure can also be 'impure', its 'function', then being, to allow a leaking of the 'low' impure heterogeneous elements back into the profane (homogeneous realm) – and thus to radically disturb its order.

With reference to the debate between 'The Critical' and 'The Projective' which I discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, this peculiar 'take' on the architectural, proposes a radical hermeneutic shift. This shift encompasses two displacements. First of all, Bataille's 'take' on the architectural implies that the frame of interpretation of the architectural artefact be reversed from a means exclusively assessing how architecture is *productive* – of solutions, of pragmatic results, and of positive 'performances', or, conversely, of autonomy, of resistance, and of critical distance – towards a frame of interpretation that unveils and affirms how architecture is *expenditure*. This *other* frame of interpretation coincides with a different way of comprehending and then confronting the 'notion' of 'project'. For Bataille, 'project' is seen as a servile attempt to fulfil 'planned' ends. From this perspective, 'project' can't be an act of 'resistance' or 'emancipation'. Because it remains oriented towards exterior aims or is simply pragmatic, it is, according to Bataille, a 'prison'. Thus, individuals, activities and devices taken within a 'project' are condemned to preserve their servility. Consequently, Bataille did not attempt to oppose the servility of the 'project' with another 'project'. But rather to subvert it from within: his attempt to 'escape *with* a project from the realm of project'. Bataille practiced his 'project', not as a means to an end exterior to itself, nor exactly as an end in itself, but rather as a means without further ends, thus as an unproductive squandering. Secondly, beyond an obvious displacement regarding the 'frame' of interpretation of the architectural object, the 'hermeneutic' shift encompasses also a subsequent change in the criteria available within this new 'frame' of architectural assessment. Architecture is obviously, due to its very 'function', not considered *productive*, yet it demands to be assessed according to its faithfulness to its function as *expenditure*. In other words, Bataille's 'take' on architecture proposes a new ethic for architecture (although a rather disturbing one, a non-ethic): architecture is either a 'hypocritical' (because 'productive') expenditure – that is, it serves against its very 'function' as a non-direct yet efficient means of production and accumulation as it is re-incorporated within the system of production – or it is a radical, insubordinate means of expenditure in pure loss in and of itself. In my opinion both displacements are, to an extent that remains to be fully analysed nowadays, decisive for attempting to comprehend (although this might remain logically *impossible*) our contemporary architectural condition.

Moreover, the pertinence of those two displacements should be confronted with one of the most distinct and radical traditions, which has assessed the architectural environment. Since the mid-1960s, several 'critical' accounts, which nevertheless – and perhaps involuntarily – remained ineffective with regard to, if not their acknowledged aims, at least their implied hopes, have been voiced over the body of contemporary architectural productions. The most famous example is, without any doubt, the impressive scholarship of the Italian Marxist historian Manfredo Tafuri: a 'critical' approach which has fiercely argued the impossibility of a 'class architecture' within the present phase of economic development and thus dismissed the eventuality of a social emancipation through architectural means.[2] A critique grounded in a peculiar form of historical materialism, which mutated from a radical 'criticism' of (architectural) projects towards a not less radical attempt to 'define' the project of criticism by constantly checking the accuracy and thus validity of its available 'critical' tools. In my view, the radical historiography of Tafuri, with regard to the primary function of the architectural assessment and its methodology, appears never to have renounced this seminal maxim (which is a simple paraphrasing of Walter Benjamin's remarks from 'The Author as Producer': 'Rather than ask, "What is the attitude of a work to the relations of production of its time" I should like to ask, "What is its position in them"?'), that is:

> *'The very same questions that criticism puts to architecture it must also put to itself: that is, in what way does criticism enter into the process of production? How does it conceive its own role within that process?'* [3]

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[2]. As I understand it, Tafuri's position consisted in constantly renewing his 'projection' of an unsolvable crisis, hoping as such to catalyse an escalation leading to, or perhaps more simply while awaiting for, the advent of a social uprising. Tafuri seemed to indulge within the 'negative' not because the 'historical moment' is behind us, but rather because he believes it has not yet taken place.

[3]. Manfredo Tafuri, 'L'Architecture dans le Boudoir : The Language of Criticism and the Criticism of language', in K. Michael Hays (ed.), *Architectural Theory Since 1968*, MIT Press, London, 2000, p.167.

Against this background, I contend that Bataille's 'take' on architecture does not stand in the shadow of Tafuri's historiography, but rather that it *overshadows it*. Bataille's assessment of the architectural, while it shares with Tafuri, a certain form of radicalism , turns out to be, not only a total subversion of the Italian historian's methodology but also of its findings and of its achievements (or perhaps lack of). Indeed, although Tafuri's work attempted to illustrate a sort of fall or loss (the loss of the Classical *Ordo*) he did not see this fall as the very 'function' of the subject he investigated (architectural language) but rather as a deplorable event. Hence, his scholarship, although deeply indebted to some 'negativity', appears to be in deep contrast to Bataille's 'take' on architecture.

Furthermore, beyond the mere divergences of attitude before the outcome of their respective investigations, these two 'assessments' of the architectural, appear to be radically heterogeneous in their 'writing' form. Indeed, although Tafuri's authorship is more than often elusive, his 'writing' never abandons its acknowledged aim. That is, to reveal the deeper *meaning* of architectural techniques, hidden behind ideological screens. In other words, Tafuri's 'critical' writing – although it appears sometimes time deficient – epitomizes a *productive negativity*.

Hence, to summarize the subversion that Bataille's 'take' operates, I must state that if Tafuri had requested that criticism should question in what way it 'enters the process of production', Bataille did not, but simply 'affirmed' that the architectural 'assessment' and assessor must, in any (im)possible and non-hypocritical way, participate in the 'process of expenditure'.

Architectural Contestation

From all the previous, the relevance and pertinence of Bataille's work to the architectural discipline resides at an operative or 'functional' level. That is, this oeuvre and its specific 'take' on architecture emerges not simply as a peculiar 'way' or 'style' of writing about architecture nor as just another hermeneutic approach to the architectural environment, but as an attempt to release a 'writing' which 'proceeds' according to the 'function' its unveils for the architectural. The relevance and pertinence of Bataille's 'text' to the discipline resides in the erotic conjoining of a discourse on architecture as expenditure (an hermeneutic approach), and of the transgression (as a pushing to its very limit) of this discourse's meaning (an expenditure in itself). I propose to refer to this conjoining, as an *Architectural Contestation*.

Contestation is a term that Maurice Blanchot employed for qualifying the movement at the heart of Bataille's 'inner experience' that he (Blanchot) also coined as the 'limit-experience':

> *'The limit-experience is the response that man encounters when he has decided to put himself radically in question. This decision […] expresses the impossibility of ever stopping, whether at some consolation or some truth, at the interests or the results of an action, or with the certitudes of knowledge and belief. It is a movement of contestation […]'.[4]*

Furthermore, Blanchot also contended that this 'will to contestation' (my formulation), this right or need to put himself permanently in question is the sign of a 'lack'; a lack, which belongs to Man (a lack which, as Bataille wrote, defines him: 'Man is what he lacks'), of completion while all is completed, a lack of satisfaction of he who is 'wholly' satisfied, a desire that remains within the one who has no more desires. In other words, what triggers the 'movement' of contestation is then the fact that:

> *'[…] man is the being that does not exhaust his negativity in action. Thus, when all is finished, when the 'doing' (by which man also makes himself) is done – when therefore, man has nothing to do – he must, as Georges Bataille expresses it with the most simple profundity, exist in a state of 'negativity without employ' [sic]. The interior experience is the manner in which this radical negation, a negation that has nothing more to negate, is* affirmed*'.[5]*

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[4]. Maurice Blanchot, 'Affirmation and Negative Thought', in The Infinite Conversation, Univ. Minnesota press, Minneapolis, 1993, pp.202-3.
[5]. Ibid. p. 204.

Michel Foucault in his famous eulogy on Bataille, 'A preface to Transgression', has also attempted (perhaps in more easily understood terms), to shed light on this contestation at the heart of Bataille's writing:

> *'Contestation does not imply a generalized negation, but an affirmation that affirms nothing, a radical break of transitivity. Rather than being a process of thought for denying existences or values, contestation is the act which carries them all to their limits and, from there, to the Limit where an ontological decision achieves its end; to contest is to proceed until one reaches the empty core where being achieves its limit and where the limit defines being. There at the transgressed limit, the 'yes' of contestation reverberates, leaving without echo the hee-haw of Nietzsche's braying ass'.*[6]

In the work of Bataille, this movement of 'contestation' can be seen at three different levels. First, it appears within the very materiality of the 'writing'. On this level, contestation appears as the excess, that Bataille's 'writing' unleashes, and which rebels against its own message: the release or affirmation of an un-employed negativity not negating but rendering – as an after-effect – for a moment inefficient the discursive production of meaning. In the second place, the 'act' of 'contestation' is visible within the bits of signification, which manage to temporarily survive the transgression at the heart of the 'writing'. With regard to the built environment, this movement of contestation points to the disturbing fact that architecture is not a means of production, of meaning or order, nor an accumulation of values taking the form of an investment, but rather that it must affirm its final function (at the Limit) as expenditure in pure loss. In the third place, the movement of 'contestation' appears also as what simply engulfed if not erased Bataille's own authorship and its adjunct, fame. From the multiple use of pseudonyms to the assumed impossibility of exposing his thought didactically as 'his', one should not simply read, in my view, Bataille's attempt to avoid legal issues or his wish to remain obscure, but rather the voluntary acceptance that such a 'contestation' does not leave aside the 'Ego' or the 'I' in its movement. The 'I' and the 'authorship' are also brought to the 'Limit' in which they vanish (and paradoxically reappear as *impossibilities*): the assessor does not escape the 'contestation' he unleashes. In short, contestation within Bataille's work and with regard to its relevance to the architectural discipline, appears as the affirmation of the unemployed negativity of the architectural object, of the 'writing' that take the appearance of its assessment and of its so-perceived assessor: a radical *architectural contestation*.

This *architectural contestation* as a 'movement' or 'act' introduces a different 'function' for the architectural assessment. It assumes that the aim of the assessment is thus not beyond itself, hence not linked to deferred or expected ends, goals and results. Rather it forwards a way to operate the architectural assessment as a means towards no further acknowledged or hidden ends. Furthermore, I contend that such *architectural contestation* does not simply offer itself as an alternative to performance related or operative or Marxist architectural criticism and theory, but rather by constantly re-affirming itself (as an unemployed negation which negates nothing) through the very affirmation of the unemployed negativity of the architectural object, its assessment and its assessor, it induces the radical squandering of those conventional forms of criticism and theory.

Finally, the reader might have noticed several times, while going through the body of this dissertation, certain irremediable contradictions and unpardonable faults, or he might just consider the whole enterprise a mere failure or shame. Facing this, I must state that it is not my intention to contest these comments or observations, nor do I demand clemency with regard to those issues. Rather, I wish to draw the attention of the reader to the fact that within these 'fraudulent' spaces or problematic interstices, I argue, he might have unknowingly experienced (as much as the author of these lines) the affirmation of a negativity which is unemployed: a sort of writing *on* and *of* the excess as a radical *contestation*. Hence, the title of this dissertation's conclusion – a parody of Bataille essay's title which attempted to discuss, 'The Practice of Joy Before Death' but perhaps released this ecstatic 'joy' involuntarily – *The Practice of Architectural Contestation Before Death*.

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[6]. Michel Foucault, 'Préface à la transgression', in *Critique, Hommage à Georges Bataille*, no. 195-196, summer 1963, p. 756

APPENDICES

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Résumé
Nederlandse Samenvatting

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Résumé

Julien Merle was born in 1979, in Le Puy En Velay, France. He passed with success his secondary education final exam in 1997, with a specialization in mathematics and more accurately in conic sections, complex number and probability theory. He holds M. Arch (2003, Architect D.P.L.G.) degree from the ENSACF in Clermont-Ferrand. Since 2003 he has been working in Holland for several offices. He has conducted his PhD research since September 2007 at TU Delft. He has taught theory courses as well as given lectures. And he has presented in several conferences and published in journals.

Nederlandse Samenvatting

Architectural Contestation

George Bataille behoorde tot de invloedrijkste en radicaalste denkers van de 20e eeuw. En inderdaad, zijn gedachtegoed en zijn oeuvre wordt gezien als van grote invloed op de werken van een omvangrijke groep bekende post-stucturalistische en post-moderne intellectuelen zoals Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida en Jean Baudrillard, om slechts enkelen te noemen. Binnen de architectonische disciplines met name de architectuurkritiek/theorie wordt zijn standpunt overwegend bediscussieerd en gezien door een specifieke bril - men kan zeggen door het uit zijn oeuvre te extraheren - van de twee artikelen die eind twintiger jaren gepubliceerd werden in het tijdschrift *Documents*: 'Architecture' en 'Informe'. Een dergelijk benadering, echter laat in essentie de rest van zijn (filosofische) inzet of van zijn 'paradoxale' filosofie van het exces en de gerelateerde wijzen van verspilling, buiten beschouwing. Bovendien gaat het voorbij aan de brede waaier van onderwerpen die zijn onderzoek behelst, van individuele ervaring naar collectieve - of zoals Bataille het zegt de 'algemene' -economie. Tot slot, schuift deze houding de dubbelzinnige maar radicale functie die 'het schrijven' van deze auteur als doel verondersteld terzijde.

Een 'schrijven' (in het Frans '*écriture*'), die inderdaad twijfelachtig heen en weer beweegt tussen de praktijk van het verspillen (van betekenis) en een meer wetenschappelijke studie van het exces. Zijn bibliografie bevat bijna twintig boeken en tientallen artikelen, romans en essays (zijn *Oeuvres Complétes* bevat circa 6000 pagina's) over onderwerpen die gaan van filosofie tot kunstkritiek, architectuur en economie. Slechts weinig geleerden hebben een 'echte' poging gedaan het gehele werk van Bataille te onderzoeken en ondervragen op relevantie voor de discipline.

Deze dissertatie richt zich op zowel de beperkende en bepalende lezing en de daaruit volgende fundamentele onjuiste interpretatie van Bataille's werk die de velden van architectuurkritiek/theorie doordringt (in ieder geval in de Engelstalige context). Een lezing die neigt de fundamentele verbindingen in zijn werk opzij te schuiven (door zich uitsluitend te beperken tot de artikelen 'Architecture' en 'Informe'). Anderzijds is dit een te beperkte interpretatie die leidt tot een simpele kritiek van klassieke architectonische vormen – of tot louter ontkenning van alle vormen van architectuur. Tegen deze 'toe-eigening', d.w.z. deze reductie welke een verkeerde interpretatie tot gevolg heeft, die op gewelddadige wijze tekort doet aan de relevantie van Bataille's werk voor de architectuurkritiek/theorie (die op de dezelfde wijze een erg zwakke definitie van architectuur verraadt, nl. het voornamelijk bezig zijn met de ontwikkeling van vormen).

Deze dissertatie betoogt dat Bataille's oeuvre een 'geheel' of 'totaliteit' vormt die, alhoewel ontwrichtend en verstoord, beschouwd zou moeten worden in zijn geheel om de bijzondere functie van verspilling, contestatie die architectuur en architectuurkritiek gemeen hebben, aan het licht te kunnen brengen – mits niet hypocriet geïnterpreteerd. Beginnend met een grondige analyse van de verschillende pogingen om Bataille's denken binnen de discipline toe te eigenen, zoekt deze analyse omgekeerd Bataille's 'gebruikswaarde' los te laten, door argumenten aan te voeren voor een oproerig begrip van architectuur en een radicale vaststelling van zijn correlatieve inschatting als niet hypocriete verspillingen die Bataille's kijk op het onderwerp doordringen.

Met bovenstaande doelen, plaatst deze analyse Bataille's oeuvre in een bredere context van de voor- en naoorlogse intellectuele geschiedenis, door de invloeden, groepen, tijdschriften, polemieken en erfenis van de auteur te bediscussiëren. Het beschouwt de wijze waarop Bataille, bekendheid geeft aan zijn persoonlijke ervaring van het exces, blijk geeft van zijn lezing van Hegel, Nietzsche en de Sade, een bewuste verbinding zoekt met opmerkelijke intellectuele tijdgenoten zoals André Breton en Jean Paul Sartre, en bekende naoorlogse denkers beïnvloedt. Terwijl het probeert de relatie met deze filosofen en intellectuelen terug te winnen, kijkt deze dissertatie ook naar zijn gepubliceerde en ongepubliceerde boeken, romans en artikelen om grip te krijgen op hoe zijn 'schrijven' op een paradoxale wijze een theoretisering van de verspilling is als ook gezien wordt als een praktijk van het exces (een verspilling in zichzelf). Bijgevolg, stelt het voor om Bataille's opvatting van architectuur te lezen binnen de context van zijn 'paradoxale filosofie'. Vanuit dit gedegen wetenschappelijk gezichtspunt onderzoekt het en laat het zien dat Bataille's teksten over architectuur niet alleen een kritiek blijken te zijn op architectonische vormen, maar

veeleer een controversiële opheldering van de politieke, sociale en economische functie van architectuur: een middel van 'uitwisseling' of 'communicatie' tussen wat Bataille schetst als de heterogene en homogene gebieden. Om het anders te zeggen, Bataille, zoals de dissertatie onthult, ziet architectuur als een list of een uitvinding die toestaat dat het sacrale teruglekt in het profane.

Met deze bevindingen – in het vervolg Bataille als leidraad nemend - komt deze dissertatie na voren met een these van architectuur als een *verspilling – w*erkelijk of symbolisch, ofwel productief of in zuiver verlies – werkend vanuit een duale modus. Aan de ene kant, is architectuur gebiedend: het dient de hegemonie van de 'hoge' heterogene elementen, terwijl het de orde van het homogene rijk structureert en in stand houdt. Aan de andere kant is het 'onzuiver': staat het een teruglekken toe van de 'lage' onzuivere heterogene elementen in het profane (homogene rijk), en verstoort als zodanig zijn orde. Deze functie van verspilling, concludeert de dissertatie, lijkt niet beperkt te zijn tot het architectonische object. Inderdaad, zoals Bataille het suggereert, schijnt de ware functie van de architectonische vaststelling/inschatting ook een verspilling te zijn. Een 'project' dat geen verdere doelen/bedoelingen heeft dan een radicale verkwisting in en van zichzelf. Bataille's 'opvatting' van architectuur is niet enkel een vernieuwing van de architectuurkritiek maar een radicale *architectural contestation.*