

From Myth to Market: Bataille's Americas Lost and Found

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I do seem attracted to trash, as if the clue—the clue—lies there.
Philip Dick, *Exegesis*[\(1\)](#)

A complaint to the management! Miffed, patrons of the “Cabinet des Médailles” groused in a petition to the director of the Bibliothèque Nationale of a section head who failed to appear at his post at the appointed hour.[\(2\)](#) Where was Bataille? Sleeping, maybe. We have it on real authority that he enjoyed a nap. Recalling that he would doze during Kojève’s course, Queneau described his inattentive friend as “the fly on the orator’s nose.”[\(3\)](#) Marked down on his day job at the BN for “his lack of assiduity,”[\(4\)](#) he proved vulnerable to the identical charge at the famous Friday evening lectures: “He was not a listener of exemplary assiduity,” noticed that expert on laziness, author of *Le Dimanche de la vie*.[\(5\)](#) An old habit, an old science. “I have been patiently developing a method that will enable me to dream in the most humble of circumstances,” young Bataille wrote to his cousin sometime in 1922. Just staring at a cheap tie, he said, could do the trick.[\(6\)](#) The “pure and decided use of poverty,” was Benjamin’s term for the operation.[\(7\)](#) The entirety of experience, properly mismanaged, could be a discount warehouse of fantasy roles.

It couldn’t hurt a fly, the dialectic. And not that there would be, at least in this insignificantly distracting case, anything like the temptation, the insult being so scaled that the machine would only most mildly mind. Breton once accused Bataille of reasoning like a man with a fly on his nose.[\(8\)](#) Wrong fly, wrong nose, Lacan, the offending librarian’s friend and fellow Kojève student, helps to grasp. Does he understand why Nietzsche required the expression “fly happiness,” and why the figure of the merest fly, in Augustine’s *Confessions*, triggered the great medieval and early modern debate over that weakest autoaffection, *vana curiositas*? For the

conjuring away of agonistic confrontation, to brake the aggression involved in the experience of the spectacle of a contrasting sufficiency, to vanquish that less lovable Lacanian bug, “the great winged hornet of narcissistic tyranny,”⁽⁹⁾ what serves is something that is almost nothing: “A flash of lightning—but that is too much, as a bolt of lightning can be taken to be a sign of the presence of the Father of the gods. . . . A buzzing fly, if it passes into this field, is sufficient to cause me to shift my bearings elsewhere, to take me outside of the field of the visibility of the i (a).”⁽¹⁰⁾

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It is through some initial attention to what this “i (a)” is shorthand for, and to its relation to the disrupting fly, that we can develop the sharpest sense of an unknown Bataille, one whose role in the canon is deserving of an entirely different basis. On the (not easy!) condition that we forgive the French-centeredness of the remark, it is now hard to disagree with the recent words of Sollers: “One day, it is to be hoped, we will realize that the explosive center of twentieth-century thought was Georges Bataille rather than those whose names have come to obscure his, or those whose names have come to be automatically associated with his.”⁽¹¹⁾ Sollers went on to say, irrefutably, that wrenchingly poor knowledge has been demonstrated of what is actually contained in the twelve volumes we now know to be inappropriately called by Gallimard the *Oeuvres complètes* of Bataille. Towards the end of his life Bataille widened his experience to a sphere that one would not, on the basis of the way we find him characteristically represented, have imagined natural to him. Entirely overlooked has been his uncannily prescient analysis of how consumerism would play an inspirational part in the demise of communism and the Soviet Union. He came to notice what he felt to be the ethical superiority of the market with an impressive logic, one that parallels that of Generative Anthropology, that independently reinforces its claims. “Esthetic form remains sacrificial,” Gans writes, “but sacrifice is no longer understood as a necessary feature of social organization.”⁽¹²⁾ In Bataille’s development we notice the sharpest awareness of the necessity of this separability, as well as the historical and moral necessity of the blurring of post-modern esthetic patterns—what Gans terms “ironized sacrifice”—into the patterns of market exchange.

There are flies that undo what Freud called the ego ideal—which Bataille termed alternately the heterogeneous element, or “the sovereign”—and there are those who towards it are fatally drawn. There are flies of convergence, flies of unconvergence. Hegel: “A consciousness that opens up to a subject-matter soon learns that others hurry along like flies to freshly poured-out milk, and want to busy themselves with it.”⁽¹³⁾ The “freshly poured-out milk” of flies, writes Anne-Lou Steininger in her masterfully sinister book-length poem on the sociology of flies, is another fly:

I am Queen of flies.
Swallow the words that fall from my mouth.
It is not enough for me to be immortal:
I am-and of this I boast-universal.[\(14\)](#)

Addressing the worshipful, the monster slips into prose: “To begin, I want to impose upon you a desire without end, the sensation of being cut in two, deprived of your truth . . . like the body and its shadow at sunrise. I will make of you strangers to yourselves, avid for fusion, love and copulation. I will impose myself through lack. . . .”[\(15\)](#) And further impudicity: “I am Queen of flies, the most hated of all. My subjects detest me, they curse, abhor and conspue. . . . They spit in pronouncing my name, hiss when I appear, jeer, rail and rant.”[\(16\)](#)

The “i (a)” would be the fly within the fly. And it is the function of Lacan’s abbreviation to enable us to understand the two fly possibilities, contrasting emotions, contrasting group experiences, to understand that it is the sequestering of the one fly that makes possible the other, the ego ideal, with its social effects. Communicated through the symbol was Lacan’s view that Freud’s notion of an originary objectless narcissism required the modification that had been supplied by Melanie Klein with her view of the enigmatic partial objects, corralled by that resented thing she called “the self-feeding breast.” The “i” would be the narcissistic subject. The a is the hoarded object that is no object, the exclusive, unmediated relation with which marks the subject as death-worthy, the form which I must pass to violently through the “i,” if I am myself to have an unmediated relation with the world.

3

Blood-crime will be where the ego ideal was—it can only make a fatal appearance, emerge only into what is contested territory, exclusively in harm’s way. Ego ideal can only be imagined towards a reckoning, as inviting terrible comeuppance, projected in collective wish-fulfillment to be a stricken ego ideal, a combustively contrastive, stormed and finally displaced seducer, one that upon its real or imagined justly merited death is pillaged, piñata-like, for its store of “objects,” their soul force immediately, angrily drawn into the unsharing control of another, triumphantly constituted upon the emptied prior form. Greedy for the hidden source of his life, Lacan writes: “The patient says to his partner, to the analyst, what amounts to this—I *love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you*—[the a]—I *mutilate you.*”[\(17\)](#) Existing only as delivered to danger, it is, if hoarded, only killingly accessible, this thing the availability of which brings a shaming enchantment to an end. The provocation of an endomorphic impounding

thus triggers a markedly stationed sequential pattern-identify, *then don't identify*—the serial distribution of the experiences of absolute custody and lack over a diversity of bodies and moments, the airless passage of the undecidable wrenched in this flayer's zone from one frame directly into another. This form of the raw object constitutes and undoes the extrasocial force of ego ideals in the course of its subcutaneous, alternatively, starkly, enriching and impoverishing travels. This sequence pattern-recognizable, of course, as sacrifice—results in the awareness that exclusive access to unmediated relations will issue in the sense that if I were to succeed in achieving my goal there would be, certainly, those around me who will kill to get what I have. Spinoza in the *Ethics* wrote that “The joy that we feel in seeing our enemy suffer is an impure joy because it is always mixed with sadness.” Melanie Klein used the term “envious superego” to label this depression, this entropy-generating awareness of the potential violence of the offended other. Sacrificial ritual would be this specific type of “envious superego” formation—the invidious transfer of the object that is no object, that of the passage into and out of the damaged ego ideal of the outrageous individual that we are warned against becoming for the sake of the production of sugar-coated envious superego—the guilt-ridden self-licking ice cream cone.

But there needn't be this cruel pedagogy of the beautiful; the daunting learning that occurs as the exhilarating vertical arc, the loving/killing movement of identification, is followed by steep descent back to a now poisoned, self-intimidated self love. There was not only the depth model, the going in after the object. It could be differently transindividual, the object that is no object, as we have seen Lacan notice. There could be an object that did not produce the murderously preachy hieratic separation. The fly can be what Lacan called “the elective object,” a uncoercively housed, the a without the mighty outwork of the “i,” from the destruction of which we receive our bad conscience:

This kind of object can have the power that is sufficient to put in question the reality and the coherence of the illusion of the self. It suffices that there move into the field of the Other something that can anchor the subject, but that can at once cause the consistency of the Other, or more precisely of that which is there as the field of narcissistic investment, to be weakened, to vacillate, to be questioned. [\(18\)](#)

The subject is happy—too happy, cf. Augustine—to lose its texture in favor of an infinitely proliferating patchwork of attentions. The relief-happy, but not death-worthy, the other no longer a rival, no longer death-qualified, one no longer has a self one feels required to pull things towards. Because of the unhousedness of the

object, desire has been deceived downwards, deceived into desiring what is undesirable. Desire is realized *out of* rather than *into* danger.

Nodding off before the vaulting negation, Bataille could only continue, finally, to be inside the system, surprise with distracting insignificance from within this philosophy that he would never renounce. ("My thought is tributary to the interpretation of Hegel developed over several years in an influential course taught by Alexandre Kojève at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes."[\(19\)](#)) Was Bataille himself the missing discomfort Hegel required to be entirely himself? "Beyond all knowledge is non-knowledge and whoever becomes convinced that beyond his knowledge he knows nothing, if he were to possess the rigorous lucidity of Hegel, would no longer be Hegel, but would rather be the aching tooth in the mouth of Hegel. Is a sore tooth the only thing that the great philosopher is missing?" (V, pp. 422-23). Tributary was Bataille's full career to the question of the redemptive potential of "the elective object" that offered relief from the pattern that I have termed "the sequence." Early in life, reconciling his experience of the logic of Kojève with that of French anthropology and sociology, Bataille concluded that "sacrifice is a ritual analogue (or 'displacement') of traditional narrative and speculative dialectics."[\(20\)](#) The fly, the toothache? The discovery of a soft spot in the dialectic, something that was sacrifice without being sacrifice. The spirit that exalted itself as absolute had vulnerable basis in just anything at all, in what was not beyond reach, but just rather unworthy of it.

4

Bataille's relevance is due to his being an at once unconscious Kleinian and an unconscious pacifist loosener of her view of partial objects. The outflanking of the master/slave story is achieved through the realization that there are forms buried within the contours of the Hegelian master, and that unbothered access to them explicitly becomes the issue of issues for Derrida, Lyotard, and Deleuze, all of whom bring up Klein early in their careers, and pointedly. Bataille sees that sacrifice is about releasing an object only to see it returned to a provocative captivity that causes the cycle to endlessly rebegin. The noticing of this pattern will organize much of what we think of as post-structuralist thought-in evidence, for example in Derrida versus Husserl and Lévi-Strauss and Foucault, in Foucault against Freud, etc. From Bataille to Deleuze, there will be the struggle to bifurcate the heterogeneous in order to shed the identification with the aggressor.

"The heterogeneous element is missing in Freud," he said (II, p. 171). But the discovery of the group-bonding powers of what he also termed, drawing upon Tarde, the heterogeneous element,[\(21\)](#) was not to be his originality. What was also labeled "the sovereign" was indeed not missing in Freud, who had been fully aware

of its magnetic powers in the crowded-up, because fattened, figure of the ego ideal-familiar quarry in “On Narcissism, an Introduction,” in *Moses, in Totem and Taboo*, and in the essay on group psychology. The problem was finally less that it was lacking than that it was present as unautopsied, its inner resources unexamined. Required was the supplement of object relations theory—we have seen friend Lacan notice—as damagingly absent in Hegel/Kojève as it had been in Freud.[\(22\)](#) Bataille will take up residence in a Hegelian loophole. It is his discovery of the possibility of the nonviolent transference of the partial object—*near* lost in Hegel—and its integration into his view of the fate of ritual that led him to implicitly criticize any notion of a preobjectal state by passing first into and then out of Klein (of whom he was unaware) on his way to presage the adjustments that would come to drive the garrulousness of critical theory.

It is important to insist, for what follows, that direct access to strangeness does not suffice. A valuable aid in understanding Bataille and the revealing history of his object preferences is Malebranche’s *De la Recherche de la vérité*, a book that had an important role in the legitimization of curiosity. Dangerous, Malebranche felt, are those things that are insufficiently strange, as they provoke little in the way of a controlling drive:

There is nothing so difficult than to apply oneself to a thing for a long time without wonder, the animal spirits not carrying themselves easily to the necessary places in order to represent it. . . . It is necessary that we deceive our imagination in order to awaken our spirits, and that we represent the subject upon which we wish to mediate in a new way, so as to excite in us some movement of wonder.[\(23\)](#)

In Malebranche the object had, if necessary, to be artificially charged with difference in order for there not to be generated the scorned inert response. What is the difficult form if not the a not yet detached from its hoarding, therefore energizing, matrix? There must be a drumming up of wonder for the sake of its productive beating down—that is, the sequence. The mind inflames itself with wonder to move to new levels of thrusting intelligence, of manipulative vigilance. This is what Blanchot termed “persecutive prehension”: “At certain moments, this hand feels a very great need to grasp: it must take the pencil, this is necessary, this is an order, an imperious requirement.”[\(24\)](#) It is the function of the aggravation of wonder to cause us “to examine things with the . . . highest level of exactitude.”[\(25\)](#) But if wonder is minimal there is a stalling into a poor wonder that is not transformed into a manipulative drive. When wonder was minimally wonder, enticed was the soul to “enjoy its riches rather than to dissipate them” in vigorous inquiry

[\(26\)](#) Wonder, lazy rather than busying wonder, could be an occasion for the unproductive self-pleasure that had been noticed by Augustine and by La Bruyère in his description of the stunned tulip collector, passive in weak delight before the inert glory of his treasure. The splitting of *curiositas*, therefore, between passive and aggressive versions. The strong object—the wonder impatient for our appropriating touch—may be described as a form that collapses Klein’s breast with its contents; the weak version would be the correction tirelessly supplied by that field we term “critical theory”—the object without the “i,” without matrix, the depredation-inciting contour, the trussing that excites the appetite to dominate.

5

Malebranche’s points are to be put in touch with those of G. H. Mead who expands upon what Whitehead called “the pushiness of things.” [\(27\)](#) There is agreement with Freud, in notice of “the identification of the inner effort of the organism with the matter of the object.” [\(28\)](#) The thing is said to stimulate an organism to act as the thing acts upon the organism. The action of the thing is the organism’s resistance to any pressure that arises when a hard object is firmly grasped by the hand. The rigidities of the object, through which it brings itself into hurting range, excite the best efforts of the hand. “The distant object, setting in train the responses of grasping and manipulation, calls out in the organism its own inner nature of resistance.” [\(29\)](#) The organism in grasping and pushing things is associating its own effort with the contact experience of the thing. The hand moves only as much as its reference moves. One arouses in her or himself an action which comes also from the inside of the thing. “The vision of the distant object is not only the stimulus to movement toward it. It is also, in its changing distance values, a continual control of the act of approach. The contours of the object determine the organization of the act in its seizure.” [\(30\)](#) Thus the significance of the properties of the thing—the intensity of a predatory relation—depends upon the extent to which the features are epistemologically aphrodisiac, the extent to which we are driven by them to blaze a way into the heart of an enigma.

Now Mead’s support of Malebranche has the virtue of alerting us to a trap, one that may be described as organizing the entire anxiety system of critical theory. Through attention to Mead on the exotic form, we see that *distance is something that participates in its own overcoming*—distance creates narrative, excites disciplinary triumph, and consequently envious superego. Why is it that “[w]e cannot eliminate from the dialectics of the extant what is experienced in consciousness as an alien thing.” [\(31\)](#) Distance there must be, if there is to be a free subject: “There is truly no identity without something nonidentical.” [\(32\)](#) And it is the duty of art to base itself in this understanding, says Adorno: “[M]odern art is constantly practicing the impossible trick of trying to identify the non-identical.” [\(33\)](#) But if this distance is to

be no deceit, if it is not to draw one onto the rocks by the power of its solicitation, it can broker no killing return. Because it moralizes access to strangeness, there can be no happiness in *capturing* power. Adorno: “The spell cast by the subject becomes equally a spell cast over the subject. [. . .] The subject is spent and impoverished in its categorical performance; to be able to define and articulate what it confronts. . . the subject must dilute itself to the point of mere universality, for the sake of the objective validity of those definitions. [. . .] The objectifying subject contracts into a point of abstract reason, and finally into logical noncontradictoriness, which in turn means nothing except to a definite object.”⁽³⁴⁾ And: “The more autocratically the I rises above entity, the greater its imperceptible objectification and ironic retraction of its constitutive role.”⁽³⁵⁾ “Where the subject feels altogether sure of itself . . . it will be least subjective.”⁽³⁶⁾ In so far as there are social acts, there are social objects, and social control entails bringing the act of the individual into relation with this social object. And what is the social object? The distant object, because it produces envious superego. Thus distance is required, distance is impossible. Strangeness must be bonded with failure—Adorno on the work: “its enigmatic quality is a deficiency, a condition of want.”⁽³⁷⁾

The necessary trick: in preshrunk wonder to preserve distance without invoking process. If “we recognize the identity of resistance and effort,”⁽³⁸⁾ how are we to frustrate distance from participating in its own, autonomy-ruining overcoming? The object must be a prelude to a release from the object—this is the sequence: “The primacy of the object, as the potential freedom from domination of what is, manifests itself in art as its freedom from objects.”⁽³⁹⁾ But not just any provocative object will do, for the sequence must be unkillingly experienced. If there is to be a yielding to the object, required will be help from the object itself, Malebranche noticed. The eye moves as much as its reference moves, according to the energizing sufficiency of immersive qualities. Adorno says that “It is not the purpose of critical thought to place the object on the orphaned royal throne once occupied by the subject. On that throne the object would be nothing but an idol. The purpose of critical thought is to abolish the hierarchy.”⁽⁴⁰⁾ There must be “the primacy of the object,” but this has to be experienced by the subject “against its own omnipotence”⁽⁴¹⁾ if there is to be avoided the unfolding of a muscular corrective. The danger is that of which Kant spoke, in his description of what occurs in the sublime, of “a certain . . . substitution of a respect for the Object in place of one for the idea of humanity in our own self—the Subject.”⁽⁴²⁾ The choice: Be the always already small, or suffer the condition of being the agent (and victim) of its forcible and preachy revelation in time. For there to be Malebranche’s unmolesting lazy wonder, time must be subtracted from the experience of distance so that the small will not be the byproduct of invidious process. The collapse of distance and proximity, the banalization of distance, the defamiliarization of the proximate, the fly as “the elective object” is wonder divided against itself, the self-distance of

distance.

6

It is indeed the case that “Critical theory was the attempt to come into the inheritance of dialectics without spinning victor’s fantasies.” (43) And this project has the structure of our innocent separation, the division of Malebranche effects. From Lacan’s version of the break, to Adorno’s distinction between predatory “identification” and the passive “mimesis” that just lets things be, to Derrida on the relation of the voice to the written word, to Deleuze on that between the molar and the molecular, to Lyotard on the relation of saving ugliness to “the beautiful whole,” one only, inexhaustibly, encounters the same procedure, however ingeniously varied the labeling.

Focus upon the reflecting subject must be supplemented by attention to the just-any-old-thing medium of reflection. What was the relation of the object to the contour of a body? Could it be a fly on the nose or something that required a bloody removal? Intimate difference inside or out? Only through Bataille’s anticipation of Klein as well as prophetic notice of her perceived weakness—her too great display of strength!—will he cease to be diminished by admiration of disastrous greatness, will he shake free from the hurting into and away from the ego ideal as disciplined, disciplining shade. “Theory” is the locus of an endless work of not permitting the existence of the combustible hoarding matrix tissue. To detach envious superego from ego ideal it must inexhaustibly randomize/universalize access to insignificance.

Lacan’s discovery that the object could pass from a positional to a distributive economy resembles a development in Kojève of which we must take notice. Our two Malebranche effects (at the center of the relation between Girard and Gans) are what is at the heart of the struggle between Bataille and Kojève. Upon return from a 1959 trip to the East, Kojève added a footnote of consequence to the *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*. Here he reports deciding that he had erred in predicting that the human adventure would conclude in the American way of life that he associated with the achievement of a socially unprocessed animal existence. Kojève’s eventual “American” was imagined to be a no longer an indirect being. His desires would be unmediatedly objectal; he would be undialectically, happily appetitive. Instead of heading towards this goal, we were pushing towards the post-historic snobbery that he discovered in Japan, towards the emerging infinite good of minimalist negativity, one that involved a relation to the world that reduced the struggle for recognition to a *near-vanishing point*. Through useless attention to objects such as those involved in a tea ceremony there is possible a minimally contrastive, self-limiting, almost unusable indifference. At the end of history there is a shift in relation to the object

world. The last men do indeed have their objects, but they are without extension. Half way to askesis:

In order to remain human, Man must remain a “Subject opposed to an Object,” even if there is the disappearance of “the action that negates the given. . . .” [. . .] Post-historic man must continue to *detach* “forms” from their “contents,” not for the sake of actively transforming these last, but for the sake of using them as mediations with which he can present, as a pure form, himself to himself and to others. . . .[\(44\)](#)

In post-historic *farniente*, a world of “elective objects,” there is no school of process, involving as it does the permanent and universally distributed condition of the absence of desiring transformation of objects, there being no inculcating through the moralizing zero-sum episodes of contrastive achievement of “i (a)” status. Minimally dialectical, the mastery that ceases to risk its life, *almost* ceasing to generate a struggle for position, can only be made possible by a poor object idiom. Kojève’s late and inadequate coming to the point that the dialectic could be near immobilized if it were to be turned against itself was pressured by his awareness of Bataille’s points. A crawl space within the dialectic would be the French loophole, the French exception. Kojève was, as we shall see, becoming French at the moment that Bataille had already become an American, understanding as he finally did the power of a soaring shallowness, the world-transforming, triumphant vulgarity of a new objectality that could only be accepted in the most mystifyingly, incapacitatingly neutered terms by Kojève.

At the outset of Bataille’s logic is a pleasure trap, a trap because delight is bonded with a fearsome identification:

In . . . tragedy we identify with a character who dies and in so doing we believe ourselves to be dying while we remain alive. The imagination suffices, but this fantasy has the same meaning as do those classical subterfuges that are the basis of the books and spectacles that are most appreciated by the multitudes. . . . Humanity, everywhere and in its totality, has sought, through a detour, to seize that which death at once offered and hid from its sight. (XII, p. 337)

and its servitude that is commanded by useful objects" (V, p. 273). And it is through death in tragedy that the escape is achieved.

Sought through this experience was release from the objects of our shaming dependency: "This world of objects that transcends me. . . that locks me into its sphere of transcendence, traps me in some way into my exteriority, and creates within me a network of exteriority" (V, p. 205). Escape, in the form of a not knowing of the useful objects of the world, is available through a terrible detour: "Man needs to offer to himself the perspective of non-knowledge in the form of death" (VIII, p. 194). Deflating news, this, because the tainting of the pleasure would appear to have the status of a destiny. But everything changes, hope rises, when there emerges the possibility of an alternative: "Know nothing, otherwise there is fascination" (VI, p. 125). To dislocate sacrifice from the dialectic is to bust any affinity between *nonsavoir* and death, that is, envious superego from ego ideal. Sacrifice and finding result in the revelation of an identical material that brings us from the alienating outside to the inside, that is, materials with which there are (the illusions of) unmediated relations. But it is the presence or absence of some antecedent figurality-Lacan's "i" barring access to *a*-that is opened explosively that changes all. In sacrifice, harsh law that manacles pleasure and disgrace, the partial object has the status of a *compensation*-access to strangeness is moralized. The subject is intimidated as an inevitable consequence of its conquering movements and in this process the object itself is not innocent-it is the bribe or the "pleasure premium" offered to compensate for the suffocating envious superego's installation costs. Because the sovereign as hoarding, exclusivizing ego ideal is the breast and object as indissociably kneaded together, access to the object *through* it results in an indentured self-love. Demoralizing is replaced with amoralizing through the recognition of the splitting of Malebranche effects, the employment of one thing that was inaccessible to categories against the other, by uncoupling the anxiety of punishment and the pleasure that the Hegelian master seemed to describe as necessary blur.

"Imagine indifference itself as a power-how could you live according to this indifference?"(45) One could only *live* in indifference-the question is Nietzsche's-if it could somehow be indefinitely sustained, as was not the case in the target-rich world of Hegel/Kojève. How can one indifference be immediately matched, but not bested by another? How can it be transindividual without being entropically so, that is, *sequentially* so? A possibility—"fly happiness," the torpid subversion achieved by minimizing the extent to which the desire of another might be addressed. The drama of the transferal of indifference is a moralized indifference, an indifference that has been put to work, Bataille will come to conclude, against his teacher. Master of masters would be the engineer of its undoing, the fly on Kojève's nose. A zero-sum economy of indifference would be succeeded by one of infinite good. In

the tiny *hauteur* of an Ungreat Refusal, Bataille is not awed into anonymity but through a sly anonymity gives the dialectic the slip, in the famous letter of the fly to his Ben Turpin, December 6, 1937. The complaint is about the presence of sequence in Kojève's thought, the absence of a possibility for the deliverance from the rigidities of a culture of ritualized revenge.

I admit as a likely possibility that as of now history has, excepting for its final episode, come to an end.

However, my own experience, lived with much anxiety, has led me to think that I have nothing left "to do." (I was reluctant to accept this, and, as you have seen, have only resigned myself to this after having forced myself to do so.)

If action (the act of "doing") is-as Hegel says-negativity, there then emerges the question of knowing if that negativity which "has nothing any longer to do" disappears or continues in the form of "*useless negativity*." Personally, I can only see things in a certain way, being myself exactly this "*useless negativity*" (I would not be able to define myself in any more precise way). I accept that Hegel may have been aware of this possibility, even if he does not locate it at the conclusion of the process he describes. I imagine that my life-or its abortion, or better yet, the open wound that is my life-itself alone constitutes a refutation of the closed system of Hegel.

The question you put regarding me amounts to asking if I am or am not insignificant. Haunted by the possibility of a negative response, I have often posed this same question to myself. Furthermore, as the image I have of myself varies, and as it happens that I forget that I might indeed be mediocre, I have compared my life to those of the most remarkable of men. I have said that at the summit of life there can only be that which is negligible: no one, finally would be able to *recognize* a summit that would be night.

At the moment that it enters into the game of existence as a catalyst of great vital reactions, negativity is not "recognizable as such," neither in works of art nor in the affectivity of religion. On the contrary, it becomes part of a process of assimilation. There is, therefore, a fundamental difference between the objectification of negativity, as it has been experienced in the past, and that which remains possible *at the end*.[\(46\)](#)

And luck was on Bataille's side, for this is what he happened to be, the fly, the toothache. He loved himself as insignificance-insignificance as first love-and thus the ego ideal needn't be lunged at, the envious superego borne. This was a theme throughout his writings. For example, from many years later: "What is within me that is sovereign is the ruin. And my visible absence of superiority-my state of ruin-is the sign of an insubordination that is equal in scale to the starry sky" (XI, p. 131). One might not finally be able to extinguish the dialectic, but it could be set to idle. There was another path to the "suspension of desire" (Hegel), but you had to be lazy to get there.

The degraded subject will need a degraded object-a nothing was needed that would make everything possible. Judith Butler wonders: "What constitutes the latest stage of post-Hegelianism as a stage definitively beyond the dialectic? Are there positions still haunted by the dialectic, even as they claim to be in utter opposition to it? What is the nature of this 'opposition,' and is it perchance a form that Hegel himself has prefigured?"[\(47\)](#) Bataille would rival the gods not by stealing fire, but by finding what it was that fire had left behind, that through which one cannot be endangered and what cannot be lost. Hegel's skull is what Barthes called "the obtuse dimension of the signifier":

The skull bone is not an organ of activity, nor even a "speaking" movement. We neither commit theft, murder, etc. with the skull bone nor does it in the least betray such deeds by a change of countenance, so that the skull-bone would become a speaking gesture. Nor has this *immediate* being the value even of a *sign*. Look and gesture, tone of voice, even a pillar or post erected on a desert island, directly proclaim that they mean something else than what they *simply* are at first sight. They at once profess to be signs, since they have in them a peculiarity which points to something else, by the fact that it does not properly belong to them. A variety of ideas may well occur to us in connection with a skull, like those of Hamlet over Yorick's skull; but the skull-bone just by itself is such an indifferent, natural thing that nothing else is to be directly seen in it, or fancied about it, than simply the bone itself. It does indeed remind us of the brain and its specific nature, and of skulls of different formation, but not of a conscious movement, since there is impressed on it neither a look nor a gesture nor anything that proclaims itself to have come from a conscious action; for it is an actuality whose role it is to exhibit another sort of aspect of the individuality, one that would no longer be a self-reflected, but a purely *immediate* being.[\(48\)](#)

If there was only the experience of the dialectic, and if it and sacrifice had to be decoupled, the trauma from the sequence subtracted, required would be a version of the dialectic that was no longer recognizable as such, the “lazy infinity” that Hegel had “prefigured.”

An unmediated relation is the consequence of the encounter, Hegel adds: “The *pure* category as being is present for consciousness in the form of *being* or *immediacy*, is the object as still unmediated, as merely given, and consciousness is equally unmediated in its relation to it.”⁽⁴⁹⁾ An immediate return of attention and desire to the self is the result. When consciousness has the pure category as its object: “Consciousness has cast away all opposition and every condition affecting its action; its starts afresh from *itself*, and is occupied not with an *other*, but with *itself*.”⁽⁵⁰⁾ Not occupied with another, but, crucially, not having been occupied with another during this scandalous shortcut, desire returns, innocent, untempted. So thoroughly “occupied not with another” that the dead weight of envious superego is not produced.

For Hegel, singleness is a philosophical nothing that demands nothing for thought; something heterogeneous acquires meaning only when it is transferred into the homogeneous environment of concepts and generalized contexts. Whereas in Klein’s beautiful form what is lost in violence is the skin, with Hegel’s skull there is no flesh to lose. There is not the experience of something *becoming* forsaken. The hand that reaches toward this object would be like a thought without a need, that wished for nothing, that would be like nothing. But there would still be the reaching that weakens any impression of sufficiency. One remains active, but for nothing; one needs but to be without need.

9

Relationless in idiotic (i.e., invulnerable) self-pleasure, the skull produces something akin to esthetic contemplation, but certainly not in Hegel’s sense. In the *Aesthetics* the profiles of Greek statues are held beautiful because the flatness of their features communicated an absence of needy tension towards an external (shaming) thing that there might be some dependency upon. Neither statue nor skull is a reaching physiognomy, but one dips beneath the need that the other is quite indifferent to; one is a subject become object, the other a dumb object. But as the impression of absence of reference is in the skull yoked to the imagery of what is *beneath* rather than beyond effort and desire, it is experienced in a mode of failure, an inadequacy that releases from an attachment at the very instant it is produced, and hence attention is ceaselessly remobilized in an ostinato-like pattern, freed to then form the new bonds that are fated to be freshly disillusioned in their inevitable turn. Here one goes out to an object only to reveal by the choice of the

inconsequential that it was only the illusion of need that brought about this movement outside the self. Despite momentary appearance, we say to ourselves, as we are positioned before these forms, trivially rapt for a moment but in the instant released from an unimpressively coercive spell, they do not finally have the strength to not desire, as much as they seek to convince that this is not the case. Objects of this ilk make possible an immediate return of desire to the self rather than the identification with a larger whole that is alone master of these objects. The uselessness of “the elective object” causes it to not exist at the intersection of other worldly desires, and thus through its embrace the phantasmagoric anteriority of one’s desire is established, in the absence of a threat of the cataclysmic birth of the ego ideal at the expense of the ruin of another. But assertion of priority is nevertheless made *through failure*—there is no object, but this is expressed through the dependency upon an object. This was Hegel’s premature discovery of “low materialism,” of “useless negativity.” The skull is not the *caput mortuum* of Melanie Klein, the inside already having been given up.

While for Hegel the non-identical is in view only as a restraint upon the powers of the subject, for Bataille it will prove the emancipation of a certain aesthetic subject—crowd-parting charisma inhibitor—that he will come to equate with the redeeming *American* potential he acquires the duty to urgently advance as the discovery of a political center and the panacea of a redeemed *homo oeconomicus*. The crack in the dialectic—the self-pleasure of insignificance that collapses the moments of the dialectic—would be large enough to contain a reinvented America, reformed away from the habits of Aztec happiness whose only apparent rudeness obscured what was finally a regimented prissiness, so very different from the animal self-presence that is the nothingness of the dialectic’s end Kojève thought he had found in his very different America.

Bataille had been at work (!) on the issue of negativity’s tactical retreat long before facing the challenge posed by Kojève. To embarrass him he needed only to resurrect the private science mentioned above. Writing to his cousin in 1922: “It is at present absolutely certain that I am now in Madrid, but am in neither of the states of mind that you might imagine me to be in—enthusiasm or despair. Instead, I live a condition in which despair and enthusiasm have become blurred.”⁽⁵¹⁾ The new state functionary, having just completed his studies at the Ecole des Chartes, about to assume a position at the Bibliothèque Nationale, wrote to his cousin of his new, modest science of pleasure:

My scientific mission is off to a good start because, as if by a miracle, I have discovered a new science, one that is cause for rejoicing and congratulations. Most unfortunate folk fantasize in a manner that is

entirely lacking in scientific rigor, and this is general calamity. There may be methods to enhance the pleasures in smoking tobacco or opium, in tasting exotic coffees, but there are none for profoundly savoring a fantasy. There is no method for imagining burning kisses and perfumed sunsets while studying faces that are no more expressive than a German beer mug or a cheap tie. That is why I have patiently invented a method that will enable me to fantasize in the most humble of circumstances.[\(52\)](#)

Desire could be deceived into realization. Unassimilability would be founded upon falling outside of the interpersonal agon. Benjamin: “The existence of Mickey Mouse is such a dream for contemporary man. His life is full of miracles-miracles that not only surpass the wonders of technology, but make fun of them. For the most extraordinary thing about them is that they all appear, quite without any machinery, to have been improvised out of the body of Mickey Mouse, out of his supporters and persecutors, and out of the most ordinary pieces of furniture, as well as from trees, clouds, and the sea.”[\(53\)](#) If he did not go timid, if his resource were other than his own abject self, he would be certain to be usurped by the dialectic for its own use.

10

Deleuze remarked that the speed of a philosophy is decisive. There was a dialectic within the dialectic, a fluctuation in the intensity of its fluctuations. Derrida gravely misrepresents when he writes: “[S]overeignty is totally other. Bataille pulls it out of dialectics.”[\(54\)](#) And it is from Kojève’s error in not seeing that the dialectic could be differently timed (*i.e.*, that there are differing degrees of separation distancing correction from excess), the error in not noticing that the sovereign can be experienced in differing intensities, that no positive politics can follow.

“Democracy,” says Bataille, “is founded upon a neutralization of forces that become relatively weak and free; it excludes all explosive condensation” (I, p. 469). As Kojève came himself to grasp in his famous footnote, there was a split within the field of heterogeneous phenomena-between the banal and the extraordinary, the movement from one to the other being the essential progress, that of the deliverance from revenge. There are two sovereigns, one proving sustainable, the other not. These two figures with their two temporalities, oppositely provisional, one, the envious superego-mitigating temporality of just anything at all, immanently, the other externally scheduled for death, one, immanently distressed, figure of autogenous disgrace, that escapes the *consequences* of a negation (while remaining a negation), the other that does not. To correct Kojève is to notice the camouflage, the zone of an internal alteration, the separability of the economic from the historical. The collapse in indolence results in the compression that

eliminates the phase information involved in the issue of a successor. Low heterogeneity, to use the language of Bakhtin, is microdialogic—"an intra-atomic counterpoint of voices and their combination only with the bounds of a single, dissociated consciousness."(55)

"The goal of poetry is the same as that sought in sacrifice, that of making as vivid as possible the experience of the content of the present instant" (XI, p. 102). The illusion of desirelessness is achieved through both procedures, but in one case there is a modernly unacceptable price to pay. The irony of transgression marks the one that is admonitorily ephemeral: "The immense happiness of God, his measureless *jouissance*, was proposed to our misery in the same manner as formerly the happiness of the sovereign was proposed to the misery of his subjects. The sovereign of Sade, the integral man, whose imaginary figure Sade substituted for the poverty of the life of the prisoner that he actually led, does not himself escape the negation he performed" (X, p. 701). Something is given body only for the sake of its instructive removal. And the object accessed along this hard path, through this cruel temporality, reflects the effort to reach it. Thus: "The infinite inferiority of God when compared to man is due to man's potential to limit himself to the stupid and shifty." (V, p. 485). It is the embracing of human limits that makes possible the saving release: "Sovereign thought involves the thoroughgoing separation of the world of things from that of subjectivity" (VIII, p. 454). This is to say that the sovereign can only be *uninterruptedly* experienced as a relation rather than as a body, a body that would always be subject to a brutally instructive undoing.

Needed and supplied by Bataille through proudly assumed mediocrity was the blurring of the stations of the dialectic's visibly fraught version of the imperative to identify *then* don't identify over several persons and moments into its collapse-causing it to appear in a single individual in no perceivable elapsed time. As the pre-1959 Kojève lacked this simultaneity, this double identification the moments of which are just too quick to be chastizingly instructed by, he was without means to cause the economic to break from history, to cause the undoing of what Keynes called "the fallacy of saving." If there were to be that freedom of insignificance that produced the palliative rubato within the dialectic, then there would need to be that separation of the Malebranchean doubles, that is, the emergence of a found object logic.

It is the aleatory that will make possible the "separation of the world of things." "My doctrine of chance is that part of what I have said that is external to the logic of Hegel. The rest can be absorbed into it" (X, p. 659). For Bataille, "What is sovereign can only arrive through the arbitrary, through chance" (VIII, p. 273). "Sovereign art involves the access to a sovereign subjectivity that is not dependent upon rank" (VIII, p. 450). The unembedding of the object through indifference, rather than

passive hoarding as sign of indifference, involves a social consequence, a social precondition. Sacrifice versus the *trouvaille*-the product displaces the process in one case, the reverse is true in the other.

It is in his allergy to the sequence that Bataille proves most Nietzschean. From *Human all too Human*:

We must display our unhappiness and from time to time be heard to sigh, be seem to be impatient: for if we let others see how happy and secure in ourselves we are in spite of suffering and deprivation, how malicious and envious we would make them! We have to take care not to corrupt our fellow men; moreover, they would in the instance referred to impose upon us a heavy impost, and our *public suffering* is in any event also our *private advantage*.[\(56\)](#)

11

And from the same text: “*To one who is praised*-So long as you are praised think only that you are not yet on your own path but on that of another.”[\(57\)](#) The danger:

The behavior of those who admire Sade resembles that of primitive subjects in relation to their king, whom they at once adore and loathe, and whom they cover with honors and narrowly confine. In the most favorable of cases, the author of *Justine* is in fact treated as any given foreign body; in other words, he is only an object of transports of exaltation to the extent that these transports facilitate his evacuation (his peremptory expulsion). (II, p. 55)

A vitalistic philosophy had to be a *barely* visible arrogance. On the cheerful asceticism of the philosopher:

A voluntary obscurity . . . a modest job, an everyday job, something that conceals rather than exposes one; an occasional association with harmless, cheerful beasts and birds whose sight is refreshing; mountains for company, but not dead ones, mountains with eyes (that is with lakes); perhaps even a room in a full, utterly commonplace hotel, where one is certain to go unrecognized and can talk to anyone with impunity. . . .[\(58\)](#)

What he seeks is to live nameless and lightly mocked at, too humble to

awaken envy or hostility, with a head free of fever, equipped with a handful of knowledge . . . as it were a poor-doctor of the spirit aiding those whose head is confused by opinions without their being really aware who has aided them! Not desiring to maintain his own opinion or celebrate a victory over them, but to address them in such a way that, after the slightest of imperceptible hints or contradictions, they themselves arrive at the truth and go away proud of the fact! To be like a little inn which rejects no one who is in need but which is afterwards forgotten or ridiculed! To possess no advantage, neither better food nor purer air nor a more joyful spirit-but to give away, to give back, to communicate, to grow poorer! To be able to be humble, so as to be accessible to many and humiliating to none! To have much injustice done him, and to have crept through the worm-holes of errors of every kind, so as to be able to reach many hidden souls on their secret paths! For ever in a kind of love and for ever in a kind of selfishness and self-enjoyment. To be in possession of a dominion and at the same time concealed and renouncing! To lie continually in the sunshine and gentleness of grace, and yet to know that the paths that rise up to the sublime are close by! That would be a reason for a long life!(59)

The project of French Nietzscheanism will be develop the requirement of the poor objectality here already sensed to yoke a requirement of a redemptive modesty to the work of freedom, that is, add speed to Hegel. Kojève did not protect the master from himself and neither did Nietzsche, fully, so Bataille noticed, because they had no sufficiently developed object relations theory. Nietzsche's "Caesar with the soul of Christ" could only be found in the streets. In a remark that summarizes the entire development of Bataille: "Sovereign, no, collector of cigarette butts" [Souverain, non, ramasseur de mégots] (V, p. 556). Sovereign must be replaced by *ramasseur*, the true sovereign because unrecognizable as such, invulnerable as such. Bataille's furtively finding undandy is not the opposite, but rather the hyperdialectical undoing of his impeccable double. Happy with almost nothing, this unselective receiver from an anonymous and unknowing hand unaware of its own unintended generosity brings to an end the struggle Baudelaire's *soleil couchant* had sought to fan from an all but extinguished spark. The *ramasseur* would be that figure delivered from revenge, his gutter, "the space towards which he who crosses over is moving," "the bridge to the highest hope."(60)

pacifism of post-World War I France that so clearly suffused the positions of Bataille. There was the cunning of this laziness, a slacker version of negativity that could overwhelm by underwhelming the working model, thereby revealing “Identity’s dependence upon the nonidentical.”⁽⁶¹⁾ Through laziness—a negativity that is minimally contrastive, “useless negativity,” he would reach escape velocity, robbing the dialectic, through a different schedule and circumstance of return, of the perception of the plurality of its moments. The timing is everything: “The sovereign operation *that owes authority to itself alone, simultaneously expiates this authority*. If it were not expiated, it would be of some use—it would seek an empire, seek to endure. But authenticity refuses sovereignty these things. Sovereignty is impotence, absence of duration, hateful or delighted destruction of itself” (V, p. 223). Bataille *contra* Kojève—there is another, parodic dialectic, its moments so intensely compacted that it appears at a standstill (Benjamin). One could limit its sway through the immanentization of its effects, the collapse of outside and inside, through the privatization of the configuration in a system of internal regulation that facilitates a mutual recognition and security: Duthuit, in a letter to Breton, 18 November 1943: “In contrast to our enemies, Bataille felt that each should practice upon himself and not upon others these experiments that were supposed to lead simultaneously to joy and death.”⁽⁶²⁾ The insignificance that would allow for something other than Hegel/Kojeve’s scene required an object, and here, we have seen, the master came to agree with the student.

The issue is shame, and its solution in its deployment against itself. In his stooping to a derelict objectality Bataille reaches the conclusion of the neoclassical tradition as Gans has described it,⁽⁶³⁾ the historical destiny of which was to escape from the culture of shame through the association of beauty with the entirety of experience. “*What is for you the most human thing?*” Bataille asked himself. “To spare someone shame,” he answered. “What is the meaning of a freedom that is fully achieved? To no longer be ashamed before oneself” (V, p. 265).

Shame, Sartre said in a Kojève-inflected passage, is all about an outside:

Shame is nothing. . . but the experience of having the feeling that my being lies outside of me, engaged in another being and thus defenseless, lit up by another being and thus without defense, lit up by the absolute light that emanates from a pure subject [. . .] Shame is the sense of an *original fall*, not due to the fact that I may have committed this or that sin, but simply due to the fact that I have fallen into the world, in the middle of things, and that I require the mediation of the other in order to be who I am.⁽⁶⁴⁾

And it thus has its basis and solution in an objectality. Hence the logic of Freud, writing that “At the very beginning, it seems, the external world, objects, and what is hated are identical.” And: “As an expression of the unpleasure evoked by objects, [hate] always remains in an intimate relation with the self-preservation instincts.”⁽⁶⁵⁾ The relation of hate to objects is older than that of love. “Thus at the very beginning, the external world, objects and that which was hated were one and the same thing.”⁽⁶⁶⁾ From Bataille’s “La Souveraineté”:

A thing is alienated, it exists always in relation to some other thing, but if it is seen to be in relation with all possible things, with the entirety of experience, then it is no longer determined, alienated. It is no more one thing than would be this, the thing that I imagine in front of me, that I cannot name, and that being neither table nor brook, could according to an entirely arbitrary will, be either a brook or a table, or whatever. (VIII, p. 341).

13

Shame would thus be about the availability of the experience of not telling the difference. There are, via an outside, two avoidances of the outside—the not being able to tell the difference that is universally shared, versus the tragedy of the contrastively experienced person who cannot tell the difference. The dialectic is about the tragedy of the one-before whom one is, for a moment, supplicant—who cannot tell the difference; it is the intimidating *telling* of the difference of the one who cannot tell the difference. Unintimidating banal strangeness is about the atomized universalization of not telling the difference, the not telling the difference that will not be told. The move from the subject to the *just anything*-narcissism’s rescue—is the transfer from time to space—that space that is the neutral corner into which an unmolestable sufficiency can repair, where the sovereign can be free of itself. From one Malebranche possibility to the other:

Above all, it is a matter of not submitting oneself, and with oneself one’s reason, to anything that can give borrowed authority to the being that I am, or to the reason with which this being is equipped. This being and its reason can only be submitted, in fact, to something *lower*, to something that cannot, under any circumstances, serve to mimic any authority whatsoever. (I, p. 225)

From 1929: “The wretched apes and hoofed gorillas of the Gauls, unspeakably

behaved, surpassingly ugly creatures, staggering prodigies that constitute a definitive, comical and horrifying response of the human night to the platitudes and arrogance of idealism" (I, p. 161). The gorilla-crowd pleaser, "an extreme performer," (67) no eventless object-is the breast and the object a in provocative keeping, in indivisible amalgam-our lightning bolt. It is because it does not provoke the desired lazy, undermotivated response, because it *confronts* the idealist, that it is to be avoided. The end of this form is the end of sequence, in possession as the gorilla is of chthonic traits. The prodigious enhancement that one can locate in this figure-in what Bataille called "Icarism" in his critique of the leader of the Surrealists-is accompanied by a loss that is preserved through insignificance. (68) Bataille's complaint of Breton on the grounds that he admiringly focused upon perfection packed forms, majestic forms that encouraged angry response, that is, the kindling of sacrifice, is in effect a critique of sacrifice as servile through an effect of synecdoche. "We must . . . distinguish between two radically opposed categories of seduction. The inability to distinguish between them has resulted in the most absurd misunderstandings . . ." (I, p. 203). This is Bataille's version of the Malebranche opposition. Adorno: "The indissoluble, in the face of which [philosophy] capitulated, and which Idealism slid away from, is itself a fetish in its 'thus-and-only-thusness'-that of the irrevocability of what is. The fetish dissolves in the fact of the insight that it is not just the way it is and not otherwise, but that it has become under certain conditions. This process of becoming disappears and dwells in the subject-matter." (69) The gorilla is a trap: "The idol of pure original experience is no less of a hoax than that which has been culturally processed." (70)

An indifference that wants to escape paying for indifference is a scavenger, and a lazy one. There would be rescue from the jostling of the narrative, at least if one were willing to go through its trash. A do-nothing subject would need its object similarly reclined, an object of an entirely exposed interiority, emerging from no jealous habitation-at once surface and subcutaneous. With this inside object that was outside, announced would be an indifference to which others would not be compelled to subject themselves. Desequenced, indifference would be shared. The imbalance described by Hegel was something Bataille always opposed. From his praise for Céline's first novel: "We can no longer play the insignificant game of Zola, that of borrowing one's own grandeur from the misfortunes of others, while remaining oneself at a safe distance from their misery" (I, p. 322). To be avoided was this hieratic separation: "The gravitation about the sovereign city impoverishes the existence of those cities that surround" (V, p. 103). Struggled towards instead would be the miracle of the Beckett protagonist: "In the face of an infirm, imperfect indifference, how not to be, finally, indifferent?" (XII, p. 93).

Why was Kojève everything and why also was he nothing? Sartre wanted to agree with him on everything, but something got in the way—something that was nothing. What freedom expert Sartre considered to be a frustration to the subject in Hegel had the potential to be the saving sore tooth. Hegel's occupational deformation caused him to mislocate freedom in a capacity to transform without remainder, that is, in the working negativity Bataille judged to be a trap. Laziness can always use an excuse—say, an object you can do nothing with. But Sartre—famously fearful of being governed by the inert—didn't recognize freedom in the toothache, couldn't always find the subject's freedom in what work left over, described the irritant that will be the basis of Bataille's entire departure. There was something that remained unmetabolized, that would always block an ideal efficiency:

Kojève says: to work is to deny the tree in order to make it into a table, while preserving it (the wood) in the table. I would like to agree. But in this way one conserves the tree as in-itself and as unsurpassed exteriority, inertia, passivity, identity. There is therefore a resistance to the dialectic at the very heart of the dialectic. Description of the manufactured object. If we are to have a *true* dialectic, the *thing* transformed into a utensil by *work* has to lose its thingness in the instrument it becomes.[\(71\)](#)

Sartre's disappointment was Bataille's—and later, Derrida's—consolation. The possibility of staking identity upon a passivity here escaped him. There would be sadness in achieving what he regretted not achieving. Bataille noted the fall into sociability and a subdued objectality involved: "In general, the world of things is experienced as degrading. It involves the alienation of the person who has created it. A fundamental principle: to subordinate is not only to modify the subordinated element but to be oneself modified. The tool changes at the same time the nature of the man: it subjects nature to the man who makes and uses it, but it links at the same time man to tamed nature" (VII, p. 297). The found object is the unmaking of the tool that is shameful, as "the fashioned tool is the embryonic form of that which is not the self." And "The tool introduces exteriority into the world . . ." (VII, p. 297). As "All communication between men is rich with refuse [*déchets*]," (VI, p. 279), and as it is the *déchet* that opens the subject (as we noted in Lacan), it stands to reason that Bataille would see things in the following way: "The cogito of Sartre is the impenetrable, timeless atom, the irreducible basis. For me there exist only relations, a tangle of relations existing in time. The atom opens into a current in the form of a language, words exchanged, books written and read" (VI, p. 408). Bataille's pre-humiliation takes the form of an open-Klein position: "The wound of incompleteness opens me up. Through what could be called incompleteness or

animal nakedness or the wound, the different separate beings *communicate*, acquiring life by losing it in *communication* with each other. The fate of finite beings leaves them at the edge of themselves" (V, p. 249). The membrane that demarks the subject is open weave: "And this edge is [always already] torn" (V, p. 362).

Before the left-over the pleasure in the subject's inefficiency is or is not attached to resentful response, this according to whether the object's abandonment is associated with a pressed antecedent figurality. The remainder is the yield of destruction, and the trace of it in the *déchet* is the sign of a subject that has lost its solidity. "In a paradoxical fashion the subject negates itself to the extent to which it is involved in the mockery of appropriation and spends without hope of profit" (XI, p. 302). The incapacitated subject can have two meanings. Whether it has the one or the other is determined by the absence or presence of a relation of an exemplary figure to the experience of destruction, whether or not there is an edge that is always already torn. For there to be the undoing laziness, loyalty would be required to what Hegel had noticed but for which he had no enthusiasm. The epigraph to *The Theory of Religion* is from Kojève: "Born of desire, action tries to satisfy it and can do this only through a negation, the destruction or at least the transformation of the desired object" (VII, p. 283). Bataille will come to see the agency of transformation as decisive. This is the case as: "This is the fundamental principle: to subordinate is not simply to modify the subordinated element, but it means to be modified oneself as well" (VII, p. 305). Before the untransformable, one is unemployed. But how does one come to be unemployed? Is the untransformed, untransformable material made available through a subordination or through chance distribution, through an edifying destruction or its absence?

Alertly pouncing upon a most unusual sentence in Bataille, Blanchot shows where subsequent sympathies lie: "Sacrifice does not tell men to kill, but rather to abandon and to give." (72) In the choice of the unrepresentative remark there is quailing before the oppressive posterity of the identification in death. More characteristic is this in which the inheritance is clear, where it is clear that there is such a thing as harm's way: "[The sacred] is the ultimate in murderous power, and the sacrifice that produces this effect most frequently involves a murder" (XI, p. 243). And from 1957: "In its major form . . . sacrifice is the ritual putting to death of a man or an animal" (XII, p. 468). To say that the arrival of the object occurs through anonymous release is to relieve it of a *spoils status*, detaching it from the tutelage of the muscular absolutism of the sequence. This inertia of the object that follows use is a strength the subject will not be allowed to use against itself. What remains is what is not the tool—all hangs upon where it is located—inside or outside a figure, beneath or beyond the tool.

But was the absence of the tool just something to be suffered? Sartre: "There is emotion when the world of tools suddenly disappears."⁽⁷³⁾ Bataille saw two emotions, one the enemy of the other-fantasy and pleasure. It is the schedule of the object that counts, the conditions of the availability of the *déchet* with or without the memory of catastrophic process attached.

First of all one must oppose to one's normal state a calm that approaches sleep. It is necessary to shun any image, to become a self-absorption so complete that you remain impenetrable to any image. Nevertheless this self-absorption can only be made possible with the aid of an image-a precise image of peace, of silence, and night. (V, p. 515)

Image versus image equals the figure versus "the elective object." Bataille will complete the scattering of desire nervously begun by Kant, who, critical of Aristotle's protagonist orientation, refound beauty in what is dispersed throughout the natural world.

A requirement of passivity follows. Bataille, like Adorno, notices the primacy of the object in subjective experience. Consciousness, writes Adorno, in harmony with Bataille, is modeled after objectivity: "It is not true that the object is a subject, as idealism has been drilling into us for thousands of years, but it is true that the subject is an object."⁽⁷⁴⁾ "Whether or not there is autonomy depends upon its adversary and antithesis, on the object which either grants or denies autonomy to the subject. Detached from the object, autonomy is fictitious."⁽⁷⁵⁾ Both dialectic and sacrifice are about seeking the object of unmediated relations through a detour. And needed will be "an object that is not an object" (V, p. 29), but all would depend upon the clocking of its undoing and the agency involved in the object's not being this object. There is a busy negativity that causes the loss of the distinctness of the subject: "Negativity is action, that action that consists in the taking possession of things" (V, p. 384). In the experience of the process involved in the loss of the object, at stake is the subject's autonomy that can never prove detached. "When the subject proclaims itself a . . . master of all things . . . it reveals the extent to which in consuming the object it is beholden to the object,"⁽⁷⁶⁾ Adorno says. The master cannot long be master: "The practice makes it a part of what it thinks it is ruling; it succumbs like the Hegelian master."⁽⁷⁷⁾ In response there must be shrinking of wonder through the velleitization of objectality, the finding of an object that sets the sociological tension a notch too low, minimizing the play of the dialectic's rude law of attraction. If there is to be an uncoupling of dialectic and sacrifice, the objects of sacrifice and the found object are to be unbonded. Denis Hollier has noticed that Bataille quickly lost interest in the grotesque natural forms

that absorbed him in the *Documents* period (1929-31)—extravagant vegetation, outrageously colorful posteriors of apes... It was the thoroughly anticultural character of these extravagant objects that caused them to constitute a capitulation that, we understand through Mead, caused them to be finally coercively cultural. It is the only *halfway* hopeful consciousness that proves the winner. The insult of the gorilla left the compact group *more* than unscathed. Raw insistence upon the wholly alien-powerless fetish-will constitute an appropriation of the alien, and at the same time a hypersocialization. In order to keep the movement outside the self from taking a shaming (re)turn, a condition of indifference must not be realized in violent passage through a *figure* of indifference, but via the mediation of an open-sourced *déchet*.

For a subject to be not given over to resentment's scheduling and its tutelage of cruelty, an object must be unintegrated out of *indifference*: "Low matter is exterior, foreign to the aspirations of human ideals, and does not allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines attached to these aspirations" (I, p. 225). And: "This being and its logic can only submit to that which is *lower*, to that which can have no relation with any authority whatsoever" (I, p. 225). "My indifference is my Empire" (V, p. 538), one that is only unassailable if there is an underwhelming of the dialectic, if it is the case that "What most appeals to me is the impression of *insignificance*" (XII, p. 489). Indifference is unalterably first and last love, but what of the moment in between? There is always self-love at the onset and at the end, but the question is how to keep it from being mobilized against itself, how to block a self-hatred from functioning as mediation of self-love and vice versa.

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This is done through the enfeebling of a solicitation. You behave as the object behaves. "The low element presents itself as above all passive" (II, p. 167). Passive, it finds a corrective for one Malebranche effect in another; the result is *nonsavoir*, in Freud's terms "the naïve," (78) an invalidism of the ego ideal that resists the ethical asperities of the uncamouflaged ego ideal. Bataille will fill that space with his own and our indifference through his choice of an object of unsequencing indifference. Looking back at the relations between the members of the Collège de Sociologie, Pierre Klossowski notes the importance of an unaggressive relation, an attachment that did not involve a provocative digestion and thus not a forced release from a threatened figure: "We would never have remained as attached to one another, and gotten through our disagreements, if there had not been the focus upon a *shared space* within which thought could focus upon the *strangest* of objects that would come to our attention, not for the sake of *understanding* them, but in order to *bond* ourselves to them" (79)

The sore tooth had another name. “In developing his philosophy of work . . . Hegel suppressed the element of chance,” Bataille wrote (V, p. 341). “For God I have substituted chance” (VI, p. 135). Packed with perfection, God, with combustive allure, is hoarder of indifference, through the negation of chance: “To will to be everything—or God—is to suppress . . . chance (VI, p. 140). And as exclusivizer of indifference he incites to the contrastive response that is sacrifice: “The idea of God is the casing of an exploding bomb—divine impotence and misery are to be contrasted with the human experience of chance” (VI, p. 135). As “the free play of indifference” (X, p. 245), chance, what is released by and into indifference, releases indifference into an economy of infinite good. In chance there was no subject before the object. Chance, “a state of grace, a gift of heaven” (V, p. 320), freely discharges sovereignty into the world, revealing it to be relation rather than substance. Not the residue of figurality, it is the open secret, the availability of unmediated relations not dependent upon violent transfer. The chance arrival is the nimbus-free detail—nothing sucked from its hoarding frame. By choosing the unhosted rather than the hosted partial object, Bataille peels away from the envious superego unmediated relations that are fused in sacrifice. No passing through the figure on the way to the junk that is now low-lying fruit, no hurting into and away from the ego ideal. The two negativities are to be seen in terms of two returns—via killing and unkilling access. When the experience of the object is randomized, there is no looking for the ego ideal. “What gives Proust’s lesson a privileged character is no doubt the rigor with which he reduces the object of his *search* to an involuntary find” (XI, p. 391).

It is the indifference of the artist that makes possible the chance arrival. “Let the author be indifferent to that which he writes. . . .” (XII, p. 94). Chance brings to an end the inevitability of the exclusive means of access here described: “Self-intimacy can only be experienced through a *thing*: this thing that is finally the opposite of a thing, the opposite of a product, of a piece of merchandise: something that has been consumed, a sacrifice” (VII, p. 126). Thus the centrality of chance for Bataille, what he felt absent in Hegel, that thing that amounted for him to a politicized objects-relations theory. The figure of chance, the ventilated rather than the irremediable breast, breast without matrix, without supporting material—that which is always releasing its objects, not hoarding and then releasing, rich and poor simultaneously, making possible the unmediated relation that is not experienced contrastively. Chance is the negation of a consequent objectality, against the experience of an antecedent resented figure. “Sovereignty . . . is the object that is forever unavailable, the object that no one has seized, that no one will ever seize for this definitive reason: we can not possess it in the form of an object and thus we are reduced to eternally seeking it” (IX, p. 305).

An example from painting:

The paintings of Delacroix and Courbet are often marked by an eloquence that seeks to convince us about a meaning that the painter has assigned to the objects that are represented. Whatever rebellion there is here is limited to the proposal of a new convention. It is only beginning with Manet that the painter comes to substitute for a grid of convention the revelation of an unanticipated element that is meaningless, or the revelation of the incongruity of things as they are (this incongruity that it was the duty of the traditional painter to mask: "He has enormous feet," said an irritated Gleyre to Monet, "and that is just the way you have painted them." (XII, pp. 373-74)

17

To paint the big feet such as they were would cause them to appear to be unhoarded by the artist, or, because of incongruity, even by the attached subject. Chance subtracts the burning sense of injury and the killing process that follows. The objects no longer have the status of the details of a desecration, and the subject no longer fatefully receives its light from some hypersubstantial other. When the object arrives by invisible agency there is no wonder broker to pass through, and thus indifference is blocked from being bonded with culpability.

The sovereign is not to be strained towards: "The essential point is that it cannot be consciously attained, sought, for to seek it results in its unavailability" (XII, p. 345). "While we seek something, whatever it might be, we do not exist in the sovereign state, but rather subordinate the present to that future moment that will follow it" (VIII, p. 207). Chance is linked to the experience of the absence of effort as unlocatable through ubiquity. If the goal of the classical struggle for recognition is to appear before the other as *sans effort*, Bataille adjusts to seek to achieve effortlessness without process and contrast. *Satori* is found in a passive relation with a "concrete nonsense" (VI, p. 160), not through a figure: "*Satori* is only achieved in the Zen experience through the details of a comical etiquette. It is the pure immanence of a return to the self. In place of transcendence, an ecstasy—the emptiest, maddest abyss—that reveals the fusion of the self with the entirety of the real, of the absurd object with the absurd subject. . ." (VI, p. 159). "*Satori* can only be realized without effort: it is the nothing that provokes it, that arrives unexpectedly from the outside" (VI, p. 159).

"'Why,' asked Zarathoustra, 'was it necessary for the lion to become a child?'" (VI, p. 169). Because chance is "his majesty the baby": "The lion is *the will to power*, but is not the child the *will to chance*?" (VI, p. 169). "Only an absolute solitude and disorientation make possible the sovereign. It is like the experience of the full

brightness of the sun, and as such it cannot be endured. Imagine this: an infant dependent upon no one, gifted with infinite intelligence and strength employed to satisfy all of his most capricious desires, without ever seeing in the other anything more than a baby's rattle" (X, p. 704). A sustainable sovereignty, that is, not subject to reversal, this figure who cannot tell the difference will escape correction.

The thing-in-itself, goes the logic of Hegel, is to be discovered in its truth through the loss of immediacy, and what appears to "external reflection" as an obstacle is in reality a positive condition of our access to truth. The truth of a thing appears because the thing is not available in its immediate self-identity. The remainder that concerned Sartre is not here present:

And self-consciousness is thus only assured of itself through sublating this other, which is presented to self-consciousness as an independent life; self-consciousness is *Desire*. Convinced of the nothingness of this other, it definitely affirms this nothingness to be for itself the truth of this other, negates the independent object, and thereby acquires the certainty of its own self, as *true certainty*, a certainty which it has become aware of in objective form. . . .

And:

Indeed, the grasp of an object consists in nothing else but that an I will make the object its own, will penetrate it, and will bring it into its own form, i.e., into the universality which immediately is definition, or into definition, which immediately is universality. In visuality, or even in visualization, the object is still something external and strange. By grasping it, the being-in-and-for-itself which the object has in visuality and visualization is transformed into posited being; the I penetrates it in thought. Yet the object is in and for itself as it is in thought; it is phenomenal as it is in visuality and visualization; thinking voids the immediacy of our first encounter with it and thus turns it into a posited being. . . .

The goal for the object: to be a feature of self-consciousness, to have no other moments or definitions than the I itself.[\(80\)](#)

This “Hegelian fury of disappearance” (Adorno) does indeed make its appearance in Bataille. But this Hegel Bataille supplemented with the Hegel of the *déchet*. His sacrifice has its idealistic tendency, in that it involves an effort to take things unlike the subject and make them identical to it. The principle of sacrifice is destruction, “desire having as its object the absence of an object” (XII, p. 541). “The ultimate goal of man is the destruction of what he has made” (VII, p. 437). Access to “interior experience is though this object that is no object. And: “There is in the *interior experience* of which I speak an element that I believe to be ungraspable: some ‘thing’ is there destroyed, some ‘thing’ is there transformed into nothing . . . and the object comes to coincide with the subject” (XII, p. 408). Self-intimacy can only be communicated on the condition that there is a thing: this thing is finally the opposite of a thing, the opposite of a piece of merchandise. It is something that has been consumed, a sacrifice. Because the experience of intimacy is a consumption, it is a consumption that expresses it and not the *thing*, of which it is the negation:

I have said of the sacrificial death that it reveals the *absence* of the victim. Would this absence constitute the ultimate meaning that sacrifice . . . offers as spectacle? It is clear that an object that has been proposed to our attention, in as much as it is a distinct object, addresses our practical intelligence, associated in our minds as it necessarily is with the possibility of producing it, of using it. . . . If I see a horse in a barn, it is the animal that men raise and harness that I see. It is to the extent that it is destroyed or diminished as a distinct entity that it has the power to move me. Putting to death a horse involves its suppression as a distinct animal: the dying horse is . . . what I myself am. The suppression of the object through death is the elimination of the barrier that separates me from the animal. Now it is the same thing that I am-like me it is a presence at the edge of an absence. There no longer remains either a distinct *object* or a distinct *subject*. (XI, p. 102)

Sacrifice is the *production* of the *déchet* that stands in for the hope of an absence of an object that must be expressed objectally. Anticipating Klein’s critique of Freud’s view of a primitive objectless state, Bataille writes: “Waking to interior life, the spirit is nevertheless in search of an object. It renounced the object that action has proposed in favor of one of a different nature. But it cannot do without the object, its existence not being able to turn back upon itself without it” (V, p. 137). There is the first step of the ego-ideal identification: “a desire to become oneself the sun (it matters not whether this be a blinding or blinded sun). In the case of the eagle, as in the case of my own imagination, the act of looking directly at something equals an identification ” (II, pp. 14-15). Often Bataille emphasizes in sacrifice the

movement away from use: “destruction is the best means to negate the utilitarian relation between an animal or a plant” (VII, p. 61). Destruction of use value here, as in Kant, is a mask behind which the angry homing in on the ego ideal is obscured. But in Bataille there is no lack of occasions of self-unmasking. Here there is no mistaking the resentment provoked by a contrasting prosperity: “Seduction involves the appeal of destroying that which seduces us” (X, p. 635). Or: “In sacrifice, the victim is chosen so that its perfection accentuates the brutality of death” (X, p. 143). And here the role of anger could not be more clear: “the sovereign operation involves the putting to death of a king” (V, p. 458).

But afterwards, “there is a *déchet*” (III, p. 541), the sight of people not seeing. Sacrifice would be the transformation *within* what Bataille calls the heterogeneous field. This left-over is the partial object, transferred from the contrastive ego-ideal figure to the resentful group. But here one *worries* one’s way back to self-love. “It is the thing—and only the thing—that sacrifice seeks to destroy in the victim” (II, 14-15), he writes, reminding us of Lacan on the object *a*. The destruction makes possible the change of address, making possible the objects required to move from a shaming externality to the inside of the subject. The stricken form is opened and reveals that which had been hoarded: “Sacrifice substitutes the spectacle of the blind convulsion of organs for the ordered life of the animal” (X, p. 93). We recognize in sacrifice the object *a* (“it is that little piece that has been ripped out of something” [\(81\)](#)) as he writes that “The necessity to . . . throw some part of oneself *outside of oneself* remains the principle of a psychological . . . mechanism that can in certain cases only conclude in death” (I, p. 265). This object, on the condition that it be understood not to be the result of a catastrophe, has the potential to cause sacrifice not simply to be the dialectic at its rudest.

19

Thus the impeccable logic of Derrida in protest against Sartre’s famous claim:

Bataille above all is not a new mystic. That which *indicates itself* as interior experience is not an experience, because it is related to no presence, to no plenitude, but only to the “impossible” it “undergoes” in torture. This experience above all is not interior: and if it seems to be such because it is related to nothing else, to no exterior (except in modes of nonrelation, secrecy and rupture), it is also completely *exposed-to* torture-naked, open to the exterior, with no interior reserve of feelings, profoundly superficial.[\(82\)](#)

If the subject is always already open, it will not, forcibly, be *now open, now not*

open. Exposed to violence, says Derrida, but invulnerably so, it must be added, because without a strength hoarded inside. It is thus not provocative of any external threat because an opposition cannot strengthen itself through the spilling of an exclusive resource. “What attracts us in the destroyed object (in the very moment of the destruction) is the power it has to question, to ruin the solidity of the subject. Thus the goal of the device is to destroy us as objects (to the extent to which we have remained deceived, and locked into our enigmatic isolation)” (XI, p. 484).

Nietzsche: “Art in the service of illusion—that is our cult.”⁽⁸³⁾ This is refined by Bataille who notices that “Art . . . proceeds . . . through successive destructions . . .” (I, p. 253). But all will depend upon a *scheduling*. A fragmentary jotting found in his papers after his death : “Beauty, the power of seduction, necessary for poetry in advance of destruction. Hence the necessity of power” (V, p. 455). On beauty: “It is desired for the sake of its degradation” (X, p. 143). Beauty is the precursor form of the envious superego, a hardened, hardening ally. What Klossowski has to say on Ingres reveals the resentment not always clear in Bataille. The spectator of his “*la Grande Odalisque*” is degradingly excluded from access to a body. As she awaits her absent master (and the spectator is not the master), “[She] is insulting to our mediocrity.”⁽⁸⁴⁾ “The décor within which we find her is of a sumptuousness that is wounding to us.” And then there is the imagined price: “We see her, the one inaccessible to us, the explosive spectacle, the beautiful one who will pay the price.”⁽⁸⁵⁾ Bataille: “Author and reader, each independently avoids the mutilation, the annihilation. Each limits himself to the prestige of success” (IX, p. 305). The “success” would be the avoidance of death that would be at once the flattening safety of the envious superego—all power granted over the *Odalisque* is a trick.

“Sacrifice is the negation, the destruction of the world of knowledge” (XII, p. 511). That is to say, production of the object with which one has unmediated relations. But what price the fun? Bataille sees that sacrifice resists the charismatic. In sacrifice the charismatic exists in order to not exist, but the sacrificial critique of the charismatic equals the envious superego. As sacrifice is revealed to be the replacement of one provocative membrane with another, Bataille changes the direction of his attack on the charismatic, “ironizing sacrifice,” to use the Gans expression. Necessary was the creation of an unmurderous will, the will that does not suffer from itself. Therefore the conditions of access to the object were central.

In Nietzsche there is no notice of this price of a loss of spontaneity, of sacrifice as the normative sequence. To solve the problem of Kojève, Bataille had to address what was equivocal in Nietzsche. And this could only be done with the *ramasseur*:

Affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems, the will to

live rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the *sacrifice* of its highest types—that is what I called Dionysian, that is what I recognized as the bridge to the psychology of the tragic poet. Not so as to get rid of pity and terror, not so as to purify oneself of a dangerous emotion through its vehement discharge—it was thus Aristotle understood it—but, beyond pity and terror, to *realize in oneself* the eternal joy of becoming—that joy which also encompasses *joy in destruction*. . . . And with that I again return to the place from which I set out—*Birth of Tragedy* was my first revaluation of all values. . . .[\(86\)](#)

Or:

What does the Renaissance *prove*? That the reign of the individual can only be brief. The prodigality is too extreme; it has not even an outside chance to collect or to capitalize, and exhaustion follows at its heels. There are times when everything is *squandered*, when even the force itself with which one collects, converts into capital, and piles riches upon riches is squandered.[\(87\)](#)

20

Confronting Bataille with a problem that was central to him was the juxtaposition of the sacrifice of these passages with the Nietzschean goal of deliverance from revenge. “Of primordial importance” (VI, p. 329), Bataille said of this Klossowski remark: “But for Bataille to not be guilty is finally not to exist at all. To be or not to be guilty, this is the dilemma, because for Bataille, to be without guilt is not waste . . .” (VI, p. 328). Bataille demonstrated understanding of this point when he wrote that “Sacrifice creates conscience . . .” (VII, p. 533). And “The drive to destruction that is explosively revealed in the festival finally constitutes a conservative wisdom that orders and limits” (VII, p. 313). The disciplinary dimension that throws its taint on this pleasure had escaped Nietzsche, and Bataille at first as well, whose indignation over the charismatic contrastive had blinded him to the danger of confusing success with an entropic culpability that was another form of servitude, this time self-servitude. He didn’t always see sacrifice as a trap in which a critique of the charismatic is used to create another flatness, another limitation of spontaneity. Bataille sees that the sovereign in sacrifice, as opposed to the sovereign of chance, only relocates the problem of transcendence along a different axis; as still a sequence, it remains an internalization of external authority.

The full fantasy of the archaic procedure is about a passage: “The putting to death

reveals. . . the *absence* of a victim. The ritual has the virtue of fixing attention upon the burning moment of a passage" (XI, p. 101). The problem of the transition had to be solved with progress from Klein to the anticipation of critical theory's modification. The nature of the communication depends upon whether or not the *déchet* is associated with disaster, as we have seen. "Through the status of object as *catastrophe* thought lives the annihilation that constitutes it as an infinite, dizzying fall. Thus it has only catastrophe as its object—its structure is catastrophe" (I, p. 94). He had to unmetonymize the relation between catastrophe and the form. The dialectic was about not loving yourself first—transforming fantasy into pleasure—and sacrifice follows. But the murderous dimension of fantasy remains as a freezing memory. If ritual is about first loving something great-ego-ideal totem—then the availability of the *déchet* communicates intimidation together with the pleasure that would be a feature of the experience. But it is the case that "In sacrifice, the sacrificer identifies with the animal struck by death. Thus he dies while watching himself die, and even, after a fashion, dies of his own volition, as one with the sacrificial arm" (XII, p. 337). More Klein: "The sacrificer is himself hit by the blow that he strikes. He succumbs and is lost with the victim" (V, p. 176). "In sacrifice, the sacrificer identifies with the animal that is struck with death. Thus he dies, seeing himself die" (XII, p. 306). And from *La Littérature et le mal*: "There is the tragic link between punishment and sovereignty" (IX, p. 293). "The negation of others becomes the negation of oneself" (X, p. 174). The object restores the subject's access to itself, but conditionally—ubiquitously martyred is the fantasy of the individually realized ego ideal.

The separability of the moments is the index of moralizability, measure of spontaneities denied. The sovereign as ego ideal is precursor substance of sacrifice, pointing doomily towards the inevitability of its process. "The grounding principle of the heterogeneous economy is that death is assumed at the outset" (II, p. 458). It will always be crashed and bled out. As in Klein, the passage is always implied by the ego-ideal, whether a resentment has or has not been acted upon: "Sovereignty is in its essence guilty, and one could say that, in a sense, it is the same thing as guilt" (XII, p. 164). The provocative luster of the ego ideal is inseparable from representation itself: "The image . . . is already sacrificial; to represent is already a murder" (IX, p. 321). It follows that a requirement for culpability results in "the necessity of a *spectacle*, or, more generally, of *representation*" (XII, p. 337). Thus representation is tightly associated with envious superego. "The weakness of sacrifice was due to its eventually losing its power by finally imposing an order of sacred *things* that were no less servile than real objects (VII, p. 328). "The sovereignty of sacrifice . . . is dubious" (V, p. 476). "Sacrifice is the communication of anguish. The only true sacrifice is a human sacrifice, and the knife that delivers the victim to the power of death is there *for me*. Through my experience of the victim I am able to picture myself as taken down by a destructive rage . . ." (V, p.

442). The goal of sacrifice is to “negate egotism” (V, p. 444). The environment of the dialectic is rich in opportunities for entropic lessons. In sacrifice, Bataille seems to be saying, “It is because I sought that I did not find” (III, p. 510). The “hard message” (V, p. 444): sought, rather than found; sovereignty of ego ideal always imposes a liquidation; the figural delivers one to the envious superego. The object of sacrifice is the one that is *sought*. Contours are devoured as indifference is alloyed with culpability—in the overlap, Klein’s object, Klein’s trap.

Bataille comes to see, with Adorno, that the spell cast by the subject would be no less one that is cast over the subject. Both are driven by the “Hegelian fury of disappearance.” The *déchet* can point in either direction:

The subject is spent and impoverished in its categorical performance; to be able to define and articulate what it confronts, so as to turn it into a Kantian object, the subject must dilute itself to the point of mere universality, for the sake of the objective validity of those definitions. It must cut loose from itself as much as from the cognitive object, so that this object will be reduced to its concept, according to plan. The objectifying subject contracts into a point of abstract reason, and finally into logical noncontradictoriness, which in turn means nothing except to a definite object.[\(88\)](#)

21

And in the same spirit Bataille wrote (late, in 1959): “If we seek to grasp something that escapes us, and, what is more, if what escapes us ceases to escape us, there is the certainty that we are destroying our sovereignty, that we are subordinating ourselves and that we are destroying the experience of the sovereign of which we have had a glimpse” (X, p. 669).

Sacrifice is “at once the richest and most agonizing of experiences” (XII, p. 338), Bataille writes, kneading together elements the delinking of which was to be his life’s work. A destruction and a happiness *can* be perceived to be the same thing: “A satisfaction and a rending coincide . . . in *pleasure*. This coincidence occurs in sacrifice” (XII, p. 339). To put it in these terms is to see envious superego and ego ideal as fused: “It is humanity everywhere and in its entirety that has always sought, through a detour, to grasp that which at once death offers him and obscures from view” (XII, p. 337). There must be the separation of death from the experience so that addictive pleasure and humiliating fantasy are not pressed together indistinguishably. “The excitement announces a depression” (III, p. 533).

“Nothing is more essentially perishable than the sacred and the poetic. . . . But, as they die, sacred or poetic moments leave a variety of residues at the moments of their disappearance” (XI, p. 105). Indeed. But there is the humiliated versus pre-humiliated, a distinction of which Bataille is very much aware: “The sacred that the sacrifice exposes to view is different from the experience of the poetic—it provokes a cowering horror linked to a humiliated attitude” (XI, p. 102). “And as the sacred involves the suppression of the sacred object, in the same manner, poetry involves the suppression of poetry” (XI, p. 105). But it occurs in different temporality and with different agency. “Destruction is no less necessary to poetry than it is to sacrifice; but in poetry the destruction is experienced without constraint . . . (XI, p. 102). “Each true poem dies at the same time that it is born, and its death is the condition of its realization” (VII, pp. 394-95). The simultaneity is key to the avoidance of the oppressive message. And: “[N]othing is as desirable as that which will immediately disappear” (I, p. 560). Thus Bataille’s affection for the famous concluding moment in Hugo’s “Booz endormi”:

. . . quel dieu, quel moissonneur de l’éternel été
Avait en s’en allant négligemment jeté
Cette fauille d’or dans le champ des étoiles.

[. . . what god, what harvester of the eternal summer
Had, in departing, carelessly tossed
This golden scythe into the field of stars.]

“The object sold in a hardware store has been subtilized by the metaphor, lost into a divine infinity. But the black element has disappeared. . . . The experience of destruction no longer emerges *from outside* . . . ” (my emphasis) (XI, p. 104). Spatio-temporal decisiveness lost in the use/not use blur, veined with failure, there is the absence of an external agent of humiliation. “Poetry is a negation of itself” (XI, p. 21). “In general, a sacred language is a destroyed language. In the sacrifice of a lamb, the lamb is destroyed by the knife not only as living creature, but as word-identical-to-the-object” (V, p. 462). On Prévert: “The words in his *Cortège* are destroyed through a process of arbitrary association. Here we find the professor and the porcelain of everyday life confused to become *porcelain professor*. A *windmill of eyeglasses*, or a *watch in mourning* in the same manner the explosion of objects that had been defined by their use” (XI, p. 104-5). Bataille noticing the Malebranche effect as he at the same time reminds us of the Russian formalists: “If poetry introduces the strange, it does this through the path of the familiar. The poetic is the familiar dissolving into the strange, and dissolving us at the same time. But it never dispossesses us of everything, for words, the dissolved images, are suffused with emotions that have already been experienced, attached as they are to objects that attach us to the known” (V, p. 17). As the goal is to compress into

indistinguishability the discrete, *diphasic* moments of sacrifice, there is thus praise for “le merveilleux sordide” of Beckett (XII, p. 85).

22

Bataille can be found failing to make what for him is the saving distinction:

Modern painting . . . perpetuates the obsession associated with the image of sacrifice and the destruction of objects that is its defining operation. . . . The man who is caught in the trap that is our life moves within a field of forces of attraction that is organized around that flashing point where solid forms are destroyed, where those objects of use are consumed as in a furnace of light. It is finally the case that the character of contemporary painting-fourth of July of objects [*feu de la Saint-Jean des objets*]-has not been understood to be related to sacrifice. In a fundamental way, what the surrealist painter seeks so passionately to see as he produces his images does not differ from what the Aztec crowd came to see at the foot of their pyramids where hearts were ripped from the victims. (XI, p. 482)

Here is the *process* by which the sublime figure is transformed into a rind. Still here is the idea of the figure and its crowd: “The painting of former times, that had no autonomy, was but part of a majestic edifice that was proposed to the crowd as an intelligible totality. I insist upon this fundamental point: the great didactic monument—whether it be a castle, church, temple or palace—that the past has inexhaustibly built and rebuilt, this monument that spoke and proclaimed authority—had as its function the forcing of the entire crowd to its knees” (IX, p. 127).[\(89\)](#)

But the mass begins a dimming process in Manet, in whose paintings we begin to take note of the sharing of indifference to the subject that we saw Bataille notice fully developed in Beckett: “the spectator reproduces his profound apathy” (IX, p. 133). Indifference produces a found object relation for the spectator: “In the details themselves we notice the independence of each part” (IX, p. 127). Art now preemptively sheds its Kleinian skin and thus begins to cease to define identity through outraged contrast, for the painter associates his genius with chance. “Chance alone suits him” (IX, p. 127), it is said of Manet. Thus “the presence of a sovereign element imposing itself from without, we now discover within” (IX, p. 128). No imbalance, no “majesty given from without” (IX, p. 135). In these pictures “the . . . absence of unity that characterizes the relation between the objects described refers us to the more profound unity of indifference” (IX, p. 153). On these objects—“The only thing that saves them from indignity is the active

indifference that is the special quality of Manet" (IX, p. 154). Because the indifference is active, rather than passive, he preempts our own role in a process that would otherwise involve the forcible exposure of an object.

Bataille may say that here "It is the majesty of just anybody and of just anything" (IX, p. 147), but movement in this direction is not complete, as there remains the residue of a crime: "The 'Olympia' is barely distinguishable from a crime or the spectacle of a death. . . . Everything here glides us towards the *indifference* of beauty" (IX, p. 147). The chain of custody ends a bit later. "Impressionism liberated painting from the servitude to which it had been submitted . . . and that submitted it to the subject represented. . . . In Impressionism the painter gained *autonomy*, but Cézanne was alone in taking powerful advantage of this freedom" (IX, p. 135). Bringing serial ownership to an end, royal apples replaced royal persons and the royal crimes to which they will fall prey:

In *The Voices of Silence* Malraux spoke of the royalty of the apples of Cézanne.

The expression is appropriate, yet we ask ourselves: in what does this *royalty* consist?

I would suggest that this enigmatic thing that is *royal* was that which in the past was felt to be that which, in the person of the king, negated the men who were indistinguishable from other men. But, for [the critic] Kahnweiler . . . that which the painter puts on the canvas is an emotion, his emotion. It is true that the feeling of a man before a king is an emotion. Cézanne would thus, using as his raw material real-world objects, put on his canvas objects that are moving. This clock, this house, or this tree are indeed majestic. But their majesty, their royalty, owe nothing to another. These objects are nothing in themselves and no one attaches to them the least dignity. *Except Cézanne. Except the emotion of Cézanne.* (XII, p. 378)

23

In Lacan's terms, the goal here is the peaceful separation of *a* from "i". The emotion of Cézanne must be an indifference, as ended through it is any metonymic relation with the gorged subject. The apple is not Lacan's lightning flash, associated with the father of the gods. And it is thus that Cézanne's indifference to the nothing apples blurs with his otherwise unaccountable love for them. This indifference always already releases the object, cordially assigning "collector of cigarette butts" status, this "mimetics of social inferiority" (Burke), to the viewer. "The principle of

equivalence is resisted by the species, a species constituted through constant exclusions, in the issuing of curses against that which it situated at a rank beneath the one it had attained" (VIII, p. 373). There is a collective redemption when no one can tell the difference.

"I have concluded that poverty is the cure" (V, p. 258). The poor form of the royal apple that comes to us by way of an indifference, agency of an anonymous surfacing, is the cure for this: "Royal sovereignty, the prestige of which is ruined or something that is in the process of being ruined, is a degraded sovereignty" (XII, p. 27). Not subjecting us to a royal persona, the fruit leaves us unincited to admonitory royal crime. The *détournement* of sacrifice, the ironization of sacrifice of Gans. Our relation to the apples, as is the artist's, is parodically proprietary. What is sovereign today is the "secret royalty" of the apples of Cézanne (IX, p. 135), the possession of which is no invitation to dispossession. This is so because they are not in the possession of "the royal person" (XII, p. 119) who would provoke "the true royalty of crime" (IX, p. 293). Poverty is always the cure for having something that is too much before one. If poverty is there at beginning, no cure is necessary. In Cézanne one is always already poor. "But the modern writer reaps . . . a major privilege over those 'kings' he has succeeded—that of renouncing that minor power of kings, that major privilege of not being able to do anything, and of reducing oneself, in active society, *in advance, to paralysis and death*" (my emphasis) (XII, p. 28). The object is not sovereign, but produces a sovereign not perceived from without as such.

Could the Soviet Union be Cézanne? Did the painter anticipate what would be the internal and external politics of the Soviet Union? There was for a time the hope. Bataille on the historical opportunity of a Stalin as political post-Impressionist:

He who exercises a supreme tangible power should have as his goal the prevention, in any way possible, of all domination over things. Things should be freed of all particularized subordination. They should henceforth be subordinated only to indifferent man. In this way the man, who has this power available to him, and who voluntarily renounces any joy in the objects he administers, becomes the equal of the sovereign his predecessors had dethroned. (VIII, p. 392)

Not the equal but the superior, because invulnerable, because unhoarding. Of vast significance was this issue of the painterly state: "The challenge of which I speak—that of the exhaustion of a surplus without war—is the one faced by a world of production that has escaped dependency upon subjectivity" (VIII, p. 455). But the failure of which he speaks must be immediate: "All the luster of poetry reveals itself outside of those beautiful moments it attains. Compared with its failure, poetry

crawls" [*comparée à son échec, la poésie rampe*] (III, p. 532). Timing is a factor in the economy as well—the simultaneity of mastery and its loss being the key. The political problem occurs, world peace is menaced, when it is not the case that "[I]t is a thing that, in the same instant, is not a thing" (VIII, p. 512). Recognition must be won and lost in the same moment.

Religion destroys the object that the profane preserves. The destruction of the object is undesirable because of the envious superego's daunting, but no less disastrous is the preservation that can only give birth to the religious. Thus, "The profane world must, in its turn, be destroyed as such. That is to say that all within the capitalist world that transcends and dominates man, must be reduced to the status of an immanent thing, via a subordination to a consumption by man" (VII, p. 437). "It is a question of extending religious action into the profane world" (VII, p. 437). If simultaneity is the key to poetry, it is no less the solution to world peace—the always already destroyed would have to be the model.

24

Stalin could not live up to the vanguard destiny that had been thrust upon him. No Manet, much less a Cézanne, Stalin was that thermonuclear threat, the Ingres of Klossowski. An economic miracle—an economics that became poetry in Bataille's sense—was not something that could be achieved in the Soviet Union. It could not become the simultaneity of "a splendor infinitely ruined" (V, p. 262). Stalin may personally have been "the man of renounced sovereignty" (VIII, p. 454), but accumulation remained a mortal threat at the international level. Wherever there is accumulation without immediate destruction, others would test themselves against this success. "In effect, it is the quest for sovereignty by the alienated man . . . that is basis for agitation in history" (IX, p. 305). The problem of wealth-generating antagonism *may* have been solved, in the Soviet Union, at the level of interpersonal relations, among the members of the national group, but not between this group and other groups. The imbalance-producing, reversal-inciting sovereign now appears in the form of an entire hoarding country, and this provocative hoarding of a mortally weighted national subject drives fatally to war. Absent in the struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States appeared to be the state version of this saving alternative: "Sovereign art involves . . . *the access to sovereign subjectivity that is independent of rank*" (VIII, p. 450). World-threatening shame would only be brought to an end through the equal availability of the mediations of omnipotence—an upward leveling through the universalization of access to the royal apple, "the elective object."

It is a previously lusterless lodestar that emerges as what will rescue us from violent exchange. Stalin failing to be Keynes, America became the hope for the poetic

economy. In a 1948 lecture Bataille had argued that American culture was marked by an internal violence, heritage of Puritanism, that would cause it to inexhaustibly accumulate, thus inexhaustibly tempting itself and others to violently squander in war the obscene surplus that had been amassed. The religious would fatally *follow* the profane. Deritualization- Bataille here anticipating Girard-can only lead to universal destruction. If it is the case that "Sacrifice cannot be for us what it was at the beginning" (V, p. 289), it is because of the fact that the consequences are no longer livable. The Soviet Union was argued to have been itself reactively forced in this situation to mimic the enemy in its heaping up of flame-worthy materials. But it proved fatally to be without the developmental flexibilities that would make available any possibility of an exit from the rigidities that an outside threat might be said to have imposed. If the Soviet Union could be other than this accumulation, it could only be the catastrophe of the dilapidation of this accumulation.

In 1956 Bataille wrote that *Homo americanus* was now striking out beyond the phase of accumulation (XII, p. 446). World peace-the denarrativization, the desequentialization of the exhaustion of accumulation-would now be achieved through an America reformed away from the culpabilizing, entropy-producing habits associated with Aztec happiness. On display here, in the phenomenon of the mass market, was the realization of the ideal of "immediate consumption" (VII, p. 436), that made possible the passing into one another of the profane and the religious, made possible "the complete separation of the world of things . . . from the world of subjectivity" (VIII, p. 454) that characterized a sustainable, pacific sovereign that would be relieved of its burden of Hegelian irony. Adorno: "The new is intimately related to death." (90) This is the genius of it: destruction is within the form, and not external to it. Egalitarian consumption is the achievement of a society that has renounced the sovereign, that is, achieved it (VIII, p. 452). The porous (pacific) subject is a metonym for the aerolith object. The critique of the "fallacy of saving" was to be lived at every moment-in the new, the sovereign not as concentration of resources but as relation. The community that imitated everything did the same as imitating nothing. Only America could be this: "The suppression of the subject and the object would be the only way to not end in the possession of the object by the subject, that is to say the absurd rush . . . of the being seeking to be the *all*" (V, p. 67).

This positive development in American culture would appear to be the result of a final step in the process of the immanentization of the dialectic that Bataille described as a Christian inheritance: "Their myths associate social ignominy and the cadaverous degradation of the torture victim with divine splendor. In this way religion assumes the total oppositional function manifested by contrary forces, which up to this point had been divided between the rich and the poor, with the one group condemning the other to ruin." (VII, p. 113). "Naturally," Bataille responded in

reaction to a remark of Sartre. He had said to Bataille: "Sin, for you, has a dialectical value, that is to say that it disappears on its own. It has the role of pushing you towards the position in which you can no longer recognize it as sin" (VI, p. 347). But culpability cannot simply vanish, for Bataille goes on to say that "As in every dialectic, there is the moment of overtaking but there is no suppression" (VI, p. 348). Redone is the career of the sinner through the tightening of his schedule, rescheduling the dialectic as a quasi-simultaneous occurrence. Culpability could not disappear, but could be vitiated into the invisibility of a stilling vibration, in the revving towards but not achievement of escape velocity. According to this logic, the found object is the conclusion of Christianization. "My only concern is with the human tribunal, and I would like to deceive even this, and what's more without actual deception," Kafka wrote to Felice. The goal: "to become so pleasing that in the end I might openly act out my inherent baseness before the eyes of the world without forfeiting its love—the only sinner not to be roasted."[\(91\)](#) Only in the consumer economy, in the idea of the new itself—that simultaneously wins and loses the struggle for recognition—does poetry reach escape velocity from gravitational field of myth.

25

Two mobs, one nastier than the other. Bataille dreamt: "An icy fever seizes hold of me. I sensed the presence of the lapidating crowd . . ." (III, p. 232). But this Aztec group proved effortlessly vulnerable to a derealization. On that famously vague female figure depicted in Manet's "A Bar at the Folies-Bergère": "The crowd that is actually in front of her appears merely as a reflection, as a luminous spectacle in the mirror." The reasons for the transformation: "[T]he subject of the paintings of Manet is less destroyed than outdated, left behind" (IX, p. 157). What does it mean to say, as Bataille does, that Manet "disappoints expectations"? The focus of a potentially resentful attention is *already* small. Myth clouds into the market. What was the immaculately sealed breast is not destroyed, but scatters its contents throughout all of life. "A sacrifice in which everything is victim"[\(92\)](#) The subject that reflects the object that is no object is a subject that is no subject. The neutralization of the difference between charisma and demystification—nothing can thwart the promise of its grace. As the crowd fades with the sequence that is all its energy, with the end of *sequenced* destruction, in the birth of the new—in which, as Adorno noted, death is *immanent*—there is the emergence into full relief of the figure of economic man.

"The esthetic of market society thrives on its hostility to market exchange," Gans writes.[\(93\)](#) This is correct for the two contrasting reasons that have been noticed by Joseph Schumpeter: on the one hand the market encourages the development of empathic moralities designed to compensate for the disruptions it inevitably

produces, and, at the same time, in an antagonistically complicit maneuver within a larger structure of antagonistic complicity, the market generates unpunishably delinquent individuals who must be spectacularly available as models to suggest the desirability of adopting those dynamizing contrarian roles that are, according to Schumpeter, the market's major source of strength. As we shall see, Bataille is allied with Generative Anthropology in his refusal of all antagonistic complicity. In his embrace of the market, he betrays the imperative to betray.

J.-M. Besnier wrote of Bataille: "The intellectual of pathos [L'intellectuel pathétique] seeks every opportunity to produce the emotion of empathy."[\(94\)](#) But in Bataille there is no notion of empathy, only the differently timed movements into and out of identification with the ego ideal figure. We should not confuse remarks such as the following with an empathy: "I only live *fully, entirely* in the moment on the condition that I do not hide or steal my plenitude from my fellows. Put differently, my plenitude will belong to me only on the condition that it coincides with that of others" (XI, pp. 93-94). The group can only be made possible through the antisocial, with the poetry that he describes as "an absence of community" (XI, p. 131). There is only the group through the heterogeneous element, there are only different degrees of heterogeneous intensity that produces a drive to identify that must come to an end. Empathy is only achieved through killing and through death and temporarily—there is only the speeding of the process from identification to the absence of identification. Empathy is no synonym for Bataille's heterology that has copped a plea, his stealth ego ideal that keeps narcissism and sacrifice from necessarily entailing one another. On Manet and identification: "He wasn't . . . supremely self-certain. He hesitated. He neither knew how to be apart nor to be together with them. He did not have within him, as did Baudelaire, that something full and strong that was at the same time a curse" (IX, p. 122). Leiris said that Bataille, in 1924 or 1925, had the idea of creating an organization that would be called "Oui"—in response to the Dada "Non." It would have been "a movement of acquiescence to all things. An absolute nonresistance."[\(95\)](#) To solve the problem of shame within the dialectic is to tighten the interval between *oui* and *non* to the verge of invisibility. The only alternative to the new—an intimidating, because exploding, God.

Another betrayal—in Bataille the extravagant figure is replaced by the process of the market. The Baudelairean subject is replaced by the unhoused poetic object. "It is a thing that, in the same instant, is no thing" (VIII, p. 264). "Nothing is more desirable than that which will immediately disappear" (I, p. 560). And through it the market rules: "If one seeks to govern the world, one must renounce the project of governing it: the degoverning of the world" (VII, p. 612). Poetry could no longer be a niche experience, but needed to become the whole picture, that is, the market that offers something that immediately becomes nothing: the only paradise not just

promised, but-such as it is-delivered.

26

As introduction to a last betrayal, this betraying nullification by a professor of French who hands over France to what it most decidedly is not:

In general, French philosophy since the war can be viewed as a series of very acute commentaries on German philosophy. Paris has thus played a mediating role in the cultures of the world: it has taken German categories and rethought them in connection with the very real challenges to Aristotelian metaphysics posed by the end of colonialism and the rethinking of questions of hybridity in theory, culture, and race. True, this mediating role is something of a demotion; French thinkers are not, in general, nearly as original as they are taken to be. But the mediating role is important.[\(96\)](#)

This same critic has argued that the single most salient feature of modern French thought is its “porous” character:[\(97\)](#) And French theory is just “woven together out of other things,” writes an equally benighted colleague.[\(98\)](#) This contentless universalism is said then to justify the routine nonmention of the Frenchness of French theory—it happens so easily because there is little that is French about it!

In urgent opposition to this insensitive caricature, it is to be noted that modern French thought is dominated by a highly recognizable trait, that of marking philosophy with what I would term “the prowess of poverty.” Bataille wrote that “Poor means (the poorest) alone have the virtue of operating a break-rich means are too charged with meaning and come between us and the unknown . . . ” (V, p. 29). And in his posing of his own nothingness as *ramasseur de mégots* against Kojève’s conquering dialectic, he was far from alone in drawing unanswerable apotropaic powers from the heritage of the Latin notion of poverty that blurred into the ancient prestige of the withdrawn agricultural nobility (cf. Montaigne). Examples are hard *not* to find. On the final page of *Tristes tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss describes his ideal of detaching (*se déprendre*) from any controlling, mastering relation with the world, of lazily locating the only happiness possible in something that is nothing. Required is

[t]hat opportunity, vital to life, to *detach*, and that consists—Farewell savages! Farewell travels!—during the brief intervals in which our species accepts to interrupt its hive-like activities, in seizing the essence of what it was and continues to be, beneath thought and beyond society: in the

contemplation of a mineral more beautiful than all our works, in the scent located in the heart of a lily that is wiser than all of our books, or in the blinking eye, heavy with patience, serenity and reciprocal pardon, with which we meet with in the course of an involuntary exchange with a cat.[\(99\)](#)

Examples of this patriotism: Foucault's affection for the anonymous outcast, Lyotard's praise for "la laideur," and Derrida's affection for ruined forms.

Greatness, Adorno said—"the instinct against it is specifically French."[\(100\)](#) The tastes of theory are mirrored in popular literature. "Who benefits from progress?" Emilie Carles wrote in her 1977 best-selling memoir of the French peasant life of the first half of the century.

Why must we have eight-hour days? With a work day of four to five hours, unemployment would be eliminated and everyone could have a job. Let us learn to live very simply: one table, four chairs, a bed: that's all we need, let us learn to make use of our leisure time, get as close to nature as possible . . . Learn to live by knowing how to live and let live. Never take anything in life but flowers, and from flowers, only the perfume; drop the religion that has the largest number of followers: I am talking about the religion of money.[\(101\)](#)

27

From the Fourth Republic humor of *Les Carnets du Major Thompson* of Pierre Daninos. "[The French might appear] to be charmed by one of their *great* men who speak to them of their *greatness*, of their *great* civilizing mission, of their *great* land, of their *great* traditions."

But that of which they truly dream is to withdraw, after a good *little* life, in a *little* quiet corner, on a *little* patch of land of their own, with a *little* woman who is happy with her *little* inexpensive dresses, who will cook good *little* dishes and who will know how to very agreeably from time to time invite over some friends for a *little* game of belote.[\(102\)](#)

It is this modesty that Bataille betrays when he comes to insist that poetry must become the world, that the entropic esthetic must become the churning economic. Hegel's lazy infinity grew up in Bataille to become a very busy little infinity. A slow

starter, as infinities go, unimposing as a beginner, perhaps, but a fast finisher, the only finisher. Sartre liked to tease Bataille for being a state-employed librarian, while writing of Aztec horrors in the evenings. The real irony was elsewhere—an institutional bourgeois betrays his class-one impossible choice is replaced by another in the baleful discovery of an Americanization to which one is necessarily given over. Only through American mass culture can a community continuously, liberatingly, be the opposite of itself. “There is evil when passion has become servile, when it has put itself in the service of a legal power and can only be coldly exercised. True passion is naturally in a state of revolt and never wants to associate itself with legal authority. Generally it does not have power as a goal, but rather is in quest of ruin, a measureless expenditure that rapidly destroys power” (XI, pp. 248-49). Every object must be consumed upon emergence if a conquering orientation is to be avoided, if weakness is to break its drive to press against strength, if there is to be an unsequencing indifference. American mass culture as the only sustainable heterogeneity, the heterogeneity blurred away from predatory focus, the heterogeneity that is not always collapsing into alienated successor forms. The only ever renewable fire? Self-betrayal, the renunciation of the full measure of national otherness, the loss of control of national destiny. Better red, white, and blue than dead, argues Bataille in acknowledgement and acceptance of a shift in social dominance. Communism must lower itself, betray itself, embracing what is utterly opposed to it, he felt. And the same might be said of his feudal France. America right or wrong. Watered down, trite yet blandly acceptable, yet uplifting at the same time, shy difference now steps forward, transformed, gains insistence and impatience, appears ready for work. In a final flourish of the dialectic, a final tightening, the immemorial-bitter necessity-turns on a dime.

28

Notes

1. Quoted by Lawrence Sutin, *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick* (New York: Harmony Books, 1989), p. 154. [\(back\)](#)
2. Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: la Mort à l'oeuvre* (Paris: Séguier, 1987), p. 482. [\(back\)](#)
3. Raymond Queneau, “Premières confrontations avec Hegel,” *Critique* (August-September 1963), p. 695. [\(back\)](#)
4. According to Surya, p. 482. [\(back\)](#)
5. Queneau, “Premières confrontations avec Hegel,” p. 695. [\(back\)](#)

6. Georges Bataille, *Choix de lettres, 1917-1962*, ed. Michel Surya (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 27.[\(back\)](#)

7. "Experience and Poverty," in *Walter Benjamin. Seleted Writings*, Volume II, trans. Rodney Livingstone and others (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 734.[\(back\)](#)

8. *Manifestos of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1972), p. 184.[\(back\)](#)

9. *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 122.[\(back\)](#)

10. *Le Seminaire. Livre VIII; Le Transfert; 1960-61* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), p. 436-37.[\(back\)](#)

11. "La Société de Bataille," *Le Monde des livres*, April 30, 1999, p. I.[\(back\)](#)

12. "Sacrificing Culture," *Chronicles of Love and Resentment*, No. 184, October 9, 1999.[\(back\)](#)

13. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller trans., (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 251.[\(back\)](#)

14. *La Maladie d'être mouche* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 40.[\(back\)](#)

15. *La Maladie d'être mouche*, p. 65.[\(back\)](#)

16. *La Maladie d'être mouche*, p. 111.[\(back\)](#)

17. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), p. 268. [\(back\)](#)

29

18. *Le Seminaire. Livre VIII*, p. 437.[\(back\)](#)

19. *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. XI (Paris Gallimard, 1988), p. 93. Future references to Bataille's works-unless otherwise indicated-will be from the *Oeuvres complètes*, Vols. I-XII (Paris: Gallimard, 1970-88), and will appear in the body of the text. All translations are my own.[\(back\)](#)

20. Dominick LaCapra, "Temporality of Rhetoric," in *Chronotypes*, ed. John Bender and David E. Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 124.[\(back\)](#)

21. Tarde wrote "Avec l'hétérogène se constitue l'homogène." *Les Lois de l'imitation: étude sociologique* (Paris: Alcan, 1900 [3rd ed.]) p. 77.[\(back\)](#)

22. Bataille: "Alexandre Kojève ne développe pas une autre pensée que celle de Hegel." *Oeuvres complètes* Vol. VIII (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 403.[\(back\)](#)

23. *De la Recherche de la vérité* [1674-75], 6th ed [1712], in *Oeuvres*, Vol. 2, p. 204. *Oeuvres de Malebranche*, 20 vols., ed. Geneviève Rodis-Lewis (Paris: J. Vrin, 1962-67).[\(back\)](#)

24. "The Essential Solitude," in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader: Fiction and Literary Essays*, trans. Lydia Davis and others, ed. George Quasha (Barrytown, N. Y.: Station Hill, 1999), p. 405.[\(back\)](#)

25. *De la Recherche de la vérité*, p. 205. [\(back\)](#)

26. *De la Recherche de la vérité*, p. 207.[\(back\)](#)

27. *The Philosophy of the Present*, ed. by Arthur E. Murphy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 121.[\(back\)](#)

28. *The Philosophy of the Present*, p. 124.[\(back\)](#)

29. *The Philosophy of the Present*, p. 123.[\(back\)](#)

30. *The Philosophy of the Present*, p. 191.[\(back\)](#)

31. *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), p. 191.[\(back\)](#)

32. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 120.[\(back\)](#)

33. *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 33. [\(back\)](#)

34. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 139.[\(back\)](#)

35. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 177.[\(back\)](#)

30

36. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 39.[\(back\)](#)

37. *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 186.[\(back\)](#)

38. *The Philosophy of the Present*, p. 126.[\(back\)](#)

39. *Aesthetic Theory* (nt), p. 259.[\(back\)](#)

40. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 181.[\(back\)](#)

41. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 188.[\(back\)](#)

42. *Critique of Judgment*, trans. James Creed Meredith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 106.[\(back\)](#)

43. Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 375.[\(back\)](#)

44. *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 437. [\(back\)](#)

45. *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 9.[\(back\)](#)

46. *Choix de lettres, 1917-1962*, p.132-33. [\(back\)](#)

47. *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 176.[\(back\)](#)

48. *Phenomenology of Mind*, pp. 200-201.[\(back\)](#)

49. *Phenomenology of Mind*, p. 209.[\(back\)](#)

50. *Phenomenology of Mind*, p. 237.[\(back\)](#)

51. *Choix de lettres, 1917-1962*, p. 26.[\(back\)](#)

52. *Choix de lettres, 1917-1962*, p. 26-27.[\(back\)](#)

53. "Experience and Poverty," p. 734.[\(back\)](#)

54. "From Restricted to General Economy," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 256.[\(back\)](#)

55. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. R. W. Rotsel (Ann Arbor: Adris, 1973), p. 184.[\(back\)](#)

56. Human, All Too Human, Vol. I, trans. Gary Handwerk (Stanford: Stanford

University Press, 1995), p.289-90.[\(back\)](#)

57. *Human, All Too Human*, p. 290.[\(back\)](#)

58. *Genealogy of Morals*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), III, 7, 109.[\(back\)](#)

59. *Daybreak*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 189.[\(back\)](#)

60. See Heidegger: "The space of freedom from revenge is where Nietzsche sees the superman's essential nature. That is the space toward which he who crosses over is moving—the superman." *What Is Called Thinking?* trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 88.[\(back\)](#)

61. *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 120.[\(back\)](#)

62. V. V. V., no. 4, (February 1944) p. 47.[\(back\)](#)

63. In *Originary Thinking. Elements of Generative Anthropology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 150-163. [\(back\)](#)

64. *L'Etre et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 349.[\(back\)](#)

65. "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), Vol. 14, pp. 133 and 139.[\(back\)](#)

66. "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," p. 133.[\(back\)](#)

67. Term of Geoffrey Hartman, *The Fateful Question of Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 122.[\(back\)](#)

68. See especially "Le Jeu lugubre," in II, pp. 211-16.[\(back\)](#)

69. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 62.[\(back\)](#)

70. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 368.[\(back\)](#)

71. *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 64. Laziness could always set you back to work, if you weren't careful. Bataille on the role of the left-over in philosophy and religion:

Through philosophy man has always been able to appropriate to himself the tangible elements of the world, but as in every process, this appropriation has regularly produced a *déchet*, in such a way that the operation has always been inexhaustibly rebegun. It would be possible to characterize the *déchets* of the philosophical order as “total *déchets*,” the mention of which cannot be made without creating a sense of unease or of the ridiculous, as for example, in the case of the words “nothingness,” “infinite,” “absolute,” etc. . (II, p. 424)[\(back\)](#)

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72. Quoted in *The Unavowable Community*, trans. by Pierre Joris (Barrytown, N. Y.: Station Hill Press, 1988), p. 15.[\(back\)](#)

73. *L'Imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1940), p. 100. [\(back\)](#)

74. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 179.[\(back\)](#)

75. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 223.[\(back\)](#)

76. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 179.[\(back\)](#)

77. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 180.[\(back\)](#)

78. *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), p. 182.[\(back\)](#)

79. Pierre Klossowski, “De Contre-Attaque à Acéphale,” in *Change*, No. 7 (Winter 1970-71). Quoted in Vol. XII, p. 638.[\(back\)](#)

80. Quoted in *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 174-75.[\(back\)](#)

81. *Angoisse*, May 8, 1963, p. 10. (unpublished transcript of the seminar).[\(back\)](#)

82. *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 272.[\(back\)](#)

83. *Nietzsches Werke*, (Leipzig: C. G. Naumann/A. Kroner Verlag, 1895-1913), Vo. XII, p. 89.[\(back\)](#)

84. “La Revocation de L’Edit de Nantes,” in *Les Lois de l’hospitalité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 21.[\(back\)](#)

85. “La Revocation de l’Edit de Nantes,” p. 22.[\(back\)](#)

86. *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 121.[\(back\)](#)

87. *Werke in Drei Bänden*, ed. K. Schlecta (Munich, 1966), Vol. III, p. 825.[\(back\)](#)

88. *Negative Dialectics*, p. 139.[\(back\)](#)

89. It is Hegelian to have a problem with this: In devotion, Hegel said, "Consciousness . . . can only find as a permanent reality the grave of its life." *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 132.[\(back\)](#)

90. *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 31.[\(back\)](#)

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91. *Letters to Felice*, trans. Elizabeth Duckworth and James Stern, ed. Erich Heller and Jurgen Born (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), p. 100.[\(back\)](#)

92. *Inner Experience*, tr. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 130.[\(back\)](#)

93. *Originary Thinking*, p. 165.[\(back\)](#)

94. "Georges Bataille, intellectuel pathétique," *Esprit* (Jan-February 1996), p. 145.[\(back\)](#)

95. Remarks made to Bernard-Henry Levy, reported in *Les aventures de la liberté*, (Paris: Grasset, 1991), p. 183.[\(back\)](#)

96. Françoise Lionnet, "Performative Universalism and Cultural Diversity: French Thought and American Contexts," in Jean-Joseph Goux and Philip R. Wood, eds., *Terror and Consensus; Vicissitudes of French Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 123.[\(back\)](#)

97. Lionnet, p. 123.[\(back\)](#)

98. Naomi Schor, "Universalism and Diversity," in *Terror and Consensus*, p. 132.[\(back\)](#)

99. *Tristes tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1955), pp. 479-80.[\(back\)](#)

100. *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 187.[\(back\)](#)

101. *A Life of her Own; The Transformation of a Countrywoman in Twentieth-*

Century France, trans. Avriel H. Goldberger (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 259-60. [\(back\)](#)

102. *Les Carnets du Major Thompson* (Paris: Hachette, 1954), pp. 18-19. [\(back\)](#)